

TRAF'G

Transnational Figurations of Displacement

Local connections for local solutions: Lessons learned in Tanzania

Tanzania has 264,475 registered refugees, almost 85 per cent of whom live in camps (UNHCR, 2021), while the rest live outside of refugee camps, often in urban areas. In Dar es Salaam, the country's largest city, which has a population of around 6.7 million people, the official number of refugees living in the city does not reach 300 individuals, while estimates suggest a figure of around ten thousand vulnerable migrants in refugee-like situations.

The Tanzanian National Refugees Act (1998) makes it an offence to live outside of refugee camps without a government permit. Yet, mobility from the camp to Dar es Salaam is not uncommon, nor is it only in one direction. Only a few refugees who want to leave a camp and build a life in Dar es Salaam manage to get permits to do so. The majority are forced to go 'underground' and join other vulnerable migrants in refugee-like-situations who live covertly in the city. Without local connections, these urban refugees—refugees lawfully in Dar es Salaam and migrants in refugee-like-situations, who might be in the city lawfully or otherwise—have to hide their identity in the city and risk living their lives in a perpetual state of marginalisation, displacement and not belonging.

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Good Samaritans as local connectors

Inspired by religious and humanistic values, some Tanzanians support displaced people in need. These 'Good Samaritans' (or *msamaria mwema* in Kiswahili) have often assisted refugees with housing, food or money for transport. Some of this help is also motivated by the possibility to cooperate in the future. For example, DIGNITY Kwanza learned that Tanzanians who have interacted with refugees trust in their expertise and wish to partner with refugees in business. By doing so, Tanzanians tap into refugees' translocal networks and resources. In the trade of *vitenge* (African prints), for instance, cloth is bought in Congo, and the shipping is organised through Congolese connections. Good Samaritans have played a key role in facilitating refugees' access

to public services and in the participation of urban refugees in society.

In addition to these more personal relationships, a combination of local Tanzanian organisations, initiatives created by the migrants themselves and faith-based organisations help to keep refugees afloat. Between 2018 and 2019, DIGNITY Kwanza implemented a "business pairs" project under its community empowerment programme. The project involved business skills training for refugees and host community members alike. After being trained, participants were asked to form pairs of two: One

refugee and one Tanzanian. The pairs had to come up with a joint business plan. Out of 25 pairs and business plans, eight of the best were awarded two million Tanzanian shillings each (about 800 euros) as a kick start package to invest in their small business. The awarded businesses included a small roadside restaurant, a seamstress' shop, a beauty salon, a second-hand clothing business and a grain merchant. While only Tanzanians can legally

register the business, the refugee can put his/her know-how into practice. The business pairs project underlines how collaboration between Tanzanians and refugees results in a win-win situation for both sides, enabling refugee entrepreneurs and Tanzanian citizens to establish livelihoods in Dar es Salaam.

Legal status and connection

Legal status or lack of it plays directly into refugee mobility and connectivity. The ability to connect and move freely, access public services (education, health) and assistance from organisations depends greatly on whether the urban refugee is documented or not; those who are documented are considered to be in a better situation than the rest. The undocumented urban refugees have to get help from the locals to register their businesses, to access public services and are often not eligible beneficiaries of many NGO programmes. For example, only urban refugees who had some form of government document recognising their stay in the

country could participate in the “business pairs” project implemented by DIGNITY Kwanza.

Likewise, most undocumented urban refugees lost the ability to communicate via mobile phone when the requirement to register SIM cards using national IDs was enforced in January 2020 (documented refugees can apply for the national IDs). For many, their phones were not just tools of communication and connection, but also a tool to advertise their products and services, interact with potential customers and receive payments.

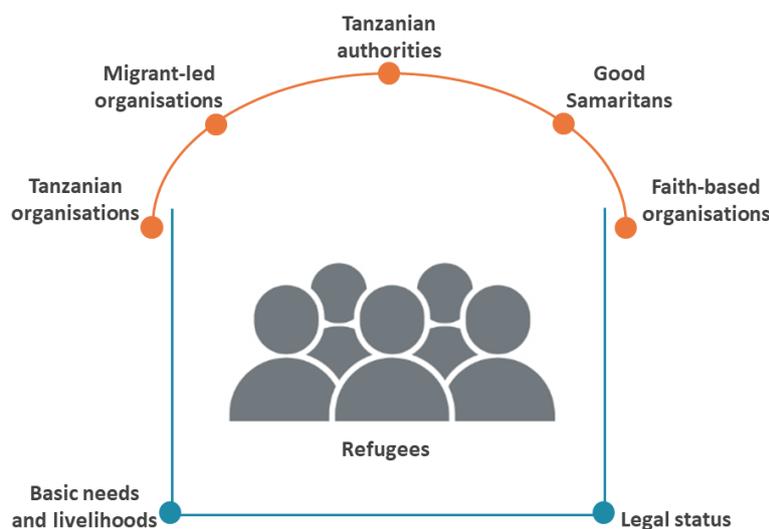
Interactions with undocumented urban refugees have shown that they would like to regularise their status. Some applied for peasant permits that were offered by the Immigration Department between 2011 and 2012. They have also responded to the Department’s call to go and register themselves, even without knowing the clear intention for such registrations, hoping that they may result in some form of recognition and legal status. Urban refugees’ undocumented status is mostly due to a lack of

options that are within their reach both financially and in terms of conditions attached to the available options.

Government and non-governmental practitioners can be inspired by locals in building connections with refugees. In Tanzania, many refugees know what they need and what they can offer better than governmental or non-governmental practitioners. As a matter of good practice, practitioners should always engage the people they aim to serve before making decisions that affect them. In some cases, local hosts, refugees, organisations and churches have already taken steps to better their situations.

Action should be taken to legalise the status of urban refugees and facilitate legal movement from camps to urban areas. This would not only foster the urban refugees’ economic independence, but also benefit the Tanzanian citizens who engage with them - and ensure that they can all live in dignity.

Connecting to find solutions



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