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Repatriation as a Durable Solution

Refugee Perspectives on Repatriation Policies and Education in Dadaab Refugee Camp

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Executive Summary

As a result of domestic terror attacks in the last decades, Kenyan government officials and media outlets have begun to frame refugee camps as hotbeds of terror and extremism. These representations have shifted dominant and traditional perceptions of Dadaab refugees as victims of conflict to potential terrorists and threats to Kenyan national security. Accordingly, the Government of Kenya has taken a series of policy measures, including the introduction of an encampment policy to restrict refugees' movement and, more recently, a policy of repatriating Somali refugees to Somalia and relocating other nationalities to Kakuma. Recent escalations of attacks in Kenya have further amplified calls from the Government of Kenya to expedite the repatriation of refugees to Somalia. The policies of repatriation have significantly impacted operations in the Dadaab camp, particularly around the education of refugees, throwing refugee individuals and families into panic and confusion. Refugees in the camp place their hope and expectations for better living conditions now, as well as in their future, on the education offered in the camp as they await a durable solution.

In this paper, I investigate the relationship between repatriation policy, demographic change, and educational systems in Dadaab. I have shown how the shrinking of the camp due to repatriation has contributed to the closure of organizations that offer education, resulting in significant effects on the continuity of education. Using semi-structured interviews, I analyzed the relationship between repatriation and education. Interview participants discussed their time in the camps, education, restrictions on movement, economic opportunity, vulnerability, uncertainty, and hope. Although I contend that repatriation remains immensely valuable as one possible durable solution for refugees, I outline the key challenges and issues surrounding forced repatriation, including the sociocultural and economic disadvantages for those who repatriate as a result of government policy versus personal will. The paper concludes with recommendations on continuing to support access to education for refugees in the camps and on adequately supporting refugees who are repatriating to Somalia.

Introduction

Since the 1991 collapse of the Siad Barre government, tens of thousands of Somali refugees have fled to neighbouring states such as Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya to escape violence. The fall of Barre's government paved the way for ethnic-based fighting among Somali clans over land and resources. The sheer number of refugees seeking asylum in Kenya, in particular, forced the international community to intervene and negotiate with the Kenyan government to establish a refugee camp. Since the establishment of Dadaab in 1991, the camp has broken the record of being the longest-standing and largest refugee camp system in the world (Mackinnon 2014). In existence for more than 29 years, Dadaab represents a protracted emergency, defined by UNHCR as one in which refugees have been in the camp for more than five years (Fleming 2010). Camps are intended to accommodate refugees on a temporary basis. However, Dadaab has become the permanent home for African refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Congo, Burundi, and Eritrea.

The decision to flee one's country is fraught with pain, sadness, fear, and a host of other disturbing emotions. While each refugee situation is created by unique circumstances, common reasons for flight include war, social disorganization, political persecution, natural disasters, and economic difficulties. Refugees leave a situation that has become intolerable in the hope of reconstructing a social environment in a place of safety (Williams 1990). The Dadaab refugee complex was not expected to host refugees in prolonged displacement. Rather, it was intended to be a temporary haven for refugees as their countries recuperated from war and as the international community, African Union, and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) negotiated for security in their countries. In Dadaab, consistent with general UNHCR policy, UNHCR and refugee affairs secretariats are the governing bodies entrusted with camp management until such a time that durable solutions for refugees become available.

In May 2016, the Government of Kenya decided to close Dadaab, disbanded the Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA), and replaced it with the Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS). The registration of newly arriving refugees stopped, with Kenyan officials citing security, environmental, and economic burdens as the reasons for the closure. The Government of Kenya further legislated mandatory repatriation with the intent to force refugees to make the choice to

return to Somalia. Refugees in urban areas were rounded up and moved to the Dadaab camps. They had to leave their possessions and businesses, as well as abandon their children's education, to comply with the government order.

This study seeks to understand the implications of this policy of so-called 'voluntary' repatriation for refugees who lack information about their futures and fear for their safety. The Kenyan government's decision to close Dadaab has resulted in enormous challenges for refugees, particularly in the area of education. This study explores the expected and unexpected challenges of repatriation for refugees' lives and educational journeys. It asks two questions:

(1) What are the challenges that refugees face when they accept repatriation?
(2) What are the implications of repatriation for refugees' educational aspirations, access, and experiences?

As a researcher who lives and works in Dadaab, I understand that there was widespread concern among refugees about the implications of repatriation for education. Through this study, I looked more carefully at the relationship between changes in refugee policy and educational systems. I paid particular attention to the lived experiences of three families from the Somali community. I supplemented this data with conversations with other relevant stakeholders including an officer in the department of repatriation and a secondary school teacher who has a returnee in his class from Somalia.

1. Durable Solutions in the Kenyan Context

According to the UNHCR, the three durable solutions for refugees include: local integration in the country of asylum, resettlement to third countries and voluntary repatriation (Jansen 2008). Repatriation and local integration are the most common durable solutions for refugees in Africa (Stein 1986). Both resettlement and local integration are difficult to obtain. According to UNHCR, resettlement is "the transfer of refugees of refugees from the country in which they have sought asylum to another State that has agreed to admit them as refugees and to grant them permanent settlement and the opportunity for eventual citizenship" (UNHCR 2011: 36). Resettlement depends on the willingness of third states to accommodate refugees. The UNHCR

relies on the goodwill of the state; it is not a refugee's right to resettle (Garnier et al. 2018). For these reasons, the possibility of resettlement is narrow and has strict criteria, policies, and processes that benefit only a very small percentage of the refugee population. It is generally reserved for refugees with special needs, such as women at risk who have experienced gender-based violence, or refugees with medical needs. Without resettlement, refugees hope for local integration in the country of first asylum. The 1951 Refugee Convention provides a legal framework for the integration of refugees in the states who are party to the Convention. The groups which are often considered on a priority basis for local integration include refugees born on the territory of the host country who may otherwise be stateless, refugees who cannot repatriate in the foreseeable future, and refugees who have established close links to the host country (UNHCR 2016).

1.1. Kenyan Resistance to Local Integration

In the Dadaab camp, there are few possibilities to consider refugees for local integration because the Government of Kenya believes that the camps have been turned into a hideout and training ground for Al-Shabaab terrorists, particularly after recent attacks on Kenyan soil. Instead, the Kenyan government has come to focus on repatriation as the most probable durable solution for refugees in Dadaab. Even though the majority of youth in Dadaab were born in Kenya, the door for integration and resettlement remains locked (Da Costa 2006). This is the case despite the 2010 Kenyan constitution which stipulates that refugees who reside in Kenya lawfully for seven years and speak the national language could be considered by the government for citizenship, but this law was not implemented (O'Callaghan and Sturge 2018).

In the process of local integration, refugees face difficulties in obtaining legal documents like a national identification card that allows them to move freely. Another obstacle to local integration for Somali refugees is the suspicion among unfriendly hosts that Somali refugees are terrorists, leading hosts to impose financial constraints (Kirui et al. 2020). This relationship of suspicion was not always the case. In the early 1990s, Kenya was hospitable and welcomed the relatively small number of refugees who were seeking asylum in the territory. The Kenyan government allowed many refugees to acquire national identity cards, to have access to social services, to seek employment, and to engage in commercial activities (Mogire 2009). However, the political,

economic, social, and environmental problems that accompanied the mass refugee influxes in the early 1990s forced the Kenyan government to shift their policies towards restriction. The Government of Kenya enacted specific terms and conditions for refugees being hosted in the Dadaab camps. One example is requiring that refugees be settled in closed camps, meaning that once refugees admitted to a camp, they usually do not have freedom to move within the asylum country (Hyndman and Nylund 1998).

As a result of increasing terrorist activity in Kenya, refugees came to be seen as security threats. The Kenyan government blamed the terrorist attacks at Garissa University in 2015, Nairobi's Westgate Mall in 2013, and the Dusit 2 office and hotel complex in January 2019 on Somali refugees in Dadaab (Bryden and Bahra 2019). Kenya's policy of encampment became even more restrictive, leading to confinement, denial of asylum, forced repatriation and expulsion of refugees. These policies prevent refugees from moving outside of their designated camps, rearing cattle, or working or integrating with the host community. Currently, encamped refugees must obtain a permit letter – known as a 'movement pass' – to leave the camp's enclosure, even if for short periods (Ruaudel 2016). By limiting the free movement of refugees outside of the camp, the travel restrictions make it difficult for refugees to access goods outside of Dadaab. As a result, refugees are fully dependent on humanitarian services.

Inadequate humanitarian assistance and educational opportunities in refugee camps in Kenya have increased the number of refugees leaving the camps and settling in Nairobi, Kenya's capital city. By moving to the city, these refugees hope to improve their livelihoods and find alternative educational settings where their children can have more access to quality education (Karanja 2010). To many of these refugees, their children's education is a means to a promising future, whether in their home countries or for integration in their countries of asylum. Indeed, the refugees view a well-educated population to be critical in rebuilding their countries both economically and socially. Official figures suggest there are around 46,000 refugees in Nairobi (Fleming 2010), however unofficial estimates are closer to 100,000 (RCK 2008; Dix 2006 in Pavanello et al, 2010). Urban refugees are often highly mobile and reluctant to come forward for support due to fears that they could be deported or sent to refugee camps.

1.2. Efforts to Repatriate Somali Refugees

Under international refugee law, forced return is a violation of refugee rights. The 1951 Refugee Convention prohibits refoulement (the return), of a refugee "in any manner whatsoever" to a place where their life or freedom would be threatened. Refoulement occurs not only when a refugee is directly rejected or expelled, but also where indirect pressure on individuals is so intense that it leads them to believe that they have no practical option but to return to a country where they face serious risk of persecution or threats to their lives and safety (Human Rights Watch 2016). As a result, the UNHCR intervened and negotiated for a better and more humane way to send refugees back to their home countries. In November 2013, Kenya, Somalia, and UNHCR signed an agreement for the 'voluntary' repatriation of Somali refugees that says both countries and the UNHCR will ensure Somalis return voluntarily in safety and dignity. The term 'voluntary' is only used to brand the whole process in a way that is palatable to the international community. In reality, what is happening in the camps is the opposite: refugees are being threatened to accept the process.

Policies of repatriation have significantly impacted operations in the Dadaab camp and sent refugees into a state of panic and confusion. To pressure refugees to leave, the Kenyan government and UNHCR have threatened refugees with ration cuts, gone to residential blocks with trucks and police escorts to collect people's belongings, cut off the water supply and hospital services, ended employment contracts, and de-registered students who were supposed to sit for the 2020 Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations in Dadaab. These exams represent the culmination of primary and secondary education, respectively.

The forcible closure of Dadaab threatens not only the physical security but also the educational aspirations and access of these young people. The significance of education in the lives of refugees cannot be overstated. Schooling provides skills and knowledge to refugee children, giving them access to better employment opportunities, financial earnings, and quality of life, regardless of which durable solution they take. Education in refugee camps also helps to establish peaceful relations between refugees and the host community members (Wright and Plasterer 2010). The previously educated refugee youth in Dadaab were able to gain knowledge,

voice, and skills that gave them access to better employment opportunities and earnings, contributing to greater equality and independence back at home or in a resettlement country (Plasterer 2010). Thus, education is the engine to keep refugee hope alive and to help them to think beyond the current barriers for future success. An entire generation of young people have pinned their hopes and expectations for better living conditions on the education offered in Dadaab as they await a durable solution.

In Kenya, the effort to repatriate Somali refugees must be seen as part of the government's overall response to terrorism. In addition to racialized fears of terrorism, the Kenyan government has faced donor fatigue in Dadaab. While many refugees in Dadaab have been displaced for decades, international funding to support the livelihoods of encamped refugees has dropped. In 2015, the World Food Programme announced the reduction of food for 420,000 refugees in Dadaab. Paul Turnbull, WFP Deputy Country Director for Kenya, said "WFP has done all that it can to avoid from reducing rations, using all methods available to us to cover critical funding gaps; cutting rations is the final retreat and we're doing it to squeeze out the restricted nourishment" (WFP 2014). A similar situation took place in Uganda, where Tanzanian refugees suffered from ration cuts to force their repatriation back to Tanzania (Ahimbisibwe 2016: 863). The situation in Kenya reflects broader declines in donor support to refugee crises worldwide. For example, on January 16, 2018, the U.S. administration cut $65 million in contributions towards the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN organization aiding Palestinian refugees (Lee 2018).

Facilitating the repatriation process and assisting repatriating refugees are key functions of UNHCR. In a resolution on the Question of Refugees adopted on February 12, 1946, the General Assembly stated that the main task concerning displaced persons was to encourage and assist in every way possible their return to their country of origin (UNHCR 1980). In the late 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the UNHCR also focused on the promise of repatriation. After drawing attention to UNHCR's Executive Committee on the poor conditions in which the majority of refugees are forced to live (UNHCR 1992), the UNHCR commissioner Sadako Ogata declared the nineties as a "decade of voluntary repatriation" (Crisp & Long 2016).

According to Addo (2016), many refugees opt to live in camps even with little humanitarian support, suggesting a possible preference for staying permanently or awaiting resettlement. Most refugees living in Dadaab are uneasy and reluctant to go back home, especially since their home countries' situations are not stable. To counter such resistance, the Kenyan government is considering all means to incentivize refugee departures. Negative incentives used by the UNHCR and the Kenyan government include threatening cuts to food, water, and other services – including education – which are provided to refugees in the camp. More positive incentives include working with the UNHCR to provide gifts such as money before and after they arrive in their home countries. However, these cash grants and allowance, intended to give refugees a new start in their home country, are said to be inadequate. Refugees' socioeconomic and political expectations have not been met. In the case of Dadaab, UNHCR is providing small quantities of cash to support refugees who are willing to repatriate by covering their basic needs on arrival in their country of origin or former habitual residence. They have also provided other types of assistance in the form of different food items, utensils, other household products, and even promised six months of food assistance (UNHCR 2015).

1.3. Implications of Repatriation

Research on the voluntary repatriation of refugees focuses on the challenges that refugees face before and after repatriating to their country of origin (Addo 2016; Akol 1989; Musisi and Trombola 2017; Ahimbisibwe 2017; Stein 1986). Prior to repatriating, challenges include intimidation and the spread of false information. For those born in exile, it becomes their first experience of their country of origin because the camp was their home, making it difficult for them to even talk of repatriation. Once refugees have left the camps for repatriation, problems of adaptation arise for both the returnees themselves and for communities into which they return. As one author points out, "whether they return to their birthplace or to a different area within the country of origin that is new to them, they often face intense competition with local residents for resources, social services, employment and educational opportunities" (Hammond 1999: 228). In the case of Burundian refugees who returned, acceptance of the returnees by those who stayed in Burundi was difficult because of structural challenges and demographic pressures, including poverty and scarcity of resources such as land (Kuschminder and Fransen 2012). According to Akol (1989), refugees repatriating from areas where they have become fully self- reliant, or from

organized settlement schemes where they have adapted to basic infrastructural services given by NGOs, may experience reduced living standards upon return from the country of asylum. Their experiences and skills acquired while in the country of asylum are transferable upon their return and may generate a general improvement of economic conditions for those local residents who were not exiled.

Refugees may also face challenges related to language differences. The existence of a new language or a blended version results when refugees return from areas where different lingua-francas existed. Refugee children may have mastered the language of instruction in their asylum state but need to readjust to the language of their home area. Second-generation refugees may never have learned the lingua-franca of their home regions. For instance, in Eastern Sudan, Eritrean and Tigrean refugee children are educated in Arabic (both language and script) using a Sudanese curriculum. Even if some token classes were offered in the vernacular, one can imagine the difficulty that refugee youth would face trying to adjust to an Amharic-dominated curriculum and education system if they were to repatriate (Akol 1989). These problems can also be illustrated by the Southern Sudanese returnees of 1972-1974, who had sought refuge in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo), Uganda, and Central African Republic (CAR). The refugees who had fled to CAR did so primarily as whole village communities and on arriving in CAR, settled in organized agricultural settlements at M'Boki together with their ethnic kin (Akol 1989). They appear to have had very little interaction with local people. Although a few learned French, most underwent little, if not any, cultural or social adjustments. They returned to Sudan after 1972 in much the same way as they had left, and thus had little difficulty (Akol 1989). In contrast, in Uganda, from the Navikale and Kyaka refugee settlements in the Southwest, around 1,700 Rwandan refugees were rounded up and heaped into trucks by Ugandan police and deported to Rwanda. Several refugees who feared for their lives panicked and others jumped from trucks. Many were injured, children were separated from their parents, and others lost their lives in this operation (UNHCR 2010).

Somalia has also been experiencing increased desertification and prolonged droughts that further heighten tensions between those who stayed and returnees upon repatriation. Such calamities could force refugees to return back to the camp and start reapplying for refugee status once again. According to UNHCR, a total of 83,248 Somalis have been assisted in returning to their

homeland from Kenya since the voluntary repatriation program was launched in 2014 (Loughran and Aden 2019). They are aware of nearly 2,900 individuals who have made their way back to Dadaab for various reasons such as a lack of infrastructure and basic services, access to land, and property rights, coupled with conflict and drought.

The literature tells us that research has been done on the issues and challenges of repatriation, but few have studied the direct implications for individuals and families. The policies of repatriation have significantly impacted operations in the Dadaab camp, including the education of refugees. This study being of an exploratory nature raises a number of opportunities for future research.

2. Research Methodology

My intention is to uncover the implications of repatriation in Ifo Refugee Camp through a phenomenological study that explores the lived experiences of the participants. Phenomenology is a specialized method within the interpretivist paradigm for describing the different ways in which people conceptualize the world around them (Lichtman 2010). In this study, interviews were preferred to gather information. Interviews are an essential strategy to gather information from participants using qualitative research (Hatch 2002: 23). I chose semi-structured interviews as it allows respondents a chance to share more information and provide the interviewer enough flexibility and a greater opportunity to ask richer questions based on what is discussed with interviewees. Semi-structured interviews allowed for open-ended questions and flexibility of ‘give and take’ between the participant and the interviewer. This methodology makes it open to the members to share their encounters and comprehension (King, Horrocks, and Brooks 2018: 94). Jamshed (2014: 87) showed that semi-structured interviews permit members to “express in their own specific manners and speed.” Thirty to forty-five minutes interviews were conducted with each participant. While interviewees may be proficient in English, there was a need for a translator to help mediate linguistic barriers as Dadaab is a multilingual region with persons hailing from different linguistic regions of Eastern and Central Africa. During the interview process, I encouraged ‘asking back’ where participants had the opportunities to make inquiries about the research and/or researcher.

The participants of this research study were selected from refugee families living in the encampment of Ifo, Dadaab, Kenya and who are either (1) in the process of repatriation or (2) who repatriated but then returned to Kakuma or Dadaab. I extended my personal invitations to the heads of the three selected families. I met with them prior to the interview to create an environment of trust. Invited study participants included: three heads of families (two female and one male; ages 35-40), one student (25-30), one teacher (30-35), and one agency staff member (35-40). Among the participants, two were Kenyans working in the refugee camp (teacher and DRA/UNHCR staff. Participants who volunteered to take part were interviewed individually. I chose to solely interview respondents separately from each other because I trusted it gave them time to respond comfortably to the questions without feeling shy or intimidated. There was a one-week time period when the participants communicated feedback, questions, concerns, and suggestions to the study before the interviews took place. This period gave time for participants to understand the study as well as to build relationship with the interviewer (myself).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed to capture the exact information shared by the participants. Each interview transcript was analyzed for major ideas and shared themes. In my analysis, I assessed the content of the collected data and literature and then identified patterns of specific relationships (Hatch 2002: 10). I critically assessed the collected data from the field and the literature explored to check quality, determine whether it answers the research questions, identify patterns of similarities and differences that might emerge, interpret findings according to the research locality, give recommendations, and present my work for peer debriefing for trustworthiness before the final submission. I then identified meaning in each interview and finally grouped the meanings with relevance and wrote a summary which incorporates themes induced from the data. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. In what follows, I offer an overview of the six participants and then describe the ten themes that were generated from the thematic content analysis of interview data.

3. Overview of Interview Participants

Aden is a first-generation Somali refugee born in Ifo Camp on December 13, 1994. His family fled Somalia in 1992 during the civil war. Aden was born second-to-last of six siblings. He was enrolled in nursery class in a friend's primary school when he was five years old. At the time of

my study, he was one of the secondary school students in Form One at Ifo Secondary School (the first year of secondary school). His mother used to have a small shop to fulfil her children's basic needs while she was in the camp. Since she left for Somalia, her brother inherited the shop to sustain their daily livelihood.

In 2017, when the Kenyan government introduced repatriation, Aden and his family returned to Baidoa in western Somalia. At this time, 23-year-old Aden was filled with high expectations. With the help of a UNHCR voluntary repatriation program, he returned to Somalia after spending all his teenage years in Kenya's sprawling Dadaab refugee camp. "I was happy to go back home when I was assured of good security, education, and food," he said. When he returned to his homeland last year, however, he was horrified to find continuing bloodshed and few ways to study or make a living. He added, "They transported us back to Somalia and dumped us there; I couldn't stay in Somalia, there is no food to eat and people are starving to death. I have come here so that I can get something to eat and get back to education which I lost before."

Somalia is currently facing its most devastating famine. In the worst-hit parts of the country, people are starving to death. Aden said that "In the refugee camp I never missed food…but in Somalia, which I claimed to be my home, things are worse…Al-Shabaab attacks are a constant threat." One bombing in the capital city of Mogadishu some months ago killed many people. Aden, like many other Somali returnees, decided to return once again to Kenya. "I regret going back to Somalia," Aden said in Dadaab, as he echoed others' claims that UN pledges of assistance with healthcare, housing, and education did not materialize. "Unless the situation changes, I will not go back to Somalia, let the Kenya government come and force me, as long as UNHCR is still in Kenya, I will not touch Somali land with my bare feet."

Khalid is a refugee living in Ifo Camp who was born in Baidoa, Somalia in 1984. He was raised there until the collapse of Siad Barre's government. He witnessed the Al-Shabaab insurgency in the country. He fled Somalia to Dadaab, Kenya in 1991 when he was eight years old along with his mother. While living in the camp with the hope to be resettled, he was married. Today Khalid has a family of seven (three girls and one boy) born in section C Ifo camp. Khalid had never gone to school in Somalia, but upon his arrival in Dadaab he joined the only primary school set up at the time by UNHCR to help refugees build a better future through education. Luckily,

because of free education he completed his secondary education in Ifo High School and then got the chance to go for higher education and earn his diploma in community development at Gresta University. Khalid is one of the few educated youth in the camp and is now working with one of the agencies in Ifo Camp as an incentive worker to provide for his family. He is known as a respected community member upon whom many depend to give advice and to mediate conflict.

When asked about the current information concerning the Dadaab refugee camp, he responded:

> I am not waiting around to see what happens. I have heard this several times on the radio. During the refugee verification exercise, in which officials count refugees and verify their identifications, they asked me if I was willing to go back, I said yes if there is peace in Somalia. But the main reason I am going back is because of what the government has said. We haven't seen force yet, but if force will begin to be used, I would worry for my children. Not only this, I have been a refugee for a very long time and I felt like it is time to go back home, I opt for repatriation because of uncertainty about the camp closing, since this camp is likely to be closed by the government of Kenya, the government is threatening to close this camp, I did not know what is going to happen to my family, I did not know our fate; so that is now how I decide to go and register for repatriation and eventually I will go back home.

On August 23, 2019, Khalid visited a help desk where refugees go to register with UNHCR for repatriation. The situation was chaotic and information was severely limited. Outside the disorganized, crowded, and overwhelmed office, hundreds of refugees were pushing and shoving to get near the doorway. Human Rights Watch witnessed many private security guards and at least one police officer hitting refugees with wooden sticks to control the crowd (Frelick 2016). Since then, nothing has come to pass, only constant threats from the government about closure of this camp. Due to this situation, Khalid has not been able to plan for his future. He described living in a state of fear that Dadaab will be shut down at any time.

Ataib is a Somali Bantu refugee who has lived in the camp for almost 13 years. He was born and grew up in Beledweyne, Somalia in a small neighborhood with his sibling, father, and mother. When he was in Somalia, he worked as a carpenter making enough money to handle the family finances. He came to the camp after his father was killed due to a land dispute between his family and a powerful person in the local government. After following up in the case of his father's death through the legal means in order to have the killer arrested, Ataib learned it was a government agent who secretly masterminded the killing. The killer threatened to kill Ataib too

if he did not drop the court case. Yet Ataib never left the matter; he continued to seek for justice to prevail on his father's case. The situation became worse to the extent that one day an unknown group of young men came to his house looking for him and his family. Luckily, they had traveled to the countryside to pay some dowry to his father:

> When I came back with the family I was informed about what happened. I report the matter to the nearest police station, as I was giving the testimony, someone in uniform from the other room spoke loudly warning me to stop the court case and the statement I was recording. The statement recorder did say anything but he told me in low voice to be careful. After two nights, I heard my door bumping; someone was knocking and kicking the door asking for me. We sneaked out of my house from the back door. Straight we went to a nearby village; we stay there for one day. The following day because of the condition, I left my family and I travel from Beledweyne to Kenya border at night inside the truck container.

Atib stayed in the Dadaab refugee camp for almost three years without his family. He knew that they were left in Somalia but bringing them to Dadaab would require fare and allowance for lunch and determination to reach Dadaab. He remained optimistic that one day he would meet with his wife and children. He took a job in one of the hotels in Ifo camp where he accumulated his monthly salaries of five thousand KSH a month. After three months in the job, he was able to send money to his wife. He met his wife and children at Ifo transit center as new arrivals in the camp. He narrated that he was so happy.

Halima is 35 years old. She was born in Kismayo, Somalia in a family of six children: four boys and two daughters with father and mother. Today Halima lives with her husband and their children. Halima is a mother of four, with two sons and two daughters who were later born in the camp. Halima is among the refugees who were taken to travel to Somalia, but her trip was cancelled after the coronavirus hit the world. Halima owned a shop located in the Bosina market, but after she decided to opt for repatriation with her family, they sold all the shop items and house furniture believing that they would be taken out of Dadaab. Unfortunately, they never succeeded. Halima started her primary education in Somalia. Like others, she fled Somalia due to the clan war that has been ongoing for decades. She explained that one-day in 1991, gunmen from the Hawiye clan attacked her mother's house in Kismayo, Somalia. When her clan, which belonged to one of the main clans fighting the Hawiye, escaped, her mother “told us we had to flee.” Later, Halima was told that gunmen from a coalition of clans had killed many people and

looted the town on several occasions. She is now living in the Dadaab refugee camp where she claimed that life is full of hardship and difficulties:

> Lack of clean water was common here and our only shelter was a plastic sheet. I have food shortages because the handouts given by the World Food Program in the camp were never enough. Today, I am waiting for UNHCR to process my travel back to Somalia. I am very tired all these years I have stayed in the camp, I have not gone even to Garissa so I felt nervous I need to go back where I can travel freely without intimidation and fear from Kenya police.

Mr. Kiok is a Form 3 teacher (third year of secondary school) with five years of teaching experience at Ifo Secondary School. This school is made up of different nationalities: Southern Sudanese, Somalis, Congolese, Rwandese, and Ethiopians. He has been teaching in this school for almost 4 years. He was hired by Windle Kenya to teach mathematics. In his class, Mr. Kiok accommodates refugee students who came back from Somalia due to various reasons, which include security, hunger, and lack of land.

Being a student in a refugee camp is not easy for many reasons, mainly because students spend the entire day at school. The only meal they have at school is porridge and students then return home for dinner later in the day. For girls, they spend most of their time outside school doing household chores, leaving little time for extra studies. Mr. Kiok described the key challenges that his refugee students face, specifying that school resources such as a library, computers, and study lamps were not available. He further went on to highlight some thoughts regarding students' performance: "school rules and regulations were very loose and it wasn't even a big deal if students didn't finish their assignments, miss classes, or arrive late in school. Still, some students did extraordinarily well by obtaining good grades and an education level that a student in a well-organized school with all the necessary resources could achieve." Mr Kiok, apart from being an English teacher, was working as head of the language department in Ifo secondary school. He described how Refugee students go through language challenges during their time in school:

> Language of instruction is a key barrier for refugee children around the refugee camp. Due to the current nature of conflict and the average length of displacement, most refugee children in protracted situations will live in exile for the duration of their school lives, rather than return to their home countries.

Mr. Kiok said he was delighted with the effort made by UNHCR to prioritize refugee inclusion in host country educational systems, which is now the preferred approach to refugee education,

as recognized in the Global Compact on Refugees. As a result, most refugee students will have to follow their host country's curriculum and will be taught and examined in their host country's language. Mr. Kiok believes that taking this approach is the most effective and sustainable way to ensure refugee students have access to a relevant, quality education that is recognized. Likely, refugee students will not know their host country's language or have the level of competency required for academic learning. He has extra classes in the afternoon to support his students in learning their new language of instruction, since it holds the key to whether they will be able to access past learning, keep learning in their new classrooms, integrate, and recover.

Dahir is one of the agency staff based at Dadaab; he works at the department of repatriation and is sometimes assigned to registration. Dahir has been working in Dadaab for the last three years. According to Dahir, UNHCR believes that after 28 years of Dadaab camps there is a need to find long-term, sustainable solutions. Voluntary repatriation is considered as one of the sustainable solutions for a protracted refugee situation like Dadaab. UNHCR is determined to ensure that any return to Somalia that takes place is done in a voluntary, humane, safe, and dignified manner. To ensure that refugees make an informed decision, there are Return Help Desks located in the three camps of Dadaab, continuously providing updated Country of Origin Information and counseling for refugees willing to return. He described:

> We guarantee their protection, but as well we have to inform them the other alternative of going back home once things are settling like these days. We see there is good promise in terms of peace and stability being restored in Somalia; we will do our best as the agency to support the country to ease the burden of refugees once they are in the country's origin.

In Dahir's personal opinion, nobody will be forced to leave Dadaab, because it is their right to stay in the camp.

4. Thematic Analysis

Six themes recurred in each interview related to the implications of repatriation on families and individuals: time in the camps, education, restriction of movement, economic opportunity, vulnerability and uncertainty, and hope.

4.1. Time in the Camp

During the interviews, the participants mentioned some of the challenges they faced during the process of securing a long-term solution. For example, one key theme that emerged across interviews is the feeling that the duration that many refugees have lived in Dadaab shaped their desire to return home. However, participants varied in how they made sense of the consequences of this time. Four participants described that they felt incentivized to repatriate given how long they had lived as refugees. As Atip noted, “I have been a refugee for quite a while and I had a feeling that, the time has come to return home.” While Atip highlighted the long time in Kenya and the feeling of having a place in Somalia as motivation him to return home, Mr. Kiok proposed that time away from home had weakened refugees' sense of belonging. “These group of refugees,” he explained, “would be better if they stayed in the refugee camp for whichever duration it takes, since most of them had lost their sense of belonging in that country.” For Mr. Kiok and two different participants, extended time spent in Kenya made a return to Somalia difficult to imagine. This difficulty reflects not only an emotional sense of belonging but also issues of land and livelihood. Khalid stated that, “I go through depression because I loss of dignity, identity, and sense of belonging that kills my spirit. I would like to do something to improve my life, but I have no options.”

People who flee persecution and violence expect to return home. Only once they have arrived at a refugee camp do they understand that their previous lifestyle is finished, and whatever position they may have held is lost. After the government announced the voluntary repatriation policy, refugees questioned what remained for them at home. Halima, who has spent many years in the camp with the hope that one day she may get resettlement, noted, “I developed a fear of being left helpless once I arrive in my country since I owned nothing as a result of my long stay.” Dahir argued along the same lines that those who owned land in Somalia would have had their land taken by the government in the ensuing period.

For Khalid, the issue of reclaiming land was an urgent one. He noted:

> So we need our land back because it will help us to easily establish ourselves. We want to be entrepreneurs and that is the best way to survive in Somalia because it is difficult to even get a menial job, I have stayed in the camp for so long waiting for a resettlement opportunity in the camp but I did not get a chance. Every day I

> woke up with new hope that tomorrow I may be called to UNHCR to start my process but all it went in vain. As I continue waiting, one day I will find myself old without any power to help myself or my family. Before too late, I would rather go back home.

The fact remains that refugees are fed up with the long stay in the camp without improvement in their lives, and many have opted to repatriate back rather than stay in the camp given unfulfilled socio-economic and political expectations. Though most of them genuinely preferred resettlement in a third country, they knew resettlement options are limited to extremely vulnerable refugees with severe medical or security problems. While a long stay in the camps made some eager to repatriate to their countries of origin, others worried about the length of their stay. After all, life in Dadaab afforded them some chances, including those around education, that many were concerned to give up if they left.

4.2. Education

Another key idea that emerged in the interviews is the role that education plays in refugees' lives before repatriation and the benefits refugees get after repatriation. Many respondents compared the quality of education in the refugee camp to education in Somalia. From the respondents' points of view, some of them thought that repatriation has become a barrier for refugee children in school from pursuing their education, while others had a different opinion. In the discussion, the interviewees developed two main ideas about education in the camp and Somalia. Three of the participants argued that education is of better quality in the camp than the education system in their country of origin, while the other three participants were of the view that education in Somalia remained useful. As stated by a female Somali refugee, aged 36 (Halima), "Good education should be given to our children before and after we go back home. If UNHCR gives us money alone, it will finish, but with good education for our children, we are sure that they will get a good job for survival. This will make us happy because they are our hope for the future. We shall benefit from them directly or indirectly."

Refugees believed that the camps offered good education and a better, healthy life without fear of attack, despite negative discourse about the camp (such as that it has scorching heat, restrictions on their movement, etc.). Education was mentioned several times as the main reason

why refugees preferred to stay in the camp or wait for a third country opportunity. A male Somali refugee aged 36 (Khalid) disclosed:

> My major expectation would have been a third country where I would be able to advance myself, but I wasn't lucky to be there. Here is repatriation before me; I never thought I would be going to Somalia where access to education and employment is still a problem. I want to regain the lost years to cover up here in the camp; else going back home (Somalia) will be a shame to me. I will be neglected. They will make fun of me for the time I have spent here without anything.

Halima, who is raising children in the camp, believes that education is the only option left for her children to improve their standards of living. Moreover, she wanted a better lifestyle than the current one; she hoped for a life with quality education and employment once she repatriated with her children to Somalia.

Generally, the respondents asked for equal employment opportunities, equal access to formal education, skills training, the right to own landed properties, protection, and the provision of quality healthcare services after they are formally integrated into Somalia. These are what refugees hoped for, and they believed that their life would improve in Somalia once such a proposal was considered by UNHCR. Looking into their experiences, their hopes of educational opportunities/scholarships are related to their future. Even those who had passed the assumed school-age envisioned a better livelihood in the future if their children were well-educated. In their opinion, attaining quality education was the means to better employment in their countries of origin, which can consequently improve their lives. As stated by Mr. Kiok, "Refugees around the refugee camp believe that if you want to be a better person now and in the future, you have to heavily lean on education, perhaps it is the soap that makes someone clean mentally and physically. Refugees without education and resettlement are useless and nothing you can contribute to your society." In this view, education is the tool that can free refugees from this bondage culture where you only wait for a monthly food ration and are heavily dependent on humanitarian aid.

While repatriation continued to be the preferred durable solution by UNHCR and the Kenyan government, refugees wanted repatriation only if it supported them with a package that incorporates intensive skills training before departure and study scholarships. Those who are allowed to go to school and progress to higher education, including technical and vocational

training, are better equipped for their futures when they return home rather than repatriating them only with their luggage and children. UNHCR must educate the refugee before repatriation or after in their country of origin. Dahir stated that, “Apart from this kind of assistance, I regard repatriation as an additional burden on refugees since the result will not help us to regain our lost identity and confidence. Therefore, education is the only thing that can build our image positively and make us more welcome in our community back home.”

Aden was one of the refugees who had spent most of his time in the camp. He had repatriated to Somalia at one time, which led him to miss some opportunities like school. When he repatriated, he never expected that he would miss school in Somalia, but due to a lack of educational opportunities, he made it back to the camp to resume his secondary education. Here he stated, “As I am here, I am thinking that I will be the last person to leave the refugee camp…I would be better stay in the camp where basic needs are hardly found but the availability of free education, upon arrival in the home country in Somalia I used to look after camels and cows after missing the chance to attend school.” This quote shows that education facilities in Somalia are inadequate to accommodate returnees from Dadaab refugee camp and would likely ignite conflicts between the host and returnees. However, as Aden was saying, there is a strong demand for UNHCR to build schools in Somalia prior to repatriation, especially in areas where returnees will be settled. Aden continued to say, “In the refugee camp in Kenya, refugees have got access to school and access to quality education as opposed to the situation in Somalia; we cannot compare education in the refugee camp for a reason that the one in the camp is funded by UNHCR and has quality.”

The Kenyan teachers who were hired by Windle Trust Kenya to teach refugee students in primary and secondary schools within the camp are qualified and recommended by the Kenya Teachers Service Commission. As a result, students’ performance is good. To back his argument, Aden shared that he knew someone who was in grade nine in Somalia, but when he came to the camp he was given an entrance examination to continue grade nine but was not qualified to be in grade nine, so started from grade eight. This situation happened as a result of the curriculum difference between Somalia and Kenya. The school curriculum in Kenyan refugee camps teaches subjects in English, unlike in Somalia where they teach subjects in Somali. Dadaab schooling is more international since English is the main curriculum language in the camp. Khalid, who was interviewed at the transit centre waiting for his flight to Kismayo, supported this argument

stating, “I felt bad because some have children who are already in school, and some are in standard five and six. The children can speak some English, I admire them but I feel like these children will miss all these opportunities.” Moreover, Khalid claimed that he already heard some of those children with their parents were taken back to the lower Juba region in Kismayo where there are not many schools.

Throughout the research, some of the participants indicated that being in the camp gave them quality education compared to education in the country of origin. Atib mentioned that:

> In the camp, we have free education, job, and livelihood within the camp are available. I believe that investing in refugee education is immense and far-reaching. I trust that quality education in the camp gives children safety and instances can also reduce child marriage, child labor, exploitative and dangerous work, and teenage pregnancy. It allows them to make friends and mentors and provides them with skills of self-reliance, problem-solving, critical thinking, and teamwork. It improves their job prospects and boosts confidence and self-esteem.

Education was a primary incentive to stay in the camps. Those who wanted to repatriate were either concerned that their children would lose opportunities or hoped UNHCR would support them to further their education either in Somalia or before leaving. While education represents a key factor in refugees wanting to stay in Dadaab, the next section will discuss the restriction of movement, which emerged as one key theme that could force refugees to return back to their countries of origin.

4.3. Restriction of Movement

The right to freedom of movement has been characterized as a right of personal self-determination, but that does not apply in the refugee camp where the encampment policy is strongly implemented by the Kenyan government. This policy, which prohibits refugees from leaving the camp, has created a desire to return home. Restriction of movement was mentioned by participants as one key theme that motivated refugees out of anger to leave the camp. From the participants’ views, six of them see restrictions on movement as the main driving reason for refugees to leave the camp. For example, here is what Halima has to say: “I have spent almost my entire life in the refugee camp; I didn’t know Garissa which is 90 kilometers from Dadaab. I am very stressed, as a result, my physical appearance now looking older but the fact remained that I am still young.” Some see repatriation as an opportunity for the refugee to regain access to

freedom of movement which was something that refugees missed in the camp. To Khalid, repatriation is good since he will have free movement within and outside of Somali regions, unlike in Kenya where people are forbidden to move. Even moving between the different Dadaab camps (such as from Ifo to Hagadera) is sometimes hard. According to Atip, when you are in Somalia, “You can go anywhere you feel like even though there are security challenges like Al-Shabaab, apart from that there is nothing like applying for movement passes because you are not foreigners.” Kiok explained “Concerning freedom of movement, refugees do not have the right to move freely within Kenya unless you are given what so-called traveling document, which allows the refugee to move to any other place especially like Nairobi. The process of getting this legal document is not easy; sometimes the authority can disapprove the issuing of this document.” The youth who are living in the camp would like to go beyond Dadaab town, but this restriction, which confines refugees in the enclosed area, resulted in youth losing hope and the future seeming bleak. From Dahir’s perspective, one thing that forces refugees to go for repatriation is the restriction of movement where they are told to stay in the camp, and if they leave, their card will be blocked from access to foodstuffs and other refugee needs.

The need for traveling documents is so essential; movement without this document has a dire consequence. Refugees caught traveling outside designated areas – that is, outside of the camps or Dadaab, which they can freely access – without the proper documents are subject to a fine of 20 000 KSH or six months in prison. You cannot move without government authorization. Abdi stated that if refugees want to go to another part of the country they have to follow the same procedure; you apply for a movement pass and you are vetted. Your success depends on your claim and the vetting committee is the one to decide. Looking from the perspective of running a business, restrictions on movement are one of the primary issues limiting refugees’ self-reliance. Beyond feeling “like a prison,” refugees are unable to take advantage of employment and livelihood opportunities that would otherwise be available to them through their social networks in Kenya. There is a practical business challenge that results from these limitations on mobility because business owners must pay intermediaries to obtain goods. These goods are consequently more expensive, and buyers have no way to ensure the quality and safe movement of their products. These restrictions impact market exchanges, not only amongst refugees, but also

between refugees and host communities. Market and social exchanges, as well as socio-economic inclusion, would be enriched by greater freedom of movement.

At the same time, refugees are concerned that if these rules are not relaxed, corruption will only increase. Not only do they see travel restrictions as hampering the growth of micro-enterprises, but there are also notable issues of bribes. Abdi discussed the implementation of restrictions on business mobility. He had this to say: “We also face travel restrictions and the officers demand money to give travel documents. We send somebody who cannot be trusted to buy goods for them in Nairobi who can lose your money or even steal. Still, we continue because even if you cry kids are waiting for the daily bread.”

Finally, refugees are restricted for many reasons, as the government claimed that the camp is not safe enough because of the Al-Shabaab threat. Also, the host community, the owners of this land, do not want to integrate with refugees. Refugees living in the camp do not agree with such kind of government allegations and claim they live in peace with the host community without sensing some of those problems. Above all, from the data gathered, some of the refugees repatriated not because the country was safe but because the asylum country imposed restrictions of movement, which made it difficult to do business within the camp. Education was a pull factor (to Dadaab), but the restriction of movement pushed many refugees to want to leave.

4.4. Economic Opportunity

In the interviews, one of the refugees mentioned that the reason why many decided to accept the call or reject the offer of repatriation was the issue of economic opportunity. Of the six participants involved in the interviews, three strongly argued that repatriation without good financial support to boost refugees economically does not help and it would be better just to stay in the camp, while the other three participants convincingly argued that there are better chances of doing business in Somalia if returnees were given access to land and resources. Moreover, they supported the idea of repatriation without condition, stating that home is home whether you are rich or poor. Atip, a senior refugee who has lived in the camp for a long time stated that:

> I usually pray to Allah to grant me health, I know I have been in the camp for long without UNHCR giving me a chance for resettlement. My last option is to apply for repatriation; I don’t care! Provided I will be in my birth place, once I am

> there God will show me another door of success. If I don't retired from refugee life; no one will help me here through my life.

This sentiment was echoed by Halima who mentioned that she had enough of refugee life: "I am really tired; every month lining up for ration, dust is unavoidable with strong wind blowing every direction. I want to go back home to start my new life, God knows tomorrow and I don't need to bother of what to eat, where to sleep and protection. Everything depends on Allah." Khalid agreed with the first respondents and explains his stance that once he found himself in Somalia, "I would do business in my area to develop myself and as well as farming. If the government will consider allocating me some acre of land, I will do my farming but that depends on the availability of land."

The period post-repatriation is always critical for those who return, since there will be many challenges. For example, after the UNHCR's duration of support has finished and you are mingled with the people back home, you are left to yourself. If you do not have a business or someone to help you set up a business, things will be a nightmare. Khalid said:

> Some of those children are now becoming labourers, the parent are becoming labourers once the period of UNHCR support has ended; UNHCR or agency are supporting them a period of time and then after the support stop. Those who did not have other source of income have to resort to labour work; parents are doing manual work: some are carrying stones for building, they have no opportunity. I saw how those people suffer.

In light of Khalid's concern that returnee children will be forced into labour to survive post-repatriation, many refugees feel their best option is to remain in Dadaab. Indeed, several refugees have already been successful in developing their own businesses in Dadaab. A few refugees are slowly progressing and becoming successful with good business and stable conditions. Some had jobs and better shelter, while others were attending schools.

In light of this stability, Aden felt like extra assistance would be needed to make repatriation make sense: "I am happy to stay in Kenya as refugee. There are no job opportunities in Somalia, though some part of Somalia like Kismayo is peaceful but I am not sure to find a job to support my family. Therefore, before I go for repatriation, UNHCR need to equip me with vocational skills related to business that opens the opportunity to start-up business in Somalia." He said that "life is good here because there is peace," recounting how his life changed when he come to

Dadaab camp. “I was very young when I came here, I won’t feel secure if I go back, and I am used to Dadaab now. I am requesting Government to allow me stay here.”

As shown above, economic stability is a foremost concern for refugees either in the camp or in their country. Including refugees in the economies of their host countries is widely recognized as an effective way of increasing their independence, boosting the economic health of local communities, and restoring dignity to forcibly displaced people who have lost most (and perhaps all) of their possessions and livelihoods. From the data gathered during this interview period, I learned that refugees may also hope to go back home, but would appreciate a better financial package that can help them start their life once they arrive in their country.

4.5. Vulnerability and Uncertainty

Another theme that emerged during the interviews was the subject of vulnerability among refugees and asylum seekers during repatriation. In the refugee camp, the term vulnerability is used constantly by the agency staff and refugees themselves to show how much a need for security exists. For agencies, it can help justify funding (to argue for large numbers of vulnerable populations). For refugees, it may position them better for access to resettlement or assistance. In the case of these interviews, respondents used the term vulnerability to refer to the instability in Somalia compared to Dadaab.

Among the six participants interviewed, four argued that Dadaab is safer in terms of peaceful co-existence among refugees. Refugees face insecurity in places like Somalia, Ethiopia, Congo, South Sudan, and Burundi (e.g., fear of being recruited by armed groups, hunger, and arrest). The other two respondents claimed that, given that Somalia is their original birthplace, they can survive in whichever condition. Some refugees consider Dadaab as a haven and they live in peace with their host community. Mr. Kiok supports this argument, saying “Whichever place you go within Dadaab you can live in peace, you go to Hagadera, Dagahaley or Ifo you don’t see gun unless with the policy, no robbery, no abduction and child trafficking. Dadaab is free from those threats; I love Dadaab only that I don’t have a good job here.” Atib stated that “the host community in Dadaab and Kakuma are not hostile to the refugees; they regarded us as their brother and sisters. No attack at night, no looting of properties (items and money).”

Furthermore, greater efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence exist in Dadaab as opposed to countries of origin, where women can be victimized by their spouses, and girls are subjected to female genital mutilation, early marriage, and school dropout. This is the bigger picture of what is happening in Somalia. The participants strongly believed that these practices would be more prevalent upon their return to Somalia. Khalid shared his testimony:

> In Somalia, security has been the main challenge since we constantly hear the issue of terrorism (Al-Shabab) targeting women especially when it's a female-headed household; the challenges are far worst, my younger sister was taken from my mother by force; they point the gun to my mum at night and I was hidden somewhere in the room. They took my sister with them the last time I saw her was with the baby when she was rescued by the government forces.

Participants feared Al-Shabab would forcibly recruit their children, especially if the family has a mother and mature daughters who are more vulnerable. Girls are being forcibly married, while boys are recruited into radicalization. Halima stated that "Girls anytime can be taken away from the father's home and join another family through marriage or sometimes, boys joined militia by force." Aden, supporting the idea, said, "the good thing about Dadaab is that girl's right is protected and they are allowed to go to school and participants in making decisions."

While four respondents described Dadaab as safer, two respondents felt less vulnerable in Somalia. According to Atib:

> We just live like that; generally, the camp even is not safe because of getting constant threat from the government force about closure of the camp. I am being traumatized of constant reminder of this closure; I wish it will come to pass one day. Beside Somalia situation is not like before, now we have government in place with the support of Somali; those small clan conflicts are managed well. It only that the country image was distorted by the false report from the media which gave negative views apart from the exist truth on the ground.

Khalid stated "I can say, maybe more than ever, that the opportunities for peace are there, because organizations are still doing an enormous job to stop fighting, provide basic services, and fill much of the vacuum left by state institutions. So the presence of other people likes Somali and humanitarians' staffs are the good signs that we can go back and live in peace."

These two contradictory views are common in the minds of refugees living in the camp: those who think Somalia is not for them due to ongoing security concerns and who prefer to stay in Dadaab because of peace they enjoyed in the camp, and others who view that Somalia is getting

back to normal, making it possible for refugees to start thinking about how to rebuild their lives. These unreconciled ideas make refugees live in a dilemma where some of them trust in the peace process in Somalia, while others who have stayed in the camp for a long time consider it a second home and have enjoyed sustainable peace within the refugee camp. The fact is that refugees think of their vulnerability in Somalia upon their return and sometimes here in the camp. Many still have some hope that a time will come when everything changes.

4.6. Hope for a Better Life

The truth is that everyone who is living in this world, whether refugee or not, has the spirit of hope, courage, and dedication to overcome obstacles in life. Some hope to stay put, and others to resettle but only with the promise of support to make it successful. The theme of hope for a better life was mentioned by participants as one reason why refugees are reluctant to accept voluntary repatriation. Among the six participants, four of them feel that life is good here in the camps. Educational, medical, and food services are free in the camp compared to countries of origin, which have experienced constant conflict, drought, and poverty. Two participants argued that the desire to stay long in the camp solely reflected the hope for resettlement: if not for the hope of resettlement, they explained, we would not be here.

The life of being a refugee in the camp is never easy. To many, it is a life of poverty, limited access to services, lack of access to sporting or recreational facilities, and few opportunities. Hopelessness and despair abound but despite these circumstances, hope and faith like that of the character David, who killed Goliath “the giant” with a single stone, are the secret engines that keep refugees in the camp. These hopes build the belief that a camp is a place where everyone is waiting to be issued a free ticket and visa to travel abroad. Halima is one of those who claimed that a better future is only secured by living in the camp with the hope of resettlement, business, and education:

> I stayed in the camp for almost 20 years hoping that one day I will be lucky like others who went to the USA. I never thought of going back home, those friends and my classmates whom l left in Somalia and some who left to US are doing well, living a better life; some of them own big businesses, houses, and a good job.

The harsh conditions of day-to-day life and the constant feeling of being a burden on host societies make many refugees lose hope that their situation will improve. As a result, some anticipate that they may be better off returning to Somalia. As Khalid explained, “Life here is very difficult. I want to make business but I have no money until now. Those problems will push me back into Somalia despite existing conditions.” It is clear from the research that it is these harsh living conditions that are starting to push Somalis and refugees of other nationalities to think of returning home. Refugees who stayed in the camp for long periods have missed many advantages at home because such unplanned movement when fleeing the country resulted in leaving education, business, and property behind. Atip stated that while he was in Somalia, he had engaged in business to help his family improve their lives. He was enrolled in a vocational training center with the objective to better his future but unfortunately, his dream changed after clan conflict erupted and he was forced to leave Somalia:

> I was in college at Somalia teacher training center before I came to the Dadaab refugee camp I was a bright student among my classmate, sometimes, they seek my help but today due to my presence in the camp, they have gone ahead of me. Imagine, if I go back home what will I do, if not only being a burden on my family. I always pray to God for his grace, strength and keep my hope alive.

Realizing repatriation as a viable and attainable solution for refugees in protracted situations can be possible only when the conditions of security, as well as access to adequate services, housing, and livelihood opportunities are fulfilled. Lacking all of these opportunities in their country of origin discourages them from returning home. Here is what Abdi stated regarding his plan for repatriation which is aligns with the dream of opportunities at home:

> If I leave the camp for repatriation, I will only accept repatriation with the hope of improving my life better than this life in the camp. I had lived in this situation long where basic needs like food, water, and shelter were my problem. I spent fifteen years in the camp, so getting the privilege to go back home is meant for me to gain access to the lost opportunity I missed here.

To conclude, the essence of hope is always very sweet; it is an inspiration to live life the best way you can because it will give refugees the courage and inspiration to stick to your dreams as long as you breathe. If you have a strong aspiration, hope, and faith, nothing can bring you down, even if you live in the camp as a refugee or host.

5. Conclusion

As shown above, the provision of education for refugees in the camp has always given them hope for a better future, either in the camp or at home. All refugee respondents hoped for a better life and access to jobs. This hope motivated many Somali refugees to accept going back home. While some claimed that education was the main reason why many were reluctant to go back home, others blamed their prolonged time in the camp for causing them to miss education, business, and land ownership opportunities. Still, the participants strongly recommended education in the refugee camp, arguing that it is the primary avenue for refugees to succeed in life. Repatriation would be cutting their dreams short. For refugees to go home in dignity and with respect, they should be empowered educationally and economically, which will bring them to the same level as citizens in the host country.

Voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement in a third country have been widely accepted as durable solutions to the refugee problem. In the case of the Dadaab refugee camp, UNHCR prioritized voluntary repatriation after the government demanded to close the refugee camp. Many refugees believe that resettlement is the only hope that can easily rebuild their life and regain their dignity. However, as a result of insecurity related to al-Shabaab in Kenya, the government changed its policy and announced urgent repatriation for refugees in Dadaab. In the wake of a call by the Kenyan government to repatriate refugees under a tripartite agreement, the decision was not well received, and instead generates anxiety and fear among refugees.

This research was conducted to understand how the repatriation discourse affected refugees living in the camp, since talk of repatriation has been going on for a very long time. Based on the findings, I learned that the process does not capture most refugees' interest but fulfilled the UNHCR policy for repatriation. Those who had stayed for a long time in the camp would like to continue living in the refugee camp, since they see the camp as the only solution that could rebuild their hope since resettlement is offered by UNHCR on a limited basis. Refugees lived in the camp hoping that one day they will get a chance to resettle, only to realize that they have stayed in the camp for many years. The resettlement process has been halted, however, after the unexpected cessation of movement across the world. In the absence of resettlement, many put their hope of getting a good life in the camp into education and economic opportunity, these

being the key reasons why refugees stay in the camp. In the area of protection, many of them feel that the security at home is worse than in the camp and feel that they would be more vulnerable upon return to Somalia.

Many spoke of the fear of going back only to find themselves with no opportunities for employment (due to the lack of educational and formative opportunities in the camps). Yet, the opportunities in the camp and availability of services are also making it hard for some to think of going back to their country of origin. Some refugees want to go home because they strongly held the belief that they can have freedom of movement, which is one of the main restrictions on refugees. They believed that once they are back in their country, they should be issued land that enables them to make a business without any threat from their government. While repatriation is put forward as a solution by the UNHCR and the Kenyan government, little is known about how refuges feel about it, and about what motivates them to go or stay. From a policy perspective, this paper has shown the need for refugees to be equipped with livelihood skills and education before repatriation, which will give them hope to thrive upon their return to Somalia. Conclusively, these opportunities prepare them to improve their standards of living, protect themselves from all forms of persecution, and become self-reliant.

Recommendations

- **Refugee perspectives:** It is important to listen to refugees and get their points of view in designing solutions to their predicament, to achieve refugee-centered durable solutions, and to protect their rights.
- **Future research:** Future research could study the impacts of the relocation of refugees from one camp to another within the same country (such as in Kenya from Walda to Dadaab, Mombasa to Kakuma/Dadaab, and from Thika in central Kenya to Dadaab). I talked to some of the refugees who experienced this relocation, but it was outside of the scope of this study to discuss these relocations in detail.
- **Availability of education and scholarships:** In this study, refugees wanted repatriation only if it supported them with a package that incorporates intensive skills training before departure and study scholarships. Many youth in the camp do not have the opportunity to complete secondary school or post-secondary education. Increasing funding for higher

education to make more secondary schools and post-secondary opportunities available in the camp would support refugees in the camp and refugees returning home in achieving self-reliance, transitioning from dependency, and gaining the courage to earn for themselves. Scholarships for post-secondary education are very limited. Increasing the number of scholarships available – both to study within the camp and to study in Nairobi – would make it easier for refugees to find employment in the host country or in countries of origin after repatriation.

- **Adequate infrastructure supporting repatriation:** UNHCR needs to build schools in Somalia prior to repatriation, especially in areas where refugees will be settled. In this study, education was a primary incentive to stay in the camps and those who wanted to repatriate were concerned that their children would lose educational opportunities. It is also important to build houses for refugees prior to their repatriation.
- **Economic opportunities following repatriation:** UNHCR, partner organizations, and governments can play a role in offering jobs and creating employment opportunities for educated returnees and in giving loans for business opportunities. That will help economic and social integration into the country of origin.
- **Training and psycho-social support before and after repatriation:** Refugees who are returning would benefit from training on a number of topics: counselling and trauma healing, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, child protection, prevention of and responses to sexual and gender-based violence, disaster management, environmental conservation, and the importance of education in society.

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