

PERCEPTION TOWARDS HOSTING REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PEOPLE FROM CONFLICT ZONES: A CASE STUDY OF TANZANIA

Asha Juma Mdundwa

Masters Scholar
School of International Studies and Diaspora SISD
Gujarat University
Ahmedabad – 380009
Mobile: +91 8238250697
Email: mdundwaa@gmail.com

Abstract

In 2021, Tanzania was hosting around 300,000 refugees, housed in over 65000 households in 7 UNHCR established camps across the country. Understanding public perception is crucial in shaping inclusive policies aligning with societal expectations regarding hosting refugees and displaced people. This study examined Tanzanians' perceptions towards hosting refugees and displaced individuals from East African conflict zones. The survey questionnaire was distributed online in the hosting communities comprised of question to understand their perception. The findings reveal 91% are aware of hosting policy with a limited knowledge, while 81% are viewing the hosting as a positive humanitarian gesture, however participants have concerns about resource strains and cultural differences. Moreover, humanitarian ethos, national pride, and realistic considerations found to shape attitudes toward hosting refugees and displaced individuals. The study underscores the importance of effective communication, collaboration, and policy implementation in navigating these challenges while upholding Tanzania's humanitarian tradition and commitment to international cooperation.

Keywords: Refugees, Displaced people, Tanzania Policy, Conflict zone

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, global conflicts have surged, leading to unprecedented levels of forced displacement, with over 108.4 million individuals displaced by the end of 2022, as reported by the UNHCR (2022). East Africa is among the affected regions, where countries like Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and South Sudan are affected with prolonged conflicts, resulting in large-scale displacement (Ongpin, 2008). Tanzania emerged as a significant provider of support and refuge to refugees from these conflict zones, owing to its favourable geographical location and historical commitment to humanitarian principles (Camarena, 2023). According to UNHCR (2021), Tanzania alone hosts around 300,000 refugees in 7 camps of Nyarugusu, Nduta, Mtendeli, Dar es Salaam, Kigoma, Old settlement and Chogo.

LITERATURE

Forced displacement and humanitarian diplomacy

Forced displacement has become a pressing global issue in recent years, with millions of people being forcibly uprooted from their homes due to armed conflicts, political instability, persecution, natural disasters, economic hardships, and other factors (Myers et al., 2024; UNHCR, 2021). Displaced populations face numerous challenges that affect their well-being and livelihoods such as limited access to basic services, economic instability, and social exclusion (David et al., 2023; Kaiser, 2023; Myers et al., 2024). They also face long-term difficulties in finding durable solutions, this includes the search for safe and voluntary return, local integration, or resettlement in third countries (Ekanayake & Amirthalingam, 2023; UNHCR, 2021).

The concept of humanitarian diplomacy emerge in the early 2000s and plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of refugees and displaced people worldwide (Lauri, 2018). It involves diplomatic efforts and negotiation processes undertaken by states, international organizations, and NGOs to protect and assist displaced persons. It is a part of 2030 agenda committed to "leave no one behind" (Lauri, 2018). It also contributes to the formulation and implementation of policies and frameworks for the protection of displaced populations (Peter M, 2015). It seeks to ensure access to basic services such as shelter, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities (Ongpin, 2008; Peter M, 2015). It also contributes to finding durable solutions for displaced individuals, promoting peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and inclusive development to address the root causes

of forced displacement. This includes efforts to facilitate safe and voluntary returns, local integration, and resettlement in third countries (Bowden & Metcalfe-Hough, 2020; Ongpin, 2008).

Historical and geopolitical context

Tanzania as a host country played a significant role in shaping its approach to support displaced populations. It has a legacy of hosting refugees dating back to the decolonization era and its own struggles for independence (Lung, 2019; Ongpin, 2008). The history fostered a deep understanding of the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by displaced populations, leading to a steadfast commitment to alleviating their plight (Obodoruku, 2018). The government of Tanzania, together with partners, has implemented comprehensive programs to address the immediate and long-term needs of refugees (UNHCR, 2022). This longstanding commitment to humanitarian principles has made Tanzania a respected player in the field of refugee assistance and protection (Erdilmen & Sosthenes, 2020).

Tanzania's geographic location, bordering countries experiencing displacement crises, has positioned as a primary entry point and transit country for individuals seeking safety (Ross Camarena, 2017). This strategic location has both opportunities and challenges, requiring Tanzania to manage the influx of refugees and coordinate with regional partners and international agencies (Camarena, 2023; Ongpin, 2008).

Tanzania's role in hosting refugees and displaced people

Tanzania's commitment to providing support and assistance to refugees and displaced people is evident in its comprehensive policies, and legal frameworks (Rubakula & Msoka, 2023; Turner, 2023). Tanzania is a signatory to international agreements relating to refugees, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. These agreements outline the rights and protections afforded to refugees, including the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the expulsion or return of refugees to territories where their lives or freedoms may be threatened (*The 1951 Refugee Convention*, n.d.). Tanzania has established procedures for determining refugee status, typically carried out by the government in collaboration with UNHCR and other relevant agencies.

Collaborating with UNHCR and NGOs, the government of Tanzania has implemented comprehensive programs to meet the needs of refugees and displaced people (UNHCR, 2022). UNHCR, supports Tanzania's efforts like technical assistance, financial resources, and coordination mechanisms to strengthen the response to displacement crises (Obodoruku, 2018). NGOs often have direct access to affected communities, allowing them to address specific needs and vulnerabilities, including healthcare, education, livelihood support, and psychosocial assistance (Obodoruku, 2018; Pincock et al., 2020). Despite the collaboration effort, challenges such as limited resources, coordination issues, and political complexities persist, necessitating continuous collaboration and innovation (Bonaventure, 2023; Ndayeza, 2022; Whitaker, 2002)

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to investigate the perception of Tanzanians toward hosting refugees and displaced individuals. Qualitative data, gathered through online questionnaires with Tanzanian citizens, explores their perspectives, while quantitative analysis employs statistical methods to provide numerical data. Focusing on Kigoma region, home to Nyarugusu and Nduta camps, the study population comprises Tanzanian citizens near and distant from refugee camps, ensuring diverse perspectives through random sampling.

Respondent profile

The age distribution of the respondents is as follows, 53% falling within the range of (25-34) age, 18-24 years occupied approximately 22% of the sample, 35-44 and 45-54 represent 19% and 5%, respectively while respondents aged 55 and above make up a smaller proportion at 1% as presented Table 1 below.

Table 1: Age profile

Age	Frequency	Valid Percent
18-24	20	22.5
25-34	47	52.8
35-44	17	19.1
45-54	4	4.5
55 and above	1	1.1

Gender distribution was also considered as 77% of participants are male and 23% are females as presented in the Table below.

Table 2: Gender distribution

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent
Male	69	76.7
Female	21	23.3

The educational distribution within the respondent profile offers valuable insights into the diversity of perspectives captured in the study. The study engaged participants of various levels, (55%) possess a Bachelor's Degree, (32%) obtained a Master's Degree or higher, (10%) have Diploma/Certificate while (3%) are those completed up to the secondary school level.

Table 3: Educational profile

Education level	Frequency	Valid Percent
Secondary School	3	3.4
Diploma/Certificate	9	10.1
Bachelor's Degree	49	55.1
Master's Degree or higher	28	31.5

Additionally, data collection involves structured online questionnaires, refined through pilot testing for reliability. Ethical considerations prioritize participant consent, confidentiality, and well-being. Data analysis employs regression and thematic analysis, aiming for meaningful insights. Overall, the study adheres to ethical guidelines, seeking to provide accurate and objective research findings.

Findings and discussion

Understanding the perception of hosting communities on refugees' settlement will help to make the informed decision that give value to both refugees and hosts and reduce possible conflicts. To explore the perception, a series of questions were asked to hosting communities which are discussed below. The question varies from awareness on the hosting of refugees, the participants perception of impact of hosting refugees and what can be done to ensure both communities live in harmony.

Awareness on hosting refugees and displaced people

The first question explored the awareness of participants in hosting refugees and displaced people, when asked if they are aware that Tanzania is hosting refugees, the results are reflected in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Awareness on hosting refugees and displaced people (n=90)

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I am familiar with it.	50	55.6
Yes, but I don't know much about it.	32	35.5
No, I am not aware of it.	8	8.9

The findings reveal that (56%) of participants are familiar, 35% admitted to have some awareness but lacked in-depth knowledge on the subject, conversely 09% are not aware of Tanzania's hosting of refugees from East African conflict zones. and Obodoruku, (2018) highlighted limited exposure to information may play a role in shaping awareness levels, Dempster & Hargrave, (2017) added that media coverage, individual interests, lack of comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding refugee issues, educational background, and geographic location also contribute to a individuals' awareness. Collaborations between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and media outlets are thought contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of the refugee situation, thereby influencing public perceptions positively in line with Erdilmen & Sosthenes, (2020) and UNHCR, (2022).

Challenges and opportunities on hosting refugees and displaced people

When asked about their opinion on how they perceive Tanzania on hosting refugee and displaced people, the responses are presented on Table 5 below.

Table 5: Perception on Tanzania's hosting refugees and displaced people (n=89)

Response	Frequency	Percent
A compassionate act of providing refuge and assistance.	72	80.9
A burden on the country's resources and stability.	15	16.9
I don't have an opinion.	2	2.2

The results indicate that 81% of the respondents view Tanzania's hosting as a compassionate act of providing refuge and assistance. The findings suggest of a cultural ethos that values hospitality and assistance to those facing displacement due to conflict as also found by Erdilmen & Sosthenes (2020) and Ongpin (2008). On the same, Lowe et al. (2022) added that the awareness provides an opportunity to further build public support for such initiatives. Conversely, 17% perceive hosting refugees as a burden on the country's resources and stability, which correlates to Miller's (2018) findings which raise concerns the burden the government take to host refugees and Ongpin' (2008) study about the economic and social challenges associated with hosting large numbers of displaced individuals. These findings suggest the participants view the hosting more of humanitarian aid.

Impact of hosting refugees in Tanzania

Respondents have different views on how hosting refugees impacts Tanzania as shown in the Table 6 below.

Table 6: Impact of hosting refugees in Tanzania (n=90)

Response	Frequency	Percent
Positively, by promoting cultural diversity and international cooperation.	68	75.6
Negatively, by straining resources and increasing social tensions.	19	21.1
I don't have an opinion.	3	3.3

The results show (76%) of respondents, hold a positive view, believing that hosting refugees contributes to the promotion of cultural diversity and international cooperation as supported by Tureti, (2003). Conversely, 21% perceive negative, citing concerns about straining resources and increasing social tensions reflecting the potential challenges associated with accommodating a large number of displaced individuals in line with Erdilmen & Sosthenes, (2020). Furthermore, 03% of respondents, did not express a clear opinion on the matter.

Perspectives on hosting of refugees from East African conflict zones

In this part, respondents were asked to write their views about hosting refugees in Tanzania. The question aimed to explore and collect different views that Tanzanian citizens have in their minds.

One prominent theme emerging from the responses is the positive impact of hosting refugees on the lives and well-being of both refugees and host communities. Respondents expressed a welcoming attitude, emphasizing the humanitarian responsibility to assist those in need in line with Erdilmen & Sosthenes, (2020) and Lung, (2019).

"Tanzania, is doing the best in this way because refugees have got nothing to do with countries' stability the country is doing its best to help the life of the refugees in all aspects, we are all Africans, therefore, helping other Africans to overcome these issues." (respondent number 22). Respondent number 28 added that "it is the act of kindness and relief as many lose families, relatives, job, property, etc."

Some respondents advocated for granting citizenship to refugees to promote peaceful coexistence as supported by UNHCR, (2022). In addition, the resettlement of refugees from different countries to Tanzania seems to depend on the goodwill of the country to host refugees in line with Miletzki, (2019).

"If the refugees mean no harm to our country, they are much welcome, and I insist that they find the citizenship warrant for our country so they can live peacefully." Respondent 1

The historical perspective plays a significant role in shaping respondents' views, and seen as a source of pride, reflecting a sense of duty and humanity (Alix-Garcia & Saah, 2010; Erdilmen & Sosthenes, 2020).

"Tanzania has been one of the leading countries in hosting refugees since independence. It has been demonstrating exemplary acts in exercising humanity." Respondent number 26

Erdilmen & Sosthenes, (2020) supported that the act of hosting refugees is perceived as a demonstration of strength and cultural values, contributing to Tanzania's image as a peaceful nation.

"Tanzania is regarded as a peaceful nation, and hosting refugees from East Africa is a matter of showing strength toward the East African community." Respondent number 3

"I think as a Tanzanian, we should be honored to host refugees as it's a responsibility of everyone to take care of people who are in need...." Respondent number 51

Another respondent added the call for the continuation of hosting programme

"It is a good thing; Tanzania should keep on accepting refugees and taking care of them." Respondent number 13

On an international level, respondents recognized hosting refugees as a means of enhancing cooperation among East African countries and contributing to international agreements on humanitarian protection as supported by Milner, (2016).

"It is a way of enhancing and encouraging cooperation among the East African region" Respondent number 32

"It promotes international cooperation and transfer of culture" Respondent number 06

"It increases its international relation with other countries" Respondent number 47

"It's good ideas for Tanzania because it can help the nation to be developed and widely cooperation and support for donors' country in social security, economic development and culture affairs" Respondent number 25

"It brings love and unity among east Africans country" Respondent number 34

There is a call for government intervention, including the enforcement of laws to support refugees and collaboration with international organizations to improve refugee camps and social services as supported by Steiner et al. (2003).

"Just advice to the government. To enforce laws which could favor the refugees around the world." Respondent number 21

"May the government of Tanzania in collaboration with UNHCR improve the refugees' camps, including social services." Respondent number 05

However, not all responses are overwhelmingly positive. Other respondents expressed concerns about the potential burden on resources and the government in line with Miller, (2018), Milner, (2016) and Ongpin,

(2008) also the challenges related to population increase observed as supported by (Schneiderheinze & Lücke, (2020) and Whitaker, (1999).

"Hosting refugees will bring a burden to the government, though these people need to be helped to ensure their safety." Respondent number 09

"I am concerned about the increasing population in our country, hunger, availability of jobs, and others." Respondent number 45

Safety and cultural challenges also emerged as areas of apprehension. Some respondents voiced concerns about security issues, Miletzki 2019 added that, the attitudes towards refugees have changed towards the emphasis on internal security.

"It's a good thing though sometimes it has a negative impact as some of the refugees enter with some weapons and engage in illegal acts." Respondent number 56

Cultural differences were also raised as potential challenges, with suggestions for the establishment of policies and laws to maintain peace and preserve cultural values. With the example of Burundian refugees, over time adopted Burundian-Tanzanian customs and culture as supported by Keddie, (2011) and Miletzki, (2019).

"The only concern is traditional concerns. We have our own culture that supports the kind of life we live in. And the refugees who hosted in our country have their own which are different with us" Respondent number 18

"Refugees and displaced people should be allowed to enter but with special care, and there should be policies and laws that will be followed to maintain our peace and cultural values." Respondent number 07

In summary, the views from respondents' express pride in hosting refugees, citing humanitarian duty and cooperation benefits. Concerns include resource strain, security risks, and cultural differences, requiring government intervention and policy measures for resolution.

CONCLUSION

Tanzanians hold diverse views on hosting refugees from East African conflict zones. While 91% are aware of Tanzania's role, 09% lack understanding, highlighting a need for better information. Overall, there's a positive perception, with hosting seen as a compassionate expression of cultural values like hospitality and humanitarianism. Respondents believe hosting refugees benefits Tanzania by promoting cultural diversity, international cooperation, and peace promotion. Yet, concerns about resource strain, cultural disparities, and social tensions emphasize the need for effective policies to tackle practical challenges linked to accommodating large numbers of displaced individuals. Additionally, respondents take pride in Tanzania's history of hosting refugees, seeing it as indication to the nation's resilience and compassion. They urge government support and collaboration with international organizations to improve refugee camp conditions. Effective communication, collaboration, and policy implementation are essential in navigating these challenges while continuous evaluation of citizens perceptions about hosting refugee, as feedback from the community allows for adaptation and improvement of interventions over time, ensuring that efforts align with the evolving needs and perceptions of the population.

REFERENCE

- [1] Alix-Garcia, J., & Saah, D. (2010). The Effect of Refugee Inflows on Host Communities: Evidence from Tanzania. *The World Bank Economic Review*, 24(1), 148–170.
- [2] Bonaventure, R. (2023). *Impact of Refugees in North Western Tanzania*. Docslib. <https://docslib.org/doc/8719318/impact-of-refugees-in-north-western-tanzania>
- [3] Bowden, M., & Metcalfe-Hough, V. (2020). *Humanitarian diplomacy and protection advocacy in an age of caution*.
- [4] Camarena, K. R. (2023). *The Geopolitical Strategy of Refugee Camps*.
- [5] David, O. P., Dammeyer, J., & Danganana, J. M. (2023). Experiences of mental health problems vulnerability, psychological symptoms and coping mechanisms of displaced adolescents in North-east Nigeria. *African Health Sciences*, 23(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ahs.v23i1.36>
- [6] Dempster, H., & Hargrave, K. (2017). *Understanding public attitudes towards refugees and migrants*.
- [7] Ekanayake, A., & Amirthalingam, K. (2023). Returning Home: A Comparative Analysis of the Experiences of Sri Lankan First- and Second-Generation Refugee Returnees from India. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 42(2), 180–203. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdad004>
- [8] Erdilmen, M., & Sosthenes, W. (2020). *Opportunities and Challenges for Localization of Humanitarian Action in Tanzania*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.19504.38402>
- [9] Kaiser, Z. R. M. A. (2023). Analysis of the livelihood and health of internally displaced persons due to riverbank erosion in Bangladesh. *Journal of Migration and Health*, 7, 100157. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2023.100157>
- [10] Keddie, A. (2011). Pursuing justice for refugee students: Addressing issues of cultural (mis)recognition. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2011.560687>

- [11] Lauri, A. D. (2018). Humanitarian Diplomacy: A New Research Agenda. *CMI Brief*, 2018:4. <https://www.cmi.no/publications/6536-humanitarian-diplomacy-a-new-research-agenda>
- [12] Lowe, C., Salomon, H., Hagen-Zanker, J., & Meral, A. G. (2022). *Humanitarian assistance and social protection in contexts of forced displacement*.
- [13] Lung, W.-C. (2019). The humanitarian assistance dilemma explained: The implications of the refugee crisis in Tanzania in 1994. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 31(3), 323–340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2019.1635105>
- [14] Miletzki, J. (2019). Burundian refugees' journey towards citizenship: Pragmatics of belonging in Ulyankulu settlement, Tanzania. *Migration and Development*, 9, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2019.1627785>
- [15] Miller, S. D. (2018). *Assessing the Impacts of Hosting Refugees*. 4.
- [16] Milner, J. (2016). *WHEN NORMS ARE NOT ENOUGH*.
- [17] Myers, E., Sacks, A., Tellez, J. F., & Wibbels, E. (2024). Forced displacement, social cohesion, and the state: Evidence from eight new studies. *World Development*, 173, 106416. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106416>
- [18] Ndayeza, E. M. (2022). *THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN REFUGEE INTEGRATION: A*.
- [19] Obodoruku, B. (2018). *Refugees and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): Information Access and Information Services*.
- [20] Ongpin, P. (2008). *Refugees in Tanzania – Asset or Burden?* 5.
- [21] Peter M. (2015). Humanitarian diplomacy and principled humanitarian action. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 97(897–898), 445–452. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S181638311500082X>
- [22] Pincock, K., Betts, A., & Easton-Calabria, E. (2020). *The Global Governed?: Refugees as Providers of Protection and Assistance* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108848831>
- [23] Ross Camarena, K. (2017). *Location Matters: The Politics of Refugee Camp Placement*.
- [24] Rubakula, G., & Msoka, C. (2023, July 1). *Refugees and Host Communities: Critical Issues and Implications for Policy-making in Tanzania*. | *Tanzania Journal of Development Studies* | EBSCOhost. <https://openurl.ebsco.com/contentitem/gcd:174806727?sid=ebsco:plink:crawler&id=ebsco:gcd:174806727>
- [25] Steiner, N., Gibney, M., & Loescher, G. (2003). *Problems of Protection: The UNHCR, Refugees, and Human Rights*. Psychology Press.
- [26] *The 1951 Refugee Convention*. (n.d.). UNHCR. Retrieved February 8, 2024, from <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/1951-refugee-convention>
- [27] Tureti, M. K. (2003). *Impact of refugees on host communities: The case of Kakuma Refugee camp, North Western Kenya, 1992 -2002* [Thesis, University of Nairobi, CEES, Kenya]. <http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/6360>
- [28] Turner, Y. R. and S. (2023, August 24). *Tanzania's Open Door to Refugees Narrows*. Migrationpolicy.Org. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/tanzania-refugee-policy>
- [29] UNHCR. (2021). *UNHCR Global Report*. UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP). <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/93861>
- [30] UNHCR, T. (2022). *Annual-Results-Report*.
- [31] Whitaker, B. E. (1999). *Changing opportunities: Refugees and host communities in western Tanzania*.
- [32] Whitaker, B. E. (2002). Refugees in Western Tanzania: The Distribution of Burdens and Benefits Among Local Hosts. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 15(4), 339–358. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/15.4.339>