

The Influence of Social Networks on the Livelihoods of Urban Refugees in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of social networks in enhancing the livelihoods of urban refugees in Dar es Salaam City, Tanzania. It focused on the key actors within the social networks of urban refugees, as well as the effectiveness of these networks on enhancing the livelihoods of refugees in Dar es Salaam City. Social network and actor network theories guided this study. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected through focus group discussions and document reviews. Four focus groups were organized, involving Burundian men, Congolese men, Congolese women, and a mixed group of Congolese and Burundian youth. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns in the data. Findings revealed that urban refugees rely on various social networks, both formal and informal, ranging from government to non-government organizations, international organizations, families, and friends. Actors in the formal networks included Dignity Kwanza, Tanganyika Christian Refugee Services (TCRS), Relief to Development Society (REDESO), Church World Services (CWS), UNHCR, and the Refugee Department under the Ministry of Home Affairs, which provides training, financial, and legal support. In addition, informal networks that refugees have established include family and friendship within the host community; offering critical moral, social, and material support. The results suggest that, while formal network support in the form of training has not significantly improved the livelihoods of refugees due to policy restrictions, informal networks, specifically those made up of family and friendship ties, were effective in enhancing the livelihoods of these refugees in Dar es Salaam. The study recommends tailoring training initiatives for refugees within Tanzania's refugee policy context, to optimize their impact on their livelihoods.

Keywords: *social, networks, refugees, livelihoods, adaptation.*

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, the number of forcibly displaced people globally has significantly increased, whereby more than 30m have been displaced by disasters, conflicts, and development; leading to an unprecedented number of refugees (Faas et al., 2015; UNHCR, 2023). The status of refugees globally reflects a significant shift in the dynamics of forced displacement, with an increasing number of refugees residing in urban areas rather than in traditional camps (Archer & Dodman, 2017). The growing number of refugees fleeing to urban areas has been influenced by their desire for better economic opportunities and access to social services such as education and health (Betts et al., 2021).

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However, refugees in urban areas face challenges in securing suitable livelihoods as they are marginalized and frequently overlooked by humanitarian agencies that traditionally focus on rural encampments, hence resulting in poor livelihood conditions (Marfleet, 2007; Koizumi & Hoffstaedter, 2015). Moreover, the situation is exacerbated by the lack of access to formal labour markets, legal restrictions, and limited social support systems within host countries (Fábos & Kibreab, 2007).

In many developing countries, where the majority of refugees are hosted, urban areas have become increasingly significant as refugee hosting spaces. For instance, Africa recorded more than 3.9m new displacements in 2016 due to conflicts, violence, disasters, conservation efforts, and development initiatives (Cottyn, 2018). Cities in countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Uganda, and Kenya have been hosting large numbers of refugees living outside formal camps (Betts et al., 2020). In these contexts, refugees often rely heavily on social networks that are considered crucial resources in helping them find employment, housing, and access essential or necessary services (Jacobsen, 2021). Through the available social networks, refugees can access information about various opportunities for improving their livelihoods, and how to embrace them. In cities where formal refugee support systems often lack resources, refugees use networks to build social capital, foster trust development, and enhance their resilience. However, the effectiveness of these social networks varies depending on various factors, such as gender, nationality, and length of stay in the host country. For instance, Earle (2024) notes that refugees with strong ethnic ties are well-established in cities, and able to seek assistance from their relatives when faced with challenges; whereas those with weaker ties live in fear in urban areas.

Tanzania is one of the countries that has been receiving a good number of refugees in East Africa. The refugees come from Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Chaulia, 2003; Ogude, 2018). According to the UNHCR factsheet (2021), Tanzania hosts 246,780 refugees and asylum-seekers. Historically, Tanzania has received praise for its hospitality in welcoming refugees until the 1990s, when the country shifted its policy to repatriation (Boeyink, 2020; Ogude, 2018). Although the majority of refugees reside in camps in Western Tanzania, some reside in urban cities, especially Dar es Salaam, either formally or informally (O'Loughlen & McWilliams, 2017). However, the exact number of urban refugees is not known since not all refugees are registered. For instance, the UNHCR factsheet (2021) identifies 190 registered refugees in Dar es Salaam City, whereas Tippens' (2019) study reveals approximately 10,000 refugees residing in Dar es Salaam City, presenting new challenges as they move from camp-based to urban refugee settlements.

Despite the efforts by government and non-government institutions to support refugees, their socio-economic integration remains a challenge, thereby affecting their livelihoods. Restrictive policies and limited formal employment

have made it difficult for refugees to achieve self-sufficiency in the country. In this context, social networks become an essential coping mechanism for livelihood improvement. These networks provide urban refugees with access to informal employment, and offer vital information about essential services such as healthcare and education (Nyakundi et al., 2020). However, the effectiveness of these social networks varies across different contexts, including countries with restrictive policies like Tanzania; and across different types of networks such as familial, religious, and organizational networks.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study

This work is anchored on the social network theory (SNT), and actor network theory (ANT), to explain the power of social relations and non-human actors in shaping refugees' livelihood in urban areas. The SNT aims to understand social structures by examining the relationships between individuals or groups (nodes), and their connections/interactions (ties) (Zhang, 2023). It states that people are embedded in relationships and cannot be viewed in isolation from their social environment. This is because all aspects of life entail social relations, according to Wasserman and Faust (1994). As per Dania and Griffin (2021), individual interactions and positions within a network influence an individual's access to information, opportunities, and resources. Moreover, a network is also organized based on mutual dependency (Awumbila et al., 2017).

Therefore, urban refugees are networks of interconnected nodes (people – both refugees and host communities, organizations) connected through ties (friendship, kinship, nationalities, religious beliefs, professional relationships, etc.). Their relationship with networks provides crucial resources for refugees to build their livelihoods. These resources can be in the form of knowledge, trainings, employment opportunities, or any other social and financial support. According to Li et al. (2021), an efficient network should enable an individual or organization to quickly reach one another to obtain resources such as information or support. However, obtaining resources alone is not enough; such resources need to enable members in the network to upgrade either in terms of skills, knowledge, or positive transformation of their lives (Dania & Griffin, 2021).

On the other hand, the ANT – which was developed by Bruno Latour, Michael Callon, and John Lwa in the early 1980s – emphasizes the role of human and non-human actors in forming networks (Yao & Liu, 2022). It posits that individual networks are constructed through the interplay of various factors, including humans, institutions, and technology. It has three core concepts: actors, networks, and translation. In this context, actors are individual refugees, refugee communities, local communities, and government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with refugee issues, social support systems, local businesses, technologies, the country's legal system, urban infrastructure, and

even cultural norms and practices. These actors form interconnected *networks* through which resources, information, and support flow. Through the process of *translation*, urban refugees work to enrol other actors into their networks and establish connections. They form alliances or networks with local community members, seek assistance from NGOs or government agencies, access social services, and leverage available resources such as educational or vocational training programmes. Similarly, organizations dealing with refugees may collaborate with other actors—such as local businesses, educational institutions, and community groups—to provide support and services. Refugees’ adaptation and livelihood improvement in urban areas will depend on how they have been able to transform the available actors in their networks to fit their interests or needs. However, various factors—such as the policy of the host country, the socio-economic condition of the country and its communities, and the organization’s goals—determine the ability of refugees to transform actors in their network. These factors may either facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of refugees’ social networks in improving their livelihood conditions in urban areas.

Therefore, the study utilises these two theories to understand the impact of social network usage in improving the livelihoods of urban refugees. The SNT provides a valuable explanation of how social ties among refugees facilitate their access to opportunities, information, and other socio-economic needs. Conversely, the ANT enhances the SNT by emphasizing the influence of non-human actors—like legal and institutional structures—on refugees’ ability to access opportunities, information, and other socio-economic services in their host country.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Urban Refugees and their Challenges

Refugees face the complex decision of adopting the best possible combination of coping strategies to meet their immediate needs, while minimizing their long-term effects (Arhin et al., 2022). The availability of resources and assets at one’s disposal contributes to the complexity of decision-making, particularly when a person flees without any available assets (Arhin et al., 2022). These displaced persons usually struggle with the lack of access to livelihood, lack of financial independence, and lack of social and family stability (Jayakody et al., 2022). Furthermore, displaced individuals experience distinct social, cultural, economic, and political impacts (Hammer, 2014).

Studies have found that when people are displaced from their original homes and jobs, they face many challenges (Gong et al., 2020). Upon their arrival in cities, refugees have to deal with challenges such as trauma, family loss, family separation, deprived living conditions, cultural barriers, language barriers, and isolation (Heidinger, 2023; O’Loughlen & McWilliams, 2017). Moreover, they are without valuable assets and social networks that are crucial for their lives (O’Loughlen & McWilliams, 2017). As a result, they become dependent on

support to re-establish their livelihoods, while developing new social networks that will support them during their stay in the urban area.

Despite humanitarian agencies providing protection and livelihood assistance to urban refugees, their support has not been sufficient to improve their livelihoods. This has been influenced by the nature of government policy, local institutions, civil society, and the socio-economic condition of the host country in shaping refugees access to livelihood resources in urban areas (Brown et al., 2018). Likewise, restrictive policies in most host countries have been discouraging refugees to work, hence making them more vulnerable in terms of their wellbeing and livelihood conditions (Mekonnen, 2019). Most host countries prefer the use of restrictive policies to discourage migration to urban areas (Mekonnen, 2019). Consequently, humanitarian assistance programmes often overlook the inclusion of the majority of urban refugees (Tippens, 2020). This forces urban refugees to depend on their social networks for informal livelihoods, potentially putting them in risky situations (Brown et al., 2018).

2.2.2 Social Networks and Refugees' Livelihood

Social networks play a significant role in the decision-making process and outcomes of the migration of refugees (Lee et al., 2024). They act as drivers for migration, providing economic incentives, urban amenities, preferential policies, and a sense of social affiliation (Gong et al., 2023). They also influence the destination choices of refugees (Adugna et al., 2022). This means that social networks are integral to the migration process by influencing decisions, providing support, and shaping the experiences of refugees. Anyanzu and de Wet-Billings (2022) report that refugees mostly prefer to move to areas where they have ties. Some refugees use those ties or networks to facilitate and direct their migration flows; including both legal and illegal border-crossing networks (Romaniszyn, 2022). However, studies reveal that forced migration often results in refugees losing their social networks and support. Moreover, with the loss of social network, vulnerable groups—such as older refugees, women, and disabled individuals—experience greater consequences such as social isolation, increased grief, deteriorated livelihood, and mental health challenges (Ekoh et al., 2022; Collyer, 2005).

A broader set of social relations fundamentally shapes the everyday lives and mobility of refugees (Christ & Etzold, 2022). As reported by Heidinger (2023), these social relations help refugees to access services and support in urban areas. Networks among refugees are not uniform due to their varying strengths and weaknesses: while some are strong, others are weak among individual refugees. These differences result in different livelihood outcomes for refugees in urban areas.

Due to specific risks and vulnerabilities, individual members encounter different legal statuses on the move and in asylum procedures, and they move across and settle at various localities (Christ & Etzold, 2022). Studies show that

the ability of displaced persons to migrate is largely determined by the amount of assistance that their networks can provide (Adugna et al., 2022). However, some studies have pointed out some dangers and risks associated with the reliance on social networks; and that some social networks possess exploitative conditions, which in turn heighten the vulnerability of displaced persons instead of helping to overcome them (Adugna et al., 2022). People assume that refugees, having lost their social networks, rely on new networks in the host country to access their needs and other services (ibid.).

Despite the challenges that refugees encounter when arriving in urban areas, they rely on supporting organizations and the host community while developing new social networks. They also use their new networks to access various sources of livelihood. According to Aseyo and Ochieng (2013), refugees in urban areas engage in various livelihood strategies such as shopping for groceries, craft making, tailoring, artisanship, entrepreneurship, and so forth. Moreover, Ochizuki (2017) reports that refugees in urban areas support their livelihood through crop cultivation, livestock breeding, and access to markets. In the absence of alternatives, refugees in urban areas turn to informal work with the help of existing networks, such as those with co-nationals. They also use these networks to get accommodation in the host country (Rudolf, 2022). Those with loose social networks face complications in accessing livelihood sources (Brown et al., 2018). Hence, without access to formal assistance, urban refugees rely on other informal sources and networks for their survival in urban areas (Kasozi et al., 2018).

Through social networks, refugees can obtain information about various services and opportunities available in urban areas, as well as secure jobs that are crucial for enhancing their livelihoods (Buscher, 2013). Moreover, social networks help people understand where and how to access different services (Buscher, 2013; Kasozi et al., 2018). For instance, Congolese refugees in Durban use their social ties to access job market niches and share resources, thereby enhancing their economic resilience (Amis, 2005). However, despite the power of social networks in improving their livelihood, language barriers can pose a challenge in transforming those resources and opportunities into livelihood support systems. For example, Kasozi et al. (2018) and Nakisita and Kirabo-Nagem (2023) found that language was a challenge in accessing health services in Uganda because service providers and refugees use different languages to communicate.

Although numerous studies on social networks emphasize their significance in offering essential resources to refugees (see Adugna et al., 2022; Gong et al., 2023; Heidinger, 2023; Tran, 2015; Jabbar & Zaza, 2016), the impact of various types of networks (i.e., formal and informal ones) on livelihood outcomes across diverse urban environments has not been thoroughly examined. Furthermore, it is essential to conduct additional empirical studies that evaluate the effectiveness of these network types in the context of restrictive refugee policies. This is what this study sought to address by assessing the influence of social networks in improving the livelihoods of urban refugees in Dar es Salaam.

3. Methodology

3.1 Description of the Study Area

Figure 1 shows the study area: Dar es Salaam City. The city is located on the east coast of Tanzania between latitudes 6°45"S and 7°25"S, and longitudes 39°E and 39°55"E. It borders the Indian Ocean to the east; and the Coast Region to the north, west, and south. It covers a total surface area of 1,393km². Administratively, the city comprises five municipalities: Ilala, Kinondoni, Temeke, Kigamboni, and Ubungo (Todd et al., 2019). The city hosts about 5,383,728 people according to the 2022 national population census (URT, 2022). Economically, Dar es Salaam is considered the largest business hub; and has the highest gross domestic product (GDP) rates compared to other cities in the country. According to Todd et al. (2019), Dar es Salaam is a leading manufacturing zone in Tanzania, contributing approximately 50% of the total value of manufactured goods in selected industries in 2017.



Figure 1: Dar es Salaam City with its Administrative Structure

Source: SHLC (2018) as Cited in Todd et al. (2019).

3.2 Research Design and Sampling

The study used a case study design to explore the role of social networks in enhancing the livelihood of refugees in urban areas. The design was selected as it allows for a comprehensive examination of how social networks function among refugees. It also allows for a detailed understanding of the interactions, processes, and mechanisms through which social networks contribute to livelihood improvement through access to resources, opportunities, and support. Furthermore, the context-specific nature of a case study enables researchers to concentrate on specific urban areas, thereby capturing unique insights into the interaction between social networks and the livelihoods of urban refugees. Under the case study design, a qualitative approach was adopted to capture refugees' experiences and perspectives about various factors that influenced the establishment and utilization of social networks by urban refugees for livelihood enhancement. The approach was crucial as it helped capture subjective dimensions of social networks that are difficult to quantify, such as trust and social capital.

Purposive sampling was applied in selecting Dar es Salaam City. The city was selected as it is the largest city in the country, and has a number of registered refugees. The target population was refugees living in Dar es Salaam. Two categories were purposefully selected based on their nationalities: Congolese, and Burundians. The selection of participants was done using a snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method applied when samples with target characteristics are not easily accessible, and therefore existing study subjects recruit future participants from among their contacts (Naderifar et al., 2017). In this study, the initial participants were identified through a non-government organization that works closely with urban refugees, and then the initial refugees were asked to suggest other refugee members from their networks. This method was deemed suitable given the nature of the target population (urban refugees), which was difficult to reach using other sampling techniques due to their dispersed settlements.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Methods for data collection for this study included focus group discussions (FGDs) and document reviews. Four FGDs were conducted with urban refugees from Burundi and Congo. The composition of the FGDs was one FGD with Congolese men, one with Congolese women, one with Burundian men, and one with youths (mixed Congolese and Burundian men and females). Each group consisted of ten (10) participants, bringing the total number of participants in the study to forty (40). Document review was conducted, especially with UNHCR reports, to understand the status of urban refugees in the country.

Data was processed, whereby transcription and cleaning were done to ensure their completeness and clarity. The cleaning process involved checking the

transcribed data against the recorded audios to ensure all textual data was accurate. Thematic analysis was conducted. This is a qualitative method that is widely used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). The cleaned data was coded according to the research questions and themes for analysis. These themes include types of social networks, nature of relations in the network (i.e., support and resources within the network), impacts of the support from social networks on livelihood enhancement, and challenges of social networks to urban refugees. Actors in the networks were mapped using the UCINET software, whereby the coded data was put into Excel and imported into UCINET for analysis. Finally, a network map showing all actors connected with refugees was produced.

4. Results and Discussions.

4.1 *Social Networks of Refugees in Dar es Salaam City*

The results indicate that refugees in Dar es Salaam City have established a variety of social networks that are crucial for their survival and integration into urban environments. These networks are both formal and informal, involving a range of actors from international to local, government to non-government actors, as well as religious and family groups. This diversity of networks indicates refugee capacity to interact with other actors in the host environment. Figure 2 shows the mapping of all formal and informal actors involved in refugee networks in Dar es Salaam. These networks have been very important in offering support in different issues.

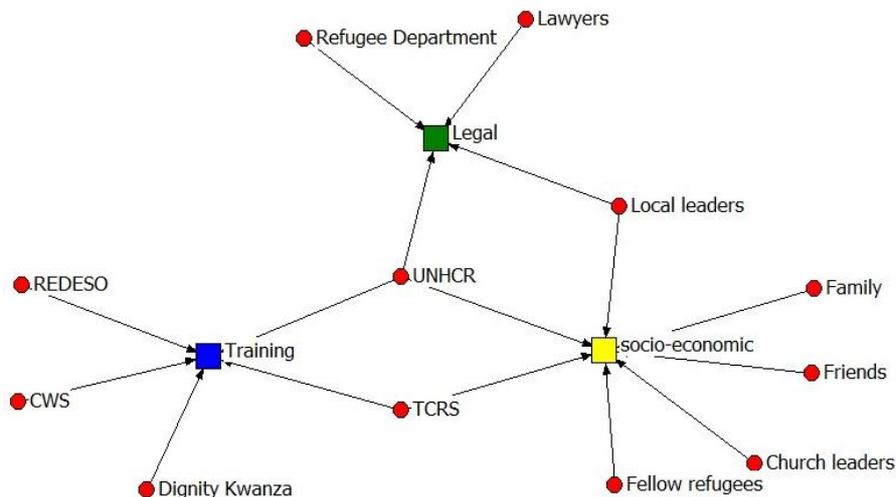


Figure 2: Social Networks of Urban Refugees in Dar es Salaam

Source: Fieldwork (2023).

As far as formal networks are concerned, refugees in Dar es Salaam reported to interact with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Refugees, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), REDESO, Dignity Kwanza, TCRS, and CWS. Refugees interact with these formal actors to access legal services such as documentation, protection, education, and other legal services. Formal networks are very important to refugees, as they play a critical role in their legitimation process. They also offer training services, as well as social and economic support to refugees. The following admission was given by an urban refugee in Dar es Salaam:

We, refugees, get support from different organizations after securing permits. We receive support from the UNHCR through REDESO, TCRS, Dignity Kwanza, CWS, and REDESO (FGD with Burundian Men in Dar es Salaam, 2023).

Likewise, informal networks that were identified by refugees in Dar es Salaam include religious institutions (specifically churches), families, and ethnic groups. These informal networks were reported to hold more weight in refugees' networks, as they provide immediate support to refugees. Family members – both within the host country and outside countries – also provide support, especially moral support. With ethnic communities, findings have revealed that refugees in Dar es Salaam are connected through their ethnic groups. Those from Congo have their own networks of interaction where they assist one another. These ethnic groups run to religious institutions, whereby it was found that refugees from the same nationality prefer to worship in the same church. This was reported in both female and male FGDs with Congolese refugees, as in the following quote:

The first network to rely on is my fellow Congolese. The majority start with relatives or family members, then proceed with finding and interacting with institutions for accessing necessary support (FGD with Congolese Women, Dar es Salaam, 2023).

When refugees arrive in the host environment, they first connect with their fellow nationals. These familial ties help refugees connect with broader networks of refugees with similar cultural or national backgrounds, which may offer practical support, including information on various issues like housing, employment opportunities, and resources. This finding corroborates that of the study by Umubyeyi and Mtapuri (2024), who report that refugees in Durban, South Africa, depend on relatives, friends, and family members for different kinds of support, including financial as well as information support. Shared experiences influence the formation of these formal and informal networks, fostering bonds of empathy and mutual understanding. The experiences can stem from migration, persecution, and search for safety. Moreover, cultural background and religious affiliation influence the formation of social networks. This implies that refugees from the same country form ethnic or religious groups, which provide practical support to members within these networks.

4.2 Roles of Actors in the Refugees' Social Networks

4.2.1 Capacity Building

The findings indicate that various actors within the social networks of refugees play diverse roles that either directly or indirectly support the livelihood of urban refugees. These actors have been instrumental in building the capacity of urban refugees by offering training sessions, skill development, and other necessary support needed by refugees (see Figure 2). For instance, findings from three FGDs involving Congolese males, females, and males from Burundi revealed that Dignity Kwanza had played a significant role in their network by offering training programmes and raising awareness about legal issues. The NGO has been providing training and raising awareness about the rights of refugees. With legal trainings from Dignity Kwanza, some refugees reported increased levels of awareness about their legal rights. This made them more confident when navigating the urban environment.

On youth groups, FGD data shows that Dignity Kwanza had been offering training sessions about gender-based violence. Apart from Dignity Kwanza, REDESO also had been offering training about language, computer skills, and other vocational skills, such as driving. The TCRS offered short courses on work/job skills; while the CWS had been providing trainings on entrepreneurship. For example, the following quotes were extracted from the FGDs:

We received various trainings from different actors who are linked to refugee issues. For example, TCRS trained us on work-based skills; CWS trained us on entrepreneurship skills; and REDESO supported us in getting vocational skills such as driving. However, before we can access services from these institutions, we must first obtain a refugee permit from the UNHCR (FGD with Burundian Male, Dar es Salaam, 2023).

We depend on legal institutions when we face challenges related to legal issues. We also thank Dignity Kwanza for conducting training that raised our awareness about our rights, and gave us confidence about living in the host country. Also, the TCRS provided loans; for example, I benefitted from that service and got a loan of one million Tanzanian shillings (FGD with Congolese women, Dar es Salaam, 2024).

As documented by Nieves and Osorio (2013), one of the roles of social networks is knowledge creation, which is provided through the interaction of actors within a network. Moreover, the findings are in line with Açıkgöz and Otrar (2024), who report that training significantly increases refugees' overall well-being, helps them develop language skills, and expands their social networks. Moreover, the acquisition of vocational skills enhances their job prospects and self-confidence. The trainings and skills offered to refugees in Dar es Salaam equip them with skills necessary for income generation. Thus, capacity building is essential for refugees as it allows them to become self-sufficient and integrate into the host community better.

4.2.2 *Social and Economic Support*

Social and economic support from actors in their social network was also mentioned during FGD with refugees. This kind of support was mostly linked to informal networks, which include family, friends, and religious actors in the networks. The family networks comprised of refugees of the same nationality and other family members from different countries. They provided social support in terms of advice, information, and other psychological support. They also provided financial and material support. Participants in the FGDs reported that, once refugees flee from their home country, they start to study the new environment (host environment), and form new social networks to support them in adapting to their new homes. These people make friends in the host environment, and also look for fellow refugees from their home country.

Moreover, apart from establishing new networks, some refugees in Dar es Salaam maintain ties with family members who remain in their home countries. They use these relationships to access resources that help them sustain their livelihoods. For instance, some Congolese refugees continue to communicate with their relatives back home to obtain materials like *vitenge* (a type of cloth fabric) and cosmetics, which they sell in the host country. This transnational support helps them earn an income; so it plays a critical role in their economic adaptation. Such ongoing connections highlight the importance of extended family networks in facilitating economic opportunities for refugees.

Furthermore, some family members and friends act as a bridge to refugees. This happens when they run into problems and need to get support from other institutions or members with whom they do not have any connection, and therefore they depend on these familial or friendship ties as links. For example, during one FGD, it was mentioned that some refugees were able to receive legal support from lawyers and police officers by using the networks of their friends. The quote below supports this:

I met one man in church who is a Tanzanian, and we became friends. One day we agreed to do business jointly, and gave him seven million shillings to purchase products from Kenya. He went to Kenya and came back without any products and told me that the money had been stolen. Fortunately, I had a two-year permit, so as I didn't believe him, I decided to report the case to the police and later went to court. Although I was threatened by some police officers, one day one of my friends linked me with a lawyer who assisted me in getting my money back. Without that lawyer, I would not have gotten my money back (FGD with Congolese women).

The quote shows the power of informal networks in accessing support and services from formal institutions. The success in recovering the money can be attributed to the intervention of a lawyer; and was facilitated by a social connection. This highlights the significance of social networks in navigating complex legal systems, especially in environments where accessing legal services might be difficult due to fear or lack of information on how to access

them. According to Granovetter (1973), social ties can provide crucial support in overcoming challenges, including legal barriers. The lawyer's assistance was pivotal in the recovery of the stolen money; illustrating how professional legal aid can transform the outcome of disputes that initially seem unfavourable.

Access to housing, education, and health services are other amenities that refugees in Dar es Salaam get through the use of social networks. They use friends who are hosts, and in some cases they rely on street chairpersons, to access these basic services. With education services, it was reported during FGDs that refugees request host members to assist them in registering their children in schools. They have to go through a third party because the country's policy has some restrictions on enrolment in the education system. Some participants also reported that friends were of great help in supporting them in the provision of educational materials and fees. The quote below was extracted from one FGD:

I once faced a challenge, when I was denied enrolment in a school because of my surname. So, my parents had to change my surname and asked a friend to assist in finding a different school... then I was enrolled and completed my class seven studies (FGD with youth, Dar es Salaam, 2024).

The findings also revealed that, beyond spiritual support, religious institutions provide urban refugees with an avenue for expanding social networks. Through gatherings, religious services, and community events hosted by these institutions, refugees can meet others who share their faith; and possibly their cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Thus, from such religious gatherings, refugees create bonds with their national or ethnic members; thereby mitigating feelings of isolation, and creating a sense of belonging. Community members share information, advice, and emotional support through these social networks, establishing informal systems of mutual aid. This sense of belonging is particularly vital when formal support services are either unavailable or difficult to access. This finding about religious institutions corroborates with what Wurtz and Wilkinson (2020), and Betts et al. (2017), found in their studies: churches and other religious institutions are very important actors for the social support of refugees. Betts et al. (2017) report that, in Uganda, Congolese churches offer both religious services and initial support, providing temporary shelter for many newly arrived refugees fleeing the DRC. Moreover, another study by Allen (2010) also found that, through religious institutions, immigrants can diversify and strengthen their social networks, leading to increased access to information about jobs and other important aspects of their local contexts.

5. Refugees' Social Networks and Livelihood Enhancement

In the previous sections we have seen how different actors in refugee networks help refugees in Dar es Salaam. Also, we have seen that social networks among refugees are of great advantages as they help them access opportunities,

resources, and assistance (Meyer, 2018). Nevertheless, having a wide network does not always translate into better living conditions, especially for refugees who live in urban areas. A major obstacle arises from the discrepancy between the skills taught in training programmes and their practical applications in the host country. For instance, various social network actors—such as TCRS, REDESO, CWS, and Dignity Kwanza—have trained a number of refugees. Even though they might be intended to improve their skills in areas like entrepreneurship, language competence, or vocational training; the capacity of refugees to apply these trainings in the job market is frequently hampered by restrictive policies. For example, in Dar es Salaam, refugees complained that their gained knowledge and skills was a waste of time. During an FGD with the youth, one participant had the following complaint:

These organizations have provided us with different skills, but in the end they cannot be applied anywhere. It is like putting water into a basket; water will obviously spill. It seems as if they are attempting to avoid us; they take our time to train us, but fail to provide us with employment-related credentials such as relevant certificates for the job market (FGD with youths, Dar es Salaam, 2023).

Similarly, another participant, a Burundian man, shared his experience of having driving skills but was unable to obtain a valid driving license:

I was a driver in my country; and I have driving skills, but when I landed in Tanzania, the system was different, and I needed to get a new driving license. The REDESO, with the support from UNHCR, took us to VETA for driving lessons. The UN covered our tuition fees and other costs. However, since we did not have a National Identification card from the Tanzania National Identification Authority (NIDA), we didn't get a license (FGD with Burundian men, Dar es Salaam, 2023).

Thus, the findings from this study imply that although urban refugees in Dar es Salaam have access to a wide range of supportive social networks, the influence on their livelihood is minimal. These results contradict the assertion made by Tran (2015): that people with large networks are less susceptible to socio-economic shocks. In the context of this study, the quantity of networks does not reflect the noticeable enhancement in the standard of the livelihoods of refugees. The main causes for this disparity are two. The first has to do with Tanzania's refugee policy, which restricts them from officially engaging in the workforce; and the second is related to awareness and perceptions of the host community about the refugees' rights to be employed within the host country. According to Demireva and Zwysen (2020), refugees have a hard time getting employment in their host environments due to legal issues, which makes them less likely to be integrated into the labour market. This contrasts with Jordan and Lebano, where the study by Jabbar and Zaza (2016) found that various trainings given to refugees had an effect on their wellbeing. Training in vocational skills was customized to meet their needs, and refugees were able to integrate into the workforce and increase their financial security.

Participants in the FGDs shared their personal stories of how friends in the host nation helped them settle and survive in an urban setting. One youth shared the experience of his father – who lacked initial connection in Tanzania – upon arrival as a refugee:

I can give an example. When my father arrived here, he didn't have any connection, and it was Tanzanians who supported him. First, they gave my mother a pot, a stove, and all crockery that was needed to fry cassava.

The significance of host communities' assistance to refugee families in settling in cities is emphasized by this remark. In addition, the provision of basic items like cooking utensils did not only assist in fulfilling immediate needs, but also facilitated economic activities such as selling fried cassava; thus contributing to the family's livelihood. According to Omata (2013), these initial acts of kindness are crucial because they assist refugees in adjusting to their new environments, and progressively achieving their own financial independence. This type of social assistance can greatly reduce the vulnerability of just arriving refugees.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the study's findings, refugees depend on a variety of social networks that comprise both formal and informal actors. While formal actors within these networks—such as government institution, NGOs and international organization—provide valuable training opportunities, the impact of these efforts is significantly constrained by the policy environment of Tanzania. As a result, the skills and knowledge gained through formal training often fail to translate into tangible development in the livelihoods of refugees. In contrast, support from informal networks, emerge as a crucial factor in enhancing the well-being of refugees in Dar es Salaam City. This informal support offers a foundation of moral and socio-economic stability, which is instrumental in helping refugees adapt to their new environment. While formal training is essential, its effectiveness is contingent upon its alignment with the host country's policy environment. To maximize the impact of training programmes on refugees' livelihood, it is recommended that training initiatives be tailored to fit within the refugees' policy context of Tanzania. This alignment would enable refugees to better apply the skills they acquire, ultimately leading to improved economic outcomes and integration into their host communities.

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