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A Critique of Demographic and Economic Determinism  
on the Question of the Impact of Refugees

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The last few years especially following the massive influx of slightly more than 800,000 refugees from Rwanda (following the 1994 genocide) and other streams from Burundi and the D.R.C. into Tanzania, have witnessed growing concern and subsequent hostility or at least ambivalence towards the continued presence of refugees on the part of a significant number of Tanzania citizens, their leaders and government. The closure of the country's borders to the 70,000 Rwanda refugees fleeing violence in Burundi on March 30, 1995 and subsequent calls for the repatriation of the remaining refugees to their countries should be seen and interpreted within that context.

This shift in attitude on the part of Tanzanians, for many years reknown for their exceptionally high level of hospitality and generosity to many refugees from all parts of the world, is shared by almost all sections of the Tanzanian community as clearly demonstrated in a recent consultancy Report on: The Impact of the Presence of Refugees in Northwestern Tanzania compiled by the Centre for the Study of Forced Migration (CSFM) of the University of Dar es Salaam with the financial and moral support from Africare, Concern, IRC, TCRS, Oxfam, MSF - Spain and NPA. (CSFM 2003).

According to the CSFM report, Tanzanians who have voiced their concern and even vetted anger and seemingly repressed feelings about the continued presence of refugees include ordinary citizens, newspaper editors, District Executive Directors and Regional Commissioners, Members of Parliament, Deputy Minister and Minister of Home Affairs, Ministers for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Prime Minister, The Vice-President and Presidents of the United Republic of Tanzania (ibid.: 4-5).

All of these have at one time or another, and on different occasions, voiced their concern about the negative impacts caused by refugees onto the Refugee-hosting communities and/or areas especially in Kagera, Kigoma and to some extent Rukwa regions of Tanzania. Some religious leaders and academics also share some of these sentiments (Musoke 1995; 1997; Tanzania Journal of Population Studies (1997).

The Tanzania government blames its changed attitude and reactions on the heavy burden placed by the continued existence of refugees in its Northwestern districts in Kigoma and Kagera regions ..... on the fragile natural resources and environment, physical and social infrastructure, increased crime rates and insecurity of lives and properties of its citizens. The continued presence of refugees is now seen as "unsustainable."

The negative impacts or objectionable behaviors so far quoted include the following

- i) Environmental degradation (vegetation cover, soil, water quantity and quality, air pollution and sanitation).
- ii) External Security and International Relations
- iii) Internal security
- iv) Rising crime rates - including murder, armed robbery and banditry, thefts, rape,
- v) Destruction and/or overburdening of the Physical and social infrastructure including the communication and transport network including roads and basic social services/amenities such as health, education, power and water.
- vi) Possession and/or proliferation or circulation of small arms and light weapons.
- vii) Terrorising local communities leading to emotional and/or psychological trauma or impacts.
- viii) Overburdening the host communities/government's expenditure including those of local governance and administration especially the police, security and judicial services.

All the above quoted negative impacts are in turn said to lead to the retardation or slow pace of development of the refugee hosting areas and/or districts in the Kigoma and Kagera regions of Northwestern Tanzania.

The end result of all the above stated/quoted negative impacts and/or developments is Tanzania's changed attitude towards refugees and, impliedly, the abdication of its international humanitarian obligations of protecting human rights and lives including those of innocent children, women and other vulnerable social categories.

According to the CSFIVI report quoted earlier on, Tanzania's changed tone and generosity towards refugees can also be explained by changes in the country's foreign policy and economic considerations in that the country could no longer continue with her old policy based on the principle of "support the oppressed people in the world" even at the brink of economic collapse. Being poorer than it was before, the country can no longer afford that sort of generosity, even if there was no change in her foreign policy. The New Foreign Policy has as one of its main objectives and central theme, "the mainstreaming of economic considerations in the formulation and conduct of URT's foreign policy" (ibid.:12; URT 2001 para 3).

Instead, Tanzania now pursues a foreign policy aimed at finding solutions to prolonged political crises in all countries in the Great Lakes Region which usually have a tendency to undermine regional peace and security thereby putting so many countries at unacceptable levels of political and military risks which a poor country like Tanzania can no longer afford (CSFIVI op.cit.: 13).

In order to grasp the basic cause of Tanzania's changed attitude and the seemingly abdication of its international humanitarian responsibility, we need to go beyond the statements and indeed rhetoric from various speakers. We need to look at the general conceptual framework that has indeed informed and guided such thinking on the part of those who behold such thinking to which we now turn.

## **2.0 Conceptual and Methodological Framework**

Till very recently most of the debate, research and the resulting literature on the impact of refugees to host communities/countries and the subsequent government policies on refugee protection have been guided and informed by demographic/population theories based on the assumptions made by Thomas Malthus (1766 - 1836) and Ester Boserup (1965) respectively.

According to the Malthusian School, an increase in population would overburden and deplete the country's/national resource base, overstretch the structure and/or system of social services and physical infrastructure available thereby leading to economic deprivation and hardships, poverty, hunger and, above all, human destitution and misery. Accordingly, people would then compete for the scarce resources available

and which competition would automatically lead to environmental degradation or damage. As pointed out earlier on, this view is held by a significant number of researchers and authors on the impact of refugees on host communities including Tanzania (Hoertz, 1995, 1997; Lwehabura et al 1995; Lwehabura 1996; Lourdes 1996; Lonergan, 1995; Mbonile 1997; Shitundu, 1997; Sawio and Sokoni 1997; Rugumamu 1997 and Zetteler 1995). Till very recently this author/presenter also subscribed to the above school.

Contrary to the above position and/or argument, other scholars and researchers informed by the Boserup school advance the argument that rapid population growth/increase is developmental and leads to judicious exploitation/utilization of available natural resources and hence sustainable management of the environment. On top of Boserup herself (1965) other scholars who subscribe to the said school include Davis (1955); Chenery (1974); Allan (1987); Daley 1991; Leach (1994); Tiffen et al (1994); and Black (1998).

Those in the above named Boserup School who have tried to exonerate refugees from all blame do argue that, if at all there are any negative effects, such effects could have been caused by any mass migration whether domestic or foreign in origin, and especially given the short time within which such processes might have occurred and which must have taken both the host country and the international donor community (the U.N. system and other agencies and NGOs) by surprise and without any preparations to receive the refugees. In such a situation, the masses of refugees have no choice but to turn to the host environment for building materials, firewood, food, water, meat supply and all other basics of livelihood. In the process they definitely degrade the physical environment (vegetation cover, soil, water) and air; over burden the available governance, security and judicial systems; and basic social amenities including education health and environmental sanitary infrastructure, if at all any.

Some such researchers and scholars go on to argue that asylum seekers or refugees cause such negative impacts, especially on the environment, because they are either very poor or because of the nature of their stay which is usually temporary and expected to be very short. It is thus argued that these refugees have no love and

commitment to the environment in the host country. As a result they go on plundering and degrading everything they come across without any consideration.

The above arguments fail to explain situations in which richer people or local businessmen and women go on pillaging the forests ... felling trees for both timber and firewood which they then sell to the refugee relief agencies and refugees (directly) and outside the refugee affected areas. On their part most refugees collect the remaining residues or fallen dry wood for their fuel wood.

The explanations so far advanced as regards the refugees' lack of love and commitment to the environment in the host district does not also hold water in that no man/woman in his/her normal senses would like to destroy an environment from which they derive their livelihood and means of survival.

In between these two seemingly competing schools, we offer a third and seemingly radical paradigm in which it is argued that rapid population growth or increase can lead to either negative or positive impacts depending on the conditions prevailing in the host country and the nature or composition of the people moving into the new area. These conditions include the nature/size of the economic/resource base, the existence or lack of sound national economic and development policies and programmes including those related to the ecology or environment, whether the refugees are housed in a fragile environment, the presence or lack of regulatory and institutional mechanisms and framework to mitigate against any negative developments, size of the refugee population, duration of stay, their education and awareness levels and, lastly, the existence of specific programmes to create awareness and mitigate against the actual and potential negative socio-economic and environmental impacts.

This school draws mostly from some of the arguments or statements and findings by some of researchers and scholars from the Boserup school outlined in the preceding paragraph (Black et al, Chernery op.cit; Tiffen et al) and more recently Joseph (2002).

This presenter/author is also moving from his traditional Malthusian position (Musoke 1995; 1997) to this particular school, whose initial major mentor seems to be Richard Black.. hence the "Richard Black" school.

According to the above (Black) school, population increase or the presence of refugees does not necessarily lead to negative physical/environmental and socio-economic consequences and nor are refugees potentially environmental degraders. They become so only under certain conditions especially when and where governments or local communities do not have in place specific development projects and programmes to mitigate against such consequences and when the international community has renegades in their obligations towards the principle of "burden-sharing" in such emergencies.

### **3.0 Evidence from the Ground**

A recent study on. The Impact of Refugees on the Environment: A Case of Karago and Mku kwa refugee camps in Kibondo district, Kigoma region, observations by the author during recent visits in the area as well as findings from other studies do attest to the fact that presence of refugees in Kigoma and Kagera regions has proved somehow a "blessings in disguise"for the respective areas as the international community continues to pouf more money to rehabilitate the areas. More specifically, findings from Joseph study have it that "the refugees have in fact been instrumental efforts towards environmental conservation in the area unlike indigenious people who continue to degrade the environment (Joseph 2002)

A good and indeed excellent study that has utilized the above mentioned radical paradigm, whether consciously and intentionally or not, is the study by the Centre for the Study of Forced Migration (CSFM) of the University of Dar es Salaam quoted earlier on.

The study comes out with the assertion that the presence of refugees in the study areas has had both negative and positive impacts depending on the timing of the influx, the size and selectivity of the people moving into the host areas, preparedness on the ground, specific programmes put in place during the presence of the refugees and the commitment of the donor agencies/international community to the principle of "burden sharing".

The authors of the study continue to argue that most of the negative environmental impacts for instance happened during the early or initial stages of the arrival of refugees during which time the authorities and international community were not aware of ..... and indeed prepared to play

The negative impacts so far pointed out in the CSFM Report were mainly in the following areas:

- i) External security and International Relations and more specifically the trade of words and border skirmishes between Burundi and Tanzania especially in 1997 (pp. 10-13).
- ii) Internal security - of lives and properties of Tanzanian citizens and/or increased crime rates (pp. 13-17)
- iii) The Environment (pp. 17-20)
- iv) Communication Infrastructure especially roads (pp.23-24)
- v) Social Services - Health, Education, Water Services (pp. 27-28; 32, 36-37)
- vi) Local Governance and Administration including local administrators, the Police, the Judiciary and Prisons (pp. 41, 43-46)
- vii) Economy and Development (pp.48-49)

According to the authors of the Report (Khoti Kamanga and Bonaventure Rutinwa) most of the quoted negative impacts were there long before the arrival of refugees in some of those areas. What the refugee influx might have done is to exacerbate some of them.

Having pointed out the negative security, environmental, infrastructural (both physical and social) as well as Economic and Development related impacts, the report attempts, in more details, to point out and demonstrate the positive impacts of the presence of refugees especially in Kibondo district of Kigoma region.

Specific areas picked for that well informed exercise include:

- i) Refugees and Internal Security (pp.13-17)
- ii) Environment (pp.20-23)
- iii) Communication Infrastructure (pp.24-26)
- iv) Social Services (pp. 28-40):

- Health (pp.28-31)
- Education (pp.32-36)
- Water Services (pp.37-40)
- v) Local Governance and Administration
  - Impact on Local Administrator (pp.41-42)
  - Impact of the Police (pp.43-44)
  - Impact on the Judiciary (pp.45-46)
  - Impact on the Prisons (pp.46-48)
- vi) Impact on Economy and Development

On top of donor agency initiated and supported development projects, outlays and programmes especially for capacity Building of the Police, Local administration (District Councils), the Judiciary and Prisons, as well as investments in health, education, water services and the communication network, the presence of refugees is also said to bring about Positive Economic Benefits to the hosting areas and/or communities.

The Positive Economic Benefits are said to include the following developments:

- Expansion of Business and marketing opportunities (pp.49-50)
- Increases in Revenue Collection (pp.50-51)
- Cheap Refugee Labour (p.51)
- Employment Opportunities for Local People (pp.51-52)
- vii) Other Benefits (pp.52-53)

There are also other benefits that are said to have accrued to these refugee hosting areas. These include Publicity, Radio Services, Access to materials which people in these areas would not have had from various humanitarian agencies in the form of utensils such as buckets, pots, cooking oil, plastic sheets or buy them cheaply from refugees in exchange of local foodstuffs.

Such benefits also include Cattle, Leisure, sports and Recreation organized by personnel of various agencies and institutions working in the areas. From the proceeding statements, it is now quite clear that while the presence of refugees in the respective areas initially had some negative impacts, these were soon turned into

positive impacts. Available data for instance does indicate that basic social services and infrastructure which were initially negatively impacted upon have during the presence of refugee received a lot of assistance including buildings, equipment, personnel, hard cash and training. Some of these facilities are also regularly supplied with drugs and other basic inputs. Notable among the achievements in some of these services are the considerable investments in education. Indeed the social services sector seems to have benefited more than it ever suffered due to the presence of refugees.

Unfortunately enough however, it does seem that the local communities have failed to take advantages of the economic opportunities opened by the presence of refugees including the said market opportunities for their agricultural products such as beans, employment opportunities in the several organizations dealing with refugees, possible skills possessed by the refugees and the sharing of some of the basic social services initially provided for refugees.

#### **4.0 Some Lessons**

Working from the proceeding statements and observations, it is now clear that any meaningful study of the environmental, economic and social impacts of refugees or any other such population movements has to put the following into consideration.

- i) That there is usually, and always, a dialectical linkage between population/demographic variables, exploitation of the natural resources for livelihoods and survival on one hand, and the state of the art of the environment.
- ii) That likewise, natural ecological/environmental destruction or degradation, socio-economic deprivation, lack of physical infrastructure and basic social services in certain countries have themselves been the causes of several forced migrations all over the world.
- iii) That the negative environmental/physical and socio-economic impacts can be caused by any rapid massive population movement or migration pattern and not necessarily by refugees.
- iv) That in some of the areas under study, environmental degradation and its attending negative socio-economic consequences had been going on for

sometime before the arrival of refugees and what the 1994/5 influxes did was to exacerbate the poor conditions in the already fragile environment. As such refugees are not exceptional environmental degraders. In some cases they contribute to positive environmental rehabilitation and sustainable management.

- v) That in some instances the presence of refugees has proven a "blessings-in-disguise" especially in the so-called "refugees affected areas" where the international donor-community has poured in substantial amounts of investments to rehabilitate the affected social services and physical infrastructure as well as in building local capacity. In some areas this has meant the building of new physical structures altogether.

The above described state of affairs implies that, for any future studies on the impact refugees on host communities/areas, we need to adopt a more rigorous analysis and understanding of the relationship between population size and movement on one hand, and environment/ecology on the other and, much more so, between environmentalism and humanitarianism. All in all, we need to eschew seemingly dogmatic environmental and economic determinism and apply a much more down to earth radical paradigm as explained earlier on or pointed out in section 2.0 of this paper/presentation on the Conceptual and Methodological Framework (pp 6-10)

## **5.0 Conclusion**

In conclusion it would not be a bad idea to try and remind the reader/this audience about some of the fundamental principles we are all supposed to know about that we all know or are supposed to as regards Asylum, Protection and Relief to Refugees but which we tend to forget especially when caught up in very complex and hard situations. By doing so I do hope we shall avoid making some of the ill - informed judgments and subsequent seemingly embarrassing or irritating statements to some of the audience or recipients.

For the purposes of this discussion it is imperative and, indeed, a matter of expediency to start by pointing out that asylum, protection and relief to refugees is, as a general rule, based on international humanitarian law and the commitment of all humankind to help fellow human beings when such need arises-This works from the

basic assumption that Refugees are human beings and that their problems should be addressed immediately they arise (Peter 2003:3). It is also common sense knowledge that refugees are deprived people; that they need food, clothing, shelter and protection since they are also stateless with no government or any other institution upon which they can fall. International law and practice requires that the first state in which they enter becomes their de facto host state which should provide the refugees all their requirements. The rest of mankind has a responsibility to help the host country to meet its obligation through the principle of "Burden - Sharing".

The Principle of "Burden-sharing" requires the rest of mankind to share the burden with the host country in case of large numbers of refugees in the host country. The Principle of "Burden sharing" is itself anchored in two assumptions: International Solidarity and the Concept of Common Humanity and Responsibility.

a) International Solidarity which has three components (ibid:5) including:

- i) That the refugee is a person of concern to the international community;
  - ii) The obligation to extend protection to those compelled to flee persecution or violence; and
  - iii) , The obligation to share the responsibility of finding durable solution to the problems facing such people
- b) The Concept of Common Humanity and the Responsibility (ibid.:6) The international community feels it has a duty to preserve human life and diminish human suffering.

In International law, the Principle of Burden - sharing is enshrined in the 1951 UN Convention on the status of Refugees, the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1967 UN Declaration on Territorial Asylum, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the 1967 Resolution of the Council of Europe and Authority of the Asia - African Legal Consultative Committee and the 1969 OAU Convention governing the specific aspects of Refugees.

The importance of Burden sharing in this regard and as clearly pointed out by Professor Peter (Peter ibid:8) lies in the fact or sense that it does not force the

burdened host states to decide to resort to violation of other basic principles in refugee law in order to survive.

Accordingly, the Host-state may, when pushed to the corner, decide to bar or order out the refugees or close its border to them.

Accordingly, the UNHCR has been in the forefront pleading with the relevant parties to implement the principle of burden sharing especially as regards cases of mass influx of refugees. In its Conclusion number 22 (xxxii) the UNHCR) Executive Committee succinctly points out:

A mass influx may place unduly heavy burden on certain countries. A satisfactory solution of a problem cannot be achieved without international cooperation. States shall, within the framework of international solidarity and burden sharing, take all necessary measures to assist states which have admitted asylum seekers in a large scale influx situation.

Thus in order to avoid a re-occurrence of what has or is happening in Tanzania there is need for the following:

### **1. Potential Refugees Host Countries**

There is need to put in place certain regulatory and institutional mechanisms and framework to deal with any such emerges when they arise. Given the potential for internal crises and the subsequent production of refugees on the part of Tanzanian neighbours there is thus the necessity to put in place an early warning system.

At the level of foreign policy and international diplomacy, Tanzania should, together with its regional neighbours in the Great Lakes Region take a proactive role in peace-building and conflict-resolution in the various countries and between the member countries.

### **2. The International Community**

The international community should renew its high level commitment to the concept and practice of Burden - sharing so as to help poor host countries effectively provide for the refugees in their countries from the moment they begin to cross into such

countries, through their stay in those countries and during the repatriation process or when a durable solution to their problems has been found.

Side by side with that, the international community should apply equal standards and rules of the game when dealing with refugees from different countries. Richer countries should open their doors to refugees from all countries as against the present practice of a "selective" open door which, to some of us, seems closed and at best, ajar.

It is thus only through concerted united efforts and commitment on the part of all members of the international community and especially the rich ones that all humankind will be able to solve the refugee crisis which is predominantly humanitarian.

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