Dynamics of Economic Interaction between Refugees and the Host Community in Šärqolle Refugee Camp, Benišangul-Gumuz Region

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Abstract

This paper shows the economic interaction between refugees and host communities in the Šärqolle Refuge Camp of Benišangul-Gumuz Regional State. As such, it aims to investigate how refugees in Šärqolle Refuge Camp explore their surroundings, assess the attitudes of their hosts, and find a niche for themselves in which they can feel consistent with their background, with the host community, and with their gradually changing expectations. The paper also unpacks the changing interaction between the host community and refugees because of the host state and humanitarian interventions. The paper argues that the nature of host-refugee interaction is not inherently conflictual, as many prior studies have focused on. Conflicts between refugees and their hosts do not exist because refugees are "outsiders" and host communities are "insiders." To substanciate this argument, the study employed a qualitative research approach. The data were collected from 2016 to 2021 using systematic observations, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings show that in Šärqolle Refugee Camp, a peaceful co-existence between refugees and hosts developed into animosity following the anticipated implementation of the new Ethiopian refugee policy, which attempts to institutionalize the economic interaction between them through the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. Therefore, as refugees and hosts are rational actors who exploit their surroundings for mutual benefit, the dominant image of host-refugee conflict in current scholarship needs to be balanced with studies that focus on amicable relations between the two groups.

Keywords: refugees, host community, economic interaction,peaceful interaction, Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), conflicts

1. Introduction

> …I came to Ethiopia in 2007 from Sudan. As you know, the support we are getting from the international aid [agencies] is not sufficient.

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> Additionally, we are not able to work due to the refugee policy of the country. Thus,it was necessary to find some work to supplement the livelihood of my family. In 2011,many refugees came to Šärqolle from South Sudan. As a result, WFP[2] started to distribute non- food items for the new arrivals. In the mean time, Ethiopia laid a corner stone for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project. Many people started to visit the dam from different parts of the country. Then, I and my friends started to buy different equipment from the refugees and sell them to the people who came to visit the dam. At that time, there were some shops in Assosa town that used to receive some camp materials from me. The shop-oweners sold them to visitors of the dam.[3]

Many researchers have studied the economic competition over scarce resources between the host and refugee communities and the ensuing tensions between the two (Martin, 2005; Allen, 2009; Grindheim, 2013; Musielak, 2016). However, apart from the competitions, there are also many chances to collaborate between refugees and the host community.This article attempts to show how the refugees in Šärqolle Refugee Camp have been engaged in different economic activities both in and outside the camp without having formal permission to work but in harmony with the host community.

Following this introduction, the article gives a brief description of the methodology used in this work. Then, it gives a brief background to the refugee setting in the Benišangul-Gumuz region with particular emphasis on Šärqolle Refugee Camp, connectivity and networking refugees use to engage in economic activities with the locals,competition between refugees and the host community to control business and resources, and the influence of the new Ethiopian refugee policy in tandem with the Comprehensive Refeguee Response Framework (CRRF) on the already existing harmonious economic interaction. The final section gives a conclusion.

2. Methodology

The data for this article were collected from 2016 to 2021. During April 2016, the researcher conducted a one-month fieldwork, and visited all of the five refugee camps in the Benišangul-Gumuz regional state and collected preliminary data. Amharic and English languages were the major means of

[2]World Food Program
[3]IDI with Sudanese refugee, April 2017, Šärqolle refugee camp.

communication during the data collection process and throuhought the entire fieldwork. However, language translators were used to communicate with the local community members who speak Berta language. In April 2017, Šärqolle refugee camp was selected as a case study area, and much of the information was obtained during this period. During this phase of the research, the researcher conducted key informant interviews (KII), in-depth interviews (IDI), and focus group discussions (FGDs) with refugees, the host community, UNHCR,[4] ARRA,[5] and other members of the government offices at a regional level. In August 2019, the researcher conducted the third round of fieldwork. During this time, the researcher made follow-up interviews with the informants. The number of key informants interviewed at regional level between April 2016 and August 2019 were 30. These key informants were recruited purposively. 70 in-depth interviews were also conducted with refugees and host communities. Moreover, informal conversation with refugees and the hosts as well as systematic observations were conducted in the camp and in the surrounding areas. Finally, the researcher visited the field in August 2021 to see if some data would need to be updated. The empirical data obtained from the fieldwork were supplemented by findings from a desk review.

3. Refugees in the Benišangul-Gumuz Region

The Benišangul-Gumuz region is a unique destination for refugees because it is the only region of the country that hosts refugees from various countries. It is also a 'tri-junction zone' where the borders of Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia meet on the south side of the Yabus River. James (2013) explained that from 1987–1989, Uduk ethnic group members got settlement around Ṣore, near Assosa, in a locality already known to the Uduk as Langkwai, where their grandfathers used to go for hunting. However, the refugees left Ṣore camp and went back to Sudan in the early 1990s due to the political turmoil in Ethiopia. This shows that the oldest refugee camp in Benišangul-Gumuz was Ṣore. But, it was demolished when the Uduk went back to South Sudan in 1990, and there was no other refugee camp in the Benišangul-Gumuz region until Šärqolle was established in 1997.[6]

[4]UNHCR, United Nations Higher Commission for refugees.
[5] ARRA, Agency for Refugee and returnees Affairs.
[6] KII with Ṣore Camp Coordinator, April 2017 Ṣore refugee camp.

Currently there are about 62, 669 refugees living in five refugee camps in Benišangul-Gumuz region, i.e., Bambasi, Tongo, Šärqolle, Ṣore and Gure (UNHCR,2020). The oldest camp is Šärqolle followed by Tongo, Bambasi, Ṣore and Gure. In 2017, Tongo was the biggest refugee camp with 20,000 refugees, followed by Bambasi with more than 16,000 refugees.[7] Gure is the youngest and smallest camp, with 8,000 refugees. Most of the refugees came from Sudan and South Sudan. However, there are refugees from the Great Lakes region, such as Burundi, Rwanda, and Democratic Republic of Congo. None of the refugees are formally allowed to live outside of the camp. In fact, Ethiopia only allowed Eritrean refugees to live outside the refugee camp under its Out of Camp Policy (OCP) (ARRA, 2017).

Table 1: Refugee camps in BGR

No	Name of the camp	Zone/Woreda	Establishment year	Number of refugees
1	Šärqolle	Assosa/Homoša	1997	11,028
2	Tongo	Assosa/Mao-Komo Special woreda	2011	20,000
3	Bambasi	Assosa/Bambasi	2012	16,000
4	Ṣore	Assosa/Homoša	2015	11,000
5	Gure	Mao-Komo special woreda	2017	8,000

Source: ARRA regional office at Assosa August 2019

4. Šärqolle Refugee Camp

There is no any written record about the establishment of this refugee camp. As a result, there are different stories about the history of the camp. According to a Sudanese informant who came to Ethiopia in 1997, the camp was established to shelter a group of Sudanese people who entered Ethiopia via Guba. Informants also remarked that there was a frequent seasonal Sudanese movement to and from Ethiopia in the late 1990s. Gradually, Šärqolle camp was established to host Sudanese and South Sudanese refugees who crossed the border and wanted to get asylum in Ethiopia.[8]

[7] Information obtained from the ARRA office of Bambasi refugee camp 2017
[8]Sudan and South Sudan were the same country before South Sudanese Independence in 2011.

James (2013) argued the Blue Nile civilians as of early 2013 came to Šärqolle following aerial bombing, and the continued influx of people from the Blue Nile state of Sudan triggered the expansion of the camp to its current shape. The Refugees Central Committee (RCC) chief also confirmed that the camp was first established to serve the present day South Sudanese refugees who entered Ethiopia via Yabus and reached Abrhamo, a place bordering Ethiopia in the Benišangul-Gumuz region with the present-day South Sudan. On the other hand, other groups of refugees joined the camp from north Sudan via Kurmuk.[9] Due to a fluid border between Ethiopia and Sudan, people from both sides moved freely and lived temporarily without being registered as refugees. McConnachie (2016) argued that refugee camps are mostly established as a political response to contain people. The establishment of camps could be partially the response that the host state gives to minimize a threat from human mobility around the border areas. Šärqolle refugee camp served as a management corridor to control the frequent movement of people from Sudan and South Sudan who were moving back and forth for different reasons.

Šärqolle refugee camp is a unique camp because it is the oldest camp in the region and its population is composed of refugees from different countries such as Sudan, South Sudan, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and Liberia.[10] There is a continuous arrival of refugees and asylum seekers. The new arrivals are expected to find relatives or members of their own ethnic community to temporarily host them until they get a shelter of their own. Currently, the camp, shelters 2855 households and 11,028 registered refugees and asylum seekers. The camp has 9 zones and 44 blocks. The zones are Zone A, Zone B, Zone C1, Zone C2, Zone E, Zone F1, Zone F2, Zone G1, and Zone G2.[11] These numbers show that there is a registration and inspection of refugees in the camp, which makes it interesting how the refugees navigate beyond the encampment to look for alternatives to sustain their livelihood.

[9] KII withŠärqolle refugee camp, RCC chair, August 2019, Šärqolle refugee camp.
[10]KII with Šärqolle refugee camp coordinator, April 2017, Šärqolle refugee camp.
[11]Table 1.1 said that Šärqolle refugee camp contains 11,500 refugees. However, the UNHCR latest data said that 11,028 refugees. The gap is due to the continues arrival and leaving of refugees, it is difficult to get consistent information.

Table 2: Organization of ŠärqolleRefugee camp

Name of Zone	Number of refugees and asylum seekers
Zone A	824
Zone B	2092
Zone C(C1 and 2)	3630
Zone E	1530
Zone F (F1 and 2)	2180
Zone G(G1and 2)	377

Source: ARRA, Regional Office Assosa, August 2019

It is to be noted that the numbers in the above table do not show the exact and static figures. The number of refugees fluctuates because of the continuous arrival and departure of refugees and asylum seekers. Such a fluctuation is observed even in weekly reports because of the mobility of refugees and asylum seekers to different places in search of jobs. So as to continue receiving the ration in the name of their remaining family members, refugee families refrained from reporting even when their family members had permanently abandoned the camp. According to the ARRA office of the camp, refugees who have shared ethnic and national origins share similar neighborhoods to avoid intra-ethnic conflicts. Zone A is predominantly composed of Maban and Darfurian groups. Zone B is dominantly occupied by Maban, Equatorial, and Agnuwak communities from South Sudan. In Zone C1, there are Darfurians and Arabs. In Zone C2, most of them are Funji ethnic group members from the Blue Nile state of Sudan. Some Nuba tribes also live in Zone C2. Zone E is composed of six ethnic groups from Sudan and South Sudan. These are Nuba, Uduk, and Darfur from the Blue Nile state. Brun, Shuluk, and Nuerare from South Sudan in zone C1.As indicated hitherto; the majority of refugees in Šärqolle are South Sudanese. Among them, the Maban are the largest in number, followed by Dinka, Shuluk, Nuer, Agnuwak, Murle, Equatorial, and Brundiyo. These refugees are among more than 64 ethnic groups in South Sudan.[12] Zone F and Zone G are occupied by the Great Lakes refugees such as Congolese, Rwandese, and Burundian, and there are also refugees from Liberia, Cameroon, and Tanzania.

The camp has formal and informal governance structures. The latest structure was established after conflict in 2015 among the Great Lakes Region refugees. The formal refugee camp administration is composed of refugee central committee (RCC) members at the top, and it is accountable to the ARRA

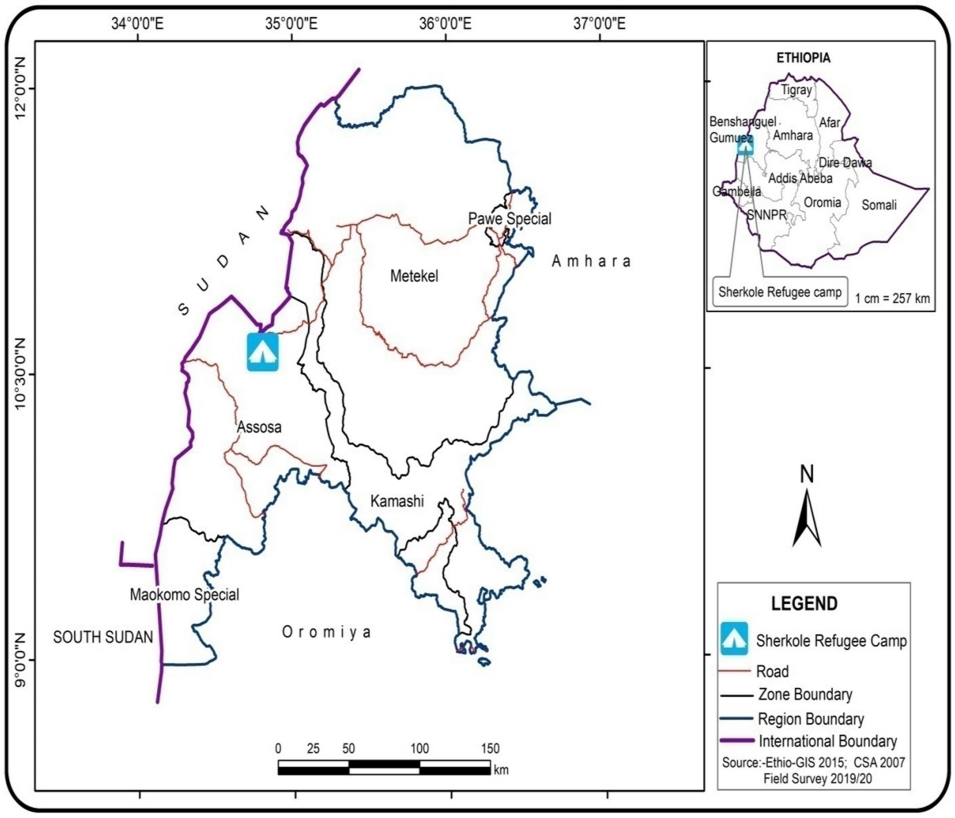
[12] KII with RCC chairman, August 2019, Šärqolle refugee camp.

protection office at camp level. The RCC has a chairperson elected every two years by the refugee community and serves as a hub between the refugees and the camp administrators. Next to the RCC, there are zonal leaders that represent each zone. Each zone has different blocks with block representatives called block chiefs. *Umdas*[13] or police also exist under each block chief. The smallest administrative structure is a one-to-ten organization. It is composed of 10 refugees, and one person, among the ten, is responsible for reporting every day's activities of his or her members to *Umda* or block chief. The formal structure is more responsible for the services and protection that refugees get from ARRA and UNHCR.[14] The informal structure serves more of the social, economic, and religious needs of the refugees. The informal arrangements are religious associations, women's associations, and youth associations. The disability association, market community, local police or Shorta who manage the day-to-day activities in the camp are included in the informal arrangement.

The Šärqolle Camp is located in the Assosa Zone, one of the three zones of Benišangul-Gumuz Regional State. The indigenous people of the area of Šärqolle Refugee Camp are the Berta, who have a different religion, physical appearance, culture, and language from the refugees who came from the Great Lakes Regions but have similarities with those refugees from Sudan.[15] In addition to the Berta community, which is the dominant host, people from other parts of the country, collectively known as Habesha, also exist surrounding the refugee camp. The Habesha, so named for their more brown-colored skins, were resettled in the mid-1980s as part of the government's policy of resettling famine-affected people from the northern and southern highlands as well as the western lowlands. Most of these are ethnic Amhara, Oromo, and Tigreans, but they also include a variety of ethnic groups from southern Ethiopia. Currently, the Habesha constitute around 24 percent of the Benišangul-Gumuz region's population (Dereje, 2013:110). In Article 2, the 2002 Revised Constitution of Benišangul-Gumuz region explicitly classifies ethnic groups which are "owners" of the region from those which are not. It reads, "[e]venthoughit is known that there are also other ethnic groups, the owners of the region are Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao, and Komo". It is obvious that the dichotomy into "owners" and otherwise non-owners is meant

[13]A Sudanese local term to say police.
[14]KII with ARRA camp Coordinator of Šärqolle refugee camp, August 2019, Šärqolle refugee camp.
[15]KII with ARRA protection officer, August 2019 Šärqollerefugee camp.

to delineate some privileges exclusive to owners (Desalegn, 2016: 109). The following sections show how refugee interaction varies across such dichotomies among the host.



Map 1: Šärqolle refugee Camp (prepared by the researcher)

5. Economic Interactions

There is a high economic interdependency between the refugees and the host community. Even though the refugees do not have the official right to work according to the refugee policy of the country that was in force before the new proclamation enacted in 2019, they have developed different mechanisms to access informal work. Most of the refugees are engaged in different activities, especially businesses that may help to complement their livelihoods.

The economic interaction between the host community and the refugees has two levels. First, the refugees and the host communities meet and make an economic exchange inside the camp. Market places inside the refugee camp serve as a meeting place to buy and sell goods between the refugees and the host. In the markets inside the refugee camp, refugees sell part of their rations to the host, such as oil, flour, peas, sorghum, wheat, and soap, to the local community. Refugees also sell the non food items such as plates, mattress, pans and other materials they received as aid from the humanitarian organizations. On the other hand, the local communities bring their goods to the refugees. Refugees sell what they received from the humanitarian organizations and after generating some cash they buy from the locals other items that are not provided as aid. For instance, the refugees do not have the right to produce charcoal, nor do they have any other means of fuel to cook food. Therefore, they buy charcoal from the host community. Refugees also enjoy eating *Injera* in restaurants that are owned by the Habesha. There are also petty trades by the local communities inside the camp, such as selling cooked or raw potatoes, corn, onions, and spices.

Many South Sudanese and Sudanese refugees are also involved in producing and selling beverages of their culture. They sell their local beverage produced from fermented maize, called *waine*. Refugees who produce *waine* and sell for both the host community and refugees announce the information by putting a sign in front of their house.

The second level of economic interaction between refugees and the host community is outside the camp. Refugees get out of the camp to the villages of host communities for an economic exchange. While some refugees do not go far away from their camps, others go to Kuburhamsa town, ten kilometers from the camp, and Homoša fifteen kilometers from the camp, for marketing activities.

Farming and mining are the major economic activities in which most of the refugees are involved. Even if the 2019 new proclamation of Ethiopia theoretically allows work for refugees, the preceding proclamation does not allow them to be enrolled in such activities. However, refugees are widely engaged in these activities informally. Refugees from different countries have different job preferences based on their economic networks and pre-flight experience. Most of the refugees who came from Sudan prefer to open small shops and sell both food and non-food items for both the refugee communities

and the hosts. There are also some refugees who have butchery houses in the refugee camp. These merchants buy oxen from the local people. Sometimes the merchants go on foot and bring oxen from Assosa. When refugee merchants bring oxen from Assosa, their local friends support them to pass the check points since refugees are not eligible to transport animals and other agricultural products into the camps unless they are allowed by the camp administration. Some Sudanese refugees also bring cattle from the bordering areas between Ethiopia and Sudan for sale and supply to the butchers both in the refugee camps and in the towns of the host community. Some of the refugees from Sudan and many of the refugees from South Sudan also preferred to engage in farming activities.

On the other hand, refugees from the Great Lakes region are predominantly engaged in mining activities. Kuburhamsa(ten kilometers form the camp) and Homoša(fifteen kilometers) are the two townsthat South Sudanese and Sudanese refugees preferred to go to search for job. On the other hand, the Great Lakes refugees go to Mänge *Woreda* (ninety kilometers away from the camp) to engage in gold mining activities.

5.1. Networking and Connectivity of Refugees with the Host

As mentioned earlier, Ethiopia's refugee law doesn't allow refugees to formally work. However, many of the refugees engaged in labor work informally. There are brokers from both the refugee and the host community who connect and receive commission from both parties after a deal between the employers and employees.

The host communities who want labor from the refugees come to the camp during market days, and most of them know the brokers and ask them to recruit laborers. After they reach an agreement, refugees move to the local cultivation land and may engage in different farming activities, including sawing, plowing, cultivating, and preparing the land for the next harvest. The payment might be agreed based on the size of the farm and the duration of the activity.

A refugee from South Sudan who worked as a broker shared his experience in a farmer's house around Homoša as follows:

> … it was two years ago [in 2017] and I was walking around amarket during a market day. Then one refugee from South Sudan approached

> me and asked if I am willing to work in afarm of the local people. At that time, I had no food for my family. Thus, I said 'yes' and he connected me with one local man. The local Berta man spoke to me in Arabic. Then I went to his home and agreed to stay with him until I finished cultivation of a plot. His farm was quite vast, and he agreed to pay me 20 birr per day and to cover my food and shelter expenses. Then I finished the job within 15 days and he gave me 300 birr. Moreover, he received my phone number and promised to call me anytime when he had some work for me. Since that time, he called me to work on his land, and when I was not ready to go, I recommended other refugee friends to work with him. He also called me when his friends needed refugees for labor. Then I started receiving some money from the refugees when I found jobs for them. This is how I started the business as a broker.[16]

This case shows that once refugees establish a network with the local community, they use that network for a long period of time. However, some activities in the area are seasonal and may not be available all year round. For example, refugees might only engage in farming activities during the farming season while they look for other jobs in other seasons. Yet, the job networks are controlled by a group of refugees, and they are not open to all refugees who want to get involved. Thus, networking and connection are very important to get engaged in any business in and around the refugee camp.

The network and connectivity with the host community and refugees is important, especially for those involved in mining activities. Refugees who have a well-established relationship with the local people in Mänge have a better opportunity to get involved in the mining activity. As a result, refugees who go to the mining fields independently to try their luck without a prior connection with people in that job may not be successful. A Burundian refugee shared with me his experience as follows:

> The mining job is already held by some people, and they do not allow other people to work. In February 2019, I went to the mining place with my friend to look for a job. However, let alone to get a job, we couldn't get a place to rent to spend the night. The local people are only willing to host the refugees they have had acquaintance with for a long period of time, and they do not welcome newcomers. This is

[16]IDI with South Sudanese refugee, August 2019, Šärqolle refugee camp.

> because the business is already dominated by some local people and some refugees in their network.[17]

The mining network is also stretched up to the Gambella region. There are brokers who create the business link from Assosa to Gambella. Legally speaking, the refugees are not allowed to leave the camp without a pass permit. However, their business partners from the host community help them and facilitate the journey. The facilitation includes preparing fake pass permits and identity cards. Sometimes they bribe the gate keepers of the camp to allow them through checkpoints. One of the informants was among the group of refugees who visited Gambella frequently for mining. He tells his Gambella experience as follows:

> … First, we learned about going to Gambella from one South Sudanese refugee who had been in the Gambella refugee camp. He told us there is a better gold mining field in Gambella. I've also heard that field owners in Gambella are looking for skilled workers among the Great Lakes refugees. Then I decided to go. The field owners facilitated my transportation and gave me a permit to pass through the gate with the local people. We were three Congolese, two Burundian and two Sudanese. Then we arrived at a place called Rooma in Gambella. We stayed there for one month, and each of us came back with about 10,000 birr. We mined twenty-five meters deep, and the amount of gold we got was sixteen kilograms. There were also twelve local people with us, but the most difficult part of the work was done by the refugees. However, the boss gave us all the same amount of money. He doesn't care whether we were refugees. But the local people who got the same amount of money as us were not happy because they knew we were refugees and they were citizens of Ethiopia. We suffered from lack of oxygen and faced every risk together, digging the hole deep into the ground. I was not convinced that they should be paid better or even equal.[18]

The refugees who participated in a focus group discussion disclosed that there are businessmen in the gold mining area who have a gold mining machine. The machine owners recruited refugees for intensive labor to dig out the places where they suspected the presence of gold. Once the gold is found, the machine owner is responsible for paying for the labor work of digging. He is

[17]IDI with Burundian refugee, August 2019, Šärqolle refugee camp.
[18]IDI with Congolese refugee, August 2019, Šärqolle refugee camp.

supposed to divide the money between refugees and local participants based on their labor contribution. Usually, six people do the digging together. However, they pay for the labor only if the laborers are lucky enough to find gold. Otherwise, the owner of the machine only gives them food and shelter for their stay while digging. A refugee from Congo shared his experience in the mining area as follows:

> … For example, last month we were in the Mänge gold mining field. I was digging with my five friends. After two days of digging, we got 10 grams of gold. Then, we brought it to the machine owner. He took seven grams and divided the rest of the three grams among us. This was a great success for us. Our friends were digging for five or six months. However, they were not successful. But we were lucky. Moreover, some machine owners may deny you payment for your labor and chase you away after taking the gold. Since we work informally, we have nowhere to complain.[19]

Besides the small wage that refugees working in mining sites are suffering from, working informally in mining has another problem for refugees. People who formally work in mining fields have life insurance because of the risk of their work. However, refugees working informally are not insured. According to my discussion with informants who engaged in mining, they lost their friends because of a landslide during excavation.

The above Congolese refugee who shared his experience claimed "I am a mining expert at Mänge mining site". However, he complained that the benefit he gets from mining is not worth his effort. Moreover, the digging activity has its own risks, and they dig about twenty or thirty meters deep to get 8-10 grams of gold. They are also supposed to move inside the hole for 45 minutes to get the gold. With all the risks and challenges, the share that refugees get from the gold is very small, and the largest share is taken by the local bosses. Refugees, especially Congolese, are experienced in the mining activity, but they get a small amount of money because they are refugees and they cannot negotiate for a better payment. The boss receives the gold, sells it to merchants, and distributes the money to the people who engage in the activity at different levels. There are some expenses that are deducted from the money. These include 20% for the people who allow the digging, 30% for the digging machine rent, 20% for the boss and the rest 30 % distributed for the diggers no

[19]IDI with Congolese refugee, August 2019, Šärqolle refugee camp.

matter how many they are. Most of the refugees who are working in the mining area also change their activity and engage in other activities during a rainy season because of the inconvenience of the weather for digging and they resume their activity in the dry season and there are many Congolese refugees who have been engaged in mining activities for 6-10 years.

Refugees also share the beliefs and superstitions of the local people about gold mining. According to informants, in Mänge mining field, there is a big red and white snake, and it is believed by the local people that if it is seen in the place, that place is rich in gold and immediately has to be excavated. In other words, it is a sign of good luck. Refugees working in the area accepted this belief as well, and according to informants who participated in the mining, they waited until they saw a snake before beginning to dig for gold. Since they are told by the local people not to kill the snake, they are cautious to protect it and obey the rule. A Congolese informant talked about the snake. Hence, chasing the snake or talking bad things about it is strictly forbidden. He also reiterated that the snake chased away some of his friends who ignored the rule and talked bad about it. This shows that the refugees work with the local people by paying respect to the beliefs of the community, and they are also influenced by them. Refugees who work with the locals in the mining place almost share the same beliefs regarding snakes, and many refugees also witness the community belief in snakes as their belief. [20]

Refugees from Congo are engaged in electrical work and installation as well. During my field stay, I observed the refugees maintaining the ARRA office's electricity. There are many refugees who repair generators, mobile phones, and stoves for both the host community and the refugees.

5.2. Competition over Business

The involvement of refugees in business activities is steadily increasing. The Homoša *Woreda*Trade and Industry Office reported that the local community complains against refugees being involved in business and at the same time being free from paying tax. The officer also added that the problem is beyond the capacity of the Woreda. Refugees are engaged in all business activities like the local communities. According to a business and trade officer, there is no law which gives the *Woreda* a mandate to control refugee businesses.

[20]IDI with Congolese refugee, August 2019, Šärqoller efugee camp.

According to data from Homoša Woreda's Customs Office, there are 6 butcher houses, one grain house, and 8 barber shops, as well as 9 cinema houses in the camp, which had never paid customs and taxes. In addition to these business centers, the customs office of the *Woreda* claimed that there are many refugees who are engaged in money laundering. Moreover, there are refugees living in Kuburhamsa town who own businesses such as tea houses and cloth shops. These refugees simply rent houses from the locals and run their businesses.

On the other hand, Ethiopians also rent the same house and run the same business. The difference is that since the Ethiopians have the obligation to pay tax for the government, they sell their items at a more expensive price than the refugees do. As a result, they suffer disadvantages from unfair trade practices. Even if they had lodged complaints with the *Woreda* revenue office, there was no solution. As a result, the local business owners were developing a negative attitude towards the refugees, which would grow into an antagonistic relationship.

5.3. Competition over Resources

According to WhaLee (2001), refugees often increase the rate at which land and resources are being used up, and this frequently generates tensions between newcomers and the native populations of the areas where they are concentrated. Fostering this argument, Fajth et al (2019:5) argued that negative attitudes towards refugees can stem from multiple sources, such as real or perceived competition over jobs, public goods, and scarce resources.

However, the resource competitions are situational, and still, there is a room for negotiation between the refugees and the host community. Refugees in Šärqolle camp perceive that their survival is highly dependent on their interaction with the host community. Moreover, they are grateful and appreciate the host people for their positive attitude and allowing them to share their environment and resources, unlike other refugee camps in other African countries. This attitude is especially shared by refugees who have prior experience of living in camps in other African countries.

All of the shelters in Šärqolle refugee camp are constructed using the savanna type of grass available in the region. The refugees cut the grass from the forest for the construction of their shelter. According to the environment protection officer of the Homoša Woreda, the local government does not strictly prohibit

the refugees from cutting the grass. Surprisingly, the local communities do not complain about the cutting of grass because the Berta people are well known for slash and burn agriculture, and when the grasses are dried, they put fire on them to clear the land for cultivation. In this case, the refugees were not considered to be exploiting the local people, but rather both mutually benefiting. Moreover, the Berta people did not know how to construct their houses by using decorated grass. But the Sudanese people prepared the dry grass in a decorative way and sold it to the Berta people. Through time, the local people also learned how to prepare decorated fences and roofs made from dry grass. Besides, some refugees soldthe grasses for the locals and for other refugees.

In addition to the roof, the walls of the refugees' shelters are also made from bamboo, which is a string tree and highly available in the region. Refugees mostly buy the bamboo from the local people at a cheap price and then construct their shelters. Sometimes, refugees cut bamboo trees without the permission of the locals, and they sell them to other refugees. Indeed, IRC[21]is responsible for constructing shelters in new refugee camps. However, Šärqolle refugee camp is perceived to be full and there is no official place to construct new shelters for new arrivals. Yet, some open spaces were distributed to the new arrivals, and they made shelter on their own. Moreover, the shelters were temporarily constructed and they need continuous restoration.

Women refugees are highly engaged in firewood collection. South Sudanese and Sudanese refugees especially participate in firewood collection both for consumption and for selling. A woman who is a South Sudanese refugee told me that she used to sell firewood after collecting the firewood from the bush, which is not allowed to enter for refugees. She had been caught many times by the local guards of the forest and by the local people. However, she talked to them in Arabic and was freed many times. She also said that she used to collect firewood with the other three refugee women. They were extremely cautious not to be caught by the locals. According to her, collecting firewood is not offensive to the locals because they understand that the refugees need it for cooking. However, some female refugees not only collect the firewood but also sell it to other refugees, and this activity directly affected the business of the local people who were engaged in selling the firewood and charcoal to refugees. According to women refugee informants, they were frequently chased by the local people from the bush. One woman refugee said that when

[21] IRC International Rescue Committee

she became weary about being chased by the local forest security, she changed her work to a daily laborer in the Homoša area with other women refugees in a school construction project by walking for two hours on foot to reach the construction site every day.[22] The local people sold a bundle of firewood for ten Ethiopian birr. On the other hand, refugees sold a bundle of wood for seven birr. As a result, the local wood sellers lost the market. This also gradually created an antagonistic relationship between refugees and the local people.

Informants suggested that the Sudanese know how to use firewood, unlike the Congolese. The Congolese mostly buy charcoal from the Berta community. Some Congolese refugees complained that the Sudanese could go to the bush and collect firewood because they could use Arabic to communicate with the locals. On the other hand, the Congolese have a language barrier to negotiate with locals if they are caught in the bush.

According to refugees from the Great Lakes region, they were often victims of internal conflict among the host community. For instance, there was a conflict between the Habesha and the Berta community in September 2018 in Assosa town.There is a physical resemblance between Habesha and the Great Lakes refugees. Hence, the Berta community considered the Great Lakes refugees as Habesha and refused to sell them charcoal. According to an informant, "Some Berta people do not know about Congo" and "They would ask you ‘what is Congo? Is that Habesha?’ A Congolese refugee asserted that the local people are relatively peaceful. However, if they have a conflict with the people whom they call Habesha, the Congolese refugees are considered Habesha due to their color and are attacked. He remembered an event in 2018 when he went to buy charcoal from the Berta village as usual. However, they were not happy to sell him the charcoal considering that he was either Habesha or their spy. Since there was a communication barrier between them, he became frustrated and ran away. The host community is less familiar with refugees from the Great Lakes region and living in Šärqolle camp, while they are more familiar with refugees from Sudan and South Sudan.[23]

Many refugees from the Great Lakes region are dependent on charcoal for their cooking. This is because, as they claimed, they are not familiar with how to cook with firewood since most of the Great Lakes refugees came from

[22]IDI with South Sudanese refugee, August 2019, Šärqolle refugee camp.
[23] IDI with Congolese refugee, August 2019, Šärqolle refugee camp

urban areas where electricity and other sources of energy are accessible, and they also cannot collect firewood from the bush because of a language barrier if they get caught by forest guards. However, there are also refugees who buy charcoal from locals and sell it inside the camp at a more expensive price. In this case, the host community members felt the refugees grabbed their market by selling charcoal inside the refugee camp. Due to this, some people from the host community had conflict with refugees who sold charcoal inside the refugee camp.

6. Influence of the New Proclamation

The policies of host governments vis-à-vis income-generating opportunities and economic activities of refugees were gloomy in most refugee-hosting countries until recently. This also includes limitations regarding employment and access to cultivable land and property rights. In developing countries, including Ethiopia, where the public sector is the main employer, refugees are excluded from employment in the formal labor sector (Kibreab, 2003:57).

Despite its "open door" refugee policy, Ethiopia had maintained reservations relating to refugees' right to work until recently. Ethiopia is party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. However, there had been no refugee policy on the ground, nor any legal framework that provided direction for a durable solution for the refugees until the 2004 proclamation. A national Refugee Proclamation No. 409/2004 was ratified based on the international and regional refugee conventions. This mandate granted refugees some rights outlined in the inter-governmental conventions but denied refugees rights to movement and work implemented in fragmented ways, which in turn created a gap in the smooth relationship between the state and refugees (UNHCR, 2018a).

According to the UNHCR (2018) report, Ethiopia was the second largest host of refugee population in Africa, sheltering 920,262 refugees in 2018, next to Uganda which hosted 1.1 million. Needless to mention, such large number of refugees is not without positive or negative impact on the host community, so requiring a clear and well-tailored policy on the refugees and host community relations.

In December 2016, at the United Nations Summit on Refugees in New York, the Government of Ethiopia was among the 193 countries to sign the New York declaration. The Declaration puts a framework, the Comprehensive

Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which focuses internationally on measures to simplify pressure on countries that welcome and host refugees, supporting the self-reliance of refugees, expanding access to resettlement, and fostering conditions that enable refugees to return voluntarily to their home countries (UNGA,2016). Moreover, the CRRF aims at improving rights and expanding services to benefit both refugees and host communities. The nine pledges include potential provisions to ease the refugees' restrictions in matters of freedom of movement, labor rights, and access to services, livelihoods, and resources (UNHCR, 2018a; UNHCR, 2018b).

On January 17, 2018, Ethiopia's House of Peoples' Representatives approved a revised refugee proclamation, which is believed to clear the road for the implementation of the "Ethiopian Compact" as part of the Global Compact for refugees. The new refugee proclamation provides refugees the right to engage in wage-earning employment in the areas of agriculture, industrial parks, small and micro-scale enterprises, handicrafts, and commerce (refugee proclamation no. 25/1 & 2/2019). It has been believed the new policy, in line with implementations, will gradually transform Ethiopia's refugee operation approach and model from encampment towards hosting refugees in village-style development-oriented settlements and other alternatives to camps like the out-of-camp policy (GoE, 2017).

In order to implement the CRRF, the Ethiopian government designed nine pledges under the categories of education, work and livelihood, local integration, and education. The work and livelihood pledges promised to give work permits to refugees. In this regard, refugees were promised to be enrolled in specific industrial parks and to get cultivable lands (ARRA, 2017).

Many of the things that the CRRF claims to introduce were already done informally by refugees and hosts in Šärqolle Camp. As discussed in the preceding sections of this paper, there had been business centers owned by refugees across the main road of the Šärqolle refugee camp, including butcher shops, beauty salons, shops, cinemas, and groceries. In earlier times, the merchants used to bring commodities from the nearby town and sell them to the refugee community. Currently, there is a refugee community market association supported by a non-governmental organization called the International Rescue Committee (IRC) working on income generation activities. IRC recruited potential refugees and gave them training and supported them up to 5,000 birr. With this money and training, the refugees

could open different businesses such as beauty salons, barbershops, and cinemas. The camp setting is also evidence of how the camp is transforming into a small town.

Indeed, the hospitality of the host community, without CRRF, is perceived to be generated from the assumption that refugees are temporary residents living as guests, and they will leave their place one day. However, giving farming land to refugees, which is one proposal of the CRRF, was not welcomed by the host communities. Camp officials stated that when the refugees were called for meetings with the host communities to discuss implementation of the CRRF, such as how to share the host's land, their behavior began to change. Their labor became more expensive than they used to work before they heard about CRRF. The host community complained that it had become difficult to get cheap labor from refugees.[24] The CRRF only disturbed the informal mechanisms by which both refugees and hosts managed their economic relations. External interventions by refugee programs and policy implementers began to create tension between refugees and the host community. As refugees complained about the disadvantages of having no work or working under unfavorable conditions before CRRF, the introduction of CRRF, even in its infancy, brought new trends that reshaped the economic relationship between the hosts and the refugees.

In addition, some of the provisions in the new proclamation, which are meant to enable CRRF, seem inapplicable to the Šärqolle Refugee Camp. For instance, there is no industrial park in the Benišangul-Gumuz region. It is not clear how these refugees would access work in industrial parks, as promised in the CRRF, far from the camp. Additionally, for refugees to be enrolled in industrial parks, they should have a relevant qualification. In this regard, the pledges seem to be unaware of refugees' qualifications and economic capital in a practical sense. For instance, many refugees in Šärqolle camp have the knowledge of mining. Just like the plan of incorporating 30% of refugees into the industrial parks, it would have been useful if the pledges identified potential economic activities that could attract refugees in a given refugee camp. For instance, enrolling refugees from Šärqolle in mining activities may benefit both the refugees and the state. However, in the context of Šärqolle Refugee Camp, the implementation of the pledges seems to rely on the land of the host community, which in turn increases animosity between the two

[24] IDI with the host, Homoša Woreda, Benišangul-Gumuz Region, August 2019

communities and interferes with the amicable relations they had before the introduction of CRRF.

7. Conclusion

This paper shows that the relationship between hosts and guests is neither linear nor automatic, as many studies on refugee-host interaction would suggest. Local economic and political contexts shape the nature of the relationship between the two groups. In terms of economic relationships, the local context refers to what refugees and hosts can give and receive from each other. Even if the benefit is asymmetrical, the Šärqolle refugees' economic relationship between hosts and refugees shows that the local people have land and mining fields that they offer to refugees, while the latter have labor. The economic relationship can arouse conflicts based on the extent to which either party believes they are abused or unfairly exploited, as the so-called cheap and exploitative labor creates discontent among refugees, or the tax-free informal work creates discontent among the host. The paper also shows how the potential implementation of CRRF has introduced adjustments to the nature of the economic relationship between the two, where, for example, the refugees feel they have a legal entitlement to work; they have begun to ask for higher labor prices. Another local context that determines the nature of relationships in this paper is identity, where knowledge of the local language helps to access local resources and vice versa. Because the refugee-host relationship is affected by local economic and political contexts, it cannot be explained by a single model or a single causal relationship. In this regard, the finding underlines that the interaction between the host community and refugees is multifaceted and goes beyond the policies and regulations of the host country.

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