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Abstract. This paper aims to investigate whether ICT technologies can have an enabling impact by creating opportunities for self-reliance and self-employment for refugees while they rebuild their lives. In the process, we explore the challenges refugee entrepreneurs in Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi face. Drawing on 25 structured interviews with successful refugee entrepreneurs, the findings suggest that refugee entrepreneurs frequently use digital tools. However, digital literacy is the main obstacle towards accomplishing the full potential of ICT tools and achieving the full benefits of this technology. With one exception, data collection using ICT tools regarding current customers is not common. Given the chance, almost all respondents are eager to obtain customer feedback so they can improve customer satisfaction. Among 25 entrepreneurs 7 are female and among them one with a non-traditional female business.

Keywords: Refugee entrepreneurship, Self-reliance, ICT.

1   Introduction

With a growing global refugee crisis, the total population of forcibly displaced people has risen to a record high of 70.8 million people as of 2019 [1]. Despite popular fear-mongering and presentations in the media, the burden of refugees, 84% of them, has fallen on developing countries [2]. Uganda alone currently hosts almost 1.4 million refugees and asylum seekers [3]. Similarly, to the south, the UNHCR found Malawi has taken on over 37,000 refugees as of March 2018 [4], many fleeing from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the number in Malawi has grown. Malawi's largest refugee camp, Dzaleka, alone hosts more than that even a year later, as this paper will discuss later.

Impoverished developing countries, like Malawi with an annual GDP per capita of nearly $1,300 [5], can face difficulties with supporting refugee and asylum seeker populations, and the refugees and asylum seekers can face quite a bit of difficulty themselves. Refugees often face structural difficulties with entering their host country's labor market, often legal in nature. Having left their homes fleeing war, natural disasters, or prosecution, these refugees are forced to start from scratch, frequently lacking in money

or possessions. These problems can both make it difficult for their host countries to take care of them and make life difficult for them. To escape these problems, self-reliance and financial security provide them with the tools to succeed. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants of the UN issued in September 2016 emphasizes the importance of this self-reliance [6].

However, the barriers which self-reliance is meant to overcome are also barriers to self-reliance, leaving few options for refugees. One such option is entrepreneurship. This entrepreneurship helps the refugees who engage in it escape the unemployment that faces these populations thanks to institutional difficulties mentioned above. It also provides them with autonomy they would not otherwise have, even among those who can find jobs. Finally, they provide benefits to their host countries by promoting social cohesion and changing the perception of refugees among host populations. As a result, this approach has been a growing tool for international organizations and focus of study for researchers [7].

Refugee entrepreneurs can benefit from the use of ICT technology in many ways, including facilitating their business. As such, it's important to examine the benefits and difficulties around the use of ICT technology among refugees to help policymakers better understand how to handle the problems, and potential solutions, they face in caring for a refugee population.

1.1   Literature Review

There is existing research, both on refugee entrepreneurship and on the use of ICT technology among refugees. It is important to put our research into the context of this existing research.

To begin with, existing research has demonstrated the benefits of refugee populations to host countries [8-9]. In addition, while research isn't comprehensive on refugee entrepreneurship, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimated in 2010 that refugee entrepreneurship is higher than normal [10]. A 2011 study of the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya finds that informal business activity, including entrepreneurship and employment of other refugees, emerged despite difficulties [11]. A 2014 study found that Ugandan refugee entrepreneurs contribute to local economies, both through paying local taxes and rent to local property owners [12]. Finally, a 2017 study in Zambia found that refugee entrepreneurs also contributed jobs to the local economy [13]. Other studies have examined the pressures faced by entrepreneurs in a refugee camp and the ability to begin their entrepreneurial activity [14-15]. In all these ways, the existing literature demonstrates the willingness and ability of refugees to engage in entrepreneurship and a slew of benefits from refugee entrepreneurship.

Existing studies examine the use of ICT technology in aiding marginalized populations like refugees [16-17], but this research has been unfortunately limited in scope to developed countries where a minority of refugees reside [18].

Some studies have examined refugees' innovative approaches to entrepreneurship. A study titled "Refugee Entrepreneurship a Case-based Topography" examined 17 case studies of refugee entrepreneurs [19]. Another study examined the use of technology in refugee entrepreneurship based on interviews with refugee entrepreneurs in Berlin [20]. This spurred on panel discussions on the topic at ICIS 2016 and ECIS, two of the largest information Systems Conferences, which explored themes of refugee ability to enter labor markets, their access to information, and opportunities they had for entrepreneurship [20]. These explorations have only begun to scratch the surface of the topic, but already show the benefits of ICT technology to refugee entrepreneurship.

This existing research has established the benefits of refugees to host countries, the ability, difficulties, and benefits of refugee entrepreneurship, and the use of technology by refugee entrepreneurs. Many have focused on developed nations with a minority of refugees. Others have broken ground on research allowing for more in-depth studies in the future.

In addition, there is no consensus on the benefit of entrepreneurship for development. The school that questions benefits of it is discussing the dark side of social entrepreneurship [21], considering terrorists as entrepreneurs [22], and indicating environmental dimension as being negatively affected by entrepreneurship [23]. The most relevant to the present case is the issue of legal identity as an obstacle, and similar to other instances where host country forbids refugee labor [24], inducing refugees to use inventive strategies.

However, the dark side of social entrepreneurship is not in itself a reason to reject more positive uses of entrepreneurship. Positive results of entrepreneurs do not rely upon entrepreneurship being always good. Furthermore, the legal difficulties present a problem to refugee entrepreneurship, but it is a problem overcome with legal fixes to the situation instead of an abandonment of refugee entrepreneurs. Refugee self-reliance would benefit from getting legal access to work and operating a business.

This study seeks to add to existing literature by exploring themes developed before in more depth. It also seeks to add more examinations of developing countries to the analysis. To this end, it will seek to answer: How have the circumstances in the Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi and the of ICT technology has impacted entrepreneurship? To this end, it will examine a series of interviews with refugee entrepreneurs. In addition, it will show the impacts of refugee entrepreneurship on self-reliance and recovery from crisis.

1.2   Theory

The theoretical basis for the current paper is in the same lines as Tonelli et al. [25] who analyze entrepreneurship by exploring the implications of the theoretical-methodological assumptions of the Actor-Network Theory (ANT). This theory unlike other theoretical perspectives for entrepreneurship, considers all entities as hybrids, diverging from the asymmetric way of accessing reality, recognizing that both, subjective and objective, aspects contribute to the success or failure of entrepreneurial initiatives. Actor-network theory (ANT) holds that social forces do not exist in themselves, and therefore cannot be used to explain social phenomena. Instead, strictly empirical analysis should be undertaken to "describe" rather than "explain" social activity. ANT represents a single circulating entity, instead of the idea dualized between two notions, micro versus macro; individual versus structure, or even subjective versus objective [26]. In addition, the actors are configured according to their position. The perception of its existence only occurs through the connection with other human and non-human elements that make up the network [27].

Furthermore, following the classification from Marti and Mair [28] about brining change to poor via entrepreneurship outside traditional boundaries, which indicates that actors, often powerless and under-resourced, sometimes leverage the following approaches: (1) engage in experimental projects; (2) probe for weaknesses and exploiting small advantages; (3) work – often behind the scenes.

Therefore, this study considers entrepreneurs in the Dzaleka refugee camp, participants in this case study, as actors who along with the other technological and non-human entities form a network in an attempt to exploit small advantages and work behind the scenes to improve their unfavorable position and become more self-sufficient.

2   Background, Methodology, and Data Collection

2.1   Culture and Location Background

Dzaleka camp is located 45 kilometers outside of the capital of Malawi, Lilongwe (see Fig. 1). The camp is small, congested and surrounded by local villages, with no adequate access to agricultural land (see Fig. 2). Refugees in the camp are from Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo. This has resulted in a multicultural community as refugees brought with them their own local cultural practices. In addition, this means that French, English, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, and Kiswahili are all spoken in the camp, among other languages. These were the languages our interviews were conducted in. Kiswahili is the most popular language in the camp and is the language most business is conducted in. This multiculturalism has produced a diverse landscape of refugees and allowed for many to leverage their unique skills.

Figure 1 Location of Dzaleka

The UNHCR, the World Food Program (WFP), Churches Action for Relief and Development (CARD), Welt Hunger Hilfe (WHH), World Food Program (WFP), Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), Plan International Malawi jointly coordinate activities within the camp. A 2019 report from WHH put the population of the camp at 45,095, far outstripping the refugee population in Malawi even the year before.

The Malawi government has made it illegal for refugees to get jobs or conduct businesses outside of the camp. However, Malawi does not restrict conducting business in the camps themselves. These legal barriers have created illegal business activity by the refugees outside of the camp and opportunities within the camp for refugees.

Figure 2 Dwellings in the camp

2.2   Network Access

It is important for ICT use to consider access to communications networks. There are two cellular internet providers available in Dzaleka, TNM, and Airtel. They bundle voice and internet separately and options are often unaffordable for residents of the camp. Even cheap internet plans carry a large cost. The cheapest is the equivalent cost of two months' rations of maize from the UNHCR. Significantly cheaper plans exist, but they are cheaper because they only allow the use of the internet-based messaging app WhatsApp. However, similar to other locations, internet speeds are less than advertised when residents actually use them. There is not any Wi-Fi in the camp, further restricting the access of residents to the internet.

Digital literacy is low, but a few organizations help build it. The Jesuit Refugee Service provides classes on computer use. AppFactory helps to teach app development. However, these are not yet comprehensive, and neither provide refugees with Wi-Fi.

2.3   Interview Methodology

Interviews were conducted by a student researcher who is also a refugee in the camp and has resided there since January 2015. The interviews began on October 5th, 2019. They were semi-structured in-depth face to face interviews. Interviews were conducted in the native language of the interviewee with a native speaker as a translator. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour each and the interviewees were asked to elaborate on some questions.

The interviews were conducted to determine the effect, positive or not, of ICT technology on self-reliance. To this end, the subjects were asked about the general state of entrepreneurship in the camps and the possibility of expansion outside of the camp and integration in the broader society of the host country. The subjects were also asked about the biggest hurdles in their business. Foremost, they were asked about their use of technology, both regarding how they used ICT technology for their business and if they used digital tools for data collection about their customers. Their answers form the basis of the discussion in the next section. Interviews were analyzed for the response patterns by finding common answers for the above questions.

3   Discussion of Interview Data

The refugee camp is estimated to have between 40 and 50 entrepreneurs. The attempt was made to interview all of them but eventually succeeded to talk only to 25 of them, about half. The interview subjects owned a variety of businesses. Some were in the hospitality industry, owning restaurants, bars, or gambling establishments. Others were in retail, owning clothing or produce stores (see Fig. 3). Some were in the service industry, owning barbershops, or providing educational services. Indeed, there was a broad variety in their entrepreneurial activity among the subjects.

Figure 3   Corner store

A majority of the entrepreneurs had been entrepreneurs prior to entering the refugee camp. Usually they were engaged in a business before they became refugees. One of them described how he had a restaurant in his home country before coming to the refugee camp. He said:

"It is not the first business, but I was also having the same business in my mother country which is the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was also having a well-known restaurant in Kinshasa which was not in a refugee camp."

Some had businesses at other refugee camps as well. One entrepreneur said:

"This is not the first business I was having a bar in Rukore Refugee Camp which was located in Tanzania."

Having previous experience allowed them to carry over skills and expertise they already had. Their prior experience and carrying over of skills doubtless contributed to the observed diversity of their entrepreneurial activity. However, some who had businesses at home did not have a business in the same industry as before. Most viewed their entrepreneurship as a path to economic security.

In addition, many entrepreneurs talked about their use of ICT. For example, one participant said:

"I normally use my phone to communicate with my customers and even publish some of my services online to attract many new customers. I use mostly WhatsApp and Facebook since they are the only apps with less data consumption compared to other apps."

In addition, some entrepreneurs built their business around ICT and education. One had a business helping refugees with computers, while the other had an education business. Both participants used a wide variety of applications:

"Mostly, I use the android studio for android development, Eclipse, Netbeans, Notepad++ and Microsoft office package."

"I use some applications in communication such as WhatsApp and Slack. I use also Chrome in order to search for some books online."

The major complaints are cost and security. One participant summarizes it:

"I only have two difficulties. The internet bundle is expensive and it is very slow that is why many people are not using many applications. The second problem is security. Some of the refugees can be tracked easily by using technology."

3.1   Gender Data

Of the 25 interview subjects, 7 of them (28%) were women, proportionally much less than the female population in Dzaleka as a whole (46%). With nearly half of women in the general population but a much smaller proportion among entrepreneurs, this shows a lot of difficulties women face in becoming entrepreneurs. Among the women entrepreneurs, 6 out of 7 owned businesses related to food and clothes. Retail is the most common business sector for women ownership [29-30]. The one remaining business was interesting because it was in welding. The owner, Anna, was interviewed in depth.

Describing how she got into welding, Anna said:

"I was trained by an organization called 'There is Hope' and applied what I have learned. Also, I wanted to support my family and my children because I am a widow."

Describing the challenges, she faced, Anna talked about having a lack of confidence, initially, and the conflicts it had with raising her children as a single mother. Male domination in business also posed a challenge and made it more difficult to raise capital as a woman. Finally, she described men expecting sexual favors from her in exchange for their support of her. When asked about how she stays motivated, she said:

"I know what I want, and the social norms and other discouragement are nothing to my business. I am supposed to prove people wrong by showing the result of what I am doing. The profit and the evolution of my business are the things that help me to stay motivated in my business."

3.2 The Internet and WhatsApp

Almost all the subjects used the internet to conduct their business. WhatsApp was the most popular app for this. WhatsApp was preferred for its security since many of the businesses were not sanctioned by the government and because of phone plans which give WhatsApp use for free. It was both used to communicate with customers and to advertise their business (see Fig. 4).
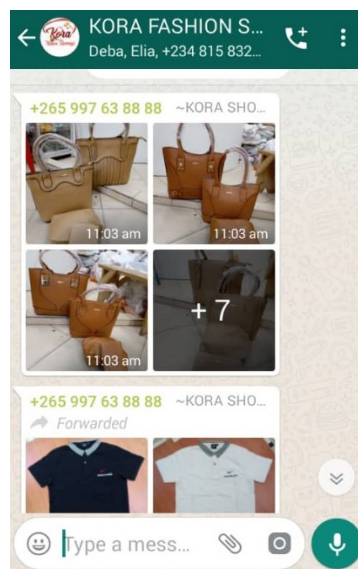

Figure 4 WhatsApp adds

They varied considerably if they collected data on their customers, what data they collected, and how they collected it. Some recorded names, addresses, and purchases and others did not. Most businesses wanted to know how their customers thought their services could be improved, and how satisfied their customers were with their business. Some were also interested in demographic information about their customers' information include purchasing power and personal preferences in products and services. Most statements are along these lines:

> " *I want to know what they think about the services that I offer to them. I would then work on their thoughts to improve my business."*

Some of the participants used digital tools for this, but not all. Sophisticated use of digital tools for data collection was extremely uncommon among the participants. One of the exceptions to this was an entrepreneur who worked on ICT technology education. His students developed apps for collecting customer data benefiting him and other entrepreneurs willing to use digital tools for this purpose.

The biggest difficulty to use ICT technology was a lack of digital literacy. Most subjects who had not used sophisticated tools for information gathering cited a lack of skills and expertise as their main reason. Many thought they were making full use of their smartphones but were only using part of their functionalities. As one participant stated it candidly:

" *The difficulty that I have is that most of my customers do not know anything about technology. They have smartphones but they are using them for playing music and calling because they do not have knowledge about them.*"

3.3 Broader Integration

While their business activity was restricted to inside the camp, some reported getting customers from outside of their camp. An entrepreneur who runs a liquor business talked about how he knew he would be successful even outside of the refugee camp because people came into the camp to buy his liquor.

Most were interested in expanding their business outside of Dzaleka and confident they could. A barber talked about his plans of opening a salon in Mzuzu, Malawi's third largest city. Speaking of the viability of this, he said:

"I believe that my skill and experience would be what brings people to my saloon and once I open this salon elsewhere apart from the refugee camp people would still come."

A food and drink shop owner said:

"I want to build my business in various districts here in Malawi once I get the capital I would be able to expand my business to its maximum potential."

Others were not so confident. One participant said:

"chapatti is a staple food for most refugees, therefore, they are prone to buying it. This is a different case with Malawians since their staple food is nsima hence they don't find chapatti as interesting in the same way that refugees do."

However, those lacking in confidence were less numerous and even they wanted to expand out of the camp.

Many would benefit from more access to ICT in expanding their business activity outside of the camp. One participant talked about what he would need to expand out of the refugee camp:

"I have to open a website that will help me to sell my products online."

In addition, some would benefit from increased access to ICT and the electricity in order to expand their business outside of the refugee camp. One computer repairman claimed:

"Electricity would help me to expand my business because its availability would enable me to always send music and songs which would increase my profitability."

4   Conclusion and Future Research

While many entrepreneurs were able to improve their situations, they faced important institutional barriers such as legal barriers that are preventing them from using their entrepreneurship to participate in broader society. A lack of digital literacy precluded many from taking full advantage of ICT technology which would benefit their business. Fitting with the assumptions of ANT, we find all three approaches discussed above among the entrepreneurs examined. We found experimentation, such as a female offering welding services; exploiting weaknesses in the system, such as lack of food variety in the camp; working behind the scenes, such as taking advantage of WhatsApp to get around the illegality of their business.

This reinforces the existing literature's understanding of the difficulties of becoming an entrepreneur as a refugee and the accompanying benefits of it. It further shows that, while existing literature demonstrates benefits to the use of ICT technology, many, especially in developing nations, can experience institutional difficulties accessing that technology, such as a lack of knowledge about how to use them. Further research would benefit from examining how we can increase digital literacy in those extreme settings. In addition, an examination of e-commerce by refugee entrepreneurs would be able to show any further effects of substantial use of ICT technology.

Finally, this demonstrates that policymakers would do well to enhance ICT technology in refugee camps. Programs to increase digital literacy would create multiple benefits for refugee populations. A reduction of legal barriers would be a tremendous help too. The participants have shown a desire to expand their businesses outside of the camps as well as the desire to integrate into the broader society. Doing so would help increase civic participation by refugees and benefit both, host countries and the refugees themselves.

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