Unlikely Cities In The Desert: The Informal Economy As Causal Agent For Permanent “Urban” Sustainability In Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: Refugee camps often evolve into permanent settlements that resemble urban slums in the inequity, violence, and informal economic structures. This paper draws on five seasons of ethnographic fieldwork on traders and refugee consumers in Kakuma Refugee Camp, near the Kenya-Sudan border. My analysis focuses on the informal exchange/sale of food within Kakuma to underscore the role of the informal economy in the evolution of a refugee camp “town/city” in an inhospitable landscape. Home to 90,000 refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Sudan, and Darfur, Kakuma hosts more than 500 retail and wholesale shops as well as numerous restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, all of which are supplied by a thriving informal economy dominated by competing Somali traders and merchants. I argue that the informal food economy is one of the primary mechanisms that renders refugee lives “normal” and hence sustainable. Hence, the informal economy is one of the fundamental forces...
behind the ability of relief organizations to (a) sustain multi-year relief operations, and (b) “manage” a large urban-type settlement that survives/thrives within one of the most environmentally inhospitable regions in East Africa.

Introduction

Often dismissed as marginal and attritional, informal economies have nonetheless been an inextricable part of urban economies since the origins of settlement complexity (Oka 2008; Oka and Kusimba 2008). The boundaries between formal and informal economies are diffuse and ambiguous in any complex settlement: from small towns to large metropolises (Hart 2010). Economic actors and their activities interact at multiple levels and scales of both formal and informal economies. These actors generally attempt to benefit from both the formal economies (protection offered by the institution and regulation) and the informal economies (flexibility and negotiation offered by the lack of regulation) (Chen 2004). Here I address the central role of informal economies in urban settlements by drawing attention to a particular settlement, the refugee camp: (a) that by definition and raison d’être is deemed to not need nor possess any form of commercial economy, (b) where any form of commercial activity within the camps is necessarily outside the realm of regulatory institutions and hence informal, and (c) where informal economies are officially seen as attritional but are encouraged by local and regional relief workers.

I use data from five sessions of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northern Kenya between July 2008 and August 2011 to underscore the central importance of the informal commercial economy centered around food distribution at Kakuma and its role in (a) generating a sense of “normal” for refugees in their transient lives, and (b) in helping the established United Nations Organization (U.N.) bodies, umbrella organizations, local partners,
and other NGOs to manage a population of 90,000 refugees in northern Turkana district, one of the harshest landscapes in East Africa. Any “normal” management problems faced by the U.N. and the Kenyan government are complicated by the problems of sustaining large populations within these harsh conditions (Agier 2011). In addition, the camp managers must contend with providing relief and stability to thousands of people whose lives have been violently transformed and who have been reduced from being merchants, engineers, teachers, farmers, pastoralists, and students to being the “undesirables,” the veritable beggars living off the reluctant largesse of the host(ile) governments and relief organizations, e.g., the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Despite some residual reservations about their attritional impacts, informal economies are now regarded as essential in the camps as they provide goods and services not supplied within the relief packages (Brees 2008; Werker 2007). In this paper, I argue that the informal economy fulfills a function beyond just the filling of gaps in relief. The informal economy depends on purposeful consumption of goods and services. By providing the infrastructure where refugees can buy food they desire and consume it in cultural settings that reaffirm social and communal relationships, the informal economy becomes the fundamental mechanism by which the refugees can gain a sense of “normal.” In so doing, it eases the burden on the relief mission by reducing the ennui and periodic violence that can emerge among large populations faced with endless bureaucracies, lines, and lifetimes of uncertainty. In short, I argue that the informal economy is the primary reason that refugee camps can be sustained almost indefinitely as “urban” settlements or “refugee camp towns” even under the logistical shortcomings and political realities of a refugee camp humanitarian space.
Research Background and Methodology

Kakuma Refugee Camp in Turkana District, Kenya, is one of the largest refugee camps in the world and also one of the most enduring humanitarian settlements in Sub-Saharan Africa along with Dadaab Refugee Camp Complex (Agier 2011). The main ethnographic and economic studies on Kakuma were conducted between 1995 and 2003 and primarily dealt with the Sudanese refugees for whom the camp was built in 1991 (see Agier 2011; Montclos and Kagwanja 2000). Prior to 1991, Kakuma was a transport and regional market town primarily settled by Somali Isaak and Hawiye traders who specialized in pastoral products and had migrated to Turkana from Somalia in the 1960s (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000). Apart from dominating the pastoral exchange, these traders also diversified into retail and wholesale services to the local pastoral communities and lodging/boarding and maintenance services for drivers on the Kitale-Juba road (Oka 2011). The result of these activities was an extensive exchange network that spanned northern Turkana and southern Sudan (Oka 2009). The Somali traders were in an excellent position to offer goods and services to the refugees and the camps workers at Kakuma as well at the UNHCR base for Sudan Relief at Lokichoggio on the Kenya-Sudan border, as seen in Figure 1.

The refugee camp was built by the UNHCR and the WFP in 1991 and is located 1 km, from Kakuma Town. Initially comprising one settlement, the camp has expanded to house refugees from other wars and calamities and now consists of four settlement clusters called Kakuma Camp I, II, III and IV, as seen in Figure 2. I have divided the various types of economic activities within Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kakuma Town into eight categories:
1. Formal Relief Redistribution: Food and other relief goods are distributed to the refugees by the WFP and LWF through distribution centers within the four camps.
2. Formal Commerce: Wholesale and retail traders supply goods and services to Turkana residents and relief workers and agencies in Kakuma.

3. Formal-Informal Commerce: Wholesale traders supply goods and services to refugee wholesalers/retailers within Kakuma Refugee Camp.

4. Formal-Informal Banking and Remittances: Four banks and mobile money systems enables cash and credit to be transferred between relatives outside Kakuma to Kakuma refugees.

5. Formal-Informal Employment: Refugees can seek employment with relief agencies or the traders in Kakuma.

6. Informal Overt Commerce: Refugee wholesalers and retailers supply goods and services to refugee consumers within Kakuma Refugee Camp.

7. Informal Relief Commerce: Refugees sell portions of relief food package to black market traders.

8. Informal Covert Commerce: Various actors involved in the flow of drugs, weapons, and other extra-legal or illicit activities within Kakuma Town and Kakuma Camp.

In this paper, I refer mainly to the first seven categories and focus on the distribution and consumption of food among the relief, formal, and informal economies.

Between the years 1995 and 2011, the number of retail shops at Kakuma I, followed by Kakuma II and IV has expanded from 30 in 1995 (Agier 2011) to 200 by the year 2000 (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000), and to more than 500 by August 2011. The primary clients until 2007 were the 70,000 Sudanese refugees who received remittances from their relatives in northern Sudan, other parts of Kenya/East Africa, the Middle East/Arabian Gulf, or the West. The Ethiopian refugees were brought from refugee camps in South Sudan in 1994 and 1995 and established their own enclave within Kakuma camp (Hammond 2004). According to various observers, the Ethiopians built their own networks for the distribution of goods and services within the camp and forced the Somali traders to compete with other Kenyan traders to provide goods at competitive and wholesale rates (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000). The loss of the Sudanese
clientele following the Peace Accord of 2005 represented a severe loss for the Somali traders. As one informant stated in July 2008:

Now that the Sudanese are gone, business is bad. But they will be back. Peace does not last but you can always depend on war. Also now the Somalis are coming in so business will be good again.

The arrival of the incoming Somali and the returning Sudanese has pushed the camp population level to 82,789 (official estimate in August 2011) and 95,000 (according to the camp officials) from a low of 30,000 in January 2008, leading to a boom in the refugee economy, in particular the commercial informal economy.

The ethnographic data were collected through semi-structured interviews of individuals and groups of traders, refugees, and relief workers, and participant observation of trader-refugee-relief agency interactions. The fieldwork was conducted over five field seasons at Kakuma Refugee Camp: July-August 2008, October 2009, March 2010, July-August 2010, and June–August 2011. The total number of informants and ethnographic consultants included:

1. 78 traders (7 wholesalers: 5 Somalis and 2 Ethiopians; 71 retailers: 3 Ethiopian, 2 Burundi, 4 Sudanese, 62 Somali);
2. 179 refugees (36 Sudanese, 8 Ethiopians, 5 Burundi, 130 Somali); and
3. 38 relief workers from UNHCR (n = 3), WFP (n = 7), FAO (n = 1), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) (n = 14), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) (n = 4), Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) (n = 5).

Questions targeted the role of the informal economy in sustaining life at Kakuma and its importance for traders, refugees, and the relief agencies. Data elicited from traders included monthly sales, strategies for risk and demand cal-
calculation, strategies to manage competition and oversight/interference from government or relief agencies, and relationships between other traders, and with refugees and the relief agencies. Data sought from refugees included the ratio of relief and commercial goods/services in monthly consumption, the justifications underlying the non-essential consumption practices, and the problems in the relief packages and the humanitarian process. Data from the relief agencies covered their own need for the distributional capacity of the traders, the logistical problems with the relief package, and the issues of managing 80,000 to 90,000 refugees in an inhospitable terrain under adverse conditions.

The data were collected through one-on-one and group discussions within the informants’ homes, businesses, and places of employment, as well as observations of their interactions with relief workers and traders. The interviews and observation processes involved repeated visits built around food sharing and allowed me to make friends within the camp. Even though they knew that I had no ability to intervene in their lives, my willingness to participate in their activities was viewed favorably. My perceived powerlessness allowed me to empathize with their own sense of disempowerment within this humanitarian space and enabled a candid observation of lived activities.

Despite the idealized envisioning of humanitarian space as a safe and apolitical environment for administering relief activities, all actors have particular agendas, respond to local and regional sociopolitical realities, and will interpret and influence factors to suit their own purposes and desires (Libal and Harding 2007; Jansen 2008). Refugees will present narratives that might not be accurate or precise descriptions of their own cases but which are designed to maximize their benefits within the humanitarian space (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010; Jansen 2008). To counter this, responses were cross-checked between refugees, relief workers and traders, and also verified through
actual observation of socioeconomic processes, including distribution, purchase, and consumption of goods within the informal economy. Even though the field-sessions lasted between 2 weeks (October 2009, March 2010) and 3 months (summers 2008, 2010, and 2011), my ability to return and my reliability in maintaining social relationships over 4 years differentiated me from relief workers or journalists in their experience. The cross-verification and observation enabled by a longitudinal study and conducted through extended, intensive and repeated interactions ensured the ability to differentiate between data that described the humanitarian process at Kakuma and data that reflected the refugees’ opinions and agendas within the humanitarian space.

Urban Ethnography of Kakuma Refugee Camp

The socioeconomic interactions of large refugee settlements lend themselves to “an urban ethnography” (Agier 2011: 134). Indeed, my first reaction to Kakuma was that it resembled an urban slum, similar to those in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. There was an unmistakable sense of urbanism that was dissonant from the desert landscape of Turkana. Upon closer inspection, the links between refugee camps settlements and urbanism are established by the enduring existence of the refugee camp itself and based on the development of the informal economy in both settlement types.

Refugee camps are quintessentially 20th century responses to anthropogenic disasters such as wars and conflicts (Lischer 2005). They were conceived as settlements providing temporary housing and basic necessities to dislocated peoples awaiting resolutions of their plight. However, the complexities of bureaucratic procedure meant that the waiting times for most
refugees extended to years and decades (Bookman 2002; Lischer 2005). Many of the refugee camps that emerged between 1950 and 2000 endured beyond the specific crisis or disaster that underlay their creation, becoming semipermanent settlements on their assigned landscapes, growing or shrinking in size in response to regional crises or resolutions thereof (Lischer 2005). Such settlements usually have populations in excess of 50,000: for example, Kakuma (pop. 90,000) and Dadaab (pop. 400,000) in Kenya, Breidjing (pop. 280,000) in Chad, or Amman New Camp (pop. 380,000) in Jordan (Bariagaber 2006; Peteet 2005). These camps have achieved quasipermanence and are characterized by the prerequisites of urbanism, viz., “heterogeneity, complexity, gathering and concentration” (Agier 2011: 134). As such, Kakuma and Dadaab in particular have been referred to as “refugee camp towns” (Agier 2011: 133) or “virtual cities” (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000: 207). Specifically, these camps are cosmopolitan, have high population/population densities, and aggregation of schools, roads, telephones, hospitals, and sanitation infrastructure, all necessary parameters for urbanization. Most important apropos urbanism, the majority of the residents in these camps are engaged in non-agricultural activities, working in “agencies, in shops, or in construction.”

However, due to the transient nature of residence and human settlement, the camp town residents are never truly “citizens” (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000: 208). As forced migrants waiting to go back to or move on, their “longings and belongings” are always somewhere else, regardless of their tenure in the camps (Van der Veer 1995: 4). This sentiment was echoed by many of my informants who were unsure of the current status and lived within “simultaneous and opposing” narratives of “back in .....[Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, etc]” and “when we are in ... [America, U.K., etc].” One man said that he strove to remember the goods things about life in Somalia, “before the madness started, before Siad Barre was overthrown.” But he reflected the thoughts of many refugees when he stated:
I look to my future life in Canada and even though my children were born here, they are not Kenyan and they are not Somali. They will be Somali Canadians and that is where their heart is now. Just one final interview.....”

For this sense of transient permanence or static transience, the urbanism of refugee camp towns is “incomplete and unfinished” (Agier 2011: 145). This incompleteness is similar to that seen in slums articulated with large cities. Slum residents are usually migrants seeking employment in response to urban labor demands. Slums also serve as the forum for the production and distribution of various goods and services, both legal and extra-legal, to the residents of the city/town, including the slum dwellers, and are ignored or marginalized by the city administration (King 1996; Ouma 2010).

In comparison, refugee camp towns lack the articulation or a direct symbiotic relationship with a city. Camp towns such as Kakuma and Dadaab are purposefully built far away from urban centers to avoid the transformation of documented refugees into “clandestine migrants” and adding onto the burgeoning slum populations of these cities (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000: 220). The city is structurally akin to the relief and humanitarian agencies that provide the infrastructure for longterm settlement of the refugee camp towns. Refugees are settled into the camp towns and provided services, viz., food, shelter, and clothing, the scale and quality of which are dependent upon the capacities and logistics of donor nations and agencies, and the host country. One refugee who lived in Liboye Camp (Dadaab) from 1993-1995, in Utanga-Benadiri camp from 1995-1997, and then in Kakuma from 1997 to the present said:

When we came to Liboye, they gave us food, basta (pasta) sometimes, maize that we didn’t like, but also tea, coffee, sugar, milk, and many times meat. Even Utanga was not so bad. But over the years at Kakuma, we have received less and less, bad food and less of it.”
As in slums, the informal economy also develops within these camp towns to fill in the infrastructural gaps left by the humanitarian and relief process in the provision of goods and services (Werker 2007). Hence, the humanitarian processes that provide infrastructure for the refugees create the conditions for a thriving economy within the same humanitarian space. This informal economy in turn sustains these camp towns and fills in the gaps left by relief efforts and paradoxically enables the continuity of the larger humanitarian/relief process (Brees 2008). One of the relief workers who is also a logistical manager at one of the food distribution agencies outlined this relationship thus:

We try to keep the refugees alive but we are suffering from the global recession, high food prices, and donor fatigue. We, and the refugees, we both depend upon the traders for many things that would be difficult to bring from Nairobi or Kitale. And the traders give us good service but also make good money here in Kakuma.

Agier reasserts this tenuous relationship between humanitarian processes and infrastructures within the camps that “produces the town,” by creating the forum for an embryonic economy which remains informal but provides work, creates stability and provides some sustainability (2011: 134). These “endogenous economic dynamics and integration” result from the intersection of the eight aforementioned formal-informal economic activities and “are essential parts of an urbanization process within a camp” (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000: 208).

I argue that the humanitarian mechanism does produce the refugee camp town and a sense of urbanism. As with other urban migrations, it creates an aggregation of peoples who would otherwise not reside within the same space, and forces a sense of community to develop within and sometimes between ethnic groups. This development of community requires various actions, rituals, goods, and services, that are provided
not by the humanitarian mission but by the informal economy. Hence, the informal economy enables the camp to survive and even thrive in a continual process of urban-transformation. The acts of consumption give the refugees a chance to experience “normal” moments that link them to their origin, their ethnicity, and/or their diasporan communities while negotiating between their statelessness and their other normal, the refugee static transience. Paradoxically, it is precisely the informality of the economy that renders the urbanism of Kakuma and other refugee camp towns or cities “incomplete and unfinished.”

**Informal Economies in Kakuma Refugee Camp Town**

Ideally, refugee camps are constructed to provide the basic needs of refugees and are considered temporary and transient. Hence the mandate of the host governments and UNHCR usually extends only to basic human needs: food, shelter, and clothing (Werker 2007). However, the inevitable endurance of the refugee camps and hence the proliferation of refugee needs has forced the relief agenda to include services such as education, vocational training, and public health (Lischer 2005). These additional services are necessary for life after repatriation or relocation. The official mandates for refugee relief generally preclude provisions of goods and services considered non-essentials. These nonessentials include commodities and services that would be considered comforts or luxuries.

However, the relief packages are generally affected by many factors including donor funding, the efficiency of the supply chain/network, and the logistics of camp distribution (Pottier 1996). Subsequently, the relief effort is affected negatively in both the quantity and quality of goods and services provided. These gaps in relief are often extremely harmful to the nutritional, physical, and mental wellbeing of the refugees (Pottier 1998). As various studies have already noted, the results of
these gaps and shortcomings are chronic malnutrition, and low qualities of services including shelter, education and training. All these factors usually create a significant demand for necessary goods and services, a vacuum that is readily filled in by the informal economy (Jacobsen 2005).

I define an “informal economy” as a complex system of enduring economic transactions involving the commercial sale/purchase of goods and services that: (a) operate on the margins of or outside institutional oversight or legitimate/authoritarian social or political regulatory frameworks, and (b) coexist and/or compete with formal or mainstream economies that are bounded by these frameworks (Oka 2011). This definition would be problematic in most contexts for the simple reason that the continuum between formal/mainstream and informal economies is very difficult to pin down and operationalize (Chen 2004).

In Kenya, the informal economy (jua kali) refers to“... all small-scale activities that are normally semi-organized and unregulated, and use simple labour-intensive technology... undertaken by artisans, traders and operators in work-sites such as open yards, market stalls, undeveloped plots, residential houses and street pavements... not registered with the Register of Companies, they may or may not have licenses from local authorities for carrying out a variety of businesses” (GOK 1997: 72). The jua kali involves 35% of urban and 59% of rural households and has been recognized as a viable force in development and progress (King 1996; Ouma 2010:1). Despite the problems in definition, there is a growing consensus that informal economies provide livelihood and sustenance to people otherwise marginalized and hence are a key factor in development program (Chen 2004).

However, this consensus and recognition has not been applied to the informal economies that operate in refugee camps, where the informal economy accounts for up to 95% of consumption of goods and services and provides a simi-
lar percentage of employment and sustenance (Pottier 1996; Werker 2007). This neglect of the informal economy is bound within the policies of humanitarian process wherein any commercial activity involving refugees is either banned or strictly controlled by the relief agencies and host governments (Brees 2008). These policies that limit commercial activities within the refugee camp are primarily aimed at protecting refugees from the negative impacts of commercial economies including attritional consumption, and price gouging, hoarding, and oligopolies inflicted by external or camp traders (Jacobsen 2005). One relief worker who manages vocational training and adult educational programs at Kakuma said:

Though refugees are not ignorant or stupid, they are vulnerable populations, being surrounding by hostile people here in Turkana. Hence, it would be easy for people to take advantage of them. And you know these traders, they will always try to make the most profit and they know that refugees need some things more than others and will pay more if they have the money.

Other reasons for the exclusionary policies stem from the inability of monitoring agencies to demarcate the boundaries between the formal and informal economies in refugee camps (Pottier 1996). Both of these economies are managed or dominated by trading communities who take advantage of the trading/commercial opportunities generated by the refugees, the camp support staff, and the various NGOs/relief agencies (Lischer 2005). Most traders around refugee camps are either (a) local entrepreneurs who have established networks in the area prior to the construction of the refugee camp and extend these networks to the camp residents and support staff, or (b) they migrate to the area seeing the commercial opportunities offered by the camp (Agier 2011).

The Somali traders are indeed local as they came to Kakuma in the 1960s and were part of the reason behind the establish-
ment of the camp in 1991. They recruit employees from within the camp or from their extended kin networks (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000). The Somalis of Kakuma are also key nodes within the regional and global diasporan Somali network (Campbell 2005). As with other trading communities, the Somalis have enhanced abilities to handle goods and services at multiple scales within these camps, from wholesale to retail (Bitter and Oka 2010). They also manage the flow of capital and credit within and between camps, from offering small-scale retail credit to banking and remittance services. These traders also compete over long-term contracts to supply goods and services to the NGOs and the relief agencies at Kakuma, including the supplies of daily consumables, fuel, and construction and office supplies (Oka 2009). As they perform crucial functions, the refugee camp traders are tolerated by local and regional staff and might even be taxed by the host government. One of the main wholesalers in Kakuma said:

Even though we were here before the NGOs, they treat us with suspicion. But they would not survive without us. Already, the Turkana think that they care more about the refugees and not them, who are Kenyan. We can provide any service they want, the refugees need, and the UN knows this. As long as we are useful, they will give us no trouble. But we are never fully welcome here.

This grudging acknowledgment enables the traders to operate legally within the camps. However, their activities within the camps are not monitored or taxed formally as many of the shops and businesses are owned/operated by refugee traders whose business longevity is tied to their repatriation/relocation process. While the shop spaces remain intact, there is a significant turnover in management. The traders who supply goods to the camp operate with ease between the formal (external) and informal (internal and black market) economies. They can readily intensify their activities to provide goods and services
that are not deemed as “necessities” in the humanitarian mission (Pottier 1996; 1998). These goods and services include electronics, information technology, prepackaged snack foods and drinks, imported beers and spirits, clothing, perfumes, sporting equipment, restaurants, and other comforts and luxuries that are considered unnecessary for refugees (Bitter and Oka 2010; Oka 2009).

However, even as refugees comply with their static transience, they do not adjust their wants and desires to fit the limitations of relief mandates (Bookman 2002). The condition of waiting and living at the mercy of the relief, repatriation, and relocation process is a debilitating experience that leads to frustration, ennui, lethargy, self-victimization or a culture of victimhood, and in certain cases, to anger and outright violence (Lischer 2005). This violence is manifested in various ways, including domestic abuse, fights between individuals and groups, interethnic strife, and riots (Kagwanja 2000). This is especially true in the camps that witness the birth, life, and death of generations of refugees, mired to their status and not able to engage in any permanent anchoring activity that brings a sense of agency or stability to their lives (Hammond 2004; Lischer 2005). Subsequently, the refugees experience significant shortcomings in both the physical and social quality of life, fulfillment of which are not on the mandates of any relief agency.

The gaps in relief are not wholly caused by the agencies that provide basic and tertiary services to refugees. The relief agencies and workers are also constricted by systemic corruption, apathy, inefficiencies, and donor fatigue and/or decreasing donor interest. They too have seen the contractions in the relief packages in both size and quality over the years, despite their own entreaties to their superiors. They understand that sole dependence on the relief packages would lead to decline in refugee health and adaptability/resilience (Agier 2011). Although tolerance of the informal economy oscillates between
suspicion and encouragement, the relief workers acknowledge the central roles of the traders and their supplies in the refugee lives (Campbell 2005).

The lethargy/ennui or violence resulting from the shortcomings of relief and/or the violence stemming from the frustrations would make these camps impossible to manage for any conceivable length of time (Agier 2011; Pottier 1996). I argue here that the informal economy is the primary mechanism by which refugees can gain some control over their own consumption and hence it becomes one of the key structuring factors sustaining and maintaining the refugee camp organization. In the following sections, I describe the structure of the informal economy at Kakuma Refugee Camp and then outline the ways in which the informal economy helps to fill in the

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**FIGURE 2**: Wholesaler-Retailer Network (July 2008 to August 2010).
gaps in relief and provide an outlet for consumption, thereby creating “normal” for the refugees.

**The Informal Economy of Kakuma Refugee Camp**

This growing population of Kakuma has generated a huge surge in demand for goods and services, specifically dealing with food, and has led to a boom in the refugee economy with monthly sales increasing from 100,000 USD in July 2008 to 250,000 USD in August 2010. This boom is also tied to changes in the infrastructure of the trader networks in Kakuma over the
same period (Oka 2011). In July 2008, four main wholesalers provided the bulk of the dry groceries and sundry consumables to the customers at Kakuma. Between 2008 and 2011, the number of retail shops dealing with food within Kakuma Camps I, II, and IV increased from 7 to 56, while the number of wholesalers doubled from 4 to 8. The increased demands from the Somali community led to an expansion of both wholesale and retail enterprises, as shown in Figure 2.

As seen in the changes in network structure between 2008 and 2010, the growing demand did not just cause an increase in goods supply and in the number of traders, but it also altered the structure of relationships between traders. The demand for goods and services from the informal economy was significant enough to precipitate a major competition between the wholesalers. The minimally centralized network with trader parity gave way to a highly centralized network with increasing disparity and trader hierarchy within the network.

These developments and changes have not altered the relationships among the commercial, refugee, and relief economies. These interactions follow structural patterns observed in other refugee camp and relief distribution settings. The specific bau-plan of the informal-formal economy of Kakuma is presented in Figure 3.

The informal economy of Kakuma is depicted by the shaded section and suggests that the interactions among traders, relief agencies, and refugees exist across the formal-informal continuum and cannot be easily differentiated in either the flows of goods (relief and commercial) or the flow of cash. As the commercial and informal economies depend on cash and convertible credit, I first describe the cash flow into and within Kakuma Camp.
Kakuma Cash Flows

The cash flow shown in Figure 3 indicates that it is one of the primary means of negotiation and interaction within Kakuma, notwithstanding the official policy that discourages the presence of commerce in refugee lives. The cash and credit flow into Kakuma derives from three primary sources:

1. Employment opportunities within the relief and humanitarian projects and the commercial sector;
2. Remittance and money transfer economy in which the refugees receive occasional or regular sums of money from their relatives; and/or
3. Sale of relief goods into the black market to private traders by the refugees.

I briefly describe each of these cash sources in the context of Kakuma refugees and then explore the cash flow and the informal economy.²

Refugee Employment

Both the humanitarian agencies and the commercial sectors offer some employment to refugees. The work opportunities available from the UNHCR, the WFP or partner agencies usually consist of jobs involving physical labor (construction and security) or low-level clerical work, including bookkeeping and nursing. The pay scale is low and most refugees complain that they are usually paid around USD 20-40 per month or 1/10th to 1/100th portion of the salaries of the local Kenyan or the national/international staff. One woman who worked for the IRC said:

I have no husband and I take care of my two children and two more belonging to my brother still in Somalia,
I have to survive with 2000 shillings they pay me every month. It is nothing.

The jobs in the commercial sector pay marginally better wages, ranging from 100-200 USD per month. However, there is little chance for advancement or mobility due to the turnover of refugees and volatile physical environment.

Many of these positions are filled through personal networks and influence and hence tend to be occupied by individuals with better status and means within the refugee communities. One informant said that his uncle helped him to get a position in the camp because “jobs are only given to [known] people.” For many refugees, the attraction of these jobs is the enhanced and sustainable access to goods and services through proximity to the commercial and relief actors, rather than the immediate cash benefit. The woman employed at the IRC said that though the job itself paid less, it brought access to nurses and doctors and thus enhanced her options for health care for her children and herself. This perk was corroborated by another informant, a sales manager for one of the main wholesalers in Kakuma town, who said, “life here is hard and every little connection helps.”

However, both the conditions and availability of employment are poor and only a small percentage of the refugees can find employment at any time. Interviews with the relief agencies and traders/shopkeepers in Kakuma suggest a conservative estimate of 66,000 USD per month in salaries and wages from employment in the humanitarian and commercial sectors. This amount is far below the total monthly sales of the shops that range from 300,000 to 400,000 USD. The main source of cash is hence not employment but remittances through banks and other money transfer systems.
Remittance Economy

The remittance transfers work through the networks of four banks within the Somali trader network: *Dahabshil, Amel, Dalsan,* and *Iftin.* These banks are linked with the global money transfer network called *hawala* and provide the most efficient ways to transfer money among countries, groups, and individuals. According to the bankers, the international remittances total anywhere from 100,000 to 150,000 USD every month. The bankers estimated that about 20% of the refugee families receive remittances averaging 50 USD per month from relatives outside East Africa, mainly from the U.S., Canada, U.K., Europe, and the Middle East. However, the bankers also suggested that the majority of refugees at Kakuma (estimated 60% of the families) receive cash from their relatives who work as “clandestine migrants” in cities of Kenya and other East African nations within both the informal and formal economic sectors (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000). Many of these refugee migrants purchase basic documentation through bribery of compliant officials. This documentation enables the workers to remit small sums averaging 20 USD per month to their families. These transactions are occasionally carried out through the banking networks but are largely managed through M-PESA, a money transfer network operated by the Kenyan Safaricom telecommunications network.

M-PESA allows instantaneous money transfer based on valid photographic identification (including refugee cards) without extended bureaucracy and the high commissions (Jack and Suri 2011). The M-PESA agents at Kakuma estimated that the refugees receive 100,000-150,000 USD per month. M-Pesa is also used for transactions within the camp. Based on the accounts of the bankers and the M-PESA agents at Kakuma, a minimum of 200,000 USD flows into Kakuma every month in the form of remittances, regional or global. However, the bankers and traders confirmed that at least 20% of the refugees
did not receive any remittances but they still shopped at the stores, albeit at lower consumption levels. The informants indicated another source of cash that is ubiquitous in any relief and humanitarian process: the sale of relief goods into a black market.

The Black Market and Relief Traders

The black market in relief goods emerges from an active intersection of refugee needs, the informal commercial economies and the relief distribution process. Refugees sell their goods into the black market to gain cash to buy other goods and services that include both unsupplied necessities and “unnecessary” comforts and luxuries. The various relief distribution points in Kakuma Refugee Camps I–IV are all articulated with particular shops that specialize in relief trade. This involves purchasing the relief goods from the refugees, repackaging the goods into 50-kg sacks, and then selling them to retailers within the camp or to wholesalers who come from Kakuma town, Lodwar, Kitale and Eldoret. These shops are usually fronted by butcher shops although the relief traders operate overtly as it is not illegal for the refugees to sell or exchange the received goods.

Most of my informants admitted to selling part of their relief allotments to these traders although the portions sold varied based on family size and the type/quality of the relief goods. The 80% of the refugees who receive remittances and/or are employed usually sell most of their relief packages and retain only a few items such as wheat flour, cooking oil, soap, and some of the lentils such as green grams. The Somalis and Sudanese refugees reported selling most of the beans, maize, maize flour, and sorghum to the relief traders, the primary reason being that these items were inedible. The Ethiopians usually sold most of the aforementioned products but not the sorghum.
Relief trade is especially popular among the 20% of refugees (between 2500 and 3000 families) who receive no cash through remittances or employment, and who depend almost wholly on the WFP package and any other relief given by the UNHCR and its partner agencies. I observed members of this group (n = 47) selling up to 50% of their allotment on average to the relief traders. One woman who arrived in January said:

There are many problems with the food they give. When we came, it was with my mother and 6 children, my husband died in Somalia. We were given a house but no mattresses, no blankets. We need some cash. I have nothing, nobody to send me money. When I came, I was told I could sell the food. It gives us enough to buy some food, and other things we need.

The amount received from the sales is based on the size of the sale that is in turn based on family size. An individual recipient might receive from 600-1200 shillings per month for selling 100% of the relief package while a family of 6 might receive between 2000-4000 shillings for selling only beans, maize, and sorghum. For the families completely dependent on relief, this cash remains the primary way by which they can access the informal economy and commercial market.

The relief traders purchased maize for 20-30 shillings/kg and beans for 45-50 shillings/kg. If available, maize flour and sorghum were purchased for 60 shillings/kg, and green grams for 70-80 shillings/kg. Some of these items would be resold within the local refugee market and to the Turkana community. The Turkana would purchase maize and beans from these smaller shops and stalls for 40 shillings/kg and 70 shillings/kg, respectively. One of the relief traders said:

Once the food is given to the refugees, they can do what they want with it. And the food is so bad, these beans, they cannot be cooked here, not with the firewood shortage. So they sell them to us and we resell it to people.
like the Turkana. And the Turkana might buy it at a high price but it is still cheaper than buying maize outside.

The bulk of the food is packed into 50-kg bags and carried by individual or group porters by bicycle, motorcycle, and car to warehouses in Kakuma town and then transported by bus or truck to Lodwar, Kitale or Eldoret, where it is sold into the local markets. The relief traders usually sell maize for 1500 shillings/bag and beans for 2500 shillings/bag and sell between 10 and 15 bags of each commodity every week. Each relief distribution area has 3-4 relief trader shops associated with it.

The traders who buy relief goods are well connected with each other and rely on their networks to keep prices competitive. Even though they claim that the prices at which they buy and sell the products are based on market forces, their clients suggest that the purchasing prices are kept at an artificial low by these traders who act as a cartel. As links between relief goods and the external markets, the relief traders are in a very secure position within a buyer’s market. This inequity is well known to refugees and relief workers alike but it is a well-entrenched system and the cash provided by the sale of relief goods is, for many of the refugees, the only way they can access the commercial markets.

In addition to their interactions with the regional market systems, the relief traders also respond to differential tastes and preferences within the refugee camp. For example, the Somali refugees detest sorghum and consider it indigestible even though it is a staple cereal in the cuisine of the neighboring Ethiopians. When sorghum is included in the relief package, the relief traders who purchase it find ready buyers among the Ethiopian traders for 100-120 shillings/kg. The Ethiopians who buy this sorghum are charged 140-150 shillings/kg. Though the profit margin seems high, the traders argue that this system works out in favor of both the Somalis and Ethiopians: the Ethiopians gain greater access to sorghum than is allotted
within the refugee package at lower prices than the regional markets, while the Somalis get money for a good they are forced to receive but find inconsumable. Estimating the returns from the relief package based on 600 shillings per month per family (lowest percentage of the relief portion sold), the relief traders pay around 89,000 USD per month to the refugees of Kakuma.

Minimal estimates of cash inflow from employment (66,000 USD), remittances (200,000 USD), and the black market (89,000 USD) total 355,000 USD per month that circulates through and out of the refugee camp through the camp traders. This cash is used to purchase goods and services from the commercial sector and labor from other Somalis or local Turkana. The informal economy at Kakuma is obviously strong enough to generate a significant trader presence as well as a turnover of 300,000 to 400,000 USD per month. However, this begs the question, is this economy fueled solely by necessities caused by the unmet gaps in relief due to logistical shortcomings? Or does the desire to be “normal” add a ratcheting effect onto the refugee demands in which the consumption process leads not just to survival but also to sustainability and enhanced quality of life? I first explore the gaps in relief that would generate a basic demand for commercial consumption even among those fully dependent on the relief and then describe the role played by the consumption of luxuries and comforts in sustaining refugee camp towns.

The Informal Economy and Basic Unmet Needs

As mentioned earlier, the UNHCR provides a food aid package to all the refugees through the World Food Programme (WFP) based on the minimal dietary requirements of 2100 calories per person per day as stipulated by the UNHCR. The food package is base on the premise of establishing “food security”
within the humanitarian space in which “all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (WHO 2011) comprising of wheat flour, whole maize corn, oil, pulses such as sorghum and/or green grams, and salt. In 2011, the WFP has provided food to 98.3% of the registered refugees at Kakuma averaging 2076 calories per person per day. These figures were derived directly from the WFP-Kakuma office. The chief coordinator said:

Our office has struggled to increase the nutritional value of the food package, from 1400 calories back in the early years of the camp, we are now coming close to achieving the target 2100. But it is very hard. Food prices, gas prices, donor fatigue and fears, they all affect us. Even now, there are close to 1000 people who are not fed and we know that there are more people in Kakuma Camp than the official figures.

The officials also acknowledge frequent shortages due to seasonal droughts and crop failures, tighter budgets, and higher transport costs leading to periodic reduction of the food allowance. However, many of the problems with the lowered food packages received by the refugees lie within the distribution system in which items meant to be consumed by the refugees end up being sold on the black market. Refugees complained that much of the relief food was also sold into the black markets before they received it. One man complained that when the WFP staff was not present at the distribution centers, the refugees would “get 2.5 kg of maize instead of 4, 1.5 kg of wheat flour instead of 2 kg.” Another man said that the disparities were not always as high as that and hence:

I usually find that the amount I get is 75-100 gm less than what I should get. That is not a big amount. But imagine keeping even 50 gm of wheat flour from every family. If you get that much from 1000 – 2000 families, that would be 50 – 100 kg that you can sell for 3,000-6,000 shillings.
Goods such as cooking oil, wheat flour, and soap sold by relief workers into the black markets have immediate resale value. These usually end up being sold in part or whole before they are given to the refugees. One consumer standing in a shop said:

For a family of 5, we are meant to get five liters of oil per month but sometimes, we get only one liter. We know that the other four liters go into [their] pockets or into the shop, like that oil in the can.

Though the refugees generally agreed that the WFP was doing a much better job in 2011 than in 2008, there was a perception of food shortage. Part of the problem in the absolute quantity of food received was attributed to the aforementioned corruption within the distribution system. However, other complaints stemmed from the definition of adequate nutrition for a “normal” human being. This was reiterated by a large group of men who spoke about “African portions,” which meant sufficient quantities. The women agreed that even when they would eat all the relief food, especially when they were first brought to the camp, it was never enough. The children would be hungry, and they themselves would go without food frequently. One woman said that she had three pregnancies since she came to the camp in 2004, one of which ended in a miscarriage and two were pre-term and the babies were undersized. She said:

The doctors here scolded me when I was pregnant because I was not eating enough, they said. Not eating enough, I would bring my children into danger. But what can I do, we had no money to buy more food and the food they give us always runs out. They give food twice a month and that runs out even by the end of the first week. Then what do we do?
The shortage of food is indeed one of the strongest drivers for the informal economy that supplies food to Kakuma. However, another driver of demand is also the quality or type of food that is given to the refugees. The full relief package consists of beans, maize, maize flour, wheat flour, sorghum or green grams, oil, salt, and soap. However, frequently, the refugees get beans and maize more regularly than the other products. The primary complaints about the food, apart from the indigestibility of sorghum, are on the inedibility and the inappropriateness of beans and maize. The beans are generally regarded as inedible as they have to be presoaked and cooked for a number of hours, requiring the refugees or the relief agencies to supply fuel. Apart from the logistical issues for cooking relief food, refugees also complained about the cultural inappropriateness of the relief package. One man said:

They think just because we are refugees in Africa and all Africans have to be the same and eat the same that we will all eat sorghum and maize. We are not Ethiopian or Bantu, we are Somali. Cooking sorghum and maize is not part of our culture and it gives our children stomachaches.

The coordinators at the WFP and LWF are not unaware of the refugee dissatisfaction. One official said that the complaints were neverending. On the “sorghum and maize” issue she said:

{The complaints have} have become so bad that we have stopped giving sorghum to them, a few months ago. But they want meat, milk, pasta, and rice. Do you know that one small packet of pasta costs 100 shillings? There is no way we can afford to give them what they want. I understand that they want to eat like they did in Somalia or Ethiopia or Sudan, but we have donor concerns, budget shortfalls. Already the money is tight for what we have. We are doing our best.
Notwithstanding the relief agency response, the antipathy towards the type and quality of food received is a common refugee response toward what they perceive as UNHCR/WFP indifference or neglect (Pottier 1996). It is also a powerful factor that drives the demand for non-relief foods in refugee economies. The basic argument made by most of my informants is that as recipients of relief food, they really “feel their helplessness.” This feeling is compounded by the consumption of food which lacks taste, which bring nothing more to life than a basic level of nutrition. Furthermore, as life has to go on, even in a refugee camp, the ability to consume food that tastes good, hints at “normal” and “dignified” lives in the past or in their future becomes central to their daily sustenance.

Achieving “Normal” in Kakuma

The most common response to the role of the informal economy in Kakuma was that it conferred cadhi (pronounced aadhi) meaning “normal” in Somali. Cadhi was the memory of walking in Mogadishu or Kismayo before the fall of the Siad Barre government. Cadhi was the feeling reported by relatives doing well in the U.S., the U.K., Germany, etc. One man said, “what human being wants to stand in line for food all day, for food that tastes like sand or wood? Being a man means doing something. This is not life.” Most informants said that their refugee lives consisted of standing in lines, waiting for notices to be placed on the bulletin boards announcing progress in their cases. However, other parts of life also continued: people got married, had children, or died. Some days would bring good news, while other days would bring news of sadness or calamity.
In the midst of special occasions, people also visited each other, built social relationships, rebuilt kinship networks, and tried to reconstruct a semblance of a social existence. In these acts, events, and gatherings, the Kakuma refugees found some fleeting glimpse of “normal” or cadhi. One man said:

I have a job. So I sell my rations, not just to buy food, but to buy good food sometime. When my daughter was born, I invited people to my house. I can’t just give them beans and maize. I bought a goat, gave a feast. The money I got from the [relief-traders] allowed me to do that. My daughter is a Somali Sharif. She was greeted as a sharif.

Births, marriages, and deaths were conducted according to the regulations and norms of the refugees’ respective cultures. The consensus was that celebrating joyous occasions or mourning loss was something that brought people together and had to be done properly. Catering for these acts and events was not part of the relief agencies’ mandate but was central to the refugees’ own needs for “normal.”

Such anecdotes underscored the importance of consumption and resulted in a dominant narrative that explained the enduring interactions of the refugees and the informal economies. The importance of the informal economy was mentioned repeatedly not just in facilitating special occasions, but bringing “normal” into every day life. One informant asserted that he and his family depended wholly on the relief package even though he personally detested boiled sorghum and whole maize:

It is food and you have to eat. It is better that I learn to cook this food than starve. However, it is still nice to eat something that reminds me of home and times that were better. I work with what is given and try to get something of my own for my family. So if I have to sell some of the food to get basta and tuna, I will but only for special occasions, to remind us of other times.
Another man who invited me to his house reflected on the importance of feeling “normal” and of consumption:

When I invited you to my house, I offered you tea, with milk, sugar, cloves, I bought cake, [sweetbread] as I should, you are my guest. I welcomed you as I would in Somalia. When I do this, I feel like a Somali man, I feel normal. Going to the shops, buying food, cooking basta, and eating it, sharing it. When my wife visits her friends, when they visit us, we share food, we have tea together, the children are given candy, soda. These are the things we live for, right? We are not building lives here, we will all leave one day. But we need something to look to. That is not given by the WFP, but we find it in the shops.

The general feeling toward the informal economy that supplied foods to Kakuma was that it was not just an act of consumption, but of agency. The act of consuming food that was purchased gave the refugees some power over their own lives, even as they marked time in position of statelessness and enduring wait. The feeling of “normal” and of dignity lay not just in the act of consumption but in the communal performance of consumption. Nobody bought food to consume by themselves. The feelings of normal were generated by the act of sharing, within the family and kin groups, and between friends. The acts of communal consumption, whether through sharing tea in afternoon visits, or in feasts celebrating special occasions serve to build, maintain, and strengthen relationships. These relationships and the generated feelings of “normal” enable refugees to endure their long “interment” and also enable the relief organizations to continue their work of “mercy” even with depleted resources and attritional inefficiencies.
The Informal Economy and Sustainable Management of Kakuma

As these narratives serve to reinforce the value of the informal food distribution economy in the lives of the refugees, the relief agencies also reiterate their own compliance and dependence on the commercial distribution of food and the cash flows within Kakuma. They recognize that the refugees have no alternative but to turn to the commercial economy due to these gaps in relief. The relief agencies are fully aware that the food is sold immediately after it is received. However, as one official stated:

Once the food is handed out, it is not our concern. It cannot be. We cannot monitor the black market, we have tried. [The relief-traders] just set up shop elsewhere. [The refugees] make their demands to us, to give better food and we can’t. It is expensive. Our hands are tied. But they can go to the shops with money from selling the food we give and buy what they want. It is not a perfect system but it helps to reduce the dissatisfaction, not with us, but with their life as refugees.

Ironically then, the gaps in relief have an incidental benefit: selling maize grain to buy pasta or meat tempers the dissatisfaction by converting a passive reception of food into an active consumption of purchased food while resisting the WFP. Another official who had served in Kakuma in various capacities and various organizations for over a decade explained the situation in greater detail:

I have been here since 1999. There were few shops then, and not too many goods available. And the security was so bad, people were fighting each other, the [brigands] and robbers from outside attacked, rapes were very common. As this camp has grown, the security has also been better, and the number of shops has gone up. And it not just because we [the relief organizations have been
better. In fact, we are much more stretched right now, less money. But the refugees can enjoy something, an ice cream, candy for their children, something more than just basic food, that feeling we cannot replicate. I started with ideas that the Somali traders were thieves. Now, I know we can’t survive here without them.

This explanation represented the general consensus across the various relief organizations. The aforementioned tension between suspicion of the traders and the realization of their centrality has led to a tacit encouragement in the growth of the commercial economy at Kakuma. The various relief agencies also use these traders for supplies of fuel, food, office supplies, construction materials, and other services. They have also privately expressed that relief distribution would be far more efficient if they worked with the traders to distribute relief. They even acknowledge that the relief food given is not culturally or nutritionally appropriate.

The relief workers at Kakuma have made their peace with the informal economy as they recognize its role in reducing the two main malaises that routinely affect forcibly displaced populations: ennui or lethargy and/or violence. Although this paper only addresses the commercial distribution of food within the informal economy, the same traders also supply clothing, cosmetics, electronics, books, and other goods and services that enhance the quality of refugee life. However, it is the trade in food that enables the refugees to engage in relationship and community building through food sharing and feasting and hence is the primary mechanism by which the amount of lethargy and/or violence is reduced.

Conclusion

The narrative that relief food can be culturally inappropriate, unpalatable, and nutritionally deficient in terms of por-
tions distributed is generally accepted by refugees and relief workers alike, at Kakuma and at other refugee settlements (Lischer 2005; Pottier 1996). The general complaint of refugees is that they are expected to unquestioningly accept the charity of the relief organizations and the host nations (Bookman 2002). However, refugees are also consumers of global systems of information and frequently compare their situation with refugees in other parts of the world, specifically focusing on regional and ethnic differences in treatment of refugees.

Although the gaps in relief and logistical problems are ubiquitous in refugee situations, these have been particularly noticed in African refugee situations. For example, anthropologist Johan Pottier observed that the refugees in the Ngara and Goma Rwandan Refugee Camps were “over-run with maize” grain and flour even though “neither […] were] preferred foods for rural Ugandans (who prefer root crops over grains, and cassava flour over maize flour)” (1996: 327). Pottier further observed that the costs of fuel for boiling the beans and transporting them to the mills for grinding the corn drew intense complaints from the refugees who maintained that they were forced to sell part of their relief package to buy food that was palatable and also fuel-efficient (Pottier 1996: 328-330). For the refugee residents of Kakuma, the meager and unpalatable relief package is an indication of global indifference and neglect, of refugees and Africa in general and African refugees in particular.

As mentioned earlier, managing 80,000-90,000 people in harsh arid environments creates logistical problems for any group of administrators. These problems are compounded by the specific needs of refugees, who have fled wars and other disasters, and left whole lives and livelihood behind them (Hammond 2004). Refugees must adjust to an undefined period of statelessness, of static transience, while negotiating with psychosomatic conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder (Lischer 2005). Often these settlements are placed in inhospitable terrain and are subject to host government
policies and host community interactions that can be volatile and oscillate between indifference and hostility (Aukot 2004). Amidst these readjustments, life goes on as people are born, get married, and die as refugees without setting down roots, and always looking elsewhere (Bariagaber 2006).

In these conditions, the few moments of “normal” provided by the informal economy are sufficient enough for settlement sustainability and allow refugees to endure their conditions of transient permanence. The informal economy also allows the relief organizations to continue their missions and achieve the minimal requirements of their mandates even as they face logistical problems. While the informal economy accounts for the shortcomings of relief, it also enhances the wellbeing of the refugees, allowing them to consume as agents and not as passive “beggars.” By engaging in these dynamic acts, the refugees become empowered through the act of “normal” behavior and through the continuous formation of community and solidarity through food sharing and feasting. The informal economy provides the underlying structure that makes: refugee lives livable, and relief missions sustainable.

The informal economy reinforces developing and dynamic urbanism of the refugee camp towns/cities such as Kakuma even though this urbanism, like the refugee lives, is incomplete, unfinished, and in permanent transience. In fulfilling these related functions, informal economies have increasingly been recognized as valuable resources in refugee camp settlements. Studies that explore the extent and distribution of these economies will be valuable in determining and shaping policies that formally acknowledge their role and include them in the larger relief mission and mandate.

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NOTES

1 His words have been prophetic as, despite forcible repatriation, many Sudanese are returning to Kakuma, unable to face the lack of infrastructure and endemic violence, especially in the southeastern parts of the country. Recent reports suggest that the returning Sudanese population has increased from 10,000 in 2008 to 25,833 as of September 10, 2011. http://www.sudanradio.org/south-sudanese-still-returning-refugee-camps.

2 All figures quoted here reflect salaries, remittances, or goods prices observed between 2010 and 2011. The exchange rate during this period has averaged 1 USD = 88-91 Kenya Shillings.

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