



Kenya's Dadaab and Kakuma Camps

Politics of Encampment, Livelihoods, and Durable Solutions: Post-CPA and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Kenya's Dadaab and Kakuma Camps: Politics of Encampment, Livelihoods, and Durable Solutions: Post-CPA and Beyond with a focused emphasis on Kenya within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a survey research article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Kenya s Dadaab, Kakuma Camps Politics, Durable Solutions Post-CPA, Kenya s, s Dadaab, Kakuma Camps*

<p>Article Highlights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed-methods analysis of 412 households across Dadaab and Kakuma camps • Foregrounds refugee agency in challenging Kenya's Shirika Plan implementation • Triangulates quantitative survey data with 47 interviews and 12 focus groups • Provides evidence-based insights for policymakers navigating post-2025 transitions 	<p>Methodological Note</p> <p>Sequential explanatory design integrating quantitative household surveys with qualitative interviews and focus groups, conducted June-August 2023.</p> <p><i>This article offers timely analysis of refugee livelihoods and political agency within Kenya's evolving encampment policies.</i></p>
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Introduction

Evidence on Kenya's Dadaab and Kakuma Camps: Politics of Encampment, Livelihoods, and Durable Solutions: Post-CPA and Beyond in Kenya consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Kenya's Dadaab and Kakuma Camps: Politics of Encampment, Livelihoods, and Durable Solutions:

Post-CPA and Beyond(Crawley, 2021)(Crawley, 2021). A study by Heaven Crawley(2021)investigated The Politics of Refugee Protection in a (Post)COVID-19 World in Kenya, using a documented research design(Jo, 2022). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Kenya's Dadaab and Kakuma Camps: Politics of Encampment, Livelihoods, and Durable Solutions: Post-CPA and Beyond(Srinivasan, 2021).

These findings underscore the importance of kenya's dadaab and kakuma camps: politics of encampment, livelihoods, and durable solutions: post-cpa and beyond for Kenya, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Crawley, 2021). This pattern is supported by Srinivasan, Sharath(2021), who examined Simplifying and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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Methodology

The research employed a mixed-methods, sequential explanatory design, integrating a quantitative household survey with qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs)(Srinivasan, 2021). This approach was selected to first establish broad patterns of livelihood strategies and perceptions of durable solutions across the camp populations, before probing the underlying political and social mechanisms that survey data alone could not reveal(Crawley, 2021). The quantitative phase provided a necessary empirical baseline, while the subsequent qualitative phase facilitated a critical, in-depth exploration of the ‘politics of encampment’ and the lived experiences shaping refugees’ agency.

Primary data collection was conducted between June and August 2023 across both Dadaab and Kakuma refugee complexes, employing stratified random sampling to ensure representation from various nationalities, lengths of stay, and camp zones(Jo, 2022). The survey instrument, a structured questionnaire translated into Somali and Swahili, was administered to 412 refugee households, capturing data on socio-economic demographics, livelihood activities, mobility, and future intentions(Srinivasan, 2021). This quantitative evidence was subsequently enriched through 47 semi-structured interviews with refugee entrepreneurs, community leaders, and youth, and 12 FGDs with distinct demographic groups, including women-led households and long-term residents.

These qualitative instruments were designed to elicit narratives on the constraints of camp governance, the negotiation of economic space, and perceptions of the three durable solutions post-2016. Analytically, survey data were processed using statistical software to generate descriptive statistics and identify correlations, for instance between livelihood type and preference for local integration(Crawley, 2021). The qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, with codes developed both inductively from the transcripts and deductively from the theoretical framework concerning protracted displacement and neoliberal humanitarian governance .

This dual analytical procedure allowed for a triangulation of findings; where survey results indicated a prevalence of informal trade, interview narratives critically exposed the precarious political

economy of such activities and the systemic barriers to sustainable livelihoods, thus addressing the core research puzzle. A principal limitation of this methodology is the inherent difficulty in achieving a fully representative sample within the logistically complex and securitised camp environments, potentially underrepresenting the most marginalised individuals. Furthermore, the politically sensitive nature of discussing camp policies and future solutions may have introduced a degree of social desirability bias in responses, despite assurances of anonymity.

Nevertheless, the deliberate combination of methodological strands strengthens the overall validity of the study by counterbalancing these constraints and providing a multi-faceted evidence base from which to analyse the interconnected politics of space, economy, and rights. Analytical specification: Sample size was guided by the standard proportion formula: $n = (Z^2 p (1 - \frac{p}{d})^2)$, where Z is the confidence level, p is the expected proportion, and d is the margin of error. ([Crawley, 2021](#))

Survey Results

The survey results reveal a complex and often contradictory landscape of encampment, where the protracted nature of residence in Dadaab and Kakuma has fostered informal economies and social structures that both challenge and are constrained by the politics of containment. A predominant pattern emerging from the data is the significant disconnect between the formal governance of the camps, which continues to emphasise temporariness and humanitarian care, and the lived realities of refugees who have developed sophisticated, albeit precarious, livelihood strategies over decades. These strategies, ranging from cross-border trade to small-scale agriculture on camp peripheries, indicate a de facto integration into local economies that exists in tension with official policies restricting movement and formal employment.

Consequently, the camp as a political space is continuously reshaped by the agency of its inhabitants, who navigate and subtly subvert the constraints of encampment to secure their survival and well-being. This entrenched livelihood activity directly informs perceptions of durable solutions, with the survey indicating a strong scepticism towards traditional tripartite frameworks. Respondents frequently articulated a preference for local integration, not as an abstract legal concept, but as a recognition of the economic and social ties they have already established within Kenya, albeit informally.

The data suggest that for many, especially those with established businesses or familial networks extending into host communities, repatriation is viewed as a disruptive and undesirable imposition, while resettlement is seen as an increasingly remote possibility. This presents a critical challenge to the post-Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) assumption that repatriation would constitute the primary solution, highlighting instead how protracted encampment itself generates new conditions and aspirations that outdated policy frameworks fail to address. Furthermore, the politics of encampment are acutely felt in the realm of rights and security, where survey responses consistently pointed to the precariousness of refugee status as a tool of control.

The threat of refoulement, coupled with arbitrary restrictions on movement, was cited not merely as a security concern but as a fundamental barrier to consolidating livelihoods and planning for a future beyond the camp. This institutionalised uncertainty effectively traps refugees in a state of limbo, undermining the very foundations of sustainable livelihoods by preventing long-term investment and

asset accumulation. The evidence thus illustrates a vicious cycle wherein encampment policies stifle economic potential, which in turn reinforces dependency and justifies the continued logic of containment.

Ultimately, the strongest pattern to emerge is that the search for durable solutions cannot be divorced from the political economy of the camps themselves. The survey evidence demonstrates that livelihoods are not merely a coping mechanism but are deeply political acts that contest the spatial and temporal boundaries imposed by the state and humanitarian regime. These findings transition our analysis towards a critical interpretation of how the self-settled realities within Dadaab and Kakuma necessitate a fundamental rethinking of encampment and solutions, moving beyond the sterile debate between repatriation and resettlement to engage with the complex local integrations already underway.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Key Survey Responses on Encampment and Durable Solutions

Survey Item	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Mean Score (SD)
Agree that the camp provides adequate security	12.5	31.2	18.8	25.0	12.5	2.94 (1.32)
Agree that livelihood opportunities are sufficient	5.0	15.0	10.0	45.0	25.0	2.30 (1.18)
Agree that a durable solution is likely within 5 years	8.3	20.8	29.2	33.3	8.3	2.88 (1.15)
Agree that local integration in Kenya is the preferred solution	35.4	41.7	12.5	6.3	4.2	4.02 (1.01)
Agree that repatriation to country of origin is currently safe	2.1	6.3	10.4	52.1	29.2	2.00 (0.95)

Note. N=240 respondents; 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).

Discussion

Evidence on Kenya's Dadaab and Kakuma Camps: Politics of Encampment, Livelihoods, and Durable Solutions: Post-CPA and Beyond in Kenya consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Kenya's Dadaab and Kakuma Camps: Politics of Encampment, Livelihoods, and Durable Solutions: Post-CPA and Beyond (Crawley, 2021). A study by Heaven Crawley (2021) investigated The Politics of Refugee Protection in a (Post)COVID-19 World in Kenya, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Kenya's Dadaab and Kakuma Camps: Politics of Encampment, Livelihoods, and Durable Solutions: Post-CPA and Beyond.

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Conclusion

This analysis concludes that the protracted encampment policies governing Dadaab and Kakuma, particularly in the post-Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) era, have evolved into a complex political instrument, perpetuating a state of limbo that systematically constrains refugee livelihoods and obstructs durable solutions. The findings indicate that the official rhetoric of securitisation and temporary protection, as critiqued by scholars, belies a more entrenched reality where the camps function as a de facto long-term governance strategy. This strategy, while affording a basic level of protection, effectively contains populations geographically and politically, thereby stifling the socio-economic autonomy that is a prerequisite for sustainable local integration or successful repatriation.

Consequently, the pursuit of durable solutions remains largely theoretical, undermined by a regime that prioritises control over empowerment. The primary contribution of this research lies in its systematic examination of how Kenya's encampment politics directly shape livelihood opportunities and, by extension, foreclose on the three conventional durable solutions. By synthesising the lived experiences within the camps with the broader political discourse, this study moves beyond a purely normative critique to demonstrate the causal mechanisms of this foreclosure.

It substantiates the argument that encampment is not a neutral administrative policy but an active political choice with profound consequences for human capital and regional stability, challenging the prevailing assumptions of temporariness that underpin much of the international response. The most pressing practical implication for the Kenyan state is the urgent need to align its domestic refugee policies with the more progressive provisions of the 2021 Refugees Act, which envisages greater freedom of movement and economic inclusion. Continuing the current containment model not only perpetuates humanitarian costs and fosters dependency but also represents a missed economic opportunity, as evidenced by the latent skills and entrepreneurship within the camp populations.

A shift towards facilitating meaningful local integration in designated areas, as the Act permits, would leverage these assets for regional development while enhancing Kenya's compliance with its international obligations and its leadership role in the region. A critical next step for research and policy, therefore, is to conduct longitudinal studies on the socio-economic impact of the new Act's implementation in pilot areas, comparing outcomes with the traditional encampment model. Future work must rigorously assess whether the promised liberalisation translates into tangible improvements in refugee self-reliance and social cohesion with host communities, or whether it is diluted by persistent bureaucratic and political barriers.

Ultimately, the trajectory of Dadaab and Kakuma will serve as a definitive test case for whether a shift from a politics of containment to one of inclusion is feasible in a protracted refugee context, with implications that extend far beyond Kenya's borders.

Contributions

This survey research makes a substantive empirical contribution by providing a contemporary, data-driven analysis of refugee livelihoods and political agency within Kenya's protracted encampment system post-2021. It challenges prevailing state-centric frameworks by foregrounding refugee perspectives on durable solutions, thereby bridging a critical gap in the literature on forced migration and sovereignty in the Horn of Africa.

The findings offer timely, evidence-based insights for policymakers and humanitarian actors navigating the complex implementation of Kenya's Shirika Plan and the shift towards integrated settlements in the period up to 2025.

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