and a neutral effect on labour, common resources and infrastructure.\(^6\)

Although the balance sheet’s overall score suggests that the refugees do not affect the Tanzanian economy, the importance of such an assessment is not the definitive measurement but rather the understanding that refugees influence specific aspects of the economy in different ways. In light of the vigorous movements towards repatriating refugees and the closure of the refugee camps, the assessment above has serious implications for current refugee strategies and programmes.

If the presence of refugees is negatively related to the economy, then the strategies in place may indeed address one of the causes of Tanzania’s current development difficulties. However, if the underlying assumptions and assessments of the national strategies are wrong and refugees are in fact able to provide positive effects on the national economy, then the methods and speed at which refugees are being repatriated need to be addressed. Moreover, the causal relationship of the refugees on the economy may also influence the social programmes that would be necessary to mitigate societal shocks occurring within the local communities most affected by refugees and their relief agencies.

**Policy recommendations**

In evaluating its repatriation programme and developing further refugee policies, the Government of Tanzania should consider the following four recommendations:

- **Greater monitoring efforts must be made** in order to document and understand the effects that refugees have on Tanzania’s economy. Although it may be too late to assess the influx’s impact, the economic changes that occur during the removal of refugees and the closing of the camps can signal the extent to which the refugees were integrated as well as the economic role that they played in the local communities.

- **Stronger and more holistic refugee policies must be created** in partnership with the countries of origin to ensure that repatriation and any other refugee migration is to the betterment of the refugees, the governments and the local communities where refugees live. Benefits offered to repatriating refugees should reflect their social and economic requirements upon return to the country of origin.

- **Regions in Tanzania that host refugee camps and significant populations of refugees must be supported.** Regardless of a negative or positive impact on the local area, the removal of refugees will cause changes in the dynamics of the area, especially in infrastructure and markets.

- **A return to Nyerere’s Open Door Policy may mitigate any future negative impact of refugees on Tanzania.** Testimonials and studies of refugees who integrated into Tanzanian society of their own accord have not raised the same economic concern as those placed into refugee camps. Therefore, a policy that would permit some refugee integration, as was the case prior to the 1990s, may ease the dynamics between locals and refugees in addition to promoting positive societal contributions from the refugees.

As Tanzania continues with its efforts to close refugee camps and reduce the refugee population within its borders, its government must consider the ramifications of its actions and policies given that the role of the refugees on the economy is not fully understood. If these actions are based on faulty premises and misinformation, the current strategies may be harming the economy rather than ensuring its stability. It is the thorough consideration of possible negative and positive influences that allows effective decision making for country policies and the future of its economy.

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**Refugee resources:**

**Sri Lankan Tamils in India**

*Indira P Ravindran*

A Sri Lankan refugee community provides spontaneous and sustained assistance to its Indian host community in their hour of need.

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami caused devastation in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, with over 6,000 people and thousands of livestock dead, and hundreds of acres of cultivable land wiped out. Moved by the plight of their hosts – and motivated by gratitude for years of asylum – a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee group known as the Organization for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation (OFERR) mobilised its staff and volunteers to assist with relief and recovery in the battered coastal communities.

Sri Lankan Tamils, who arrived in Tamil Nadu in several phases, are among the oldest refugee groups in the world. Many of them began their exodus after the 1983 pogroms that killed over 3,000 Tamils in...
Colombo and elsewhere; subsequent batches of refugees have fled violent attacks by the government or the LTTE. Tamil Nadu is also home to stateless Indian-origin Tamils who were disenfranchised by the 1948 Ceylon Citizenship Act.

Intended as a resource for refugees run by refugees, OfERR was established in 1984 by a prominent Sri Lankan human rights lawyer. Today it has an established presence in each of the 117 refugee camps across Tamil Nadu, running counselling services and programmes on leadership development, gender empowerment, disaster management, first-aid training, and legal and human rights awareness, among others.

Unable to assist with relief work in their original homeland after the tsunami hit, they wanted to help the affected Indian communities. The Tamil Nadu state government was initially hesitant to accept the services of refugees, who were already struggling with resource shortages themselves. OfERR leaders explained that the refugees deserved a chance to express their gratitude at this critical moment to the communities of Tamil Nadu which had provided asylum and hosted them for over two decades. They were motivated by the concept of senchottukadan – long celebrated in Tamil literature and tradition – which can be roughly translated as ‘debt of gratitude’. This struck a chord with the host government, and OfERR was granted access to the relief process.

In this way, refugee men and women became invaluable resource persons, empowering their host communities and themselves in the process. Former asylum seekers now assisted those displaced by the floods, and the tsunami survivors in turn acquired lessons in leadership from refugees and passed them on to others struggling on the path to recovery. Five years on, only a handful of NGOs remains working with those affected by the tsunami, and in some services, such as the building of one-room community centres.

OfERR’s non-material services – such as rights awareness, gender training, and counselling – will have a deep impact over the long term. Counselling was a specialisation the refugees had developed in order to cope with life in camps. During the first few weeks after the tsunami, OfERR counsellors visited practically every family living in the shelters, and then continued the process with them as they moved into permanent housing.

OfERR consciously chose to work within marginalised areas and to engage with historically marginalised communities such as Dalits and members of indigenous tribes such as the Irulas. Its approach emphasises building better relations between parts of the government and the public. It has made it a priority to educate the villages it serves on the full range of government services available to them. The refugees have thus assumed the rather unusual position of serving as an information conduit between the host government and the local population.

OfERR’s institutional journey is significant for the obvious reason that it highlights the tremendous potential held by refugees as individuals and as a community. No doubt, the unique combination of political circumstances and social access that currently exists in Tamil Nadu may be unavailable to refugees in other parts of the world. Judging by the impact the refugees have had in India’s post-tsunami reconstruction – particularly their successful ‘camp-to-village’ transfer of programmes – they should be able to play a crucial role in post-conflict Sri Lanka. The refugees continue to view their stay in India as temporary, and they aspire for a permanent and honourable return to Sri Lanka, and for the ability to participate as full citizens in the rebuilding of their war-torn country.

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1. www.oferr.org