

Funding the International Refugee Regime: Implications for Protection



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Despite the abundance of literature on international regimes, little attention has been given to how they are funded and the impact of funding on regime performance. This article examines how donor funding has affected the underlying principle of protection in the international refugee regime. It focuses on the case of Tanzania, where refugee protection standards have declined consistently over the past twelve years, and argues that a shortage of funding within the regime has contributed to the shift in government policy in several ways. To the extent that funding cuts have had an influence on declining protection standards, this case suggests that resource shortages may cause practice within an international regime to become inconsistent with its underlying principles, thus weakening the overall regime. **KEYWORDS:** international regimes, refugees, funding, compliance, Africa.

For years, international relations scholars have been seeking to understand the formation and effectiveness of international regimes.¹ Most studies have focused on how regimes are created, the reasons for cooperation, and the extent to which regimes influence state behavior.² Realists argue that international regimes are reflections of state interests and power. They form when the interests of powerful states converge, and they change when those interests change or the distribution of power is altered. They have no independent effect on state behavior. Functionalists see regimes as a response to perceived needs. The uncertainty associated with unregulated patterns of behavior leads to a demand for international regimes, which are supplied by willing states. As long as they continue to be effective, regimes put structural constraints on state action. Constructivists focus on the importance of ideas in the creation and perpetuation of regimes. Through their control of information and decisionmaking processes, regimes create knowledge and socialize participants, thus independently influencing state behavior.

Despite the abundance of literature on international regimes, surprisingly little attention has been given to how they are funded and the impact of funding on regime performance.³ Funding can provide an incentive for member states to comply with an international regime. In the environmental sector,

for example, China's ratification of and subsequent compliance with the Montreal Protocol was driven largely by its access to the Multilateral Fund, established to implement the protocol.⁴ The sources of funding within a regime can influence the way in which it functions. One study found that supplementary financiers of agreements negotiated by the International Monetary Fund influenced the conditions placed on those agreements.⁵ Similarly, donor governments can use their contributions to an international regime to force changes in its operations. In 1994, the US Congress withheld \$1 billion from the World Bank until it adopted sweeping environmental reforms.⁶ And, in some situations, competition for funding among actors within a regime can lead to inefficient and less-than-optimal outcomes. The struggle among international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in eastern Congo, for example, undermined their collective ability to protest the misuse of refugee assistance.⁷

This article examines the impact of funding levels on regime effectiveness, defined as member state compliance with the regime's underlying principles. It focuses on the international refugee regime, which is highly dependent on external funding, and its principle of refugee protection. Member state compliance with this regime can be understood by looking at standards of refugee protection in individual host countries. In Tanzania, recent changes in government policy reflect a consistent decline in protection standards for refugees over the past twelve years. As I explain in subsequent sections, a shortage of funding within the international refugee regime has contributed to the shift in Tanzanian policy in several ways.⁸ To the extent that funding cuts have had an influence on declining refugee protection standards, this case suggests that resource shortages may cause practice within an international regime to become inconsistent with its underlying principles, thus weakening the overall regime.

Funding the International Refugee Regime

The international refugee regime provides a useful example to examine funding issues because it depends heavily on external resources. The regime centers on an international organization and a series of agreements that are designed to coordinate state behavior on the cross-border movement of asylum seekers. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 to provide international protection to refugees. UNHCR is guided by a number of agreements, most notably the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 protocol that broadened its geographic and temporal coverage. There are also several regional agreements, including the 1969 Organization of African Unity convention that expanded the definition of refugee to include persons fleeing

generalized violence. Over the years, in addition to its mandate for refugee protection, UNHCR has become the principal coordinator of relief operations.

Increasingly, interests in refugee protection have come into conflict with political and security priorities, forcing UNHCR to make tough choices. In 1991, for example, Turkey refused to admit Kurdish refugees fleeing northern Iraq. Despite concerns about pushing refugees back at the border, UNHCR opted to participate in the creation of “safe havens” within Iraq and assist the Kurds there. UNHCR also faced a dilemma in the former Yugoslavia, where its assistance in evacuating people from situations of danger indirectly facilitated the process of ethnic cleansing. In central Africa, UNHCR provided support to Rwandan refugee camps despite the fact that their residents included people who had participated in genocide at home. In these and many other situations, UNHCR has been forced to choose between its humanitarian mandate to protect refugees and political dynamics on the ground. Often, these decisions are further complicated by the agency’s funding concerns.

The question of funding for the international refugee regime is important for two reasons. First, UNHCR depends entirely on voluntary contributions for its field operations. The agency receives just 2 percent of its funds from the UN general budget for headquarters staff. The remaining 98 percent of an annual budget exceeding \$1 billion must be raised through appeals to UN member states and other donors.⁹ The vast majority of the agency’s funding comes from industrialized countries, with the United States, the European Union, and Japan together accounting for 94 percent of government contributions. Because of the particular interests and political priorities of these donors, roughly 80 percent of the funding is earmarked for specific operations or programs.¹⁰ As a result of this funding structure, UNHCR is highly vulnerable to fluctuations in the level of donor contributions.

Second, since its inception, burden sharing has been an underlying norm of the international refugee regime. The 1951 convention recognizes in its preamble that “the grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries” and calls for international cooperation. Subsequent regional agreements in Africa, Europe, and Asia also incorporated the concept of burden sharing. Despite its importance, these instruments did not legally obligate third countries to assist host states financially or otherwise. Thus, starting in the late 1970s, a series of targeted agreements laid out more comprehensive approaches for sharing responsibilities among countries of origin, host countries, resettlement countries, and donors. The Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees was the first such effort,¹¹ followed by similar plans for refugees in Africa, Central America, and the Balkans. Over time, as refugee flows have occurred disproportionately in poor areas of the world, wealthier countries have agreed to fund relief operations in countries

of first asylum, in part to avoid any obligation to admit massive numbers of refugees themselves.

Given both the operational and normative significance of funding to the international refugee regime, attention must be given to the impact of funding patterns on regime effectiveness. Indeed, in the refugee studies literature, many scholars have highlighted the importance of donor contributions to UNHCR.¹² They have examined the agency's dependence on voluntary contributions, the high level of donor earmarking for specific emergencies, and the comparative success of fund-raising appeals for different world regions. For the most part, these studies have emphasized the impact of funding patterns on refugee *assistance*—that is, the ability of UNHCR and other agencies to meet the material needs of refugees. Relatively few studies have examined the implications of resource levels for refugee *protection*, and particularly their influence on host government policy.

To be sure, as the international refugee regime has long recognized, there is a connection between assisting and protecting refugees. UNHCR's core mandate for protection involves ensuring that the basic rights of refugees and asylum seekers are respected and that people are not forcibly returned to countries where they fear persecution. If UNHCR is to fulfill that protection responsibility, it must also ensure the refugees' survival by providing assistance for their basic needs, such as food, shelter, and health care. This reasoning informed UNHCR's progressive assumption of the coordination responsibilities for refugee assistance in the decades following its establishment. Currently, protection represents only a portion of UNHCR's annual budget, especially compared to its assistance programs, but the two are seen as working in conjunction with one another. It is clear that budget cuts affect the level of material assistance to refugees; this article argues that they also have an impact on refugee protection. By examining the nature of this relationship at the micro level, the following sections explore the ways in which resource availability can influence the willingness of governments to host refugees.

Refugee Policy in Tanzania

As a haven of peace within a troubled region, Tanzania has long hosted refugees from neighboring countries. Over three decades after independence in 1961, Tanzania received nearly 400,000 refugees from Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique, South Africa, Somalia, and Kenya. They were housed in twenty rural settlements throughout the country and were encouraged to cultivate food and cash crops. In the late 1970s, the government allowed roughly 36,000 Rwandan refugees to apply for citizenship, though the naturalization process proceeded slowly. Throughout this period, the government maintained an open-door policy and was internationally recognized for its hospitality toward refugees.¹³

In the 1990s, the scale of the refugee situation in Tanzania increased dramatically. Nearly 300,000 Burundians arrived in late 1993. Just six months later, half a million Rwandans crossed the border. The country experienced massive influxes from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo in late 1996 and low-level flows thereafter. In total, Tanzania has received more than 1.3 million refugees since 1993. The drama of such numbers attracted considerable attention from governments, journalists, and aid agencies. UNHCR and a multitude of NGOs flocked to the area to participate in a regional relief operation that at its height cost the international community upwards of \$1 million a day.

As refugee flows continued, Tanzanian policy shifted markedly. Refugees were placed in massive camps near the border and, to make their stay as temporary as possible, were discouraged from farming. The border with Burundi was closed for several months in 1995 to prevent a further influx. In 1996, the Tanzanian army forcibly repatriated nearly half a million Rwandans. Soon thereafter, the military started rounding up “illegal aliens” and moving them to camps or deporting them. A new law in 1998 made it more difficult to acquire refugee status and placed additional restrictions on those already there. In recent years, several refugee markets were closed and refugees were prevented from leaving their camps, even to search for scarce firewood. With the signing of precarious peace agreements in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo in recent years, the Tanzanian government has put increasing pressure on refugees to return home. Hundreds of people fleeing continued violence in those countries have been turned away at the border. The Tanzanian government plans to close camps for Burundian refugees in 2008 and to dismantle decades-old settlements in 2010.

In addition to these new policies on the ground, Tanzania has called for major changes to the international refugee regime more broadly. Starting in the mid-1990s, then president Benjamin Mkapa advocated the creation of safe havens in countries of origin to avoid cross-border refugee movements. The argument is based on an approach used in northern Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, but it conveniently overlooks the challenges faced in those situations. Despite garnering little support for this idea, Tanzanian officials have pressed forward on the need to overhaul international policy. In 2003, Tanzania called for a repeal of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the development of an agreement that better reflects today’s realities. The new regime would give more attention to security concerns, burden sharing, and protracted refugee situations. Though the proposal was rejected at a regional meeting, Tanzania’s strong voice makes one point clear: in a country that has long hosted refugees, patience finally has run out.

This shift in Tanzanian refugee policy has been driven in part by the huge increase in numbers during the 1990s, but there are other factors as well. Regional security considerations have been most important.¹⁴ The

governments in Rwanda and Burundi have consistently regarded the massive camps along their borders as security threats. In late 1996, frustrated with the inability of the international community to resolve the problem, Rwanda attacked camps in eastern Congo and sent thousands of refugees running. To avoid similar action across its border, Tanzania opted to send the Rwandans home against their will. Burundi has repeatedly accused Tanzania of harboring rebels and allowing them to stage incursions into that country. Tanzania has responded by cracking down on the refugees, restricting their movement, and arresting those suspected of engaging in political activity.

While numbers and security considerations certainly influenced Tanzanian policy, international funding levels also have affected protection standards. Since 1996, UNHCR has found it increasingly difficult to raise funds to support refugee operations in central Africa. At that time, donors were particularly hesitant to pump more money into the Rwandan camps. In recent years, funding for the Burundi operation dropped significantly, forcing cuts in rations and services that led to violent refugee protests. Tanzania has long made clear its position on the need for international burden sharing. In 2001, Mkapa again called on the international community to fulfill its funding responsibilities. Tanzanian officials subsequently made statements that appeared to threaten a forced repatriation of Burundi refugees. Preliminary evidence thus suggests that funding levels have played a role in recent policy changes in Tanzania; the issue of how funding levels have influenced policy is explored more fully in the following section.

Impact of Funding Levels on Tanzanian Policy

In June 1996, at a meeting in Geneva, donors signaled that funding for the Rwandan refugee operation would soon run out. The international spotlight had shifted to humanitarian emergencies in Bosnia and elsewhere, and the situation in central Africa moved into its shadows. The two primary donors for the operation—the United States and the European Union—were hesitant to pump more money into refugee camps when the situation in Rwanda appeared safe for their return. This view was promoted strongly by the new Rwandan government, which helped organize the Geneva meeting. Over the objection of France, a close ally of the previous Rwandan government, donors agreed with the US view that funds would be better spent on reconstruction within Rwanda than on temporary relief outside the country. Knowing the Tanzanian position on international burden sharing, donors were probably well aware that the withdrawal of funding would eventually lead to repatriation.

The funding situation for the remaining refugee operations in Tanzania continued to deteriorate. Between 1999 and 2003, the UNHCR country program's annual operational budget dropped almost 40 percent despite supporting roughly the same number of refugees.¹⁵ The result was a sharp decline in

services and supplies. Many refugees did not receive nonfood items such as plastic sheeting, blankets, water containers, clothing, and feminine hygiene products for several years. Vocational training and postprimary education in the camps were eliminated, and the numbers of teachers and classrooms in primary schools were cut. By 2003, many schools averaged 110 students per class. But the largest reductions were to UNHCR's budget for refugee-affected areas (i.e., Tanzanian communities), an issue discussed further below. UNHCR funding for Tanzania has hovered at roughly the same amount since 2004, and camp services have remained at minimal levels.

The World Food Programme (WFP), which supplies food to refugees in Tanzania, faced similar cuts. Its biggest donors are the European Union, which gives cash, and the United States, which provides most of its contributions in kind. Periodic declines in donations led to across-the-board ration cuts. In mid-2000, most commodities were cut by 40 percent; full rations did not resume for more than ten months. Soon thereafter, in August 2001, the definition of a 100 percent ration was reduced from 2,166 to 1,857 calories per day. This change was based on the (false) assumption that refugees would continue to be allowed to farm small plots near their camps. Subsequent ration cuts were thus even more difficult. Maize allocations were reduced to 72 percent (of the revised ration) in November 2002 and slashed to 50 percent in February 2003. Maize constituted the bulk of the ration, but cuts in beans (25 percent) and cooking oil (50 percent) were also felt. Full rations resumed in September 2003, only to be reduced again with a new round of shortages each year since then. Despite repeated appeals by WFP, donor cuts and pipeline delays have led to significant food shortages for refugees in Tanzania.

Tanzanian authorities were very critical of these developments. Senior officials increased their pressure on donors, implicitly threatening to send the refugees home if funding cuts were not reversed. Local representatives pleaded with UNHCR and NGOs for more resources. By all accounts, though, the strongest reaction came from the district commissioner in Kibondo, who threatened to close a refugee camp, declared the local UNHCR head persona non grata, and demanded that WFP distribute full rations until the food ran out (refugees who received nothing would have to go home). After these decisions were overturned by superiors, the official closed markets shared by refugees and Tanzanians and placed strict limitations on refugee movement in and out of the camps. Clearly, someone was fed up with the refugee situation.

Not surprisingly, refugees were not pleased with the cuts either. In March 2001, after eight months of reduced rations, more than 3,000 Congolese refugees marched out of their camp and headed toward the town of Kigoma to protest the cuts before being turned back by Tanzanian authorities. In May 2003, following even deeper cuts, thousands of Burundi refugees in Kibondo suddenly left their camps and headed toward the border. UNHCR refused to

provide assistance because they were returning to unsafe areas, but the Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS) set up stopover centers along the road to provide water, biscuits, and first aid. When asked by TCRS officials why they were going home, refugees cited two main factors: ration cuts and increased government restrictions.¹⁶ This pattern continued and, by the end of 2003, approximately 33,000 refugees had spontaneously repatriated to Burundi.¹⁷

Funding cuts for UNHCR and WFP therefore had a significant impact on refugee operations on the ground. Food rations were reduced, nonfood items were scarce, and services were eliminated. Some refugees even chose to return to uncertain conditions at home rather than stay in underresourced camps in Tanzania. But the impact of funding cuts was not limited to refugee assistance. Funding levels also influenced Tanzanian refugee policy, contributing to the pattern of restrictions and crackdowns and thus affecting refugee protection. Funding cuts affected government policy in three main ways: by reducing the benefits of the refugee presence, thus generating a negative net impact; by increasing security concerns along the border and within Tanzanian communities; and by providing Tanzanian officials with an excuse for developing a more restrictive approach toward refugees. The following sections explore these issues in turn.

Costs Versus Benefits of the Refugee Presence

The sudden presence of refugees, relief resources, and aid workers in western Tanzania starting in the early 1990s brought both costs and benefits to host communities. During the initial influx, the impact was largely negative as aid agencies focused on providing emergency relief to the refugees and often ignored local hosts. Food shortages and sanitation were particular problems. Over time, though, relief pipelines were established and host communities started experiencing some benefits. Agricultural production and economic activity increased dramatically, as refugees represented both a large consumer market and a source of cheap labor. Many Tanzanians got jobs with aid agencies, and others started small businesses. Rural hinterlands were transformed into sprawling cities, and sleepy towns became headquarters for relief operations. There continued to be problems as well, of course, including environmental degradation, disease, inflation, crime, and insecurity.

In an effort to compensate Tanzanians collectively for the burden of hosting refugees, NGOs initiated a range of development projects in host communities. In late 1994, seeking to coordinate these projects, donors agreed to support what later became the Special Programme for Refugee-Affected Areas (SPRAA), administered by the prime minister's office and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In many ways, the program represented a wish list of projects the government could not afford otherwise.¹⁸ Its coordination role was not felt at the local level for several years, and even then it was

limited.¹⁹ Whether through this umbrella program or alongside it, significant donor resources were directed toward Tanzanian host communities. More than fifty primary schools and twenty dispensaries were rehabilitated, four district hospitals were expanded, at least 120 water systems were improved or installed, a community center was constructed, and several teacher resource centers were built. Donors also invested large sums to upgrade the area's transportation and utility infrastructure, cutting travel times dramatically and facilitating the opening of private bus routes.

During the height of the refugee operation, therefore, Tanzanians experienced both positive and negative effects, though they were not evenly distributed. Some Tanzanians were better poised than others to take advantage of the opportunities created by the refugee presence. Those with education could get jobs, those with capital could start businesses, and those with surplus food could hire refugee laborers. Tanzanians who were not so fortunate experienced more challenges than opportunities. This included people on fixed incomes, day laborers competing for jobs with refugees, and women and children who walked farther in search of firewood and water. On a regional level, some districts benefited more than others, depending to some extent on the infrastructure and demographics of the area prior to the refugee influx.²⁰ While the impact of the refugee situation in western Tanzania was not wholly positive, there clearly were both advantages and disadvantages to the situation.

Starting in 1998, the relative balance between costs and benefits of the refugee presence began to change. Early that year, UNHCR announced funding cuts that required its implementing partners (mainly international NGOs) to reduce their budgets by 20 percent. In most cases, the first projects to be eliminated were those in Tanzanian host communities. As the international spotlight moved on to emergencies in other areas of the world, it became increasingly difficult for UNHCR, UNDP, and NGOs themselves to raise funds for programs in western Tanzania. The situation was no longer an emergency and appeared to many to be dragging on indefinitely. With the repatriation of most Rwandan refugees, the international community seemed to hope that the Burundi problem would just disappear. As funds dried up, programs were cut both in and around the camps in Tanzania, eliminating jobs, disappointing beneficiaries, and reducing the benefits of the refugee presence.

By 2003, there were noticeable changes in Tanzanian host communities. There were fewer NGOs operating in the area, especially international ones, and most did not have projects in local villages. Many agencies simply closed up shop, leaving behind renovated houses and offices that landlords struggled to rent. The number of job opportunities with the relief operation declined, forcing young Tanzanians once again to look elsewhere for employment. On the positive side, though, most senior positions, such as administrators, accountants, and doctors, were turned over to Tanzanian

nationals, creating a small number of opportunities for qualified individuals. Funding cuts also reduced the number of cars driven by UNHCR and aid agencies, as well as the amount of gas provided. For government officials whose vehicles were provided and fueled by UNHCR, this situation created some uncomfortable conflicts at the pumps.

As a result of the funding cuts, therefore, the benefits of the refugee presence in Tanzania no longer balanced out the costs. The opportunities of the operation's heyday declined sharply, while the burdens of hosting refugees did not. NGO projects in local villages ended, but environmental and security problems continued unabated. Government restrictions prevented Tanzanians from hiring refugee laborers, trading at camp markets, and making use of hospital facilities. In towns, jobs disappeared and tax collections dwindled. Senior officials resented having to beg UNHCR for resources like fuel that were once plentiful. Even in Dar es Salaam, after the donor-funded building for the government's refugee department was completed, resources dropped and new vehicles were no longer available each year. In 2002, despite the continuing presence of half a million refugees in Tanzania, SPRAA wrapped up its work as donor funding ended. According to Tanzanian officials, the increasingly negative net impact of the refugee presence is thus one factor related to funding cuts that has influenced the recent shift in government policy.

Funding and Security Concerns

Soon after refugees started arriving in the mid-1990s, Tanzanians complained about growing insecurity in the region. Theft was the most common threat to villagers. Everything from household items to bicycles was taken, but the main targets were crops and livestock. Armed banditry was also a problem. Aid agencies and businesses hired gangs of guards to protect their assets. Several people were killed and many more robbed in ambushes on open stretches of road. Crime rates rose sharply after the influx, especially for offenses such as murder, armed robbery, and illegal possession of firearms.²¹ Despite clear evidence that refugees worked in cooperation with local Tanzanians, government officials blamed the refugees alone for the rise in crime and influx of weapons. The situation prompted UNHCR to build several new police stations, hire and train hundreds of police officers, and develop unarmed security groups in the camps.

Although funding cuts did not affect these particular programs, they contributed to a deteriorating security situation in refugee-hosting areas. As rations of food and nonfood items were cut, refugees became desperate to make up the shortfall and provide for their families. Often, they had little choice but to steal crops and goods from the fields and homes of local farmers. Studies suggest that most refugees turn to theft as a last resort, after growing their own food, selling household possessions, working for

local farmers, and similar coping strategies.²² But in Tanzania, as discussed below, refugees eventually were left with few of these other options. The elimination of postprimary and vocational training programs in the camps also reduced opportunities available to refugee youth, creating a group of bored young people (primarily men) who had nothing better to do. As theft and similar problems increased, relations between refugees and Tanzanians declined dramatically. In February 2005, Tanzanians in Ngara burned to death a refugee who was caught stealing beans from their village.²³

Ironically, government efforts to address the security situation in western Tanzania may have made it worse. In response both to rising crime rates and repeated accusations by Burundi that the camps were harboring rebels, Tanzanian officials placed severe limitations on refugee movement and other activities. In most areas, the “four kilometer rule” was strictly enforced, limiting the distance that refugees could stray from the camp. Because most camps were at least that far from local villages, refugees could no longer work on Tanzanian farms—a situation that affected both groups. Common markets were closed in several districts because they were located between camps and villages. This prevented refugees from conducting trade and business that would have allowed them to purchase needed items. Perhaps most important, local officials actively discouraged refugees from engaging in agriculture outside their camps. As a result, they could no longer grow the food necessary to make up shortfalls in their rations.

Over the years, UNHCR, WFP, donors, and others tried to convince the government to give refugees land for cultivation. In 2003, it cost the international community approximately \$3.4 million per month to feed refugees in Tanzania.²⁴ If they could grow some food on their own, that figure would drop significantly. In fact, one camp established in 1993—before the massive influx from Rwanda—provided Burundi refugees with larger household plots and additional land for farming. The quality of life in that camp was noticeably higher, and its 18,000 residents coped better with the ration cuts. Even so, the Tanzanian government repeatedly refused to give refugees land for cultivation. The idea was to make their stay in Tanzania as temporary as possible. If refugees had access to land, officials argued, they would not want to leave, especially given the scarcity of land at home. Some officials suggested that granting refugees land would play into Burundian and Rwandan strategies to off-load excess populations on comparatively land-rich Tanzania.²⁵ In an effort to increase refugee coping strategies while accounting for government concerns, TCRS started promoting a highly controlled sharecropping approach and the development of new common markets closer to the refugee camps.²⁶

Funding cuts therefore contributed to insecurity in western Tanzania by forcing refugees to search elsewhere for their basic needs. Government efforts to address the security problem made the situation worse by reducing

coping strategies available to refugees. Without being able to sell their labor, exchange possessions, or farm outside their camps, refugees had little choice but to steal from their Tanzanian hosts. Coupled with the problem of youth boredom (also partly attributable to budget cuts) and the availability of weapons, security became a growing concern. These domestic security issues are distinct but not divorced from Tanzania's regional security considerations, especially its tense relations with bordering countries. As the security situation deteriorated throughout the region, it became more difficult to regulate cross-border movements of people, weapons, and goods. These factors have been important in the recent shift of Tanzanian policy and the desire to see refugees go home.

International Reputation Issues

From the beginning of the refugee crisis in Tanzania, government officials made clear the need for international assistance. Their policy on settlement (densely populated camps with no land for agriculture), their selection of camp locations (in areas where roads had to be rehabilitated), and their open solicitation of donors (starting with conferences in 1994) all indicated that Tanzania had no intention of shouldering the burden of hosting refugees on its own. As long as resources were forthcoming, as they were in the mid-1990s, the refugees could enjoy relative safety in Tanzania. As funding started to drop, however, Tanzanian officials felt abandoned and left to bear the burden alone. They made repeated pleas to donors, arguing that the international community was not living up to its responsibilities. If donors did not do their part, they suggested, Tanzania should not have to either.

To some extent, the Tanzanian government's promotion of the creation of safe havens in refugee-producing countries sought to highlight the disparities between Africa and other regions with respect to burden sharing. In places like Iraq and Bosnia, Western powers committed significant military power and humanitarian resources to protect displaced people within their countries of origin. This was an explicit effort to prevent them from crossing international borders, thus shielding neighboring countries from large-scale refugee influxes. None of these influxes would have been as large as those Tanzania experienced in the 1990s, and yet the international community did nothing to prevent the latter. Tanzanian officials were less concerned with the relative failure of the safe haven approach, particularly in Bosnia, than they were with the perception that displaced populations in Africa are not worthy of the same level of commitment and attention as those in more strategic areas of the world.

Tanzania need only look to donor countries for examples of other governments not living up to their obligations to admit and host refugees. Throughout Europe and North America, there has been a disturbing trend toward more restrictive policies on asylum and immigration. Countries like France, Italy,

and Macedonia all temporarily closed their borders or forced people back into unsafe situations during the 1990s. Tanzanian authorities looked especially to the United States and cited its restrictive immigration policies in defending their own.²⁷ In a 1995 address, then foreign affairs minister Joseph Rwegasira referred specifically to Haitian refugees and warned the international community not to apply double standards when evaluating the humanitarian records of asylum countries.²⁸ In 2004, the United States again turned back ships carrying people fleeing widespread violence in Haiti. When it comes to developing less hospitable policies toward refugees, Tanzania is not alone.

In many ways, therefore, funding cuts for the refugee operation in Tanzania provided government officials with an excuse for changing their policies. They did not crack down on refugees simply because donors were not living up to financial commitments. Rather, Tanzanian officials had legitimate concerns with respect to regional security and the impact of the refugee presence on their own population. Given that the international community failed to adequately fund the refugee operation, and that many donor countries themselves were developing more restrictive immigration policies, the Tanzanian government was effectively shielded from international criticism for its new approach. Indeed, few governments were openly critical of Tanzanian actions. As a result, faced with dwindling resources, rising insecurity, and continuing cross-border tensions, Tanzanian government policy toward refugees continued to shift in a more restrictive direction.

Overall, then, funding cuts influenced the shift in Tanzanian refugee policy in several important ways. They perhaps were not as significant as regional security concerns and demographic factors but nonetheless cannot be overlooked. Indeed, when asked whether government policy would be different if funding levels had not dropped, a senior official in the refugees department at the Ministry of Home Affairs answered with a resounding “Yes!”²⁹ As the net impact of the refugee presence became increasingly negative, the security situation around the camps deteriorated, and officials felt abandoned by the international community, Tanzanian policy shifted and refugee protection standards declined. Tanzania was no longer willing to shoulder the burden of hosting large numbers of refugees within its borders.

In an interesting final twist, UNHCR officials in Dar es Salaam believed that their organization actually could have raised more funds for refugee operations in Tanzania, thereby avoiding such deep cuts. UNHCR headquarters in Geneva reportedly limited the country office’s ability to solicit more funds from donors because it did not want to divert resources from other areas of the world. The Dar es Salaam office was pressured to reduce its operations budget for 2003 to \$16 million, although officials there believed they could get \$20 million from donors if they asked.³⁰ This situation suggests that responsibility for funding cuts did not rest solely with the donors;

in filtering information and adjusting budgets based on its own global priorities, UNHCR also contributed to the reduction in funding for the Tanzanian refugee operation. The agency's budgeting process thus had its own effect on resource levels and, ultimately, to some extent, on standards of refugee protection in Tanzania.

Conclusion

As a haven of peace within a troubled region, Tanzania has long been recognized for its hospitality toward refugees. Since 1993, the country has received approximately 1.3 million refugees from Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo. Over time, as the situation lingered, Tanzanian policy became less welcoming. Border closures, forced repatriation, and military roundup operations were signs that patience had finally run out. This shift in Tanzanian refugee policy was due in part to demographic factors and security concerns, especially fears of being drawn into broader regional conflicts.³¹ A secondary issue influencing policymakers, though, was the decline of international funding for the refugee operation. Rations were reduced, programs canceled, and jobs eliminated. These cuts had obvious implications for the refugees but also reduced the benefits available to Tanzanians. As refugees and hosts competed for dwindling relief resources, officials wondered why their country should have to shoulder the burden of hosting refugees on its own.

Tanzania is not the only African country in which refugee operations have been affected by recent funding cuts. In Kenya, budget problems forced 25 percent ration cuts and reductions in health care services for Sudanese refugees. Shortfalls in Guinea led to the dismissal of nearly 400 teachers for children from Liberia and Sierra Leone. Throughout the continent, sexual violence and rape counseling programs were cut back or eliminated due to lack of funding.³² Partly in response to ever dwindling budgets, governments in Zambia and Uganda developed new programs to integrate refugees more closely with local hosts and sought funding to channel relief resources into development activities. However, donor response was not as high as initially hoped. For this reason, Tanzanian officials were wary of the approach; as one anonymous source said, "Tanzania won't succumb to the concept of local integration." Instead, the government there increasingly sought to separate refugees from local hosts and transfer the costs of their presence to the international community.

This examination of refugee operations and government policy in Tanzania generates three broad conclusions with respect to the funding of international regimes. First, evidence from this case indicates that funding levels can influence state compliance with the obligations of an international regime. Particularly for regimes that depend heavily on external funding, and on

resource transfers within the regime, shortages may reduce the incentives for participating states to cooperate. As funding for the refugee operation in Tanzania declined, the government's willingness and sense of obligation to live up to its international commitments also waned. If this pattern of noncompliance extends to many participating states, practice within the regime may eventually become inconsistent with its underlying principles. Thus, a lack of funding may reduce compliance and weaken the overall regime.

Second, the heavy dependence of the international refugee regime on voluntary contributions initially suggests that the regime itself is simply a reflection of state interests. After all, if UNHCR cannot raise enough money from participating states for its field operations, it cannot fulfill its basic mandate of refugee protection. This would seem to confirm realist expectations. However, as the Tanzanian case makes clear, UNHCR as an organization actually shapes its own funding patterns. It determines regional and program priorities and develops budgets accordingly, presenting them to donors in the form of appeals. Donors have the option of funding some operations over others or earmarking funds for certain programs, but their decisions are influenced by the information presented to them in the budgets. If UNHCR does not request sufficient funds for the refugee operation in Tanzania, donors cannot be held responsible. Thus, as constructivists might predict, the agency has an independent impact on state behavior through its control of information and the budgeting process. Indeed, as other studies have shown, UNHCR has developed a degree of autonomy from state interests.³³

Finally, the difficulties faced by UNHCR in raising funds for refugee operations, and the resulting impact on protection standards, present serious questions about the funding structure of the international refugee regime. If its underlying principles are to be maintained, the regime may need to be reformed to provide UNHCR with a guaranteed budget for field operations and increased access to nonearmarked funding. Such changes may reduce the agency's dependence on key donors and allow it to make more discretionary decisions. Even so, unless UNHCR's budget is funded in full every year (which seems unlikely), agency staff will continue to face difficult choices about the allocation of scarce resources. Ultimately, both host countries and donor countries must live up to their obligations in order to avoid further weakening of the regime. The effort to increase overall compliance may require an exchange of ideas and discussion of new proposals to ensure minimal standards of refugee protection around the world. 🌐

Notes

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1. While the tendency in recent literature has been to focus specifically on international organizations or formal agreements, the broader concept of a regime allows us to examine issue areas in which cooperation among states is guided by several such instruments.

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3. Raimo Väyrynen, "Funding Dilemmas in Refugee Assistance: Political Interests and Institutional Reforms in UNHCR," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 143–167.

4. Jimin Zhao, "The Multilateral Fund and China's Compliance with the Montreal Protocol," *Journal of Environment and Development* 11, no. 4 (December 2002): 331–354. The full title of the protocol is Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

5. Erica R. Gould, "Money Talks: Supplementary Financiers and International Monetary Fund Conditionality," *International Organization* 57, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 551–586.

6. Daniel L. Nielson and Michael J. Tierney, "Delegation to International Organizations: Agency Theory and World Bank Environmental Reform," *International Organization* 57, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 241–276.

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8. These findings are based largely on interviews with Tanzanian policymakers in 2003. Travel was funded by a Junior Faculty Research Grant from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

9. Amelia Bookstein, "UNHCR and Forgotten Emergencies: Can Funds Be Found?" *Forced Migration Review* 10 (April 2001): 46–48.

10. Gil Loescher, "UNHCR at Fifty: Refugee Protection and World Politics," in Niklaus Steiner, Mark Gibney, and Gil Loescher, eds., *Problems of Protection: The UNHCR, Refugees, and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

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12. Gil Loescher, *Beyond Charity: International Cooperation and the Global Refugee Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Raimo Väyrynen, "Funding Dilemmas in Refugee Assistance"; Astri Suhrke and Kathleen Newland, "UNHCR: Uphill into the Future," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 284–302; Jeffrey Crisp, "Mind the Gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 168–191; Karen Jacobsen, "Can Refugees Benefit the State? Refugee Resources and African Statebuilding," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, no. 4 (2002): 577–596.

13. In 1983, then president Julius Nyerere was awarded the Nansen Medal for Outstanding Service to Refugees by UNHCR.

14. Beth Elise Whitaker, "Disjunctured Boundaries: Refugees, Hosts, and Politics in Tanzania," PhD diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999.

15. Interview with Brian Vaughan, senior program officer, UNHCR Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, 12 June 2003.

16. Despite prompting by the interviewers and claims by the Burundi government, refugees did not attribute their departure to the recent inauguration of a Hutu president at home. Interview with Jesse Kamstra, TCRS, Kibondo, Tanzania, 3 July 2003.

17. This group is distinct from approximately 37,000 refugees who returned to Burundi in 2003 with UNHCR assistance. Since then, nearly 200,000 more refugees have returned to Burundi through a voluntary repatriation program that has been heavily promoted by the Tanzanian government.

18. Loren B. Landau, "The Humanitarian Hangover: Transnationalization of Governmental Practice in Tanzania's Refugee-Populated Areas," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 21, no. 1–2 (April 2002): 260–299.

19. Beth Elise Whitaker, "Creating Alternatives: Refugee Relief and Local Development in Western Tanzania," in Ondine Barrow and Mike Jennings, eds., *The Charitable Impulse: Relief, Development and Non-Governmental Organisations in North East Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001).

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22. Mark Lawrence and Alex King, "Household Food Economy Assessment of Burundian Refugees in Northwest Tanzania," undertaken jointly by Save the Children Fund (UK), WFP Tanzania, and UNHCR Tanzania, 1998.

23. UNHCR, "Tanzania: UNHCR Expresses Appreciation of WFP Food Ration Increase, Despite Inadequate Donor Funding," UNHCR Briefing Notes, 11 March 2005.

24. Interview with Yves Horent, European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 13 June 2003.

25. In a speech at a workshop of the Refugee Review Policy Project on 15 December 2000, Johnson Brahim, a senior official in the Refugees Department, made the following statement: "The refugees Tanzania hosts come from countries facing land shortages due to their small sizes but at the same time having one of the highest population growth rates. Hence one cannot rule out the possibility of deliberate policies to keep outside part of the population in order to create enough space for those remaining. As to the refugees themselves, they may consider remaining in Tanzania for the sake of land they may be offered."

26. Interview with Duane Poppe, TCRS, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 16 June 2003.

27. Sadako Ogata, "The Future of Refugee Work (Excerpt of a Speech Given by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on May 22, 1998)," *Migration World Magazine* 26, no. 5 (Sept.–Oct. 1998): 29–31.

28. Speech delivered by Joseph Rwegasira, minister for foreign affairs and international co-operation, when opening the International Workshop on the Refugee Crisis in the Great Lakes Region, Arusha, Tanzania, 16–19 August 1995.

29. This official asked to remain anonymous.

30. Interview with Brian Vaughan, 12 June 2003.

31. The development of "Africa's first world war" in Congo suggests these worries were not unfounded.

32. US Committee for Refugees, "Funding Crisis in Refugee Assistance: Impact on Refugees," USCR press release, 20 November 2002.

33. Gil Loescher, "The UNHCR and World Politics: State Interests vs. Institutional Autonomy," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 33–56; Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

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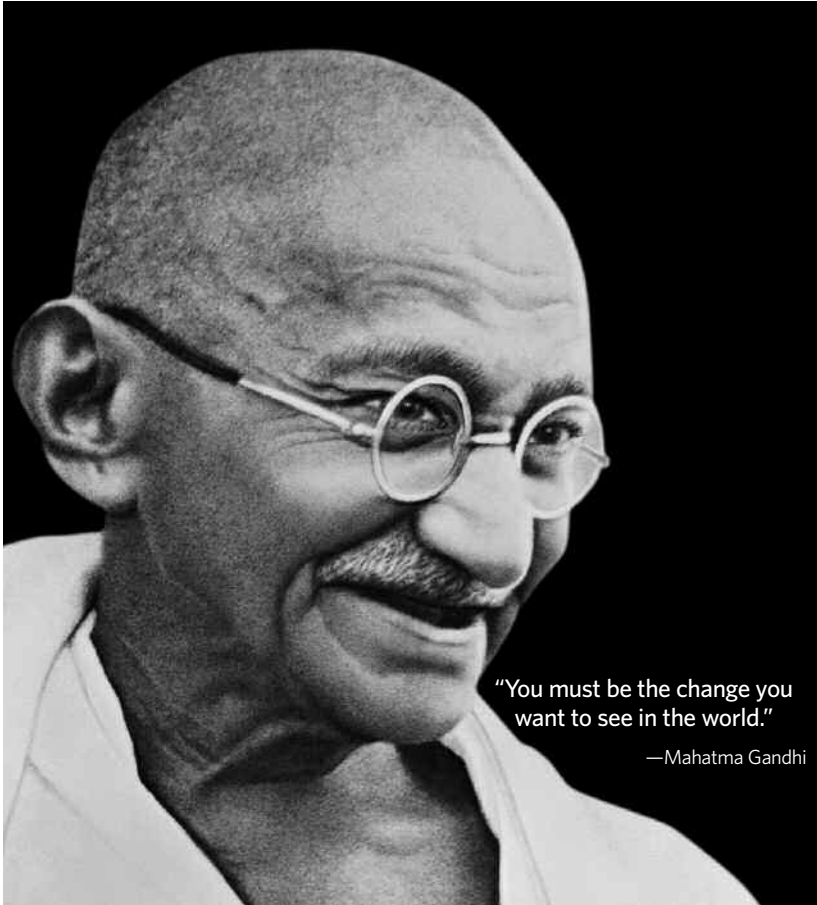
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