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What Makes Me Want You Here? Hosts’ Opinion Towards and Contact with Refugees for Integration – an African Settlement Setting

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Abstract

Many of the world’s refugees remain in Africa, where they stay long-term mainly in neighbouring countries. Present directions point to integration, in which host society and political surrounding play a key role. The paper aims to investigate how public opinion towards and contact with refugees support integration processes. This is not only an important analysis to manage the refugee crisis but also to use the crisis as an opportunity. With the refugees, additional human resources arrive to support rural development in generally poor hosting areas. We apply the research to a settlement setting in rural Zambia, a recent dataset of 275 households from 2018 and an econometric analysis. This is the first study dealing with a comprehensive set of factors that affect hosts opinion towards and contact with refugees in an African camp context, also with respect to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework by the United Nations. Our results show particularly religiosity, trust, life satisfaction, food insecurity, agricultural ownership and natural resource uses of the host society as main factors that need policy consideration for promoting refugee integration. Literature suggests refugees affect their host communities in multiple ways. They can support rural development by increasing human capital in the area but also their effect on the host community’s food security is not negligible. Either directly through trade on food and good markets or indirectly by their effect on the economy, refugees can influence the host’s nutrition. In our analysis we find no significant effects between contact with refugees and relevant variables like host’s land size, livestock possession, savings or food security. However, these variables exhibit a significant effect on the hosts’ opinion about refugees, indicating a fear to interact with them. To counter this fear, policies have to be implemented to enable hosts and refugees to achieve unrealised economic opportunities for rural development and increase food security.

Keywords: Africa, contact, host society, integration, opinion, refugees, rural development