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Title: The Consequences of Large Scale Refugee Repatriation for Economic Development

Large-scale refugee repatriation is frequently considered a threat to peace because of the additional economic burden it could impose on receiving communities. Yet the empirical evidence on the impacts of refugee return is limited. Existing research has focused on the outcomes of returnees themselves. However, return has implications not just for returnees but also for other populations in the areas of return. This paper explores the short- and medium-term consequences of refugee repatriation for stayee households (i.e. those which never left the country during the conflict) using longitudinal household data from Burundi which was collected in 2011 and 2015. Burundi is a land-scarce and conflict-affected country in which most households rely on subsistence farming. The country experienced a large inflow of returning refugees during the 2000s. Within a regression framework we use geographical features of the communities of origin, including altitude and proximity to the border, for identification purposes. Our results suggest that refugee return is linked to lower levels livestock, the main form of capital accumulation in the country, for stayee households. This result seems to be linked to the land redistribution which accompanied the return flows. The results show no statistically significant impact of refugee return on crime, food security and health related outcomes. Finally, we analyse the responses of stayee households to the presence of returnees and find evidence of increasing out-migration and changes in economic activities in response to inflows of returnees. The paper finishes with a discussion of the implications of these results for sustainable development in communities experiencing large scale repatriation. Policymakers often encourage the return of refugees to their communities of origin as a solution to their situation. However, our results suggest that repatriation can lead to hardship for communities experiencing return, which could potentially trigger new waves of conflict in countries of origin. In that sense, large-scale repatriation at times may not provide a sustainable solution to the “problem”, but may simply relocate it. There is, as such, an argument for providing support to communities receiving large number of returnees while adjustments take place in order to secure a long-term peace.

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