

## Trauma and Livelihood Opportunities: Reprogramming Support in Refugee Camps



Picture, 2015, Mai Aini Refugee Camp, Northern  
Ethiopia. Photo by Mirjam van Reisen (copyrights)

# **Trauma and livelihood opportunities: reprogramming support in refugee camps**

## **Summary**

This study investigates the needs for Eritrean refugees who reside in Ethiopian refugee camps. The camps researched are Hitsats and Shemelba in North-Ethiopia. The focus is on refugees who suffer trauma and post-traumatic stress (PTS). A Self-Help Low-Cost Post-Traumatic Stress programme (SHLCPTS) is developed for these refugees and is tested on 100 camp residents. The results showed a significant positive effect on social economic resilience.

This study also looks into livelihoods of the refugees and opportunities for income generation. Strengths and weaknesses are emphasized and relate to willingness of organizations and governments and difficulties with establish sustainable and efficient programmes.

## **Introduction**

The research focus on possibilities for trauma support for refugees via mobile phones and livelihood programmes and relief opportunities. Since many refugees in the Ethiopian camps suffer from trauma and post-traumatic stress (PTS), a tool is developed that can offer support on a low cost and is easy accessible for the refugees. The Self-Help Low-Cost Post-Traumatic Stress programme (SHLCPTS) is based on Eye Movement Desensitizing and Reprocessing (EMDR) techniques and was offered via videos on mobile phones to the refugees in the camps. The tool is tested in the refugee camps Hitsats and Shimelba in North-Ethiopia (and traumatised communities in Sudan) among 100 respondents. The results showed that SHLCPTS had a very positive effect on social economic resilience.

Besides trauma research in the camps in Ethiopia, research is conducted in order to understand needs and availability of livelihood programmes and opportunities in order to generate a small income. The need for livelihood and income generating activities is big, but humanitarian organizations face difficulties because of drop-outs in existing programmes and lack of funds.

## **Approach and results**

### *Trauma self-help in camp*

The results regarding the trauma self-help tool indicate significant positive effects on social economic resilience. SHLCPTS was tested positive in combination with livelihood support. The most positive effect was measured on SHLCPTS combined with livelihood support on refugees' capability – but the effects on income and empowerment were also positive:

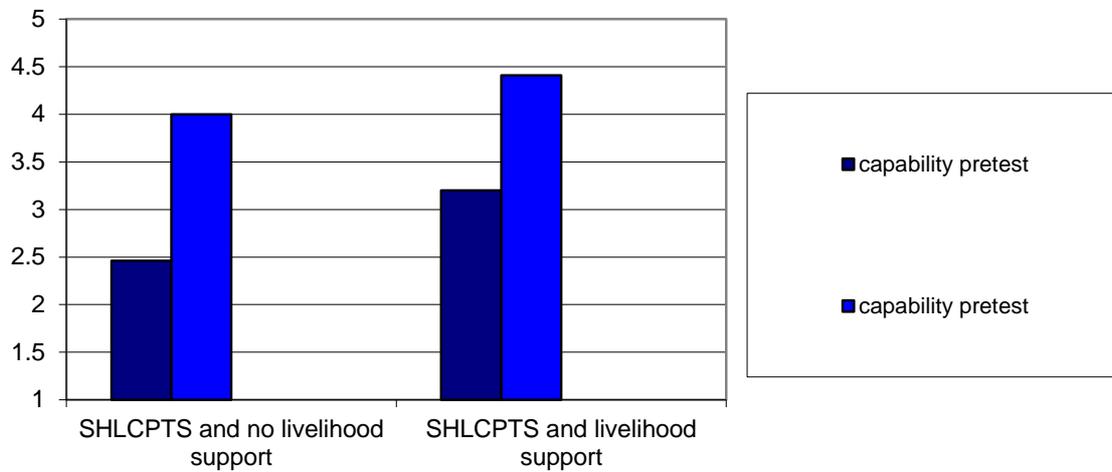


Figure 1: averages of the groups on Capability.

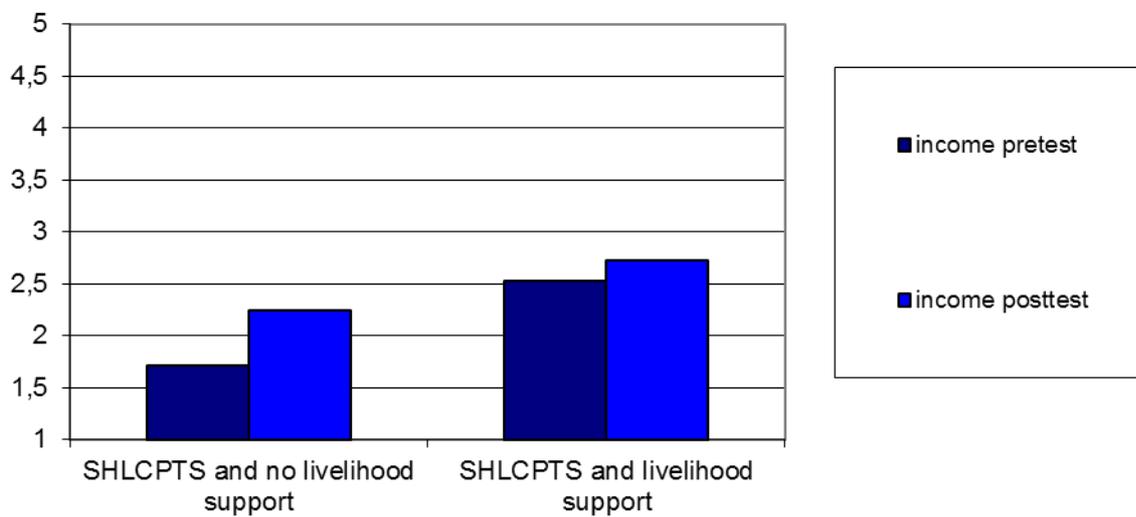


Figure 2: averages of the groups on Income.

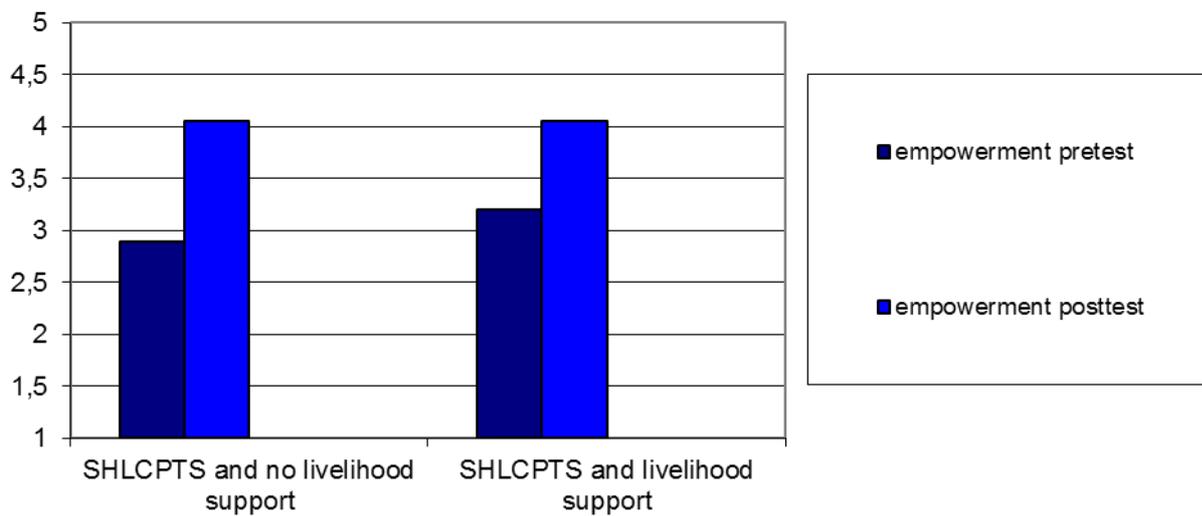


Figure 3: averages of the groups on Empowerment

## *Livelihood*

Further issues in refugee camps Ethiopia can be found in a lack livelihood opportunities. There are insufficient means from the organizational side, and the NGOs are facing challenges regarding livelihood support and income generating activities. This issue was researched in Hitsats refugee camp. Possibilities to generate an income are minimal and mainly informal. This is one reason for a strong drive to secondary movement and leads to drop-outs in existing livelihood programs that are offered by several NGOs in the camp. The organizations also face saturation in certain income generating activities. Another issues is that the sustainability of the programmes is lacking. Positive observations in Hitsats regarding livelihood opportunities included the offered micro-loan opportunities for refugees to start small businesses and the willingness of organizations and government to improve and support livelihood programmes.

## **Implications for policy**

### *Trauma relief*

- Preparedness in terms of mental health is crucial for the success of livelihood-programmes
- Measure PTS among migrants/refugees communities at reception points
- Collaborate with local authorities and protection agencies to inventories
- Integrate Self Help Low Cost PTS programmes to relief trauma
- Prepare the migrant/refugee communities to strengthen their resilience
- Ensure targeting and cost benefit of action by strengthening evidence based research to provide evidence of cost benefit balance of approaches

### *Livelihood and out-of-camp policies*

- Needs for livelihoods in high migrant/refugee density areas
- Strengthen upscaled livelihood programmes focused on basic needs and work opportunities as well as legalisation of status and work permits and out-of-camp policy
- Facilitate legal support by diaspora communities through remittances for small business investment and opportunities
- Strengthen mutual support programmes to help integration of migrant/refugee communities and host communities

## **Conclusions**

This research looked at refugees and unskilled migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan residing in Ethiopia and Sudan. The research looked at dynamics between refugees, returnee migrants and recipient communities. Negative information shared by ICT enhances trauma and causes collective trauma which decreases positive expectations of opportunities.

To enhance integration in the region, increasing interaction between youth of host communities and of refugee communities linked to out-of-camp policies are important. Moreover, interventions to relief trauma through ICTs enhance the effects of livelihood policies on social-economic resilience. A

survey among 100 refugees demonstrated the highly significant positive effects of trauma relief on social-economic resilience (especially on expectations of income, capabilities and on empowerment).

The purpose of the policy brief is: Rethinking and reprogramming of the mix of interventions to increase impact on the integration of these migrants into local communities based on understanding of their communication pathway.

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