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Protracted refugees: Understanding the challenges of refugees in protracted refugee situations in Uganda

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The purpose of this research was to delve into the challenges that refugees in protracted refugee situations in Uganda face under the current refugee progressive policies that guarantee refugees the right to work, the freedom of movement, the freedom to establish businesses, and access to land. We used Focus Group Discussions to collect data from refugees in Arua city/District. The findings showed that despite refugee-friendly policies enacted and implemented by the Ugandan government; protracted refugees are confronted with challenges such as access to post-secondary school education, labor market integration, youth unemployment, high youth crime rate within the settlement areas and outside, the lack of elderly support, congestion in the settlement areas, urban integration challenges, overstraining of the environment and unpredictable relationship with the host communities. These challenges stand as a bottleneck to the promotion of the "Self-Reliance Strategy" and the integration of refugees in Uganda

Key words: Refugees, refugee challenges, protracted refugee situations, Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), protracted refugee situations are situations where refugees have spent 5 years or more living in the host country (Milner and Loescher, 2011; Milner, 2014). The UNHCR specifies that it involves at least 25,000 refugees from the same country staying in a single country for a period of 5 or more years. Conflicts or civil wars account for a large number of refugees in the world (Kawaguchi, 2020; Lischer, 2017; Salehyan and Gleditsch, 2006). In Africa, the refugee crisis has increased since most African countries attained independence; this is because the continent has witnessed several conflicts (Blavo, 2019; Ogata, 2000). Historically, refugees in Sub-Saharan Africa are mainly due to conflicts and wars but in some incidents, Sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed environmental refugees (Myers, 1997; Otunnu, 1992). Uganda is a signatory to international legal instruments for refugee protection; the

1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention. Uganda also adopted a Refugees Act in 2006 which stipulates the rights of refugees such as freedom of movement, right to work, and access to land. Uganda's experience as a refugee host country dates to the pre-independence period (before 1962). Over time Uganda has hosted several refugees from neighboring countries like Ethiopia, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and South Sudan (Ahimbisibwe, 2018; Nabuguzi, 1993). This positions Uganda among the top countries that have hosted several refugees in Sub-Saharan Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of refugees in Africa has mainly been due to conflicts that have plagued the continent since independence (Blavo, 2019; Browne, 2006; Milner, 2009). With a series of protracted conflicts in East Africa, the flow of refugees in neighboring countries has been endless; the region has seen constant long-term movements of refugees (Adepoju, 2019; Browne, 2006). Therefore, research and studies concerning refugees in Africa have mentioned that many refugees in Africa and particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa find themselves in protracted refugee situations; staying as refugees for more than 5 years with no immediate solution (Adepoju, 2019; Browne, 2006; Kaiser, 2005; Kaiser, 2006; Kaiser, 2010). Unfortunately, refugees face more rather than fewer challenges as their stay in other countries becomes protracted (Browne, 2006; Kaiser, 2006), their needs and desires change as a result of prolonged stay (Kaiser, 2006). This necessitates the host countries to occasionally review the refugees' policy, needs, and challenges.

From the 1990s, African states adopted restrictive asylum policies due to limited resources because of prolonged stay of refugees, lack of assistance from the international community, and security concerns due to hosting big numbers of refugees (Milner, 2009). However, the debate of refugees' intervention shifted from repatriation to integration of refugees because of the many refugees in protracted refugee situations in Africa (Crisp, 2003). At the global level, there has been a shift in international policy rhetoric towards refugees from restrictive to inclusive and progressive policy for refugees' integration (Crisp, 2018; Pincock et al, 2021). This signifies the shift from a restrictive approach to refugees to an approach that promotes integration and inclusion of refugees.

Uganda as a host country for refugees has practiced two modes of settlement of refugees; encampment and supported self-settlement (Kaiser, 2006). These modes of refugee settlement were implemented through restrictive policies that restricted movement and work by the refugees (Kaiser, 2005; Kaiser, 2006). However, the Uganda government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in response to refugees changed from the restrictive approach towards refugees to what is called "Self-Reliance Strategy" to promote integration and self-reliance (Adepoju, 2019; Betts, 2018). With the enactment of the Uganda Refugee Act 2006; it guaranteed refugees the freedom to move and the right to work, making Uganda one of the most lauded refugee-hosting country in the world (Betts, 2018; Betts et al., 2019). Uganda's policies and programs for refugees facilitate the integration of refugees with host communities and increase self-sufficiency; the policies enhance land ownership, free movement, and employment (Davis, 2019; Easton-Calabria, 2016; Rohwerder, 2016). The Ugandan policies reduce the burden of supporting refugees by the Ugandan government and other actors like international organizations and local organizations. However, Uganda faces several challenges in hosting refugees such as the increasing number of refugees, for example, the South Sudan conflict has generated over a million refugees in Uganda, protracted refugee situations due to prolonged stay of the refugees, limited resources for the Ugandan government, environmental stress and security threat of hosting many refugees (Ahimbisibwe, 2018). With the prolonged refugee crisis in Uganda especially due to South Sudanese refugees who are over 1 million in Uganda, the need to focus on assistance beyond the emergency response is necessary to help the refugees have access to necessities like water, food, clothing, and shelter while also ensuring poverty eradication for sustainable livelihoods (Easton-Calabria, 2016). This is crucial in responding to refugees' needs under protracted refugee situations. Most of the refugees in the world live in protracted refugee situations (Milner, 2014). Currently, in Uganda, the South Sudanese refugees are the majority and since the crisis in South Sudan has taken over 5 years, many of these can be classified as refugees living under protracted refugee situations per UNHCR definition. Previous studies confirm the presence of protracted refugee situations in Uganda and they have also discussed integration into the local communities as part of the solutions to addressing protracted refugee situations (Dryden-Peterson and Hovil, 2004; Kaiser, 2006; Kaiser, 2010; Omata, 2012). Uganda hosts one of the largest and still growing populations of refugees in Africa with over one million refugees; almost half a million South Sudanese arrived in Uganda in the second half of 2016 alone, more than 250,000 refugees are living in the Bidi Bidi refugee camp alone (Adepoju, 2019), which is currently the biggest refugee camp in Uganda. Despite the increase in the number of refugees in Uganda, the

government of Uganda has continued to pursue progressive policies under the self-reliance model to promote refugee integration and survival in the country. Betts et al. (2019) emphasized that "policymakers and practitioners should reward countries like Uganda that provide refugees with the right to work and freedom of movement". However, many of the refugees in Uganda are under protracted refugee situations and some studies have pointed out that refugees face increased challenges the longer they stay in protracted exile (Kaiser, 2006; Kreibaum, 2016). We, therefore, sought to understand the emerging challenges that refugees living in a protracted refugee situations in Uganda could be facing despite the progressive policies in place to facilitate their integration and inclusion in Uganda.

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

As already mentioned, previous studies on refugees in protracted refugee situations or long-term refugees have indicated that the livelihoods and conditions that refugees in protracted refugees situations in Uganda face do change over time (Hovil, 2007; Kaiser, 2006; Kaiser, 2010). In the past, refugees in protracted exile in Uganda had to face forced repatriation, had no freedom of movement and freedom to work (Kaiser, 2006; Kaiser, 2010). However, due to changes in the policy, Uganda adopted a progressive policy for refugees in which refugees are free to move and work (Davis, 2019; Easton-Calabria, 2016; Kreibaum, 2016). Whereas Kreibaum (2016) analyzed the impact of the long-term presence of Congolese refugees on the Ugandan population, our interest was to understand the challenges that refugees in protracted situations in Uganda could be facing despite the policies in place such as the right to work and freedom of movement. We, therefore, framed the question:

"Under what conditions does prolonged stay become a disadvantage for refugees and the host country?"

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Before data collection and field visits in January 2020, we deliberated on the areas that we would visit for data collection. Kampala city was one of the areas of consideration since the city hosts many refugees (urban refugees). However, we chose Arua city/District in the West Nile region of Uganda as the most suitable area for the data collection because it is home to many urban refugees like Kampala city and rural settlement areas such as Rhino Refugee settlement area.

We chose a participatory research design that would allow us to interact with the refugees as a group rather than as individuals.

Therefore, we used Focus Groups in data collection; we conducted 2 Focus Group Discussions (Focus Group 1 that comprised of Refugee leaders in the settlement area, and Focus Group 2 that comprised of urban refugees in Arua city).

Before visiting Rhino Refugee settlement area to conduct a Focus Group Discussion with refugee leaders in the settlement, we took initiative to understand the structure of leadership within the settlement area. We asked one of the field workers of an international organization that has been at the forefront of extending assistance to refugees in Uganda to explain the leadership structure in the settlement area. She explained that the refugee settlement villages have over 1000 refugees each, the villages make up the clusters (a cluster has 1 to 4 villages), the clusters make up the zones. Rhino refugee settlement area has Odobu zone, Tika zone, Ofua zone, Ocea zone, Siripi zone, and Omugo zone (also referred to as Omugo Rhino settlement annex). A village is headed by a Refugee Welfare Committee 1 (RWC1), a cluster is headed by a Refugee Welfare Committee 2 (RWC2), the RWC 2 reports to the Refugee Welfare Committee 3 (RWC3) which is the overall leadership committee of the settlement. She, however, noted that most activities take place at village levels which renders the RWC2 less active in addressing daily activities in the settlement area. This made us focus on interacting with RWC 1 (village-level leadership).

Upon acquiring permission to carry out our research in Rhino settlement area, we visited the settlement area and met with a chairperson of one of the villages in Ofua zone 3 who arranged for a meeting the following day with all the other leaders under him. Before the meeting, he had confirmed to us that the committee comprised of refugees who had stayed in Uganda for more than 5 years which qualified all of them to be refugees in protracted refugee situations.

The village was a settlement area for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda. The leaders in the focus group discussion included the Chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary of education, secretary of persons with special needs, the officer in charge of security, secretary of the environment, women's leader, and the youth leader (8 members in total). We also arranged a Focus group of urban refugees in Arua city in which 5 of the participants were females and 5 males (10 members in total). Through a social worker at Arua Youth Center, this social worker connected us to an urban refugee in Arua city who helped us recruit participants for the focus group discussion; these participants were South Sudanese and Congolese refugees who had lived for more than 5 years in Uganda.

In both Focus group discussions, we began with the introduction and explaining the purpose of the group discussion. We also obtained consent to audio record the discussions; the audios were used in data transcription.

In addition, we used the observation method of study to complement the focus group discussions. In the settlement area, we moved around the different zones of Rhino settlement area to observe what was happening. We visited the suburbs where majority of the refugees reside in Arua city.

RESULTS

Our research delved into the experiences of protracted refugees to understand the emerging challenges that they are facing despite the progressive policies that are in existence such as freedom of movement, freedom to

work, and the freedom to settle out of the designated settlement areas. We present these challenges based on the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data. These themes include labor market integration and youth unemployment, higher education and vocational training, relationship with host communities, urban migration, youth crimes, congestion in the settlement areas, elderly or aging refugees, environmental stress, and urbanization within the settlement areas.

Labor market integration and youth unemployment

Uganda has been praised for progressive refugee policies; the refugees are given small plots of land to grow some food, integrate into the host communities, they can work, and start businesses (Betts, 2018; Betts et al., 2019). However, from the focus group discussions, it was evident that the refugees are experiencing setbacks in integration in the labor market in Uganda. Even finding informal jobs is also not easy for refugees who face challenges like the language barrier and lack of educational qualifications. Youth unemployment in Uganda like any other developing country is still high; many youths in Uganda are unemployed or underemployed (Alfonsi et al., 2020; Pletscher, 2015). This gives little chances for the refugees to be employed.

In the focus group discussion with the urban refugees, the challenge of getting a job was emphasized as one of the most pressing challenges that they are facing in the Ugandan labor market. Participants in the discussion stressed that:

Bosco: "I have studied in Uganda from primary to university; I graduated, and I have tried looking for a job even in supermarkets but when they see me as a South Sudanese, I am told there is no job for me. I have tried in several organizations, but it has never worked out" (Focus Group 2)

Suya: "Ugandans find it hard to give us jobs. I have tried in restaurants, phone shops, supermarkets but I have failed. I am now staying at home doing nothing". (Focus Group 2).

Similarly, in the focus group discussion with the refugee leaders, the chairperson was quick to point out that:

"We have stayed for many years here and we now have many youths; these young men and women cannot find work in Arua city, some have even moved as far as Kampala but have failed to find employment, this is something that disturbs us as leaders" (Focus Group 1). Refugees who can navigate the labor market and find

some employment opportunities especially as casual laborers face conditions at places of work that are different from the Ugandans, this can be in form of low pay, discrimination, and segregation as explained by the urban refugees:

Steve: "…. I once got work at a construction site in Kampala. However, the boss when he asked for my national identity card, and I told him that I am a refugee; he said that he would pay me Uganda Shillings 5,000 per day, yet he was paying the Ugandans Shillings 8,000 per day" (Focus Group 2).

Juma: "I have ever worked as a boda-boda rider. I was riding a motorcycle of a Ugandan. I used to give him Uganda Shillings 15,000 per day yet my colleagues who were Ugandans and riding motorcycles were giving Uganda Shillings 10,000 per day to the motorcycle owners" (Focus Group 2).

The integration in the labor market in Uganda is thus quite challenging for the refugees in protracted refugee situations in Uganda. Furthermore, the refugees in Uganda have an opportunity to start businesses (Hakiza, 2014; Kreibaum, 2016). Unfortunately, few refugee entrepreneurs have successful businesses (Kreibaum, 2016). Starting up a business or self-employment requires capital which many of the refugee youths do not have. They do not have access to credit that can enable them to establish sizeable businesses. During the focus group discussion with urban refugees, Nico explained that:

"There is no government program to support urban refugees; when you try to start up a business, they tax you and you need a license to operate and failure to get a license leads to closure but even before starting the capital needed is high and we cannot access loans for business….". (Focus Group 2).

Related to this, in the discussion with the leaders, the youth leader explained that the youths who have been in Uganda for a long time have business potential and that some were operating businesses in the market area located in the settlement. However, he decried the lack of business capital for startup and business expansion. He noted that many youths had fallen prey to con men who go to the settlements or operate from Arua city as moneylenders, yet they have ill intentions.

The refugees therefore must endure working in precarious conditions in case they find a job or start up a business which makes the process of integration into the labor market in Uganda challenging for them.

Higher education and vocational training

The challenge of accessing higher education or Vocational Education and Training (VET) is one of the challenges that emerge due to prolonged stay as refugees. The challenge of attaining post-secondary school education for the refugees in protracted situations is an issue both the old and refugee youth worry about. The secretary for education stressed that:

 ".... the challenge is what to do when these children finish primary and secondary school? This is a challenge, and it disturbs us the leaders a lot, is our university a primary school? Our children pass some even better than the nationals. They pass in first and second division which are good grades but unfortunately they do not continue studying". (Focus Group 1).

This was similar to the chairperson's explanation who noted that:

 " For us, when our children complete primary education, some Non-Government Organizations come in to assist through informal education or some kind of vocational education which is good but if someone is capable it would be better to push him/her further the education ladder because children of refugees get the same grades as the nationals do, some nationals from the host communities attend the same schools with refugee children but the education ambitions of most refugee children are cut short". (Focus Group 1).

In the discussion with urban refugees, they emphasized the need for vocational education and access to higher education, especially at the university level. This was evident in their responses:

Mike: Vocational education is good, and it would be of help to get something we can do in Uganda but accessing official vocational education and training is hard; when I finished the driving course, I could not get a driving license because I am a refugee, I needed to have a South Sudan national identity card and the Ugandan national identity card to be given the certificate. (Focus group 2).

Bosco: I have been lucky to study from primary to university here in Uganda but many of my colleagues did not go to university after secondary school level. I wish there were programs to assist refugees who have been in Uganda for more than 10 years to access university education (Focus group 2).

The provision of higher education has been ignored to address problems that refugees face and yet access and attainment of education promotes the rebuilding of individual refugees' lives (Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Dryden-Peterson, 2017). Although the refugee enrollment rate in primary and secondary education is below the global enrollment rate, from the discussions with the refugee leaders and urban refugees; the need for higher education and vocational education has become an urgent need for refugees in protracted refugee situations in Uganda. To be competitive in the labor market the refugees require education beyond secondary school level.

Relationship with host communities

The relationship with the host communities is unpredictable for refugees in the rural settlement areas while for those in urban areas like Arua city, integration and acceptance in the urban areas become a challenge. Integration and acceptance in the community are not easy for the refugees even after several years of staying in the community. In the discussion with the leaders, the chairperson pointed out that:

 "Our brothers the Ugandans welcomed us but since the situation in South Sudan is not improving and we cannot predict whether their hospitality will continue if we are to stay here longer; we are happy that they have been good to us and hope their patience is not pushed to the limits by our stay". (Focus Group 1).

In the Focus group of urban refugees, there was unanimous agreement that the integration into Arua city was quite hard for the urban refugees and that the relationship with the Ugandan urban neighbors was not good. Juma clearly explained that:

"In the communities, some neighbors are not good to us. We the foreigners here sometimes wash our clothes and water pours around the compound, it becomes an issue, and they generalize all of us as being problematic and dirty. They can call South Sudanese living in the community to address an issue of a single South Sudanese instead of talking to one person. They call the Local Council (LC1) and other leaders just to correct the issue of one person; this shows we are not one and it pains me. Let us love one another because even Ugandans are not sure whether they are going to remain here in Uganda. If you get me in my country, I will receive you as you received me in your country. I wish they would hear our request". (Focus group 2)

Although Uganda has been praised for refugees' hospitality and progressive policies for refugees (Davis, 2019; Easton-Calabria, 2016; Rohwerder, 2016), the

prolonged conflicts in neighboring countries like South Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo are a test to this hospitality, the host communities' patience to accommodate the refugees and have a good relationship with refugees for a long period is unpredictable.

Urban migration

In Uganda, the refugee settlement areas are in rural areas which are less attractive to the youths. Rural-urban migration of youths in developing countries due to exposure to urban lifestyle, search for employment, education, and globalization is a growing phenomenon (De Haas, 2010). In developing countries, it is common for youths to migrate especially to urban areas as part of their transition into adulthood (Crivello, 2011; Durston, 1996; Herrera and Sahn, 2013; Juárez et al., 2013). In the focus group discussion with urban refugees, they explained that refugee youths are attracted to live in the city and are not interested in living in the settlement areas in the villages. Integration in the urban environment comes along with challenges like housing, the problem of language barrier, and unemployment. This necessitates a call for a policy focus on urban refugees in the urban areas of Uganda. Previous studies of urban refugees in Kampala city in Uganda showed that urban refugees encounter challenges in adapting to urban livelihood (Dryden-Peterson, 2006; Muhwezi and Sam, 2004; Omata, 2012). In Uganda, most of the refugees are attracted to urban areas like Kampala city, Arua City, and other urban areas, especially the youth. These form the urban refugees who prefer settling in urban areas. This migration or preference for urban areas is partly because refugees in Uganda can search for work, are free to move, and access social services (Omata, 2012; World Bank Group, 2016). Although the migration of the youth is partly in search of opportunities, it presents the youths challenges which require effort from the urban authorities and other actors to consider.

Youth crimes

Crime rates especially youth crimes are a growing challenge; this was noted by the leaders in the discussion. The vice-chairperson stressed that:

"Every time we sit as elders and leaders to solve problems of the youth and the police also gets tired of us, they commit offenses here in this small town of ours and even in Arua City. We keep cautioning them to be careful and disciplined". (Focus Group 1).

This growing concern of youth crimes is partly due to unemployment and being out of school at the age at which they should have been in school. The village leaders pointed out that the youth population is growing and many of them are idle, yet it is hard to keep the youths when they are unproductive. This has resulted in teenage pregnancies, defilement cases, and other petty crimes in the settlement area and outside the settlement area.

A study in Nakivale settlement area in Uganda showed that there is Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the area either through sexual exploitation or rape and access to justice for young women was hard (Larsson, 2019). Similarly, a study in South Sudanese settlement areas pointed to the fact that while some crimes of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence had been committed in South Sudan or en route to Uganda, others were committed within Uganda. The report further noted limited-service response to the problem (Liebling et al., 2020).

Congestion in the settlement areas

There is population growth in the settlement areas. In Rhino settlement area, it was evident that the refugees had given birth to several children and teenage pregnancies among the youth were rising. Africa is experiencing high fertility rates especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bongaarts and Casterline, 2013; Caldwell and Caldwell, 1990; National Research Council, 1993). High fertility rates can be attributed to cultures that encourage producing many children (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987). As already discussed, refugee children experience hardships in attaining primary and secondary education while post-secondary education is out of reach for many of them which increases the likelihood of girls giving birth early. Empirical research shows that education of girls can reduce fertility rates and teenage pregnancies as it prolongs girls' stay in school (Ainsworth et al., 1996; Grant and Hallman, 2008; Kravdal, 2002; Martin, 1995; Panday et al., 2015). Girls in school have low chances of conceiving at an early age than those outside school, with the limited post-secondary education opportunities for refugee children, the youths inevitably start giving birth at an early age which translates into population increase in the refugee settlement areas.

Environmental stress

The environment in the settlement areas is overstrained due to prolonged stay; increasing population and urbanization render effort to conserve the environment futile. The secretary of environment explained how their

prolonged stay has caused environmental stress:

".… the population in this area has grown unexpectedly, this is one of the factors that has threatened the environment. The population growth has brought commercial activities and agricultural activities to this settlement area. We have planted 10,000 trees as part of our effort to encourage people to conserve the environment. However, in planting trees we destroy many trees. If I planted one tree, I destroy more than 1 tree to make a protective fence for the tree I have planted". (Focus Group 1).

During the data collection, we moved around Rhino settlement area (including other clusters where refugees were settled). It was visible that the settlement area had very few trees. The refugees in Uganda are given small plots of land to farm but due to repetitive farming on the small plots, they are vulnerable to soil erosion as the vegetation is cleared for the farmlands and the fact that some refugees own livestock on these small pieces of land. Previous studies on the environment and refugees point to the fact that; areas where settlements are established are at risk of desertification as there is a lot of destruction of trees in these areas and soil pollution (Kwesiga, 2018; Oucho, 2007; Young, 1985). Prolonged stay overstains the environment in the settlement areas and makes the small plots of land given to refugees lose soil fertility and become less productive which cannot support regular food production. This leads to food insecurity and the "Self-Reliance Strategy" is compromised due to environmental stress.

Lack of elderly support program

According to Nabuguzi (1993), African countries often viewed the refugee crisis as a short-term phenomenon. However, Uganda's experience as a refugee host country shows that the refugee crisis can take several years. The South Sudanese refugees have stayed in Uganda for several years and this has given rise to the challenge of elderly care for aging refugees. Some refugees are now aging and have children too; they are caught up in the need for health care for themselves and their children. In the Focus Group Discussion, the secretary for women's affairs stated that:

 "Some of us are aging and we have produced children here, there are many babies and children in this cluster, people of my age sometimes do not go to the hospital because they are concerned about the babies, it is like a sacrifice for the young generation to be able to access health services". (Focus Group 1).

The prolonged stay of refugees gives rise to the problem of elderly persons who need health care and elderly support programs. In Uganda, the Senior Citizens Grant (SCG) provides old-age persons with a monthly income. However, aged refugees have no such entitlement which would enable them to afford some basic needs for their survival. The burden of elderly care and support is carried by other relatives, especially the youths. Juma a participant in the focus group of urban refugees explained his ordeal of taking care of his aged parents:

"I and my parents have been in Uganda for over 10 years, now that they are old and somehow weak; I have to look for basic needs like soap, salt, sugar, and others to meet the needs of the home. I must at least look for Uganda Shilling 2,000 or 3,000 each day. Therefore, I can do any job that I get in town" (Focus group 2).

According to the UNHCR, elderly populations (60 years and above) constitute two to four percent of urban refugees in Africa (Amara and Aljunid, 2014). The elderly, the disabled, orphans, and unaccompanied minors are vulnerable groups of refugees (Blavo, 2019). The elderly as vulnerable refugees should be a target group by policymakers and the government. In our interaction with both the leaders of refugees and the urban refugees, the problem of care and support for the elderly refugees is a major challenge for refugees in protracted refugee situations in Uganda as already explained above.

Urbanization within the settlement areas

There was an element of urbanization in the settlement area in which there is a central business area with shops and a central market. This has come with new challenges like waste management in the central business area. During the field study, we toured around the settlement area and noticed that Ofua 3 had several shops and a central market with several traders inside the market. In the discussion, the environment secretary explained that:

 "This area is developing into a town, but we cannot escape the challenges of urbanization; our market and waste need serious remedies. Because of the waste management in the market area an outbreak of diseases like cholera is inevitable in the future" (Focus Group 1).

Entrepreneurship is behind the development of shops and a central trading area in the settlement. Self-employed refugees are more resilient and demonstrate success (Kreibaum, 2016; Rohwerder, 2016). Both refugees and nationals are attracted to establish business enterprises in the rural settlement areas which have led to the development of a central market and

shops within the settlements. These are elements of urbanization within the settlement areas. While it is an opportunity for entrepreneurial refugees to start up small businesses for survival in the settlement areas, it comes along with challenges like waste management in the area and petty crimes in the settlements.

DISCUSSION

Uganda's refugee policies are friendly policies that facilitate self-reliance and integration of the refugees. Betts et al. (2019) applauded Uganda's refugee policies and they concluded that "policymakers and practitioners should reward countries like Uganda that provide refugees with the right to work and freedom of movement". We agree that Uganda's policies are progressive policies that allow refugees to integrate into Uganda. However, before adopting these refugee-friendly policies, Uganda had practiced a restrictive approach towards refugees that involved encampment, no freedom of movement, and forced repatriation (Kaiser, 2006; Kaiser, 2010). Such restrictive policies do not allow the integration of refugees in the host countries. According to Browne (2006) "the longer refugees have been away from their homes, the less likely they are to repatriate" while Kaiser's (2006) findings showed that the longer refugees stay, the more challenges they are likely to face as exile becomes protracted. Therefore, granting the refugees the freedom of movement, access to land, the right to work, and the freedom to establish businesses was important for the integration of refugees and for the promotion of self-reliance of protracted refugees who are in Uganda.

However, since protracted stay of refugees comes with other challenges or emerging challenges. Our study found that despite the set of progressive policies put in place by the government of Uganda with support from UNHCR and other International Non-Government Organizations; the refugees in protracted refugee situations are facing several challenges that hinder their integration and self-reliance. The refugees are struggling with integration in the Ugandan labor market even though they have got the right to work; they must navigate the labor market to acquire even the lowest-paid jobs and at the same time fight to be accepted by the Ugandan employers. In working, they work in precarious conditions that manifest in the form of low pay, discrimination at work, and other poor working conditions.

Refugees' integration into the labour market is affected by several challenges such as the lack of social networks, discrimination, the problem of language barrier and also the lack or low level of formal education (van Dijk, 2021). A dual program (education and work) such as the one implemented in the Netherlands facilitates the integration of refugees in the labor market. In Uganda, 72 percent of the refugees are unemployed (Vemuru et al., 2016; World Bank, 2019), formal education can be part of the panacea to refugee unemployment. However, even refugee youths with formal education complain of the discrimination and favoritism that exists in the labor market which makes it hard for them to get formal employment. The refugee youths have preference for Vocational Education and Training because it offers easier labor market entry both as paid workers or as self-employed workers. Skills acquired through vocational education and training like computer training, driving skills, plumbing, electrical installation, motor vehicles mechanics, driving skills, carpentry etc., can easily enable refugee youths to work as self-employed workers or own account workers in both the urban and rural areas.

Refugees are attracted to self-employment both in the rural settlements and in the urban areas (Idris, 2020; Schiltz and van der Aa, 2020). Some refugees in Uganda possess entrepreneurship skills, experience and are known for operating businesses in Uganda (Betts et al., 2019; Ebere and Mwesigwa, 2021). It is important to stimulate self-employment through soft loans for refugees and entrepreneurship education and trainings for both urban and rural refugees.

Integration into the labor market is still a challenge for refugees in several countries including European countries (Loiacono and Vargas, 2019; van Dijk, 2021). For the youths, their integration in the labor market and stay in school are important in curbing youth crimes and idleness. Integration in the communities for both urban refugees and refugees in rural settlements is a long-term process. Those in rural settlements are uncertain of the relationship with the host communities while urban refugees feel they are not integrating into the urban areas where they face segregation from the Ugandan neighbors.

In the rural settlements the refugees do not have to worry about forced repatriation which has made them live relatively settled lives; they marry and give birth to children in the settlements which has caused an increase in the population in the settlements, this population is straining the environment and has caused overcrowding in the settlements. Furthermore, in the settlement areas, the refugees can access primary and secondary education which contributes towards solving the problem of high illiteracy rates among the refugees. However, the refugees in protracted situations in Uganda lag in access to vocational education and higher education (tertiary institutions/ institutions of higher learning). Without higher education qualifications, the refugees are less competitive in the labor market even though they have the right to work.

Although majority of refugees in Uganda live in the rural settlement areas, there are limited employment opportunities for the refugees in rural areas (Loiacono

and Vargas, 2019).

With the rapid urbanization in Uganda, the youths both natives and refugees have high preference for urban areas (Tulibaleka et al., 2021). The youths are less willing to settle in the rural settlements; they prefer to settle in urban areas where they look for jobs and try out establishing small businesses for survival. This comes with risks such as committing crimes in the urban areas or joining criminal groups. According to the World Bank, refugees in Uganda are concentrated in 13 districts out of the 127 districts with the West Nile region hosting over 750,000 refugees (World Bank, 2019). The West Nile region has the biggest rural settlement areas in which refugees live but have limited economic or employment opportunities. A focus on enabling the refugees to settle and integrate in urban areas where they have economic opportunities is necessary to contribute towards the refugee self-reliance strategy.

The elderly persons on the other hand mostly settle in the rural settlements but as refugees under protracted exile; the problems associated with old age are a rising concern. The old refugees in protracted exile do not have any support like the Ugandans who are supported through the elderly persons' grants scheme in which they receive Uganda shillings 25,000 per month. The burden of caring for old persons is therefore the responsibility of the young refugees some of whom do not have any jobs they are doing.

Within the settlement areas, there is an aspect of urbanization where refugees have stayed for a long period. The refugees and the natives in the host communities have established shops, markets, or central business trading areas. This has come along with challenges of urbanization such as poor waste disposal, environmental pollution, and congestion. These challenges need to be addressed quickly to avoid or reduce the likelihood of an outbreak of diseases such as cholera that can be detrimental to the health of refugees and host communities.

Conclusion

Refugee challenges grow from the immediate challenges that the refugees are confronted with in their initial settlement in host communities; upon being settled in a settlement or upon entering the host country, refugees aspire to live like the natives and build their dreams as the nationals do. The refugees in protracted refugee situations in Uganda need higher education (university education) and vocational education, the youths aspire to be productive and prefer to move from the rural settlement areas to urban areas to establish businesses or search for employment opportunities which comes along with challenges like urban unemployment, urban

integration challenges and the risk of committing crimes. The environment is overstrained due to prolonged stay; trees are cut down for cooking purposes and construction of shelters, population growth is inevitable which is evidenced by the children born in the settlement areas and as urbanization starts taking place in the rural settlement areas, problems such as poor waste management become a bigger threat which increases the risk of diseases like cholera.

We, therefore, recommend that actors both state and non-state like International Non-Government Organizations must consider a periodical assessment of challenges that refugees face due to prolonged stay as refugees. Uganda is a developing country and cannot adequately tackle the refugee crisis in the country, the international community or international organizations need to assist the government of Uganda in handling the emerging challenges of refugees in protracted refugee situations. The immediate challenges (such as lack of food, shelter, education for the children, and psychosocial support) that refugees face upon arrival have been the main focus of the actors in handling the refugee crisis in Uganda. However, this paper opens a debate on the need to focus on challenges that refugees in protracted refugee situations are facing despite the refugee-friendly policies that were implemented by the government of Uganda. In addressing the current challenges of refugees in protracted refugee situations in Uganda, UNHCR and the government of Uganda need to design additional policies that can enable refugees to integrate in Uganda for example including the aged refugees on the national scheme that supports old persons in Uganda, allocation of government scholarships for refugees to attain university education and vocational education, access to funds for business startup, etc.

We do not claim to exhaustively present the challenges the refugees in protracted situations face but this paper can be a basis for thinking about further research, policy actions, and programs to tackle the challenges that refugees face due to prolonged stay as refugees in a developing country like Uganda. Focusing on the emerging challenges that refugees in protracted refugee situations in Uganda are facing is inevitable for Uganda and the UNHCR to achieve the "Self-Reliance Strategy" and the integration of refugees.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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