The Absence of Durable Solutions, the Presence of Local Solutions in Protracted Refugee Situations. The Case Study of Uganda's Approach to Hosting Refugees[1]

Samuel Opono[2], Frank Ahimbisibwe[3] and Specioza Twinamasiko[4]

Abstract:

The numbers of refugees have been increasing annually, engendering protracted refugee situations in the developing countries hosting refugees, yet with very minimal implementation of durable solutions. This intrigues the question of whether the approach of local solutions that empower protracted refugees to become resilient and self-reliant, can become a viable option to durable solutions especially in poor African countries such as Uganda? We use secondary literature and primary data collected from South Sudanese refugees in Uganda to answer this question. We argue that in the absence of granting or minimally granting refugees any of the three conventional durable solutions of repatriation, local integration and resettlement; the approach of local solutions can become an important but temporary (although long term) alternative for refugees to live relatively comfortable lives. However, this approach has to be holistically embraced and supported by various stakeholders, including the national government, local governments, international community, donors, and various nongovernmental organizations, to overcome the accompanying challenges and for the approach to succeed in empowering refugees to become resilient and self-reliant for a long time in their first asylum country and live a life outside camps or designated settlements, as they wait for any of the conventional durable solutions.

---

[2] Research Assistant, Department of Planning and Governance, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Mbarara, Uganda; ORCID: 0000-0001-7352-1331; oponosamuel@gmail.com.
[3] Senior Lecturer, Department of Planning and Governance, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Mbarara, Uganda; ORCID: 0000-0002-1371-9888; fahimbisibwe@must.ac.ug.
[4] Lecturer, Department of Community Engagement and Service Learning, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies (FIS), Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Mbarara, Uganda; ORCID: 0000-0001-5431-7941; specioza@must.ac.ug.

Introduction

The numbers of refugees and other people forcibly displaced have been escalating year on year. By the end of 2018, the number of refugees was at 25.9 million (UNHCR, 2019); by the end of 2020, the number of refugees was 26.4 million (UNHCR, 2021); by the end of 2021, the number of people forcibly displaced was 89.3 million with 27.1 million refugees (UNHCR, 2022); by the end of 2022, the number was at 108.4 million with 35.3 million refugees (UNHCR, 2023); and by the end of 2023, the number was at 117.3 million with 37.6 million refugees (UNHCR, 2024). In Uganda, the case study for this article and the highest refugee hosting country in Africa with the most generous refugee policies in the world, the number of refugees hosted by the country stands at over 1.6 million (OPM & UNHCR, 2024).

Besides the yearly increase in the refugee numbers worldwide, many of them have been in protracted situations. At the closure of 2021, 2022 and 2023, 15.9, 23.3 and 24.9 (66%) million refugees and other people who needed international protection respectively, were in protracted situations. "There were 58 protracted situations in 37 host countries", by the end of 2023 (UNHCR, 2022:20; UNHCR, 2023:22; UNHCR, 2024:21). These protracted refugees are in a state of limbo with uncertain future: whether they will end up in repatriation, local integration, or resettlement in the second asylum country (Agblorti and Grant, 2019). Refugees in protracted situations are afraid of remitting back to their origin country because of insecurity (Crisp, 2003); yet only 1% succeeds in being resettled, and numerous of them are unable to permanently live in their first country of asylum because the host state does not want them to remain on its territory indefinitely (Karooma, 2017; Long, 2011).

To delve more deeply, resettlement normally targets only the most vulnerable refugees (UNHCR, nd.), applying an awfully selective process (Garnier et al., 2018). In 2022, out of the 116,500 refugees that UNHCR submitted to the resettlement countries for consideration, 114,300 refugees got resettled, twice the number of the foregoing year (57,500), as depicted in the government statistics. This figure accounts for less than 1% compared to 35.3 million refugees in need of durable solutions around the world (UNHCR, 2023). This is concurrent with the argument that resettlements in the third countries in the global north account merely as a token of durable solution, considering global displacement as a whole (Schneider, 2021). In fact, "given the narrow quotas, the chances of being resettled is slim, and indeed many people in refugee camps think of resettlement as akin to winning the lottery" (Jacobsen, 2005:55). Only 1% of refugees gets resettled (Long, 2011) or less as the above 2022 figures indicate.

Similarly, voluntary repatriation is considered the best durable solution for refugees. In an ideal situation, this is where refugees on a voluntary basis, are officially sent back to their home country at the end of the conflict, to participate in the reconstruction process and rebuilding of their country (Ahimbisibwe, 2019, p.575). However, just like resettlement to the third country, the number of repatriated refugees has been low. Out of the 35.3 million refugees generated by the end of 2022, only 339,300 (0.96%)

refugees officially returned to their home countries (UNHCR, 2023:2). The total number of resettled refugees (114,300 or 0.32%) in 2022 plus the number of returnees (339,300 or 0.96%) comes to 453,630 (1.28%), which means over 98% of refugees are still living in and/or trapped in protracted situations in the first country of asylum. To what extent has the remaining 98% in the first asylum country been locally integrated?

With respect to local integration in 2022, only 50,800 were naturalized (UNHCR, 2023) out of the remaining over 34 million refugees without any form of durable solution. Earlier in 2017, 73,400 refugees in 28 countries were locally integrated, which was a rise of 217 percent from the 2016 figure, primarily due to Turkey's decision to locally integrate 50,000 Syrian refugees. Within the same period however, very little of the developing world, which contemporarily hosts almost all protracted refugees, witnessed reasonable numbers of refugees who were locally integrated: 115,200 refugees went back to their home countries and 102,800 had the opportunity to be resettled in a third country (Agblorti and Grant, 2019:196). This shows that majority of refugees remain protracted in the developing countries that host 75% of refugees (UNHCR, 2024:2), especially in poor countries of Africa and particularly Sub-Saharan Africa that hosted 25.3 million refugees in 2022 (UNHCR, 2023:11), where Uganda is the highest refugee hosting country with 1.6 million refugees by the end of 2023 (OPM and UNHCR, 2024) and many have lived in the country for decades; many refugees have lived in the country for over two decades and some for over 4 decades. Their numbers are in thousands and predominantly from Sudan, DRC and Rwanda. Some have lived entirely in Uganda, raised families in Uganda, and for them Uganda is their home. However, up to this moment, they have not yet been naturalized, neither have they been resettled. Refugee status has become unending limbo for them – "they are unable or unwilling to return to their home countries because of the persecution suffered there, but not permitted to integrate in their adopted home" (Walker, nd:1). Despite the court ruling in 2015 that refugees were eligible to naturalize, Ugandan government has not positively acted on this ruling (Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative, 2016; IRRI, 2016); yet the number of refugees keeps growing and Uganda now hosts over 1.6 million refugees (OPM and UNHCR, 2022). The question that begs an answer is, in the absence of, or very limited availability of the three conventional durable solutions (repatriation, resettlement and local integration) to refugees; can "local solutions" – the approach that empowers the protracted refugees to become resilient and self-reliant in the first country of asylum - become a viable option to durable solutions especially in poor African countries such as Uganda? This article attempts to answer this question, learning from Uganda's approach of hosting refugees that has been globally lauded as a model.

Materials and Methods

To examine the above question, we use secondary scholarly and grey literature to answer the question posed. We assess the success and challenges of local solutions of the Ugandan nature, using the available reports supplemented by the primary views of South Sudanese refugees, who make up over 63% of refugees in Uganda (UNHCR, 2022:18). The primary data we used was collected from Pagirinya Refugee Settlement in Adjumani district in Uganda, to understand the views of South Sudanese protracted refugees concerning their situation in Uganda under local solutions. We selected both male and female ordinary adult refugees, elderly refugees and refugee leaders. Both ordinary and refugee leaders gave their perspectives on how they felt about their conditions in Uganda under local solutions, and whether they wanted to continue living in Uganda in such conditions or return to their country, since resettlement in third countries is only for a very few numbers of refugees. We also conducted individual interviews with key informants, including Refugee Welfare Council II, Assistant Settlement Commandant, and NGO staffs operating in the settlement. These range of respondents (124 in total) helped us to delve into the respondents' views and experiences of living under local solutions. Data collection reached saturation level (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Hennink et al., 2011:8). The first phase of fieldwork started on 15th September to 5th October 2020, and the second phase from 4th April – 25th April 2022.

Contextualizing Protracted Refugee Situations in Uganda

The profoundness of protracted refugee situations and the conditions of refugees living in such situations (UNHCR, 2004) have intrigued debates on refugee durable solutions (Forced Migration Review 2009:30-31; Long, 2011; Rohwerder, 2015; Agblorti and Grant, 2019, p.196). A protracted refugee situation is explained by the UNHCR's Standing Committee as:

> "…one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile. A refugee in this situation is often unable to break free from enforced reliance on external assistance... UNHCR uses the 'crude measure of refugee populations of 25,000 persons or more who have been in exile for five or more years in developing countries." (UNHCR, 2004a).

In regards to the above definition, it appears as if there is no end of protracted refugee situations as long as the push factors in the country of origin persist and refugees are not willingly repatriated or refugees refuse to repatriate, and as long as there are very limited opportunities for resettlement in the third countries and refugees remain in the first

asylum country for unforeseeable future due to the absence of opportunities for local integration.

By the end of 2022 and 2023, 23.3 and 24.9 million refugees and other people who require international protection respectively, were living in protracted situations scattered across 37 host countries (UNHCR, 2023:22; UNHCR, 2022:20). These protracted refugees are in a state of limbo and are uncertain of their future: whether they will be repatriated, locally integrated or resettled in the third country (Agblorti and Grant, 2019). Refugees in protracted situations fear going back to their homeland because it is not safe for them to do so (Crisp, 2003). Yet, many are unable to permanently live in their first country of asylum because the host state does not want them to remain on its territory indefinitely, and resettlement to the second country of asylum is possible only to 1% of the refugees worldwide (Karooma, 2017; Long, 2011).

Protracted refugee situations come with accompanying challenges to hosting countries accommodating permanent refugees with unforeseeable panacea to their problem. In a circumstance of minimal international support, host countries find themselves in the dilemma to respond to the necessities of refugees. As such, many of their responses have been restrictive in nature: constraining refugee rights, encamping them, limiting their movement and restricting their employability (UNHCR, 2006:114-115; Milner, 2009). Yet, such restrictive approach amounts to states' self-abrogation from their international obligations (Milner, 2009; UNHCR, 2006).

Uganda is the highest refugee hosting country on the African continent and features among the top refugee hosting countries worldwide, hosting an estimated over 1.6 refugees (UNHCR, 2022; OPM and UNHCR, 2024), mainly from South Sudan (63%) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (29%) (UNHCR, 2022:18). It has been globally applauded as liberal and exemplary with progressive refugee policies and laws such as the 2006 Refugees Act (which grants refugees right to work, freedom of movement, right to start businesses and access to social services such as education and health on the same footings as Ugandan nationals), which are in consonance with the country's national, regional and international obligations (Ahimbisibwe, 2019 and Government of Uganda (GoU), 2006). Most refugees in Uganda flee from the adjacent countries and the broader region, among which are South Sudan, DRC, Burundi, Somalia, Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, and so on (Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and UNHCR, 2018).

The unending war in South Sudan has heightened the number of refugees in protracted situations in Uganda. The number of South Sudanese refugees reached 2.4 million by the closure of 2021, virtually "hosted by four neighbouring countries: Uganda (958,900), Sudan (803,600), Ethiopia (386,800) and Kenya (135,300). Out of the near 1 million South Sudanese displaced in Uganda since the war started more than a decade ago, only 180,400 returned to their country by 2021 and, in 2022, "the largest groups of returnees (in the world) with 151,300 returning in 2022 primarily from Uganda (75,500)". "Returns to South Sudan are difficult to verify, however, as they tend to be

self-organized, and access is often constrained in areas of returns" (UNHCR, 2022:36 and UNHCR, 2023:38). In any case, it leaves many of them protracted in Uganda.

As reported by the World Bank (2016:71), "Uganda is faced with a large number of refugees caught in protracted situations, unable to return to their countries of origin, sometimes for decades". The report further contends that "most of the refugees in Uganda are in a situation of protracted displacement with limited prospects for a durable solution" (World Bank, 2016:6). The refugees engulfed in a protracted situation in Uganda are mainly from South Sudan, Congolese origin and Somalia. Much as refugees from other countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Eritrea and Ethiopia have lived in Uganda more than five years, their numbers fall below the threshold of 25,000, the standard UNHCR figure for designating refugees in protracted situations (Ahimbisibwe, 2019:65).

To compound the problem of protracted refugees in Uganda, there are no signs of the end of the armed conflict in South Sudan that began on 15th December 2013. Fighting rages on in some areas of South Sudan despite the negotiated peace process under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The 2015 Compromise peace agreement appended on by the South Sudan People's Movement (SPLM/A) and SPLM in Opposition led by the former Vice President Riek Machar has been abrogated a number of times (Ahimbisibwe, 2019:65; Opono, 2021). This shows that refugee movements and their protracted situations with accompanying challenges in the neighbouring countries such as Uganda will remain or even worsen if the conflicts continue without any meaningful peace processes, which affect the hope for any voluntary repatriation as a preferred durable solution, yet Ugandan government has not yet considered naturalization of refugees and resettlement of refugees to the third countries in the global north is merely a token and an obstacle to international solidarity and responsibility sharing; only a handful of the sum total of refugees globally find a spot to get into the minority world countries and, in the process incur a high financial, physical and psychological costs (Hovil and Maple, 2022:252). So, what are 'local solutions' approach and how has it been applied in Uganda, making it praiseworthy in hosting refugees, even if the three durable solutions are barely implemented to help in permanently addressing the challenges of protracted refugees in the country?

The Concept of Local solutions

When states in the global south resisted the international pressure to uphold national policies that support the durable solution based on local integration, an alternative but temporary model of hosting refugees emerged, backed at an international level in the past decades; it's been backed to strike a compromise between the majority states in the global south and minority states in the global north (Landau, 2019; Brankamp, 2021). This model espouses a development style settlement, introducing the option of "local solutions" - a policy geared towards concepts such as "self-reliance" and "resilience". These all help to confine the mobility of refugees within the African continent (Hovil

and Maple, 2022:256) and to host and protect refugees in their first countries of asylum and accord them 'fair access to public services and enjoy peaceful and productive relations with the host population' (Crisp, 2023:14). Local solutions for refugees in their first asylum states are considered as 'transitional solution arrangements aiming to assist and equip refugees on their path towards a durable solution, notably local integration' (UNHCR & ICVA, 2021:6). Local solutions aid in facilitating 'the economic, social and cultural inclusion of refugees', fostering 'the peaceful and productive inclusion of refugees and the well-being of local communities', while addressing 'issues such as documentation and residence permits' (ibid).

This conceptualized notion of development style settlements has been set into motion (Jansen and Bruijne, 2020) and has already been adopted in some countries in the global south. For instance, settlements in Uganda and Kenya where the governments of theses host countries have demonstrated the willingness to allow activities inside the settlements that surpass humanitarian aid (exemplified by activities in Nakivale and Kalobeyei settlements in Uganda and Kenya) have been sites of much focus by academics and policy researchers and analysts (Omata and Kaplan, 2013). These settlements are often illustrated in reports and publications as different entities from the known conventional enclosed and restricted refugee camps like the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya (Omata and Kaplan, 2013). There are obvious important benefits in advocating for a more planned and development style settlements, which also involve heightening interaction and engagement with local communities and recognition that refugees will most probably stay in the settlements for relatively long time (Hovil, 2016). However, despite reasonable freedom and acknowledgement of the above facts, restrictions on refugee mobility are not suspended, and political opportunities and interaction with state structures and the broader community remain restricted (Hovil and Maple, 2022:257). Uganda has, however, taken this self-style development approach further in its 2006 Refugee Act and 2010 Refugee Regulations that grant refugees freedom to move, right to work, right to start businesses and access to social services just like Ugandan nationals.

It is a known fact that these local solutions of refugee resilience and sustainable livelihood are funded partially or fully by the international donors or as part of wider policies of containing refugees within the global south, and bar them from further mobility into the north (Chimni, 2002). Indeed, whereas Uganda refugee policies is outstanding and a transformative model in these local spaces, it is still worth noting that most of its decisions have been influenced and adopted partly as a wider strategy of engagement with the international community that has interest in supporting and maintaining Uganda's reputation and ensure that its government accesses its desired foreign development and humanitarian assistance (Hovil, 2018). Because of that, its "transformative" policies have effectually consolidated the settlement model approach and beefed the notion that repatriation is the sole feasible durable solution; while local integration has been continuously obstructed, in spite of the great attention on

augmenting de facto integration (local solution) of refugee services into the national system.

Furthermore, in relation to this novel advocacy for local solutions, is the growing use of policy jargons like self-reliance and resilience, and the enactment of policies based on these concepts, which has emerged as a comfortable replacement for local integration by international donors, UN agencies and host countries (Hovil and Maple, 2022:258). These policies pay attention on the agency of refugees to mold an environment in which they are able to survive such as in urban areas and, at least on policy documents, is an important pathway to a sort of local inclusion. It is a fact that international agencies like UNHCR are facing challenges that are political and financial in nature in attempt to execute refugee policy in urban environments. Therefore, it can be argued that these types of inclusionary and integration approaches are merely trying to get the best from very complicated political environments. "Yet, fundamentally they also neatly side-step issues relating to both genuine political inclusion of refugees, and state and international agencies' roles in providing international protection for refugees. For example, refugees living in many urban areas in Africa – especially countries that have encampment policies – are still offered little to no assistance by the state or UNHCR" (Hovil and Maple, 2022:258). Uganda seems to be an exception in this argument because of its open-door policies - 2006 Refugee Act and 2010 Refugee Regulations, and refugees living in urban areas seem to be faring well economically and are not interested in humanitarian aid (Omata and Kaplan, 2013; Opono and Ahimbisibwe, 2023).

The justification of these approaches of local solutions is hinged on the "resilience" of refugees, with both states and UNHCR basically embracing the policies of non-interference in urban areas. If refugees choose to do away with the aid channeled to them in the varied refugee camps in Africa and move to towns and cities, they are now on their own to self-integrate and provide for themselves (Hovil, 2016). In short, local solutions aspire to make refugees economically self-reliant and resilient, not dependent on humanitarian aid, de facto integrate in the host communities and away from the camps and settlements especially in urban areas and also in rural host communities such as in Uganda, even if they are not naturalized. Below is a practical application of local solutions based on Ugandan case, featuring comprehensive extracts of the successes of policies based on local solutions as a model of refugees hosting in the world.

In responding to the needs and aspirations of refugees in Uganda, Ugandan government uses an integrated system of management framework called the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which is the "multi-stakeholder and partnership approach to the refugee response … that promotes self-reliance for refugees and measures to ease the pressure on refugee-hosting districts" (UNHCR, 2021b:3; Ifat, 2020). A vital aspect of the CRRF in Uganda is integrating refugees in national planning and local development, as a way of reducing the pressure on refugee-hosting districts and to improve service delivery for both refugees and local communities as highlighted in these extracts below.

Comprehensive sectoral plans have been formulated which link the refugee response to government sector plans. The plans also enable Uganda to clearly highlight where the international community may usefully channel support for a comprehensive and people-centered response in its refugee-hosting districts. UNHCR has aligned its strategies with these comprehensive plans and supports the coordination structures for CRRF implementations, such as the Secretariat for the Education Response Plan (ERP), the Health Sector Integrated Refugee Response Plan, the Water and Environment Response Plan and the CRRF Secretariat in OPM, which provides services for the CRRF Steering Group (UNHC, 2021b:3).

Whereas refugees had already been included in the National Development Plan (NDP) II (2016 – 2020) through the Settlement Transformative Agenda (STA), NDP III, which entered into effect on 1 July 2020, explicitly calls for refugees to be integrated into national planning and statistics. Refugee hosting districts have included refugees in their planning for the next five years. UNHCR is working closely with the refugee-hosting districts to provide analysis on refugees in the settlements and support the planning processes for these District Development Plans (DDPs) (UNHCR 2021b:3).

These efforts offer opportunities to integrate longer-term resilience and development approaches within the refugee and host population assistance and create entry points for development partners to invest in the response. UNHCR continues to foster a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach and to strengthen its convening role aimed at mobilizing and coordinating support, particularly regarding economic and social inclusion. Close collaboration with development partners has allowed for the handover of activities, which were previously funded by UNHCR. Development partners have also extended services for water and environment, allowing UNHCR to play a more catalytic and coordination role (UNHCR 2021b:3).

In order to enhance protection, UNHCR works with the Government of Uganda to provide effective protection for refugees and asylum-seekers in Uganda. The ultimate goal of the interim Multiyear Multi Partner Protection and Solutions Strategy (MYMPSS) 2021 is that refugees are protected by the Government of Uganda, live in safety and dignity with host communities, and progressively attain lasting solutions by 2021 (UNHCR 2021b:3).

The Uganda refugee response Strategic Objective 3 highlights that "by 2021, the refugee response paradigm in Uganda has progressively shifted from care and maintenance to inclusion and self-reliance through the promotion of a conducive environment for livelihoods opportunities and provision of integrated basic social services including: health, education, water and sanitation, provided by national authorities in refugee-hosting districts (UNHCR 2021b:4).

Figure 1: Extracts explaining Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). Source: UNHCR, 2021.

As highlighted earlier, durable solutions to refugees are being minimally implemented around the world and refugees are living in the host countries for a very long time without realizing any durable solution, for instance living for more than 20 or 40 years

in Ugandan, yet without being locally integrated. Uganda has instead, with the help of various partners and the international community led by the UNHCR, adopted the multi-stakeholder approach in their CRRF which mirrors a system of local solutions that seek to make refugees resilient and self-reliant in the Ugandan hosting communities. The following successes by sectors have been registered in the empowerment of refugees in different sectors of the Uganda economy.

Comprehensive extracts of the success of local solutions in Uganda (UNHCR, 2021b)

In the education sector, in conjunction with the government and other stakeholders, *"UNHCR provides service delivery to refugees and supports strengthening of education system. Together with NGO partners, UNHCR provides education to 79 per cent (264,470) of refugee children enrolled in UNHCR-supported Primary Schools and 11 per cent (20,991) enrolled in Secondary Schools within the settlements. Compared to the previous academic year (2019), this is an increase of 10,028 pupils and 678 students in Primary and Secondary Schools respectively (UNHCR, 2021:4). Additionally, "Uganda has made progress in refugee education through the implementation of the Education Response Plan (ERP). This includes the improvement of the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in primary from 76 percent in 2019 to 79 percent in 2020, the training and salary payment of some 4,000 teachers in Primary and 500 in Secondary to enhance the quality of education while progressively meeting the national standard; strengthening the education system for refugee inclusive planning through the contextualization of ERP at District level. The refugee-hosting districts of Koboko, Lamwo and Yumbe in West Nile, Isingiro and Kamwenge in the Southwest finalized and approved ERP at district level (UNHCR, 2021b:5).* Refugees also have opportunities to progress to tertiary educational institutions.

In the health sector, *the Uganda refugee operation has a total of 2,221 Health Workers across all settlements, of which 41 are medical doctors. Consultation per clinician per day is at 46 against the standard of <50. Refugees access health services from 89 health facilities in the settlements, with District Hospitals, Regional Referral Hospitals and Mulago National Referral Hospital acting as referral points for the secondary and tertiary health care. Disease prevention activities are continuously carried out to minimize the number of outbreaks such as measles, watery diarrhea, and cholera in the operation (UNHCR, 2021b:5).*

A total of 17,579 patients are currently receiving HIV care and treatment in the facilities within the settlements, of which 37 per cent (6,589) are refugees. Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) services are provided to the refugees and host population, as a measure of preventing the spread of HIV from positive mothers to the babies (UNHCR, 2021b:5)".

Under maternal and child health care, maternal mortality rate is at 76 deaths per 100,000 live births. Under 5 mortality rate is at 0.2 deaths per 1,000 live births. Health facilities in the settlements of Rwamwanja and Kyangwali have been supported with theaters and theater equipment for Emergency obstetric care (UNHCR, 2021b:5).

According to the preliminary findings of the Food Security and Nutrition Assessments carried out by UNHCR and partners in 2020 in the refugee settlements and in Kampala, over 76 per cent of the health facilities have been accredited and coded into the national system with the remaining 24 percent in process of being accredited (UNHCR, 202b1:5).

UNHCR partners are strategically positioned to resume screening, and detection of acute malnutrition among new arrivals and linking them to care once the Government of Uganda opens the points of entry, transit and reception centers to admission of persons of concern (UNHCR, 2021b:6).

Water and Sanitation

UNHCR and partners continue to provide water, sanitation and hygiene services to refugee and host communities in close collaboration with partners, including government institutions. Generally, service provision is evolving from emergency to medium and long-term WASH infrastructure development. This includes improving performance of piped solar systems to decrease usage of generators and hence contributing to decreasing the carbon footprint. Significant progress has been made in engaging refugees to participate in service delivery, including contribution towards the costs of the service delivery, thus promoting ownership, sustainability of services and a more equal access to services compared to host communities (UNHCR, 2021b:6).

Food Security and Nutrition

UNHCR, through its partners and with support of District Local Governments (DLGs), UNICEF, and World Food Programme (WFP) continues to provide care to refugees and asylum seekers with acute malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies across all settlements. The curative interventions, mostly facility-based, are complemented with preventive actions aimed at promoting, protecting and supporting optimal feeding practices, improving dietary diversity and mitigating micronutrient deficiencies for all refugees for optimal growth and development. The interventions largely target the most vulnerable groups, including infants, children, Pregnant and Lactating Women (PLWs) and other Women of Reproductive Age (WRA), adolescents and the elderly. UNHCR currently prioritizes a nutrition-sensitive food system approach to scale-up the production and consumption of micronutrient-rich foods. This approach involves the adaptation of available small spaces for backyard gardening. Other actions include: community sensitization on feeding practices, cooking demonstrations, community demonstration gardens, counselling, and support to influence household behavior change on feeding practices and health seeking. WFP closely supports with nutrition commodities and community nutrition services. UNICEF closely supports with the commodities and medicines, and health systems strengthening (UNHCR, 2021b:5-6).

With support from UNHCR and Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), WFP continues to provide food assistance to over 1.4 million refugees in Uganda, delivered as in-kind and cash. Distribution of General Food Assistance is implemented using the New Food Assistance Collection Standard Operating Procedures and the Global Distribution Tool (GDT). The new food assistance collection standard operating procedures have been adapted to the COVID-19 context since March 2020 to include double distribution (2 monthly rations) and crowd management to minimize the spread of COVID-19 (UNHCR, 2021b:6).

On average, over 20 million liters of potable water are supplied daily to refugees living in the settlements, ensuring a per capita access of about 16.5 liters per person per day, through almost 100 water systems. To decrease the carbon footprint efforts are made to solarize water systems or connect them to the national grid, leading towards generators used only for 25 per cent of all the water supplied (UNHCR, 2021b:6).

Over 44,000 new latrines were constructed in 2020, mostly through a market-based approach and community involvement in dome-shaped slab production, leading to an increase of latrine coverage from around 60 per cent to over 70 percent (UNHCR, 2021b:6).

The implementation of the Water and Environment Refugee Response Plan (WERRP) is ongoing, including integrating of water delivery services in refugee settlements and host communities into national systems. All water systems in Rwamwanja refugee settlement and 34 per cent of the water systems in Kiryandongo have been taken over by National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC). In West Nile, the Northern Umbrella for Water and Sanitation is managing nine water systems, serving both refugees and host communities (UNHCR, 2021b:6).

Hygiene promotion is progressively mainstreamed with national Village Health Team (VHT) structures (UNHCR, 202b1:6).

Shelter, Settlements and Non Food Items

UNHCR provides a technical support role to OPM and DLGs, with physical planning and land optimization of refugee settlements. In 2019, the Refugee Settlement Land Taskforce (RSLT) surveyed and demarcated 7,744 shelter plots (12m x 20m each), out of the targeted 10,000 (UNHCR, 2021:6).

The UNHCR Non-Food Items (NFIs) Distribution Entitlement Scale has undergone an official revision, as the emergency shelter kit component was tested within the operation. In future, where market access is possible, some NFIs will be monetized (UNHCR, 2021bb:6).

The tracking of NFI distributions using proGres V4 has been rolled out for the regular replenishment of soap and hygiene kit distributions to existing refugees in settlements, where feasible. This has enabled a more accurate recording of items delivered to beneficiaries and inform the monthly reconciliation reports and warehouse inventory reports that UNHCR and partners are producing (UNHCR, 2021b:6-7)

In order to enable refugees to have a strong voice in the design of their own homes, the Shelter, Settlement and Non-Food Items Working Group (SSNFI WG) moved away from producing strict design drawings and bills of quantities as minimum standards for semi-permanent shelter. Instead, the WG is aiming for a 'self-help' model, in which shelter actors provide material/financial and technical support. This will help extremely vulnerable households to construct their own homes and facilitate qualified external labor to construct homes for non-abled vulnerable households (UNHCR, 2021:7).

Energy and Environment

The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD) with financial support from GIZ, hired a consultant in August 2020 to help guide the process of Developing the Sustainable Energy Response Plan (SERP) for refugees and host communities. The SERP aims at increasing access to energy for household, community, commercial, agricultural and industrial users, and other institutions working in areas where refugees are located, as envisaged in its vision: "Refugee and host communities attain universal access to affordable, reliable and clean energy for socio-economic transformation in an environmentally sustainable manner". Stakeholder consultations were also held at settlement and district level to identify the needs, challenges, and possible actions to enhance access to sustainable, clean, affordable and reliable energy in refugee-hosting areas. The draft consultation report is in place as well as the costed plan for the SERP of approximately US $572 million for over 4 years. The draft SERP document will be reviewed by stakeholders and the final document will be available in June 2021) (UNHCR, 2021b:7).

Infrastructure for Sustainable Development (i4SD) handed over a solar mini grid project to the OPM in Rubondo-Nakivale settlement in March 2021. The power supply system (fed by solar panels of 30 x 360 watts panels with a power bank of 24 battery array of 2x1,500Ah capacity and smart distribution meters) supplies power to administrative offices of partners, all wards of health center II, Youth Center, and OPM accommodation buildings. The solar system was installed and integrated with the existing 24 kVA diesel generator through a manual changeover switch, which serves as a backup during the rainy days (UNHCR, 2021b:7).

> *Energy audits were carried out for six sites including Palabek filed office, Pakelle sub office, Yumbe sub office, Imvepi, Yoro and Palorinya base camps, under the Energy Supply for Displacement Settings (ESDS) project supported by GIZ. The audit was aimed providing a detailed data on supply and consumption patterns for energy in these offices which will facilitate technical system design and sizing, ascertaining technical requirements as well as financial modelling to support solarization of the sites. This would replace the diesel generators that currently supply energy in these offices (UNHCR, 202b1:7)*

Figure 2: Comprehensive extracts of the success of local solutions in Uganda. Source: UNHCR, 2021b.

Based on the above documented achievements of the initiatives underlying the approach of local solutions in empowering refugees to become self-reliant and resilient in Uganda, and considering the scarce access to resettlement to the third countries in the global north, we asked South Sudanese refugees in Pagirinya Refugee Settlement in Adjumani district in Uganda if they would consider remaining in Uganda or prefer returning to their home country – South Sudan- and the reasons for their choice. We summarize their responses in the three major typologies below.

Refugees who had unconditionally made up their minds to remain in Uganda

Civil wars and their effects in South Sudan

There was the category of refugees who had decided to settle in Uganda irrespective of whether their country of origin regained normalcy in terms of peace and wellbeing. These refugees had decided to settle in Uganda, despite lack of economic and livelihood opportunities experienced by refugees as delineated in the next typology; yet, in their country of origin, they were overwhelmingly engaged in jobs in governments, NGOs, private and informal sectors of their economy. Their decision was based on the pre-negative violent and chaotic experiences and atrocities faced in South Sudan, which led to loss of lives of relatives and friends, loss of properties they worked hard to attain, and suffering of family members. The following extracts represent their decision:

> "As for me, what has happened to me and my family in South Sudan I have not forgotten up to now. So, considering what has happened to me and my family, I will never accept to go back to South Sudan just like that. My main aim is just to stay here." (Cluster Leader of Block F in an FGD on 24th September, 2020).

> "By the time I was in South Sudan, I was engaged in business. I was selling food stuff, clothing, and so on. But when the war started, I was unable to flee with anything. I came with nothing. Right now, I am unable to pay school fees for the

children." (A Woman Cluster Leader in Block E in an FGD conducted on 23/09/2020).

"…Sometimes they begin to beat you up. They take away your solar, when they see it outside and, if you ask them why they are going away with your thing, they kill you now. That is the problem; they take everything in your compound. They come in and they want you to give them the cow, the chicken, the what… and they take it by force. And they begin to suspect people anyhow, killing people anyhow… You find they have killed so and so in this area, so and so in this area, so we realized life was more important and we decided just to run and we left everything behind. We left good houses." (Vice Chairperson Block E, interviewed on 23/09/2020).

These refugees feared returning, working and losing everything once again, in addition to the tragic risks of losing their lives. They lost faith in South Sudan governance and the peace processes. Therefore, they would rather remain and rebuild their lives in Uganda where there is relative peace, calmness and normalcy.

Rule of law, peace and security in Uganda Vs lawlessness and insecurity in South Sudan

Furthermore, the decision of this category of refugees to unreservedly remain in Uganda was based on the relative observance of rule of law in Uganda, while lawlessness continued to prevail in South Sudan. Because rule of law prevails in Uganda, security is largely guaranteed; yet, in South Sudan, refugees recalled that people's lives were not valued - anybody can be killed any time - because security forces are brutal and non-law abiding, on top of extrajudicial behaviours of the local tribal communities in terms of meaningless killings and cattle raiding. In fact, respondents narrated that in Uganda, people are secure and have a peace of mind; one sleeps peacefully and does not hear the sound of a gun, unlike in South Sudan where people live in uncivilized and archaic manner, applying the 'law of the jungle' of "survival for the fittest", an almost anarchic situation. These refugees are negative about peace ever returning in South Sudan, that war will not end because of power struggle and enmity between the Nuer tribe and Dinka tribe, because agreements have been signed but conflicts have continued. This is true in view of the fact that the 2015 peace agreement flopped, cessation of hostilities have been violated several times, and the current transitional government of national unity is barely holding. Refugees therefore feel those who are in power - political and military officers - are not fit to lead the country because they don't care about the wellbeing and security of the ordinary populace; they are not educated enough, they are not after peace or protecting the citizens, they are not after the wellbeing of the nation but after their selfish interests and greed. This category of refugees further believes

that segregation and tribalism will persist in South Sudan and tribal wars will not end. In short, they are pessimistic and have lost faith in their government.

> "Me, I will not go back to South Sudan, law is okay here (in Uganda), compared to South Sudan. Generally, the security of this country is properly catered for and, hence, all those things come in when the security is proper." (Cluster leaders of Block F in an FGD conducted on 24th September, 2020).

> "The thing is war will not end. Like those two tribes there: the other one is a president, another is a vice president. Even if those people go away or they die, another one will still say I am here; also, the other one will also come and say, I am here, then the war will continue! That's why some of us are fearing to go back." (Cluster leaders Block C in an FGD conducted on 25th September, 2020).

In subsequent fieldwork in April 2022, it was supplemented that insecurity in South Sudan had not abated. Fighting, torturing and killing of civilians were still rampant, perpetuated mainly by government soldiers. Insecurity was further exacerbated by pastoralists who moved from place to place displacing farmers, killing resistant farmers, but also fighting among themselves - fellow pastoralists - especially Dinka, Nuer and Murule as it was lamented in an FGD with refugee women on 05/04/2022:

> "Those people have many cattle; thousands of herds... When we say we have gardens, we have our land to dig, if you keep these cattle here, we cannot dig... then they start shooting people because of talking like this. They have killed many Acholi there."

This category of refugees, therefore, were scared of insecurity situation and lawlessness in South Sudan, but positive about deriving livelihood in Uganda especially acquiring land and practicing agriculture. They were further positive about the prospect of changing their nationality in the long run, despite the fact that the process of naturalization takes a long time.

Refugee fatigue

"This is my first time of running, this is my second, this is my third." (Respondents retorted) (FGD with Cluster Leaders of Block C on 25th September, 2020).

"We have a challenge of going and coming back, going and coming back, that is not okay." (FGD with cluster leaders of Block C on 25th September 2020.

> "For us we have decided that when time for official repatriation comes, we shall not go back to South Sudan. We will settle here in Uganda, because South Sudan has problems: you go and you come back, you go and you come back again. For me and even my son, we have decided to stay in Uganda... Even burial, I will be

buried here. I am now tired: the first war, I came to Uganda; during the second war, I came to Uganda; and the last one (1954, 1989, and in 2016). I am now tired of fleeing because of these wars." (Interview with an elderly woman on 06/04/2022).

"… I was born during the time of war - the time of Anyanya - so we came here in Uganda… I was 9 years; we were taken back to Sudan. I continued with my education and coming to 1980s, I got married, I had one child, and the war of SPLA started. So, I moved around South Sudan until I could not persevere anymore and I came back to Uganda. My husband remained in Sudan and I came with the children. So, these children I have suffered with them. So, we went back towards the time of referendum and reunited with my husband. Again, we began to struggle to make a better home and again the war started. I ran back to Uganda and left my husband in Sudan… That is why I am saying, if my children can get good education and buy land and build for me a house, if others are going back, I will go to the town-Adjumani- and stay there than going and coming back again." (Interview with Vice chairperson, Block E on 23rd September, 2020).

Some refugees had fled to refuge multiple times, so were tired of fleeing endlessly. Some of them had run into refuge three times: in 1950s, in 1980s and in 2016. These refuges were bitter about poor governance in South Sudan, uncertain peace, loss of properties due to war after working hard to acquire them; for example, losing a permanent house, yet they were aging and deteriorating in strength and could not keep on cutting grasses yearly to roof grass thatched houses that were frequently destroyed by termites. They, however, had their assets in the country of origin especially large chunks of land, and others were hopeful that someday peace might return and they might return to their country again, but others were thinking of settling in Uganda permanently, die in Uganda and be buried in Uganda. The major emphasis of this category of refugees was the fact that they were tired of fleeing their country over and over again due to insecurity and war. These refugees were hopeful of getting integrated in Ugandan community as they compared themselves with those who never went back after they ran to refuge in Uganda during the previous war/s and were now well integrated in the Ugandan society; they had jobs, owned land, their children were studying and some of them even had Ugandan National identity cards (Opono and Ahimbisibwe, 2023:7). Refugees who had made up their minds to unconditionally return to their country of origin, South Sudan

These were refugees who had decided to return to South Sudan irrespective of whether the security situation in South Sudan had improved or not. Their decision was based on the proceeding factors.

Livelihood

While in the preceding typology, refugees who preferred integrating in Uganda had hope of making a living in Uganda; paradoxically, in the current typology, refugees who had totally opted to return to their country of origin, irrespective of the security situation back home, rationalized their decision on difficult livelihood in Uganda. Their decision was partially dependent on the fact that refugees received limited food rations which further reduced due to corona pandemic, coupled with difficulties to find other income generating opportunities. Allocated land for building and farming was small and, for educated refugees, in spite of freedom to be employed in Uganda as provided for in the 2006 Refugees Act and 2010 Refugees Regulations, it was hard for them and many remained unemployed.

Social services and dreams

Whereas some refugees had decided to remain in Uganda because of improved social services especially in health and education; there were refugees who had made up their minds to return to their country of origin on account of difficulty in accessibility of these social services. According to this category of refugees, even if education or health care services were comparatively better off in Uganda in public health centres in and outside the settlements, sometimes they wanted to access these services in private facilities but it was difficult for them due to meagre income they had, yet sometimes there were inefficient services in public facilities, delays in referrals and lack of drugs in health centres in the settlement, and payment of school fees or development fees in schools.

> "Here, even if you complain that you are sick, you are not sent anywhere…. They don't refer you; they keep you there until you are very sick. The problem is there is no proper medical treatment for refugees. But in South Sudan, you have what to do and you can get money to go to the private clinic when you are sick." (FGD with cluster leaders of Block E on 23rd September 2020).

"…These health centres when you are sick, they only test for malaria, but for other complications they send you to Adjumani… They refer you to other hospitals only when you are badly of…" (FGD with cluster leaders of Block E on 23rd September 2020).

"… if you send your child to school here, they ask for money. If you don't have money, they will tell you to sell part of your food rations, yet the ration is too small, so me I will go." (FGD with cluster leaders Blocks A and B on 21st September 2020).

Lastly on this category of refugees who had decided to return to their country irrespective of whether peace had returned or not, were those who based their decision on patriotism. For some refugees, this decision was due to the love they had for their country, that one's country is one's country irrespective of the situation: your land is yours even though it is bad, because there you have land to dig in order to survive (FGD with Cluster leaders of Block E on 23rd September, 2020). To the majority, however,

this decision was due to hard economic situation in the settlement, yet there were economic prospects and opportunities to progress in their country despite insecurity. In fact, interviews revealed that some male youth and men, after finding life in the settlement increasingly hard, decided to leave the settlement unofficially and returned to South Sudan.

Refugees who were in doubt

The third category of refugees were those who were undecided. They were unsure of whether to return or remain. They were uncertain about peace ever returning to South Sudan due to bad governance that culminated into wars. Their decision to remain or return depended on the prevailing circumstance in the home country. Some of them lost their properties in their country of origin due to war; some of them had been in refuge for the second or third time, in 1950s, 1980s and in 2016, and were tired of constantly running to refuge; some of them had all their levels of education in Uganda but went back and was disappointed by poor governance system which manifested into war and uncertain peace which forced them back to refuge but, because of better job opportunity back home, they would want to go back and work while the family remains in Uganda; some of them had relatives both in Uganda and in South Sudan; the young ones wanted peace to prevail in South Sudan so that financial support for education would be available to them - sent from South Sudan by relatives who were living there; yet some older refugees wanted to remain in Uganda, send their children to school so that the children could be their source of support and security in the future, for instance to get a plot of land for them (parents) and help them (parents) to settle in Uganda.

"Me, mine is still unknown. This is now second time of being a refugee. I started my nursery here, I completed my secondary here, even my tertiary education I completed here in Uganda. So, with this, when I went back to South Sudan in 2007, I thought I was now at home and things are okay. But the way the country is governed, if they don't come to the reality, I will not uproot myself (from Uganda). I will only go to work then I leave my family here while checking them, because that country (South Sudan) can blow anytime, you cannot be so sure of what tomorrow is going to be; today there is peace, tomorrow there is no peace; a lot of trouble and other things." (FGD with cluster leaders of Blocks A and B on 21st September, 2020).

"For my case, up to now my dream is not settled. So, it is hard to decide where to go exactly. I am just in the middle. I have not decided exactly where to stay. If real peace comes to South Sudan and if I see good things happening in South Sudan, then I will decide to go. But, if those two people are still on the chair, I will not go. But if you can get some money, get a plot, you can become a citizen (in Uganda) and you stay." (Interview with Vice Chairperson of Block E on 23rd September, 2020).

Discussion

As illuminated in the extracts from "UNHCR Fact sheet, January – March 2021", all the achievements in different sectors of Uganda's CRRF were possible due to the support and collaborations with relevant ministries in the Ugandan government, relevant district local governments of Uganda in the refugee hosting districts, various UN agencies, numerous NGOs and donor governments (UNHCR, 2021b:8). No wonder CRRF is the "multi-stakeholder and partnership approach to the refugee response … that promotes self-reliance for refugees" (UNHCR, 2021b:3; Ifat, 2020) and their integration in the national planning and local development. Furthermore, the success of the CRRF's initiatives – local solutions - is attributable to Uganda's willingness to enact and implement generous refugee policies, assisted by various stakeholders in practically implementing those policies for the betterment of both refugees and their host communities. Uganda refugee policies have been internationally levelled as progressive and as the best global policies for hosting refugees. As provided for in the 2006 Refugees Act and 2010 Refugees Regulations, refugees have the right to work, do business, move freely, access social services such as health and free primary education. Refugees are not restricted to live in the camps but can live in towns and cities. These policies have enabled Uganda to receive immense positive attention in promoting the refugee self-reliance.

In our fieldwork, there were refugees who had unconditionally decided to remain and integrate in Uganda. They cited refugee fatigue, a more stable rule of law and peace and security in Uganda compared to lawlessness and insecurity in South Sudan as reason for refusal to return. Additionally, in our previous report 'Attitudes of Refugees Towards Integration: The Experience of South Sudanese Refugees in Adjumani District in Uganda', some refugees were hopeful of fully getting integrated in the Ugandan communities as they compared themselves with refugees who never went back to South Sudan after they ran to refuge in Uganda during the previous war/s. These refugees who never went back were now de facto integrated in the Ugandan society; they had jobs, owned land, their children were studying and some of them even had Ugandan National identity cards (Opono and Ahimbisibwe, 2023:7). Moreover, there were refugees who were well integrated in the Ugandan society and were benefitting from its comparatively better health and education services and a more stable food security compared to South Sudan (Ibid:4). All these de facto integration in the Ugandan host societies, despite the absence of local integration, mirror the success of the model of local solutions captured in CRRF and Uganda's favourable refugee policies, most notably 2006 Refugees Act and 2010 Refugees Regulations that grant refugees freedom to move, right to work, right to start businesses and access to social services just like Ugandan nationals.

Furthermore, as our fieldwork unearthed, refugees who were in doubt – undecided whether to return to South Sudan or remain in Uganda – might all still be living in or majority of them are still living in Uganda due to war in South Sudan, including the category of refugees who responded that they had made up their minds to

unconditionally return to their country of origin - South Sudan - irrespective of the situation there. This argument is tenable because officially, out of the near 1 million South Sudanese displaced in Uganda, only 180,400 officially returned to their country by 2021 and, in 2022, only 75,500 returned, although "returns to South Sudan are difficult to verify as they tend to be self-organized, and access is often constrained in areas of returns" (UNHCR, 2022:36; UNHCR, 2023:38). Generally, Uganda is a home to many refugees who have lived in the country for over two decades and some for over 4 decades. Their numbers are in thousands and predominantly from Sudan, DRC and Rwanda. Some have lived entirely in Uganda, raised families in Uganda and, for them, Uganda is their home despite not being naturalized yet. Despite the court ruling in 2015 that refugees were eligible to naturalize, Ugandan government has not positively acted on this ruling (Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative, 2016; IRRI, 2016), which is congruent to the observation that states in the global south hosting most of the refugees have evaded long-range commitment that involves granting citizenship to refugees within the framework of international pledges and pressures from home (Hovil and Maple, 2022:264). Nonetheless, these long-staying unnaturalised refugees have been favourably living in Uganda, protected under Uganda's generous policies, including the 2006 Refugees Act, the 1995 Constitution, and the 1997 Children's Act, among others (Ahimbisibwe, 2020:2) which, on the other hand, reflect Uganda's national, regional and international obligations (Ahimbisibwe, 2019 and Government of Uganda (GoU), 2006), reflected in the CRRF designs mirroring local solutions.

Despite all these strong legal frameworks and achievements as systematically expounded in the CRRF extracts, refugees are not free from struggles under the CRRF and Uganda's generous refugee policies that epitomize local solutions. In fact, as our data presentations show, there were refugees who had made up their minds to unconditionally return to South Sudan, irrespective of whether the security situation had improved in their country or not. The reason for their risky decision was based on the difficult livelihood in Uganda and limited food rations which were further compounded by the corona pandemic, in addition to difficulty in earning extra income – outside of humanitarian aid – to pay for private services especially in education and health because even if education or health care services are comparatively better off in Uganda in public health centres in and outside the settlements, sometimes refugees want to access these services in private facilities but it is difficult for them due to the meagre income they earn; yet, sometimes there are inefficient services in public facilities, delays in referrals and lack of drugs, and payment of school fees or development fees in schools. As a result, as our previous study shows, due to hardships in the settlement some refugees unofficially left the settlement and returned to South Sudan while others were contemplating the same even if the country was still insecure (Opono and Ahimbisibwe, 2023:5).

Other studies also find weaknesses in Uganda's generous approach mirroring local solutions. Refugees are not recognized in law as refugees if they live in other urban areas apart from the capital - Kampala. As "self-settled" urban refugees, they are in danger of

being misunderstood as economic migrants. Urban refugees forfeit assistance if they are not formally registered as refugees, unless they were registered in one of the settlements. Despite economic diversity among the refugees with more than 70 kinds of livelihoods activities, most refugees in settlements live by subsistence farming as their principal livelihood. The plots of land provided to refugees in the settlements are small and often infertile, discrediting farming as a viable livelihood for many refugees. This is an indication that even the "liberal refugee policies, like those promoting self-reliance in Uganda, must be backed with adequate resources if they are to be more than just words on paper" (Solutions Journalism, 2021). In their analysis of already vulnerable Ugandan economy and employment challenge for the locals despite progressive refugee policies, refugees in Uganda face and are engulfed in employment challenges even after 10 years of arriving in Uganda. "The data show a large employment rate gap of 35 percentage points between refugees and Ugandan nationals and a corresponding labour participation gap of 27 percentage points". For both old and new refugees to sustain their families and make economic contribution to Ugandan economy, more need to be done to help refugees access the employment market (Sarr et al., 2022).

However, despite the challenges associated with Uganda's generous policies underlying the philosophy of local solutions, Uganda has a long history of hosting refugees in large numbers since 1940s (Solutions Journalism, 2021; Sarr et al., 2022) and it has recently benefitted both politically and financially from its established refugee open door policy, with hundreds of millions of donor funds being channelled into the country annually to support humanitarian and development projects that benefit both refugees and the host communities. For example, between 2012 to 2021, Kenya "received Euros 200 million in humanitarian aid from the European Union, while Uganda received this much from the EU in just over four years" (Solutions Journalism, 2021) to finance its integrated system of managing refugee situation, while the three durable solutions – repatriation, local integration and resettlement - are being marginally applied at the global and local levels, including in Uganda. In the Ugandan case, out over 1.5million refugees hosted in the country by the end of 2022, only 509 departed for the third countries, and only 75,500 officially returned although others could have returned unofficially due to the porous borders and the nature of back and forth movements of South Sudanese refugees from Uganda to South Sudan, and Uganda has not yet naturalized refugees, but its approach - herein referred to as "local solutions" - has been globally praised as a model of hosting refugees, with some refugees who have stayed in the country for more than two, three or four decades.

Conclusion

The shrinking of the conventional three durable solutions of repatriation, resettlement and local integration, has engendered a de facto compromise known as "local solutions" between the global north and the global south refugee hosting countries and UNHCR. Local solutions, implemented by the national and local governments in conjunction with UNHCR and financially supported by the donor countries and the UNHCR, present

refugees with opportunities to become resilient and self-reliant, while providing a temporary although a long period for refugees to live relatively comfortably and freely in the first country of asylum, while the traditional three durable solutions are absent or limitedly implemented. Local solutions in Uganda have been successful in providing refugees services more or less like Ugandan citizens, backed by Uganda's much applauded favourable policies, of course with lingering challenges such as unemployment and restricted assistance when refugees choose to live in other cities other than the capital. Therefore, for local solutions to succeed more substantially, national governments such as Ugandan government have to be willing to host refugees indefinitely, the international community and different organizations should also be willing to financially support the national hosting governments constantly, and these different entities should work together to protect and empower refugees by guaranteeing their freedom to live like in Uganda's case with favourable refugee policies. It is however important to remember that, much as local solutions provide prolonged temporary relief to refugees in protracted situations, it is not a permanent solution; it is merely a transitional solution to permanent solutions. Therefore, it remains important for the international community – the global north states and the global south countries – not to negate their legal obligations, but to keep engaging each other and coming up with innovative ways of sharing responsibility of hosting refugees, and ultimately mechanisms of implementing the official international durable solutions in the long run, in order to ultimately address the challenges of the constantly growing numbers of refugees in protracted situations.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that they have no financial or any competing interests.

Data availability statement

Not applicable.

Notes on Contributors

Samuel Opono is a Research Assistant at the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda. His research interests revolve around refugees, forced migration, drivers of conflict and post conflict reconstruction and development in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Frank Ahimbisibwe is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda. He is a Guest Professor at the Institute of Development Policy, University of Antwerp, Belgium. Frank is also a Visiting Associate Professor at the African Studies Centre, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan. His research focuses on refugees, forced migration and international relations in the Great Lakes region and Horn of Africa.

Specioza Twinamasiko is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), Uganda. She is a coordinator of Service Course in the department of Community Engagement and Service Learning in the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, MUST. Specioza has expertise in peace, conflict Studies and Development Work, and her research focuses on development induced displacement, forced migration, and gender relations in extractives.

References

Agblorti, S. K. M., & Grant, M. R. (2019). Conceptualising Obstacles to Local Integration of Refugees in Ghana. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *38*(2), 195-213. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdz005

Ahimbisibwe, F. (2020). Voluntary Repatriation of Rwandan Refugees in Uganda: An Analysis of Lawand Practice. In M. Yonekawa & A. Sugiki (Eds.), *Repatriation, insecurity, and peace: A Case study of Rwandan refugees* (pp. 1-20). Springer Nature Singapore. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2850-7

Ahimbisibwe, F. T. p. o. r. R. r. i. U., 2003-2017', International Relations and Diplomacy, 7(12), pp.573-591. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.29822.28481. (2019). The politics of repatriation: Rwandan refugees in Uganda, 2003-2017'. *International Relations and Diplomacy,*, *7*(12), 573-591. DOI: https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.29822.28481

Brankamp, H. (2022). Camp Abolition: Ending Carceral Humanitarianism in Kenya (and Beyond). *Antipode*, *54*(1), 106-129. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12762

Chimni, B. S. (2002). Refugees, Return and Reconstruction of 'Post-Conflict' Societies: A Critical Perspective. *International Peacekeeping*, *9*(2), 163-180. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/714002734

Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative. (2016). *The eligibility for refugees to acquire Ugandan citizenship*. Retrieved Oktober 17, 2023 from

https://citizenshiprightsafrica.org/the-eligibility-for-refugees-to-acquire-ugandan-citizenship/

Crisp, J. (2003). *No solution in sight: The problem of protracted refugee situation in Africa. New Issues in Refugee Research. Evaluation and Analysis Unit, UNHCR Working Paper No. 75.* United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Retrieved September 26, 2023 from https://www.unhcr.org/afr/3e2d66c34.pdf

Crisp, J. (2023). Local integration, local settlement and local solutions: Disentangling the conceptual confusion. *Forced Migration Review*, *71*, 12-14.

Forced Migration Review. (2009). Protracted displacement. (33).

Garnier, A., Jubilut, L. L., & Sandvik, K. B. (2018). *Refugee resettlement: Power, politics, and humanitarian governance.* Berghahn Books.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Aldine de Gruyter.

Government of Uganda. (May 24, 2006). Refugee Act 2006. Act 21. http://www.refworld.org/docid/4b7baba52.h

Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative research methods. London, California.* Sage Publications.

Hovil, L. (2016). *Refugees, conflict and the search for belonging.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Hovil, L. (2018). "We Are Like a Bat. We Are Neither Birds Nor Animals": Where the Formal and Informal Collide as Burundian Refugees in Tanzania Struggle for Belonging. In (pp. 27-50). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58194-5_2

Hovil, L., & Maple, N. (2022). Local Integration: A Durable Solution in need of Restoration? *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *41*(2), 238-266. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdac008

Ifat, I. (2020). *Integrated approaches to refugee management in Uganda.* University of Birmingham.

International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI). (2016). *The eligibility for refugees to acquire Ugandan citizenship.* Retrieved Oktober 6, 2023 from https://citizenshiprightsafrica.org/the-eligibility-for-refugees-to-acquire-ugandan-citizenship/

Jansen, B. J., & de Bruijne, M. (2020). Humanitarian spill-over: the expansion of hybrid humanitarian governance from camps to refugee hosting societies in East Africa. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *14*(4), 669-688. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2020.1832292

Karooma, C. (2017). *Rwandan refugees in Southwestern Uganda: Their attitudes and responses to repatriation 1994-2012.* Edwin Mellen Press.

Landau, L. B. (2019). A Chronotope of Containment Development: Europe's Migrant Crisis and Africa's Reterritorialisation. *Antipode*, *51*(1), 169-186. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12420

Long, K. (2011). *Permanent crises? Unlocking the protracted displacement of refugees and internally displaced persons. Policy Overview.* Oxford Department of International Development, Refugee Studies Centre. Retrieved July 15, 2021 from https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/pb-unlocking-protracted-displacement-2011.pdf

Milner, J. (2009). Refugees and the Regional Dynamics of Peacebuilding. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *28*(1), 13-30. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdp015

Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) & United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2018). *Uganda comprehensive refugee response portal, 2018*. Retrieved September 25, 2023 from http://ugandarefugees.org/en/country/uga/

Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) & United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2024). *Uganda comprehensive refugee response portal*. Retrieved August 22, 2024 from https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/uga

Omata, N., & Kaplan, J. D. (2013). *Refugee livelihoods in Kampala, Nakivale and Kyangwali Refugee Settlements: Patterns of engagement with the private sector, Working Paper Series No. 95*. Oxford Refugee Studies Centre.

Opono, S. (2021). The relationship between corruption and armed conflict: A case study of South Sudan. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, *9*(9), 479-495.

Opono, S., & Ahimbisibwe, F. (2023). Attitudes of Refugees Towards Integration: The Experience of South Sudanese Refugees in Adjumani District in Uganda. *Society*, *60*(3), 333-344. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-023-00858-5

Rohwerder, B. (2015). *Refugee return in protracted refugee situation. Governance Social Development Humanitarian Conflict*. Applied Knowledge Services. Retrieved September 23, 2023 from http://www.gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/1282-Refugee-return-in-protracted-refugee-situations.pdf

Sarr, I., Beltramo, T., & Fix, J. (2022). *Understanding successful social and economic integration – an example from Uganda*. United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Retrieved May 10, 2023 from https://www.unhcr.org/blogs/understanding-successful-social-and-economic-integration-an-example-from-uganda/

Schneider, H. (2021a). Implementing the Refugee Resettlement Process: Diverging Objectives, Interdependencies and Power Relations. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *3*. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.629675

Schneider, H. (2021b). Implementing the refugee resettlement process: Diverging objectives, interdependencies and power relations. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *3*(45), 629-675. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.629675

Solutions Journalism. (2021). *Uganda's long history of hosting refugees*. Retrieved Oktober 6, 2024 from https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2021/09/01/uganda-history-hosting-refugees

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2004). *Protracted Refugee Situations, Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, Standing Committee, 30th Meeting on 10th June 2004, UN Doc. EC/54/SC/CRP.14.*

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2006). *State of the world's refugees: Human displacement in the new millennium.* Oxford University Press.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2019). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2018.* United Nations.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2021a). *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2020.*

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2021b). *Local solutions for refugees: Key considerations.*

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2021c). *UNHCR (2021b) Fact sheet: Uganda January – March 2021. Kampala.*

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2022). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2021.*

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2023). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2022.*

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2024). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2023.*

Walker, S. G. (n.d.). *From refugee to citizen? Obstacles to the naturalisation of refugees in Uganda.* Retrieved August 22, 2024 from https://www.refugeelawproject.org/files/briefing_papers/Naturalisation_Of_Refugees.pdf

World Bank. (2016). *An assessment of Uganda's progressive approach to refugee management.* Retrieved September 26, 2023 from https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/24736