

Understanding Rural – Urban Migration in Uganda’s Refugee Camps

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Abstract

With continued conflicts all over the world, more refugees will continue migrating to countries they consider safe. According to Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and Young Leaders Think Tank (2017), refugees prefer dwelling in urban areas, which can be attributed to the global urbanisation phenomenon. This paper examines the factors influencing rural-urban migration to inform refugee management in urban settings. According to the Office of the Prime Minister, Uganda Refugee Statistics of September 2023, Uganda was host to over 1.5 million refugees, mainly from, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Burundi, Eritrea and Rwanda. These refugees are registered in the rural settlements (refugee camps) as provided for by Uganda’s legal framework on the management of refugees, which framework also only recognises refugees in the capital Kampala as urban refugees. However, the landscape has evolved as some refugees have self-settled in various urban centres across Uganda, rapidly increasing the urban population and stressing urban services. Our study findings in Koboko Municipality show various personal, push and pull factors responsible for the refugees’ decision for rural-urban migration. These factors relate to demographic age, education level, gender, better social services, payable employment, economic activities, and utilisation of skills among others. The findings signal the need to recognise and plan for urban refugees in urban areas other than Kampala City. Urbanisation is a factor in refugee management in Uganda.

Keywords: Urban refugee, Rural-urban migration, Koboko municipality, Uganda



Introduction

Migration has been happening since ancient times, following the wars between kingdoms and religious persecutions at the time, as well as decolonisation and civil wars after the end of the World Wars and the Cold War (Maystadt & Duranton, 2013). In these cases, wars and conflicts pushed people to look for safer places. In Europe and the Americas, refugee settlements were recorded in the 1700s with the Huguenots in France and the local inhabitants of the Americas who were forced to resettle in Spain, England, Switzerland and the Caribbean respectively (Van der Linden, 2016). In Africa, wars over land and water during pre-colonial times, the struggle for independence and post-independence civil wars have led to displacement and movement of large populations to safer areas and locations called refugee settlements or camps.

Jacobsen (2006) while referring to the UNHCR reports, maintained that about 26 percent of refugees live in camps, 18 percent in urban areas and the remainder settle in rural areas or other locations. Rosenberg (2016) noted that in the traditional perspective, people recognised as refugees with an urban background would always prefer to settle in urban areas with specific reference to refugees with Greek, Jewish, Roman and Indian origins who were settled in cities following their urban origin. Rapid urbanisation, associated with better living conditions and employment opportunities, acts as a pull factor for refugee rural-urban migration (Deardorff, 2018). However, the Mixed Migration Centre (2021) notes that COVID 19 changed migration perceptions with some populations believing that COVID 19 is only in urban centres, curtailing rural-urban migration.

The refugee situation in Uganda dates back to the 1940s when Uganda received and hosted asylum seekers of European origin in the aftermath of World War II. Over 7000 Polish refugees were hosted in Uganda in 1942 in the rural areas of Nyabyeya and Kojja but later on migrated to urban areas of Entebbe, Wakiso, and Kampala before their resettlement in Canada, Australia and Britain (Watera et al, 2017: pg4). The Polish refugees moved to urban areas in search of better social services as well as economic opportunities.

In the following decades, Uganda has been a central host for refugees from many African countries including Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan and South Africa among others (UNHCR and GoU, 2017). Uganda has had an ever-growing refugee influx from neighboring countries faced with conflicts and severe violence (IRRI, 2018). Currently Uganda is host to over 1.5million refugees, mainly from South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo who live in rural settlement camps such as Rhino Camp, Bidibidi, and Imvepi, among others.

The majority of the population in Uganda (73.84 %) in 2022, according to the World Bank live in rural areas. Therefore, it is natural that the refugee management framework designates refugee hosting in Uganda to rural settlements. The Refugee Act of 2006 and



the attendant Refugee Regulations of 2010 do not define who constitutes an urban refugee. The term urban refugee in Uganda is largely used to refer to refugees settled in the capital city, Kampala. Therefore, the refugee management frameworks assume a rural settlement-based refugee management arrangement. However, in Uganda 26 % of the population is classified as urbanised (UN-Habitat, 2023), with fast urbanisation at a pace of 4.5% growth per annum, there are high chances that refugees will move from camps or rural settlements to urban centres.

Problem Statement

Research on urban refugees has been carried out in major cities of refugee-hosting countries such as Nairobi, Lusaka, Cairo, Johannesburg, Kampala, Khartoum, among others. The plight, challenges and reasons for migration of rural settled refugees to smaller urban areas such as Koboko Municipal Council are largely unknown. Additionally, because government policy does not recognise urban refugees other than those in Kampala, the precise count and characteristics of refugee migrants residing in small urban areas such as Koboko Municipality, remains unknown.

Again, refugees in rural areas in Uganda receive start-up care packages, medical facilities and parcels of land to facilitate self-reliance in the settlement. Despite these interventions by the government, UN agencies and other humanitarian aid organisations in the gazetted refugee settlements, it is estimated that there are 23,128 self-settled refugees in Koboko municipality (VNG International, 2018). The question is why do refugees move from gazetted rural settlements/camps to Koboko Municipal Council.

The researcher acknowledges that personal, push and pull factors determining refugee rural-urban migration maybe largely the same or similar across the globe. However, Koboko municipality, being a border town between the DRC and South Sudan, presents dynamics such as shared cultural values, language, and norms that might influence migration differently than cosmopolitan cities such as Kampala. Therefore, studying the factors that affect refugee self-settlement in urban areas such as Koboko will highlight their presence and influence legal frameworks and interventions that benefit the refugees in smaller towns and the host communities.

The study's general objective was to establish the determining factors of refugee rural-urban migration in Uganda, a case of Koboko Municipal Council. More specifically, the study set to explore;

- a) The personal factors for rural-urban migration of refugees to Koboko Municipal Council
- b) The push factors for rural-urban migration of refugees to Koboko Municipal Council



- c) The pull factors for rural-urban migration of refugees to Koboko Municipal Council

Literature Review

Theoretical Perspective

The study analysed three theories of migration, namely, Migration Theory or Push-Pull Theory, the Network Theory, and Transnationalism Theory.

Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana (2016) contend that the migration network is a contemporary idea associated with social capital and, therefore, define it as personal bonds that link migrants with relations in their countries of origin, transmitting information and any other social and financial support. The networks are expected to reduce the expenses and hazards of migration and increase the benefits of the same. Networks, therefore, influence migration decisions, especially on where and when to migrate, since they are essential in settlement and access to employment in the receiving destination.

Jakubowicz (2012) argues that transnationalism as a migration theory does not emphasise migration per se, but rather on immigrants and their offspring. The fundamental supposition of transnationalism is that migration is not a one-dimensional journey of simply moving from one country to another, but also focuses on the continued ties migrants maintain with their countries of origin. These ties range from cultural and political to economic interests and ties, coupled with the active role the sending countries play, becoming more involved and interested in the migrant communities. Alejandro in Vertovec (2001) notes that because of these interactions and interests, many immigrants live dual lives, maintaining homes in both countries engaging in economic, cultural and political interests that necessitate presence in all countries.

However, the push-pull theory was more specific in addressing personal, push, and pull factors of migration. The Migration Theory or Push-Pull Theory gives a detailed account of the factors that shape the decisions for people to migrate from one place to another in general and also to particular destinations in a given country or within (Stanojoska and Petrevski, 2012; Mubangizi, 2021). Lee stated that different individuals will respond differently to positive and negative factors at their current location or destination due to their differing capacities to surmount the challenges (Stanojoska and Petrevski, 2012). Refugees or migrants are, therefore, not an indiscriminate proportion in a given area but rather rational human beings with the potential to decide and make informed choices.

- **Personal factors**

According to Kiranda Ojok and Kamp (2017), refugees in Uganda exercise their freedom of movement in-country from which they decide to lawfully move or live where they wish, as provided by the existing legal framework. While many engage in legal activities, there is a



risk of involvement in unlawful activities like robberies and trans-border crimes (Watera et al., 2017), posing challenges to Uganda's peace and socioeconomic stability. Literature shows that education influences refugee migration decisions in two ways: through school-going children and educated adults looking for formal employment (Molla, 2022; Fransen and De Haas, 2022; Chumky et al., 2022; Nyamnjoh, Hall, and Cirolia, 2022). This scenario underscores the need for further research in Koboko to understand and address the complex interplay between refugees' freedom of movement, legal activities, and potential involvement in illicit pursuits, highlighting a significant research gap.

Olivieri et al. (2021) acknowledged and recognised the dynamic nature of gender roles in contemporary society. They observed that men and women have distinct problems and societal roles that influence their migration choices from rural regions to metropolitan locales. According to Aksoy and Poutvaara (2021), female migrants have been associated with the phenomenon of migration as they relocate to metropolitan regions to join their husbands.

- ***Push factors***

Although UNHCR and its partners have made means of meeting the most crucial services in refugee settlements, some refugees may express interest in migrating to urban areas (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018). The UNHCR and the Government of Uganda have approaches to promote food security and sustainable livelihoods in refugee settlements, but these have not fully enriched the standards of living for all refugees. According to Cities Alliance (2021), Arua City has in the past decade, experienced an increased proportion of self-settled refugees and involuntary migrants due to resource conflicts in refugee settlements. Land is a vital resource for survival and has been a source of contestation between refugees and host communities, which may result in migration to other places for alternative sources of livelihood and to defuse tensions with host communities (Miller, 2018; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Additionally, dynamics within the natural environment, such as drought and floods, that affect livelihoods interact with migration drivers to influence migration. For Hunter and Simon (2023), however, migrants may not recognise climate as a prime migration factor.

The push factors such as unemployment have forced many refugees from their gazetted settlements to urban places where they hope to find paying jobs other than surviving on handouts and rations from support NGOs such as UNHCR (Ambroso, 2016). Kiranda et al. (2017) stated that unemployed refugee youths could be affected more by the negative consequences which may rouse their desire to migrate to the nearest urban areas in search of payable employment. d'Errico et al. (2022) revealed that refugees lack employment since members from the host communities are equally unemployed or underemployed, and refugees get into an already existing wave of rural-urban migration. Darda'u and Umar, (2023) note that poor education facilities, inadequate teaching aides, and the scarcity of



teaching personnel in rural areas are push factors that influence rural-urban migration. This view corroborates Mubangizi's view that the remoteness of many rural communities negatively impacts rural service delivery and generally leads to rural-urban migration (Mubangizi, 2021; Mubangizi & Mwesigwa, 2017).

Uganda is Africa's top refugee-hosting country. Its resource pool has not met the various demands and needs of the refugee population, resulting in migration from refugee settlements (Atari & McKague, 2019). The shortfall in funding has greatly challenged Uganda's ability to support refugees within its boundaries following the reduction in international support from donors, thus amounting to refugees' migration to find livelihoods in urban areas nearing their gazetted settlements (Ahimbisibwe, 2019). However, the scale of refugee rural-urban migration in Koboko municipal council influenced by the reduction in humanitarian aid remains unknown.

- ***Pull factors***

Kampala city has a huge population of refugees of different nationalities such as Congolese, Somalis, Ethiopians, Rwandese, Eritreans, etc. living in urban communities where they hope to have access to better social services such as health, schools, etc. (FAO, 2019). With the expectations of better service delivery regarding water quality, access to healthcare services, and education services among others, refugees are enticed to relocate lawfully or unlawfully to urban townships. The proximity of Arua and Koboko from Rhino camp, Bidibidi, Imvepi and other camps in the West Nile regions made them a common urban target for the majority of refugees.

Depending on their education levels, migrants are attracted to urban areas to put their skill sets to use, notwithstanding their language difficulties, which are crucial to obtaining suitable employment (Kiranda et al., 2017). Furthermore, Darda'u and Umar (2023) note that because higher education levels improve the chance of employment, persons with education levels above secondary are more migratory, and employment opportunities in urban areas highly influence rural-urban migration. However, the exploitation of refugees in the workplace in host countries remains high (FAO & OPM, 2018). The majority expect that urban places can offer better employment opportunities to supplement the humanitarian aid from international NGOs. Such a pull factor in nearby urban townships attracts many refugees who anticipate gaining from the different employment opportunities.

Khan, Alharthi, Haquec, and Illiyan, (2023) state that migration is mainly caused by push factors, however, pull factors cannot be disregarded in making migration decisions. This study investigates the holistic determinants of refugees' migration to Koboko Municipal Council by examining the personal, pull and push factors of the migration theory.



Methodology

According to Paradis et al. (2016), the researcher adopted a case study design, which refers to any detailed exploration of a given research problem to reveal facts. The case study research design enabled an investigation of a given group of subjects, refugees, explicitly focusing on the Koboko Municipal Council at an affordable cost. The study was mainly qualitative, using the perceptions and lived experiences of refugees in Uganda.

According to VNG International (2018), there are 2,896 households of self-settled refugees in Koboko Municipal Council. The researcher targeted refugees who had previously settled in the refugee settlements and whose records or history in Uganda dates not earlier than 2014. This marked the upsurge of displacement of South Sudanese as a result of the civil war.

The total sample population for this study was 33 participants. Of these, three critical informants were from the Office of the Prime Minister, an area Local Council, and a Community Organisation leader. The three key informants were selected using purposive sampling because they know refugee issues and their role in refugee management. Thirty (30) focus group discussion participants (forming 4 FGDs), both men and women aged between 18 and 60, were drawn from the refugee population living in Koboko Municipality through convenient sampling. The researcher approached participants through the community leaders, and those who were available during the Focused Group Discussion participated in the study. Each FGD was limited to 10 participants and a minimum of 7 to ensure adequate participation and accommodation of all views. After the fourth FGD, participants' responses were deemed similar, and therefore, sampling was halted when the researcher reached the point of saturation. This technique was inexpensive and ensured the study could be carried out within a specified timeframe.

Data was collected through 3 key informant interviews with OPM Official, local council leader, Local Community Development Organisation Official and Focused Group Discussions of 30 refugee participants. The interviews and group discussions focus on the personal, pull and push factors that propel refugees to move from camps to small towns.

The researcher analysed qualitative data using thematic analysis. The researcher generated themes, sub-themes, and codes flowing from the narrative findings, which were used to answer the research questions. The researcher aggregated similar responses under one theme to avoid generic and uncoordinated information as Tracy (2013) advised. Thematic analysis was used because the researcher wanted to draw the themes from the study's objectives and keep the narrative in that form.



Data Quality Control

The reliability and validity of data was determined by establishing trustworthiness through ensuring the credibility, transferability, conformability and flexibility of the research.

Transferability, according to Peterson, 2019; Makel et al., 2022 refers to the degree to which the study results can be generalised to other similar settings. The researcher attempted to achieve transferability by providing a detailed, descriptive account of the experiences gathered during data collection. This detail will help readers infer transferability judgments.

Haven and Van Grootel, 2019 define credibility as the degree of accuracy with which the participants' responses and views are presented. Credibility in this research was achieved through collaboration where the participants were engaged as "co-researchers" in a less formal arrangement, allowing clarification to be made easily during the data collection process.

According to Kyngäs, Kääriäinen and Elo (2020), conformability entails the extent to which the collected data wholly support the research findings. This study achieved conformability by thoroughly cross-checking the data collected during the interviews and the transcription process. Additionally, select participants were invited to make quick reviews of the themes generated from their submissions to see if their views were well represented. The researcher re-checked the final analysed data against the transcripts to affirm the adequacy of information and ascertain that no significant findings were left out.

Ethical Considerations

Refugee communities are considered vulnerable in host countries and, therefore, require protection during research processes. In keeping with Sobočan, Bertotti, and Strom-Gottfried (2019), this research considered and maintained several ethical considerations. After clearly explaining the study's purpose, the researcher obtained verbal informed consent from participants, ensuring only those who agreed to participate. The researcher used pseudonyms to maintain anonymity in recording and documenting interviews and discussions.

The researcher also took steps to protect the participants by securing permission from local authorities to conduct the study in Koboko Municipality. Interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were held in safe and secure locations to ensure participants' safety and security. Recognising the unequal power relations refugees face, the research avoided sensitive and potentially traumatising questions to prevent further distress.



Study Findings

Personal Factors

Access to education, freedom of movement, and gender-biased migration were characteristics of personal factors fueling refugee rural-urban migration to Koboko Municipality.

- **Access to education**

Refugees moved to Koboko municipality to easily access good quality education, citing that schools in rural areas are still characterised by poor performance. Access to education in the rural settlements is characterised by poor quality, long distances to the schools and overpopulation in most classes compared to those in urban areas, at the same time secondary education is not provided in camps. One respondent noted, "...the best schools are in town, the ones in the camp are not current. *Performance is very poor at the end of the level; people go for quality education*".... M1_South Sudan FGD of elders. The poor performance can be attributed to the number of children in each class as expressed by one of the respondents who argued that, "*the classes are there but you find in a class there are up to 300 pupils so teaching is not proper, children don't perform well that's why people bring their children to the town.*"... F8_South Sudan Women Group

- **Freedom of movement**

Under its Refugee Act of 2006, the Government of Uganda provides freedom of movement for a recognised refugee within the country. As referenced by many key informants, this freedom is perceived to be a threat to local and national security as a result of refugees moving anywhere at any time. The refugees need to survive however, without gainful employment, some end up engaging in unlawful acts such as theft. Services were inadequate in the refugee settlements yet people may prefer better livelihood styles, because of the freedom accorded to them, they are free and comfortable migrating to areas of their preference. Therefore, refugees take advantage of the existing law to migrate from the rural settlements to the urban areas.

- **Age-related needs**

Age as a personal factor influences rural-urban migration of refugees especially among the youth/children and able-bodied refugees, those in productive and school-going age groups, with an average of 45 years. Age-related needs push refugees to move to towns. As noted by the respondents in the following narratives, "*But most of the people who have remained in the camp are the elderly, 80 or 70 years above who can't fend for themselves but the middle ages like us in 30s we come here we can run around ...for survival.*" F7_South Sudan Women Group. A second respondent noted that "*refugee rural-urban migration does not have any age bracket, it cuts across all ages. The youth have issues with education because it is one of the least funded programmes in refugee matters, the elderly have issues*



with sanitary facilities, and so forth". KII_OPM. Though young refugees tend to migrate to urban areas in search of opportunities, the elderly also move in search of better services. Irrespective of age, refugees move to search for fulfillment of age-related needs. The able-bodied migrate in search of livelihoods while the children and youth for education purposes. While the elderly though a minority, migrate due to health and sanitation factors or as caregivers to school-going children.

- **Gender-biased migration**

Families get disintegrated or separated during events that lead to refugeehood. Family members in the rural settlements take a decision to join members who have moved and settled in the urban areas such as Koboko Municipal Council. *"For me, I left the camp because I didn't have a parent but only my sister who was in Koboko town."*... F3_South Sudan Women Group. The anticipation is that their close relatives based in urban settings such as Koboko Municipality would help them address certain life challenges and better their standards of living.

Additionally, the setting in camps challenges cultural gender roles, especially where the men feel powerless in providing for their families. As noted, *"In the camp, women can no longer be ruled. When you tell her that madam you first do this and this, she will answer you that you are no longer her husband, the UN is her husband. That thing demoralised men, most of them ran away from their homes; men don't have now power to rule over their women. And for us in our cultures, we don't allow that."*... M1_South Sudan Men FGD. In terms of gender, the research also found that refugee rural-urban migration is male-dominated as noted in the following verbatim. *"If you look at the population in the refugee camps, about 85% are women and children and of course, the children are school-going. ... but you find that most men choose to relocate to urban areas to do some petty jobs and earn a simple living"*... KII_OPM. The changing power dynamics among men who used to own property in their home countries and who have unwillingly lost their power to provide for their families to the UN forces them to migrate to urban areas in search of employment.

Push Factors

Being confined in rural settlements comes with challenges that include resource conflicts, limited social services, insecurity, unemployment, diminishing support by donors, disaster and host community dynamics. These factors push the refugees to leave the settlements for urban areas such as Koboko Municipal Council.

- **Resource conflicts**

With the huge number of refugees occupying small pieces of land, competition was always high in the rural-based refugee camps which forced some refugees to relocate to other areas where they could find space for livelihood. One respondent expounded thus *"...even in the camp now there's no space for keeping animals such as cattle and goats, not even*



chicken. The place is clear, no grass. The Aringas don't allow one to graze in their fields."... F4_South Sudan Women Group. While the OPM and other stakeholders provide living and settlement space for refugees, the available land resources were always limited and not suitable to serve the needs of all the refugees simultaneously satisfactorily.

The researcher observed that due to the population pressure and nature of the settlement areas, water scarcity was not helped by the inconsistency of the water delivery trucks. Water points would be overwhelmed leaving some households without water for days. As per the findings, though water is a basic need and the refugees are happy with its abundance in urban areas, it was not necessarily a driving/motivating factor in refugee rural-urban migration.

There is competition over other resources. For instance, both host communities and refugees need resources such as wood for firewood and the construction of shelters. One FGD participant stated that *"we cannot go to gather firewood, we have to buy from the natives at a high price even this is after selling something"*, and yet in the settlements there are limited trades to generate income. Refugees end up trespassing on host communities' lands in search of firewood. This became a source of social clashes and tensions between the refugees and the host communities.

- **Health Care Services**

Individuals in need of health care services for chronic health conditions such as sickle cell, HIV/AIDS, hypertension, and diabetes, among others cannot sustain their stay in rural settlements where health facilities are not easily accessible. People move to look for better and faster services. As noted by the respondents, *"...health services are one of the reasons why people move to Koboko. We have health centres in the settlement, but the services are not as quick and fast as in urban areas... Sometimes they will tell you the ambulance may have gone to Arua or somewhere, or there's no fuel in the ambulance. There are a lot of stories. So, if somebody has a chronic illness, to avoid sudden socks, people prefer to stay in town where they are close to quicker services than being in the camp."... KII_SSRA.* Treatments and medications for complications or major surgeries are unavailable and readily accessible from the settlements. Therefore, though there are health facilities in the rural settlements, the uncertainty of health services in the refugee settlements increases the vulnerability of refugees, hence necessitating migration to urban areas.

- **Security reasons**

Refugees are forced to move because of grievances among themselves such as theft and fights among others. Tribal clashes, social disagreements including cultural differences were cited as factors that fuel social tensions and lead to insecurity in the refugee settlements. *"...there is a social problem in the camp because there are too many tribes, different tribes with different behaviours."... M1_South Sudan FGD of elders.* Another one



echoed *"It's true for me I came because I wanted peace, because there, things were not good, there was fire because we still had our grievances from home whereby some people are still fighting up to now, even in camps people still keep bitterness with each other or over another tribe."... F3_South Sudan Women group.* Refugees move to towns in search of peace and security and minimising interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds which raises conflicts.

Cultural differences were manifested in the following statement *for instance "...we have those tribes that cherish open defecation, if that one is your neighbor, you wake up in the morning a part of your compound is full of feces, that is also a problem and you cannot tell this person because culturally they believe that for example if a girl goes to the toilet they will not produce. Now how can you force the girl of such kind of person to go to the toilet?"... KII_SSRA.* Although Uganda is a multi-cultural country with different tribes, languages, and habits, Ugandan society has been able to respect these differences however, cultural differences within the camps cause's conflicts until such a time when refugees agree to live in harmony with each other.

Others move in search for food security in towns. As noted, *"...the reason some of us left the camp, first of all there is no place to dig, food is not enough. One person is given four kgs of maize and one kg of beans per month for the most vulnerable and quarterly for the less vulnerable. These things cannot be enough; it is from them that you get mukene/ngeje"...* F1_South Sudan FGD of elders. Refugee households suffer food insecurity due to their disadvantaged position resulting from lack of access to facilities or resources for farming or obtaining additional food in the settlements.

- **Unemployment in the refugee camps**

Refugees move to search for employment. As noted from the quotes here in, refugees can look for any form of legal livelihood within the borders of Uganda. *"If a South Sudanese was a teacher, and the Refugee Act allows for a refugee to engage in gainful employment and there is an opportunity in Koboko Secondary/Primary School for example, this teacher will not wait to stay in the settlement. He or she will go to Koboko to look for the opportunity. So that is the reason they move"...* KII_OPM. Refugees relocated to urban places as they sought for gainful employment to earn a living and support their families due to the lack of employment in the refugee settlement.

Even if the refugees were to engage in self-employment, the available population does not have the buying power to support that endeavor. As noted by one of the respondents; *"For me I say we don't refuse the camp but there's nothing profitable to do. I have seven children, but livelihood is hard in the camp, we have to struggle to survive and as a business person I came here to do business" ...FC3_Congolese FGD.* Camps constrain potential of individuals and those with entrepreneurial motive move to urban areas to engage in income generating activities.



- **Diminishing support from donors**

The UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister advocate for self-sustainability for refugees beyond five years. The UNHCR and partner organisations provide non-food items to refugees once on arrival while over the years the ratio for food items has progressively been reduced. As noted; *“When we are taken there UN gives us tarpaulin for building as roofing which is given once at arrival. When this tarpaulin gets torn you want to get grass for thatching your roof but the natives don’t allow, so what do you do. And UN is saying stay, they can’t allow you to come to Koboko, you are refugees, you have to stay where they allocated you. How do you get grass? You go to cut the grass, the natives burn it, you have small kids, you want to sleep in a house. This tarpaulin is given once, things like blankets, mats are given only during the time when you arrive. All these years how can these things last.”... F4_South Sudan Women Group.* With the prolonged refugee situation for especially the South Sudanese and Congolese, refugees are forced to find means of sustainability for both food and non-food items such as good housing and clothing.

- **Disasters or catastrophes**

The research established that disasters and catastrophes, such as droughts, make it impossible to carry out meaningful farming, even if it is just the cultivation of green vegetables. Animal keeping is not sustainable because of a lack of water, so refugees sell off their lands and migrate. *“Am registered in Imvepi but we have an office in Siwinga and I always go there. So, you find that when you go to Siwinga right now (January), even to get a shed to sit, you cannot, it will be very difficult. The sunshine is too much; you cannot grow vegetables...Rain comes in July in Siwinga, by October no rain, so it becomes a challenge.”... KII_SSRA*

- **Dynamics in the host community**

Refugees are settled in rural areas with cultural differences from their own and, therefore, face language barriers, restricting communication. The following verbatims attest to this finding; *Language is vital simply because most of these refugees come from Bidibidi, Imvepi and Rhino and most of these people are Kakwas and Pojulus, who speak the same language.”...KII_SSRA.*

Furthermore, the study findings show that some of the communities are hostile resulting in scuffles, especially for resources such as wood fuel and grazing land among others. *“In the camp when you go for firewood the natives remove away the pangas and chase you away but in town you can get money and even buy charcoal” ...F7_South Sudan Women Group.* Another one echoed, *“My girls and daughter-in-law went to get grass, after the grass has dried ready to be taken, the natives said no, leave the grass. Then they carried this grass, followed my girls up to the camp and put the grass on sale. trees, cut for construction of house and kitchen, my boys cut the poles, when they finish, that leave the poles, they are not yours, you didn’t come from there (South Sudan) with trees, you came*



just as yourselves. The boys were chased and they still carried these poles following my children.”... F3_South Sudan FGD of elders

Pull Factors

Better social services in terms of access and quality, employment opportunities, and skilling programmes are some of the pull factors identified in the study that influence refugee rural-urban migration.

- **Access to social services**

Refugees in urban areas, as well as education and health services, seek two social services. While there were education centres and health facilities in the refugee settlements, the quality was unsatisfactory to some individuals who intended to relocate to urban areas to have access to better schools for their children and health services for their families. Some of these sentiments are captured in the following verbatim quotes; *“I wish you could go to the camp, if you were to go to the camp you will find that every person there in the camp there has a child here in town for better education.”... M1_South Sudan FGD of elders.* Another respondent said, *“...the issues firstly are education, health, water and feeding. All these became too difficult for people, everyone. That’s why some people left the camp, looking for places for farming, for children also to go to school.”... F1_South Sudan FGD of elders.* And yet another one emphasised that, *“...health facilities are far away from the refugee camp. I was staying in Arianz, for health you have to go up to Siripi, on foot, transport is 4,000. When you leave in the morning you reach around noon, then you have to join queues and if the time for closing reached before you can get help they close.”... F3_Congolese FGD.* It was also noted that post primary education is largely lacking in the refugee settlements, therefore a child who finishes P. 7 either drops out of school or is attracted to urban centres with the prospect of furthering their education in secondary.

- **Good quality and variety services**

The availability of services was not the only factor influencing the pull factor; the quality of the services was also influenced. The research findings reveal that refugees were looking for efficiency and quality of the service, ranging from water, education, comprehensive healthcare, entertainment and entrepreneurial services. This was expressed thus; *“better services are in town including schools, health services, access to water, clean and safe water, and available water, yeah. That has also pulled people to move to Koboko town with clean water sources like boreholes and protected wells, better schools, and others.”... KII_SSRA.* Another respondent noted, *“Some refugees were in urbanised places where there was electricity, running water, schools, better hospitals but then they had repatriated and gone back, so when war broke out again they couldn’t go back to those countries they had to come to Uganda. So, when they came to Uganda, they would fit where they think their lives will be better, especially in urban areas like Koboko.”... KII_OPM.* In urban settings the

refugees would also not be confined to specific service providers giving them a choice, depending on convenience.

- **Employment opportunities**

Rural areas largely lack employment opportunities and the rural settlements are not an exception. Even those who engage in petty trade find that the buying power of the populations is very low and this is worse for refugee populations. One respondent had this to say about employment in the settlements. *“You see employment is very limited in the settlements. Mostly like those who come to town are those who have come to seek for self-employment and there are those who have come also to look for other jobs. Like now you find in Koboko, for example, there are so many restaurants, you find our women, many of them are working in those restaurants. There are those who are employed as cooks and there are those who are employed as cleaners and then even in bars and in some shops. Those are opportunities that within the settlements you cannot get but in town it is possible.”... KII_SSRA*

Economic factors, such as the prospect of wages and improved livelihoods, play a significant role as a pull factor in motivating refugees to move from rural settings to urban centers. Refugees are skilled differently from their countries of origin, urban centres offer opportunities to use these skills and make a living. Additionally, there are skilling programmes in the settlements, but there are no opportunities for absorption into the labour force or to put these skills to use.

“Some of them (refugees) are skilled, some are semi-skilled while some are professionals. So, they come to sell their professions, their skills, some are entrepreneurs. So, they come to look for opportunities where they can.”... KII_OPM. This response from one respondent highlights the influence of formal or informal employment as a pull factor in refugee rural-urban migration.

Discussion of Findings

The study affirms Lee’s Migration Theory that postulates that migration starts as a personal initiative, with each person responding differently to the stimuli (push and Pull factors) for migration. As stated by Kiranda et al. (2017), the right to move within the country supports the underlying personal, push and pull factors and interests of refugees to relocate from the gazetted refugee settlements to urban locations such as Koboko Municipality.

The study established that Koboko Municipality remains a home for urban refugees from the surrounding refugee settlements influenced to migrate because of unfavourable conditions in the rural settlements and the allure of urban life. Despite the presence of the UNHCR, OPM and over 97 partners offering humanitarian aid in the settlements, the study established that resource conflicts, inadequate social services in terms of education and



health, insecurity and unfavourable living conditions forced urban refugees out of the settlements (Lukwago & Achiro, 2013; Cities Alliance, 2021; Kiranda, Ojok & Kamp, 2017). Influences by countries of origin have been noted to cause insecurity in rural settlements/camps (Anyanzu & de Wet-Billings, 2022) especially the cultural background and the disagreements refugees continue to harbor. However, the study findings revealed that because the South Sudan conflict has tribal undertones, fights between especially the Dinka and the Nuer caused insecurity within the settlements.

The existence of essential resources and amenities that are absent in the rural setting but can be found in Koboko Municipality was found to be a major reason for refugees to migrate from the settlement. This is consistent with earlier studies (FAO, 2019; Iqbal & Gusma, 2015; Cities Alliance, 2021). Thus, with a wide range of desired services and needs being urban-based, refugee rural-urban migration would continue in Koboko Municipality even if all the services desired by the refugees were not adequately provided. Ultimately from the perspective of the refugees, the challenges faced in the urban setting are easier to surmount.

However, the study findings also reveal that refugees do not migrate only to urban areas but also to other more conducive rural settings, contrasting with the assertions of Ambroso et al., 2016 that the inflow of refugees from South Sudan resulted in a notable surge of refugee rural-urban migration to adjacent towns in the West Nile region. Additionally, though Olivieri et al., 2021; Donato & Ferris, 2020; Aksoy & Poutvaara, 2021 contend that rural-urban migration is gender-biased, however, the study findings established that the phenomenon of displacement, particularly in the context of refugees, blurs the culturally determined gender norms.

The migration network theory emphasises social capital, which influences migration decisions on where and when migration decisions are made because networks offer social support (Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana, 2016). The study findings show host community and refugee relations were characterised by hostility from the natives, challenges of language barrier, and cultural differences. Koboko, which is predominantly populated by the Kakwa tribe, offers a friendly environment for South Sudanese refugees who speak the same dialect and have a similar cultural orientation. Refugees are, therefore migrating to Koboko municipality regardless of the existence of personal bonds and social benefits.

The study findings also revealed that some refugees relocated to urban areas in response to the laissez-faire lifestyle in the refugee settlements that might lead to early marriages for the girls and substance abuse for boys. The settlement environment is characterised by idleness and negative peer influence attributed to a lack of productive activities such as farming and children dropping out of school.



Conclusion

Rural-urban migration among refugees is fueled by a range of personal, push, and pull factors that vary in context from one individual to the other. The study findings support the notion that refugees base on a mix of factors that influence their movement but social services such as education and health and the need to find a livelihood stand out.

The effect of global urbanisation on the development and creation of rural refugee camps needs to be considered. As urbanisation becomes more widespread, national policies such as Uganda's rural settlement policy that does not recognise urban refugees contrast sharply with the study's findings.

Recommendations

To minimise negative effects of children and youth idleness, and ensure school going children remain in school, the key stakeholders in refugee management should prioritise education. Health facilities within the refugee settlement zones should be able to address the health needs of refugees, especially in treating chronic ailments. This is pertinent especially in prolonged refugee situations, such as for South Sudanese and Congolese refugees.

There is need for the Government of Uganda to recognise self-settled refugees in other urban centres in the country other than the City Kampala. There is need to support the urban councils to plan, budget and develop appropriate infrastructure, especially for education and health facilities to support the increased population. To support this, there is a need to establish monitoring and tracking mechanisms for refugees' movement to ensure proper integration into host communities.

There is a need to develop a link between skills development and skills utilisation, thus creating market opportunities within and beyond the refugee settlements. This would support the self-reliance policy championed by the aid agencies and government. This would also create livelihood/employment opportunities in the refugee settlements. Refugees need to be sensitised and screened to ensure the numerous skilling programmes translate into tangible benefits for the individuals and their families, not just as a way for the youth to pass time.

The UNHCR and the OPM should settle South Sudanese according to tribes (especially the Dinka and Nuer) in different settlements or at least zones to minimise insecurity brought about by political differences.



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