

South Sudanese refugees in Adjumani District, Uganda: Telling a new story?



About the International Refugee Rights Initiative

The International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) enhances the rights of those excluded from state protection as a result of forced displacement, conflict, discriminatory violence and statelessness. IRRI believes that strengthening the rights, capacities and democratic participation of these communities—refugees, the forcibly displaced, the conflict-affected, the stateless and those suffering violent discrimination on the basis of their political status—is essential to building just, peaceful and flourishing states and communities.

IRRI redresses the imbalances in power that fuel the violent exclusion of vulnerable populations from protection through:

- tackling the root causes of exile, statelessness, discriminatory violence, and conflict through which state protection is lost;
- enhancing the agency and protection of those who are forcibly displaced or threatened with displacement; and
- promoting the re-building of just and inclusive communities in which genuine citizenship is forged and displacement and exile comes to an end.

IRRI grounds its advocacy in regional and international human rights instruments and strives to make these guarantees effective at the local level.

Background to the Paper

IRRI is grateful to the Office of the Prime Minister, government of Uganda, for permission to conduct a visit to the refugee camps in Adjumani District, Uganda. The field visit was carried out by David Kigozi of IRRI and Joseph Okumu, an independent researcher. Dr Lucy Hovil and David Kigozi were the primary writers of the report, with input and support from Olivia Bueno and Andie Lambe of IRRI. The team would like to express their gratitude to all those who participated in the study.

Summary

This paper explores the situation of South Sudanese refugees residing both within and outside of the refugee “settlements”¹ in Adjumani District of north-western Uganda. Drawing on field work carried out by the International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) in February 2015, and informed by a previous IRRI report² released in 2014 and the adoption by UNHCR in September 2014 of a new *Policy on Alternatives to Camps*³ (UNHCR policy), this paper explores both the factors that compel refugees to remain within the camp structures, and those that enable them to move outside. In this context, the paper investigates both the opportunities and challenges for the implementation of the new UNHCR policy and the movement away from the encampment of refugees as the default policy response to refugee influxes in East Africa.

The paper is based on 65 interviews with refugees living in the settlements, members of the host community and local authorities. While the findings reveal that there are serious problems facing refugees both inside and outside the camps, those living outside the camps generally described their situation more favourably. In general, they are more able to establish independent livelihoods and become self-sufficient for a variety of reasons. Although they also identified a number of challenges – in Adjumani town, for example, increased demand had created shortages in health services and



South Sudanese refugees arrive in Uganda
(© UNHCR /F.Noy)

increased prices for commodities – living outside of the settlements was still seen as preferable. By contrast, many of those remaining in the camps described worrying humanitarian conditions in the camps with insufficient food rations being provided, and inadequate health and educational services. As a result, they expressed a desire to move out of the camps, but indicated that doing so would require start-up capital or assistance to which they did not have access.

Through the exploration of these realities, IRRI seeks to continue the conversation on how refugees might be better assisted outside of camp structures, and how opportunities for refugees living outside the camps might be better leveraged and the challenges better addressed. In other words, it seeks to contribute to a dialogue on how the new UNHCR policy can be implemented in practice.

Ultimately, the paper argues that implementing the new UNHCR policy is more likely to ensure that Adjumani District as a whole benefits from its extraordinary generosity in hosting refugees. It is important to remember that while the West squabbles over the acceptance of a few thousand migrants and asylum seekers arriving over the Mediterranean, countries such as Uganda with considerably fewer resources, and districts such as Adjumani which are themselves still recovering from decades of conflict, are accepting hundreds of thousands of refugees with minimal fuss. This acceptance should not be assumed and instead needs to be built on and rewarded so that not only do refugees and hosts benefit from the resources that are available, but if and when refugees do go home, the infrastructure remains and the benefits continue to be felt by the host communities.

¹ This paper sees the words “camps” and “settlements” as being inter-changeable inasmuch as both represent restrictions on freedoms for refugees. The word “camp” is generally used throughout the paper.

² IRRI, “Conflict in South Sudan: Refugees seek protection in Uganda and a way home,” April 2014, available at: <http://www.refugee-rights.org/Publications/Papers/2014/14%2004%2001%20South%20Sudanese%20refugees%20FINAL.pdf> .

³ UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps, July 2014, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/5422b8f09.html> .

Recommendations

The findings point to a number of recommendations to encourage full implementation of the UNHCR *Policy on Alternatives to Camps*, and to better enable local integration.

The government of Uganda should:

- **Reform national legislation to ensure that it fully respects freedom of movement.** While Uganda law recognises that refugees should have freedom of movement, it states that this will be subject to reasonable restrictions. In practice, this means that refugees are required to obtain permission before they are allowed to move outside of the camps. While in practice this requirement is not always enforced and refugees are able to move around with relative freedom, the law should be reformed to no longer require the obtaining of permits thereby guaranteeing the right of freedom of movement in both *law and practice*.
- **Ensure that all refugees over the age of 16 have official identity cards and that authorities at all levels recognise and respect these cards. Access to documentation will strengthen refugee rights, security and access to services.** At the time of the visit, most refugees only had food ration cards and “refugee (family) attestation” documents. In a context in which all Ugandans are currently being issued with official national identity cards, it is important that refugees also have adequate proof of identity.
- **Promote good relations between refugees and host community.** While the findings show that there are generally good relations between self-settled refugees and host communities in Adjumani District, the continuation of such good relations should not be assumed. Furthermore, there were concerning reports of tensions between Ugandans and camp-based refugees. In this context, the government of Uganda can encourage good relations by:
 - Sensitising local populations to the reasons that refugees flee and their rights in national and international law.
 - Encouraging interaction and dialogue between refugees and host communities, which will allow for better understanding.
 - Ensure mechanisms are in place at a local level for the identification and resolution of points of conflict.
- **Ensure active partnership between the central government and local governments in the area of refugee management.** If the UNHCR policy is going to be implemented effectively, much of the day-to-day management of refugees will ultimately need to be decentralised to local governments.
- **Establish an integrated approach to enable effective access to resources for refugees and the host population.** Adjumani is a relatively poor district which is itself recovering from decades of conflict. All those in the district face challenges accessing services. Although refugees are particularly vulnerable, many of the challenges they face, for example with access to medicine and health care, are also relevant for the local population. Leveraging support from refugee assisting agencies, the government of Uganda should seek to improve access to services for *refugees and host populations alike* by ensuring assistance through integrated services that address both the refugee and host communities (rather than creating parallel services for refugees). In doing so, the government and assisting agencies should ensure that such systems accord appropriate priority to refugee needs and address the particular barriers to refugees accessing services that may be imposed by linguistic or cultural differences.

- **Facilitate fair and transparent access to land and housing.** It is necessary for mechanisms to be created to ensure that any negotiation between refugees and the host community with regards to access to land and housing does not lead to exploitation by either side.

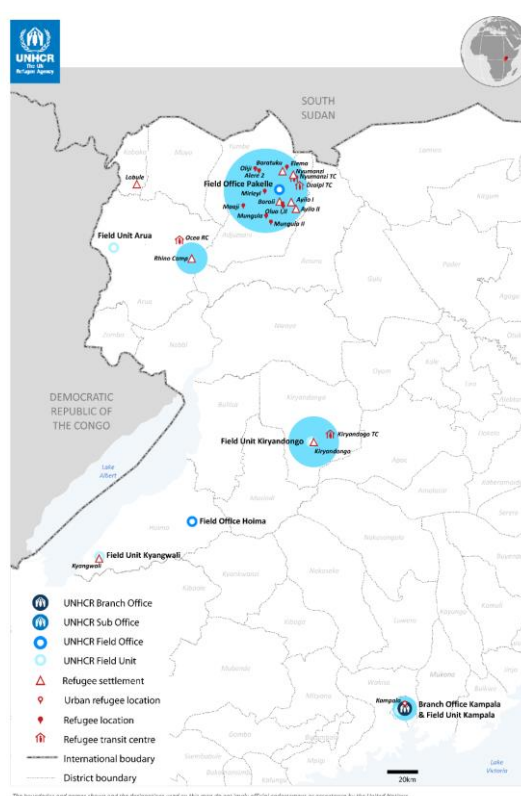
UNHCR and NGOs should:

- **Provide micro finance and other short term assistance to enable refugees to become self-sufficient.** Many of the refugees interviewed for this report indicated that a lack of start-up capital was the key impediment to moving outside of the camp and reaching a degree of self-sufficiency. Although refugees believed that in the longer term they could find work or start businesses to support themselves, in the shorter term they had no means to pay for housing as they searched for work or to invest in the base materials needed for a business. In this context, humanitarian agencies should consider making provision for greater short term assistance in the forms of grants and micro finance initiatives in order to allow refugees to become self-reliant. Existing assistance could be supplemented, for example, by converting funding available for the construction of housing in camps to a rental allowance to help refugees to live in other areas. Although it might be more costly in the short term, it is likely to reduce the need in the longer term by allowing refugees access to alternative means of livelihood.
- **Develop greater assistance outside of the camps.** Non-governmental and intergovernmental humanitarian actors, such as UNHCR, should develop assistance programmes that will allow refugees to live outside of the camps.
- **Facilitate access to land and appropriate housing outside of the camps.** UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies should assist refugees to find appropriate accommodation and land among host populations with a view towards facilitating settlement outside of the camps.
- **Movement towards cash assistance.** UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies should consider the substitution of cash assistance for distributions of food and non-food items (NFIs). It is clear that current food and NFI distributions do not address the full range of refugee needs and that refugees are already selling some items to compensate for unaddressed needs. Cash, or other more flexible types of assistance, would make it easier for refugees to address these pressing needs and prevent refugees from losing value in their rations by being forced to sell at submarket rates to merchants exploiting their vulnerability.
- **Create mechanisms for the identification and support for those refugees that are particularly vulnerable.** It is clear from the findings that the camps are acting as an important safety net for those who would otherwise not be able to support themselves, for example, because they are elderly, disabled. While identifying such cases may be easiest in the camps, other systems do exist and can be adapted to the needs of the self-settled in the Ugandan context.
- **Ensure stronger gender and child sensitive programming and environment for refugees who choose to continue to live in camps** in order to minimise risks to these populations in the camp context. For instance, currently many children walk long distances in dangerous areas to get to school, and women have to travel long distances, including at night, for maternity care or health centres.

Background

The current civil war in South Sudan began on 15 December 2013. Although it was triggered by disagreements within the government, its roots are historical and relate to the failure to create inclusive modes of governance in the newly independent South Sudan. The ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) – the ruling politico-military organisation led by President Salva Kiir – is seeking to defend itself against forces loyal to former deputy president Riek Machar of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in opposition (SPLM/A-IO). Fighting engulfed the capital, Juba and rapidly spread to other parts of the country. In the early stages, the towns of Bor, Malakal and Bentiu suffered the brunt of the fighting, although all ten states of South Sudan have subsequently been affected by the civil war. Sixteen months later, the conflict has cost an estimated 50,000 lives,⁴ has created an estimated 1.5 million internally displaced persons,⁵ and has forced approximately 500,000 refugees⁶ to flee to the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda.⁷ Much time and money has been invested by governments in the region and beyond in attempts to negotiate a peace settlement, but so far these attempts have failed.

By June 2015, a total of 154,134 South Sudanese refugees have been assisted in Uganda since the influx began in mid-December 2013, including 95,982 in Adjumani, 14,517 in Arua, 35,755 in Kiryandongo and 7,880 in Kampala.⁸ This influx of forced migrants is the latest episode in a longer story of mass population movements, whether forced or voluntary, in the borderlands of northern/north-west Uganda and southern Sudan. Most recently, since 2008, tens of thousands of Sudanese refugees who had been living in Uganda during the civil war in Sudan returned “home” after decades in exile, following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).⁹ However, neither the CPA nor the country's independence in July 2011 have brought lasting peace. As a result, refugees continue to cross the border into Uganda on a regular basis, and it is unlikely that those who have fled will return any time soon. Although UN agencies and humanitarian organisations are responding to the situation, there are



UGANDA: Arrivals from South Sudan
15 December 2013 – 17 June 2015

⁴ International Crisis Group, “Sudan and South Sudan’s merging conflicts,” Africa Report No. 223, 29 January 2015 available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/horn-of-africa/sudan/223-sudan-and-south-sudan-s-merging-conflicts.aspx>

⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), “Conflict and violence-induced displacement,” available at <http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-figures>. Statistics as of April 2015.

⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), *South Sudan Crisis: Situation Report No. 70*, 22 January 2015, available at:

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/South_Sudan_Crisis_Situation_Report_No_71_as_of_23_January.pdf.

⁷ UNHCR, “South Sudan Situation: Emergency Response: UNHCR Supplementary Appeal, January – December 2014.”

⁸ UNHCR, “Uganda Update for the South Sudan Emergency,” 12-18 June 2015 available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/SouthSudan/download.php?id=2093>.

⁹ For more details of the repatriation process, see Lucy Hovil, “Hoping for peace, afraid of war: the dilemmas of repatriation and belonging on the borders of Uganda and South Sudan.” *New Issues in Refugee Research* no. 196, UNHCR Development and Policy Evaluation Unit, December 2010 available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4cf5018b1.html>.

significant gaps in service provision. Meanwhile, despite the prospects of a long stay, the refugees have minimal or no options for local integration.

Overview of the previous report

This report builds on a previous report based on interviews conducted in February 2014 with South Sudanese refugees in Adjumani District. The report, “Conflict in South Sudan: Refugees seek protection in Uganda and a way home”,¹⁰ focused on the plight of refugees who had just arrived in Uganda and explored not only their immediate predicament but also their understanding of the conflict and the implications for its resolution.



Dzaipi transit centre, Uganda (© UNHCR / F.Noy)

The report showed that in response to the refugee influx, Ugandan authorities and UNHCR had once again pushed refugees into settlements. Despite voluminous evidence that refugee settlements are expensive, inefficient, and restrict the ability of refugees to enjoy their rights in exile, the settlements were justified by the authorities who argued that they were most effective for providing humanitarian assistance. Even so, the refugees faced inadequate humanitarian assistance and many refugees interviewed in February 2014 expressed their wish to live outside the settlement structure.

In the report, IRRI recommended an approach in which humanitarian assistance could be provided through local government structures in order to promote, rather than undermine, the organic process of interaction between refugees and host communities. By contrast, the policy of segregating refugees from the local population, we argued, made them more vulnerable both socially and economically. Segregation prevents refugees from accessing livelihoods, inhibits the adoption of varied coping strategies and reinforces differences between refugees and local communities. Although we found that the refugees were able to move in and out of the camps, the report called on the government of Uganda and its international partners to ensure that refugees were able to fully enjoy their right to freedom of movement by removing the need to acquire permission. It recommended alternatives to the settlement model as the primary response to the refugee crisis, arguing that these would encourage refugee integration. A few months following the publication of our report, UNHCR launched its *Policy on Alternatives to Camps*, which reiterated many of IRRI’s arguments including that refugee camps restrict refugee rights and access to livelihoods.

The Policy on Alternatives to Camps

This new policy, therefore, is to be welcomed. For decades, in many parts of the world, and in particular in Africa, UNHCR and host governments have responded to refugee crises by setting up camps (or settlements) which, they argued, were most efficient in addressing the social, economic

¹⁰ IRRI, “Conflict in South Sudan: Refugees seek protection in Uganda and a way home,” April 2014, available at: <http://www.refugee-rights.org/Publications/Papers/2014/14%2004%2001%20South%20Sudanese%20refugees%20FINAL.pdf>.

and political needs of refugees.¹¹ Yet what has become clear is that while the camp system may provide short-term efficiency in terms of refugees fed per dollar spent, they are not efficient overall. A significant body of research carried out in the Ugandan context has demonstrated the exact opposite:¹² those refugees who opt out of the camp system – even when doing so means forgoing any humanitarian assistance – have established a more effective alternative approach to exile than those who have remained in camps. As IRRI has previously argued, those that opt out:

have managed to live in areas in which they felt more secure, and had engaged in the local economy. Far from being passive victims, they have taken control of their lives, often without any external assistance... However, experience has shown that many assumptions underlying the policy of encampment – including the assertion that camps are more secure and more economically viable – are fundamentally flawed. Instead of generating security, camps have often created insecurity, providing fertile ground for radicalisation and recruitment of refugee populations [by external rebel groups and governments].¹³

Refugee camps have also proved inefficient with regard to the servicing of the refugees' humanitarian needs. While isolating populations of concern in designated areas makes them easier to identify and, in the short term, can make the humanitarian operation more cost effective, the system is characterised by numerous inefficiencies, “not least by creating parallel systems for delivery of services for refugees that have failed to dovetail with services for the local population, further entrenching the ‘them and us’ mentality.”¹⁴ Camps have also significantly hindered opportunities for self-reliance, with refugees being constantly hampered by restrictions on their freedom of movement, making them increasingly dependent on humanitarian assistance over a longer period. Any “savings” coming from the more efficient distribution in the short term, therefore, are likely to be lost as need persists over a longer period. In addition, when the international community loses interest and funding is reduced, those refugees in camps prove far more vulnerable than those who have found alternative livelihoods. UNHCR's policy is a recognition of these realities. The policy encourages alternatives to camps whenever possible, while ensuring that refugees are protected and assisted effectively, and are able to achieve solutions.

However, although the policy makes clear that refugees should be able to access protection and assistance wherever they are living, the long history of providing assistance only in camps, particularly in Africa, means that implementing this policy is going to require critical thinking about how alternatives can be structured and implemented effectively, and will require a fundamental shift in thinking at the international, national and local levels. In particular, the policy will need political support at both national and local levels. As it



Refugees arrive at the Nyumanzi Settlement from the Dzaipi transit centre (© UNHCR / F.Noy)

acknowledges, implementation requires a permissive national policy environment, and as yet, it is not clear how the government of Uganda will approach the new policy. Indeed, there are signs of official resistance, with some arguing that the policy does not apply to Uganda given that refugees

¹¹ Lucy Hovil, “With camps limiting many refugees, the UNHCR's policy change is welcome,” *The Guardian*, 2 October 2014, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2014/oct/02/unhcr-policy-change-refugee-camps>.

¹² See, for example, Lucy Hovil, “Self-settled refugees in Uganda: An alternative approach to displacement?” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20 (4) 2007.

¹³ Hovil 2014.

¹⁴ Ibid.

have relatively wide scope to move compared to other countries in the region and that a significant number have already successfully self-settled. In the words of the Commissioner for Refugees in Uganda, “[t]he alternative to camps policy does not apply to Uganda. We have settlements here.”¹⁵

The need for freedom of movement for refugees

One of the key factors around which the successful implementation of the policy hinges, is the effective enjoyment by refugees of their right to freedom of movement. This right is strongly recognised in international law. Article 26 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees grants freedom of movement to refugees, and Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides that everyone lawfully within the territory of a state [including refugees] shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his or her residence. At the regional level, Article 12(1) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights stipulates the rights of refugees to seek asylum and move freely. The legal protection is so strong that, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Dr Chaloka Beyani, unreasonable restrictions on the refugees’ movement could be challenged at the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (African Commission) “[i]n any hearing of this issue before the African Commission, the receiving State would bear the burden of proving that restrictions on the movement and residence of refugees are necessary, justified, and reasonable on acceptable grounds stipulated in human rights law, namely public order, public security, and public health.”¹⁶

Ultimately, nearly all other rights are contingent upon freedom of movement: “Without freedom of movement, rights to employment, education, legal access, identity papers, travel documents, naturalisation, and many other fundamental entitlements are severely curtailed, if not completely blocked.”¹⁷

The Ugandan policy context

During the decades of displacement prior to the secession of South Sudan, officially-sanctioned durable solutions remained elusive for the vast majority of refugees. The pillar of Uganda’s refugee management approach is the “local settlement” which, in theory, should enable refugees to become self-reliant. It offers a semblance of local integration inasmuch as refugees can move about, interact with the host population and buy and sell – where possible – without the intervention of the authorities. Not surprisingly, Uganda has been lauded for this settlement policy. Ideally, a refugee settlement in Uganda offers a refugee household a plot of land for cultivation on which a small house and a latrine can be built. Some refugee settlements, for instance Nakivale in the south-west of the country, are in fact a vast network of villages inhabited by refugee communities.

Some stakeholders hold the view that “settlements” are not “camps” and, according to Omata and Kaplan, “Unlike many of its neighbours, which encamp refugees, the Ugandan government promotes the ‘self-reliance’ of refugees; this means that rather than limiting responses to refugees to humanitarian relief, a space is open for a development-based approach to refugees.”¹⁸ Their assertion echoes government policy, which states, “[t]he objectives and overall goals of the Self Reliance Strategy are: (i) to empower refugees and nationals in the area to the extent that they will

¹⁵ Interview with Commissioner for Refugees, Office of the Prime Minister, Uganda, Kampala 26 February 2015.

¹⁶ Chaloka Beyani, *A Guide to the Use of the African Human Rights System in the Protection of Refugees*, 2006.

¹⁷ Themba Lewis, “Anyone who thinks refugee camps are a good idea has never lived in one: The importance of recognising refugees’ right to freedom of movement,” 25 March 2015, available at: <http://www.refugee-rights.org/blog/?p=792>.

¹⁸ Omata and Kaplan, “Refugee livelihoods in Kampala, Nakivale and Kyangwali refugee settlements: patterns of engagement in the refugee sector,” quoting Betts 2012. Humanitarian Innovation Project, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, Working Paper Series No. 95, October 2013, available at: <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/refugee-livelihoods-in-kampala-nakivale-and-kyangwali-refugee-settlements-patterns-of-engagement-with-the-private-sector>.

be able to support themselves; and (ii) to establish mechanisms that will ensure integration of services for the refugees with those of the nationals.”¹⁹

Although it is true that refugees in some settlements can cultivate some crops to supplement their food needs, self-sufficiency is hindered to a significant extent because of the practical and administrative restrictions on freedom of movement. In addition, not all refugees receive land for cultivation. Even in Nakivale not all refugee households have land, and in many other settlements only minimal plots of land are provided. Although refugees can move about freely within the settlement, their freedom of movement remains restricted by both policy and practice if they want to travel longer distances. In other words, even with access to land to cultivate, refugees need to move in order to access markets. While Section 30(1) of Uganda’s Refugees Act states that “a recognised refugee is entitled to free movement in Uganda”, this contradicted by Section 30(2), which states that this is “subject to reasonable restrictions specified in the laws of -Uganda”.²⁰ Despite acknowledging Uganda’s “freedom of movement” for refugees, research findings by Betts et al from 2014 recognise that refugees in Nakivale and Kyangwali settlements do not typically venture outside those designated spaces to transact business. “Populations in both sites tend to remain within their settlement borders when conducting livelihood activities: for instance, out of 621 self-employed refugee businesspeople in Nakivale and Kyangwali ...less than 10% regularly venture outside the settlement to earn a living.”²¹ At the same time, they state that a significant number of Ugandans visit the settlements on a daily basis from neighbouring villages and cities such as Hoima, Mbarara and Kampala to purchase products and services, therefore highlighting the free movement of Ugandans, rather than that of refugees, in these trade transactions. Technically, refugees require a special movement permit to leave the settlement, although this is not strictly enforced. The fact is that there are bureaucratic restrictions on travel – meaning that a refugee must spend valuable time (and often money) travelling to relevant offices and will still be uncertain of the outcome, making it cumbersome to get movement permits. This prevents many from selling their produce outside the settlement, where prices are better. There is also a presumption in favour of those who already have significant skills or expertise in agriculture and those with little or no experience in agriculture are also hindered from moving freely in labour markets to more effectively use their skills.

Within the Ugandan context, those refugees who choose to opt out of the official structures and “self-settle” are not eligible for assistance. In previous refugee flows into Uganda, many refugees in protracted situations who chose to “self-settle” reached a strong degree of integration at a local level, including owning property and inter-marrying with Ugandans. Some lived as *de facto* Ugandan citizens since official naturalisation is almost impossible.²² However, unofficial forms of local integration without legal protection have left refugees vulnerable, as they do not know when their legal status might be questioned.

However, there is no doubt that freedom of movement for refugees (i.e. without the need for movement permits), accompanied by the right to choose where to live, work and do business, would enhance the economic life of the majority of refugees in Uganda.

¹⁹ Office of the Prime Minister (Uganda), “Self-Reliance Strategy for Refugee Hosting Areas in Moyo, Arua and Adjumani: Report of the mid-term review,” April 2004.

²⁰ Ugandan Refugee Act, 2006, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4b7baba52.html> .

²¹ Betts, Bloom, Kaplan and Omata. *Refugee Economies: Rethinking Popular Assumptions*, Humanitarian Innovation Project, University of Oxford, June 2014, available at: <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/refugeeeconomies> .

²² On 30 August 2010, the Refugee Law Project filed a petition with Uganda’s Constitutional Court seeking the interpretation of the law regarding the naturalisation of refugees. Although the petition has been scheduled for hearing several times, there has never been a quorum.

Methodology

The visit to the refugee settlements in Adjumani District took place from 24 February to 2 March 2015. Adjumani hosts more South Sudanese refugees than any other district in Uganda. At least five camps have been set up in the district, including Nyumanzi Settlement, which hosts the largest number of refugees and is overcrowded; Baratuku Settlement, which many have left because the ground is waterlogged; and Boroli Settlement. Sixty-five qualitative, individual interviews based around interview maps were used to collect primary data. These interviews were conducted with a cross-section of South Sudanese refugees living in Nyumanzi, Baratuku and Boroli settlements; with “self-settled” refugees living in Adjumani town; and with members of the host community in Adjumani town including an elder and opinion leader. Additional interviews were conducted with the Commissioner for Refugees, a senior international NGO field representative, and local government officials. In addition, towards the end of the visit, a focus group discussion was held with 11 refugee women in Nyumanzi Settlement, which confirmed data collected in individual interviews. The host community and self-settled refugees were interviewed in Pavuraga Village of Adjumani Town Council. Refugees were asked about where their flight began, their dates of arrival and ports of entry, whether or not they came with their family, their displacement history, thoughts about life in the settlement, freedom of movement, conditions and services in the settlement, and livelihoods, among other things. The host community were asked questions about whether or not there were challenges with the arrival of South Sudanese refugees, the nature of relations between themselves and the refugees, and their thoughts on refugees staying in or out of settlements.

The refugee desk officer, Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)²³ in Pakelle²⁴ allowed us access to the refugee settlements in Adjumani District. Unfortunately, we were unable to debrief him at the end of the visit as agreed because he had travelled to Kampala. Furthermore, despite repeated requests, efforts to interview the UNHCR protection unit at Pakelle proved futile: we were told that none of the senior officials were available and we were referred to the UNHCR Head Office in Kampala, where, despite repeated attempts, we have been unable to secure an appointment to date.

While we interviewed refugees from over twelve different ethnic groups in the settlements, none of those interviewed identified themselves as Nuer. One of the determining factors for allocating refugees to the various refugee settlements is the proximity of the settlement to their port of entry into the country. Almost all the South Sudanese refugees in Adjumani District entered the country through the Elegu border post. However, thousands of Nuer apparently fled to Ethiopia and Kenya and most of those who fled to Uganda passed through the Oraba border point which is closer to Rhino Settlement in Arua District. Unsurprisingly, most of the refugees in the settlements were women and children, accounting for 87%,²⁵ including a significant number of widows and orphans. In February 2015, 56% of the refugees we spoke to (excluding the women in the focus group) were women, 47% of whom were 35 years and below, while only 20% were above 50. Of the men, 41% of were in the age range of 35 and below.

A long history of conflict and displacement

Most of those interviewed had fled from Bor, Pibor or Juba in South Sudan, and had arrived in Uganda between December 2013 and April 2014. The majority had entered first through Elegu border post, and then gone either to Dzaipi or Nyumanzi II reception centres (also in Adjumani District), before being eventually relocated to one of the camps where they are now living. Some of

²³ The management of refugees in Uganda falls under the OPM.

²⁴ Pakelle is a town close to Adjumani where OPM, UNHCR and a number of NGOs are located.

²⁵ From the minutes of the Interagency Emergency Coordination Meeting, UNHCR Branch Office, Kampala, Uganda, 26 February 2015.

those who were relocated to the camps have subsequently left them and are now living in Adjumani town, returning to the camps when rations are distributed. A few went straight to Adjumani town and by-passed the official registration system and are receiving no assistance.

Most of those interviewed had come in family groups, but a few had come on their own. A number of women told of how their husbands had come with them and then returned to South Sudan as they are soldiers; others told of how their husbands, or other family members, had been killed in the recent violence. Some had been displaced before, others had not. Regardless, all have been impacted by the years of conflict and displacement that have been a characteristic of life for Sudanese and South Sudanese alike. Of those that had previously been displaced, some had been in Uganda but most said they had been internally displaced within what is now South Sudan during the previous conflict between the government of Sudan and the SPLA.

As a result of these cycles of displacement, people's resources have become increasingly depleted. One man told of how he had been displaced to Ethiopia in 1987 when he was a soldier in the SPLA: "I stayed in Fanyidu for four years but there was a war between the government and rebels in Ethiopia and [I] returned to South Sudan in 1991. In 1992, I fled to Kakuma [refugee camp], Kenya, and returned to South Sudan, Eastern Equatoria, in 1994. There I had land and I was able to build a house and get some cattle. In 2013, war broke out in Akobo in South Sudan and I fled to Uganda. Now I have lost everything."²⁶

Another man told his story:

I was displaced in 1991 to Uganda and stayed in Loboni, Kitgum District [Uganda]. While in Loboni, I registered for primary studies at Agata Primary School. In 2008, I relocated to Alera in Adjumani District. In 2009, I returned to Bor, South Sudan, and joined a secondary school. When Makerere University opened a college in Juba, the Makerere Business Technical College, Intensive Support Centre, I joined but dropped out in the second year because my elder brother and uncle had died and I did not have financial support. Before the war, life was good and relatives assisted me. But now I have nothing and my education is lost.²⁷

Although the impact of displacement has been devastating, this is by no means the full story, and it is important that refugees are not characterised simply as victims of circumstances. People also demonstrated an extraordinary level of creativity in how they had negotiated their way around the complexities and challenges of displacement and the many ruptures that it had created. For example, one man talked of how he had been displaced three times and had used three different jobs to generate income, from carpentry to teaching: "For now, if I can get income to help my family, things should be fine. I am also a fisherman if there is opportunity for that and I can also keep cattle."²⁸

This creativity and resilience must be fostered and encouraged. Although camps offer a ready-made structure for assisting people who have lost so much, in the longer term they too often stifle opportunities to move beyond a situation of loss: they restrict opportunities to pursue ambitions and ideas. Most people need assistance in the short term, but they also want the opportunity to rebuild their lives *despite* being in exile. Without such opportunities, they are unable to move away from reliance on humanitarian assistance.

²⁶ Interview with refugee man, Baratuku Settlement, 27 February 2015.

²⁷ Interview with refugee man, Baratuku Settlement, 27 February 2015.

²⁸ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

What do the camps offer?

As we advocate for the implementation of the new UNHCR policy by the government of Uganda and UNHCR, it is important to understand the positive aspects of camps as identified by refugees. Alternative means of providing these benefits in a non-camp environment will need to be found.



Refugees with new supplies at the Nyumanzi Settlement
(© UNHCR / F.Noy)

First, given the grim circumstances in which many people arrived in Uganda, camps can be an important form of initial assistance for many. In this regard, the refugees felt the “permanent” camps were an improvement on the transit camps. One woman, who had arrived in Uganda pregnant after walking for seven days, said: “It was crazy in Dzaipi, people were fighting for food and you had to be strong to get enough to eat. Baratuku is better. There is no fighting for food although it is not enough. We get beans, sorghum and cooking oil

monthly. Salt and soap (1 bar) come every three months.”²⁹ For those who have nothing, or who lack the potential to ensure the most basic necessities outside a camp setting, camps at least offer something: “It is good to stay in a camp if you do not have any money. If I had money, I would be going and coming.”³⁰

Likewise for those who have never been to Uganda before and do not know how to negotiate their way within a foreign land, they offer a ready-made structure in which to live. As one young woman said, “The camp is good because for a stranger, it is the only alternative. This was my first time in Uganda. The people I am familiar with are in this camp.”³¹

A number of elderly people interviewed talked of how the camp created an important source of assistance for them as they were unable to support themselves. An elderly woman who is almost blind said: “For me, the camp is a good thing because they take care of me here. It would not be good for a young person who is still searching for better means of survival and also taking care of other people.”³² As another elderly woman said, “I am aging now and my husband is far away, so for me my focus is on having UNHCR to help me.”³³ Others are able to take advantage of the presence of humanitarian agencies to find a bit of work: “Since I have a bit of education and speak English, I get some work to do from some humanitarian agencies working in the settlement and they pay me some little money.”³⁴ In Boroli, many emphasised the fact that they now have access to clean water: “Water is no longer a problem in Boroli because we now have many wells dug by NGOs. Each household has a latrine – although in many cases the canvas material for the walls is torn and worn out which compromises our privacy. Many of us opt to use these latrines at night when we cannot be seen.”³⁵ For others, it is merely the lack of expenses that is seen as positive. As another refugee

²⁹ Interview with refugee woman, Baratuku Settlement, 27 February 2015.

³⁰ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

³¹ Interview with young refugee woman, Boroli settlement, 27 February 2015.

³² Interview with elderly refugee woman, Baratuku settlement, 27 February 2015.

³³ Interview with elderly refugee woman, Nyumanzi I Settlement, 28 February 2015.

³⁴ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

³⁵ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

said, “There’s not enough food, bad education, no healthcare. But at least here we don’t have to rent a house.”³⁶

It is important to acknowledge, therefore, that aspects of what camps offer remain important at some level. While we argue that camps should be discouraged for the many reasons mentioned in this report, it is worth noting that those who have opted out of the camp system have probably included a disproportionate number of those who have pre-existing resources and connections, which were likely to have contributed as much or more to their success as the simple fact of moving. In this context, therefore, it is important to acknowledge that mere movement away from camps will not automatically create the same results for all refugees and the safety net that is created by the camp environment still has a role to play. The challenge, therefore, is to find ways of providing this safety net in such a way that does not impose the same restrictions on rights as the current camp system.

What do the camps *not* offer?

Inadequate rations, inadequate land

However, overwhelmingly interviewees focused on the many hardships and problems associated with living in the camps. Although some of these hardships related generally to the situation of displacement, many were specific to the context of encampment. While it is important to emphasise that these issues are well recognised and documented, the fact that tens of thousands of refugees continue to live in camps is testament to the fact that, despite the changing policy environment, *practice* lags considerably behind.

In the settlements, refugees receive regular food rations, which they are expected to supplement with food grown on their allocated plot of land. However, there were two problems with this. First, there were reports of inadequate, monotonous and poor quality food, with refugees stating that they often went hungry. The standard rations include beans and sorghum. However, when the kind of sorghum that is provided to refugees is cooked, it turns dark and is not easy to eat, with members of the host community explaining that it is only palatable when



Nyumanzi Settlement (© UNHCR / F.Noy)

mixed with cassava flour, which is not part of the rations. As a result, there were reports of refugees, particularly children, getting sick when they eat it.

Second, the size of land they had been allocated was inadequate to properly supplement these rations. Despite the much-touted generosity of the government’s allocation of land, in reality those interviewed in the three camps had been allocated plots that were no bigger than 30 by 30 metres, and many were smaller. A plot this size is not big enough to feed a typical South Sudanese family. With inadequate rations, therefore, people were unable to properly supplement due to the small size of their plots. Of even greater concern, however, was the fact that the situation was likely to get

³⁶ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 25 February 2015.

worse. Refugees know from previous experience, the experience of others, or having an understanding of the broader politics of humanitarian assistance, that, in due course, these rations are likely to be reduced if not stopped altogether. At this point, they have no contingency.

Therefore, people are barely able to live off what they are currently receiving, let alone feed their families if they receive even less. As one man in Boroli said, “The land is 20 by 20 metres for the house and latrine. Only a few things like vegetables can be planted on the land. We have no land for agriculture.”³⁷ “While in Boroli the land is 20 by 20 metres, in Mungula it is 20 by 30 metres which is still small for agriculture. We heard that in Mungula they stopped giving rations and yet the refugees there do not have enough land to feed themselves, and have no documents to work.”³⁸ In Baratuku, where much of the land is water-logged, things appeared to be even worse. According to one refugee: “The main problem we have here is the underground water and flooding problem. The land we have is not fertile, so one cannot even think of using it for cultivation... I might have to look for casual labour from the host communities and also land to cultivate.”³⁹ He then went on to say that many people have left Baratuku and moved to Nyumanzi because of the dire situation in the camp.

As a result, people live in fear of the humanitarian aid drying up. As one man said, “If the aid stops, I will suffer badly because the plot they gave us to dig and plant crops is very small. It is about 10 x 8 metres.”⁴⁰ Refugees at times need to sell their rations for other necessities, such as medicine or clothing, which are not provided: “Life is very hard for us. The assistance is not enough. To make it worse, sometimes people have to sell their food to get money for what they want. We have no idea about if and when the assistance will stop, we are in the hands of UNHCR.”⁴¹ Or as one woman put it, “If [assistance] stops? God forbid!”⁴² It is clear that self-sufficiency cannot be obtained under these circumstances.

Inadequate services

In addition, while one of the selling-points of the encampment model is that consolidation of services allows them to be provided at higher quality, the interviews showed very poor levels of healthcare and education. One refugee living in Boroli described the situation in the camp:

The Health Centre is several kilometres away from where we stay and it does not have medicines except things like paracetamol... They write prescriptions for us but there are no medicines in the pharmacy so we have to look for it in town but we have no money to get there. Sometimes we are referred to Adjumani Hospital but getting there is expensive and they have no sufficient stocks of medicines so it is the same story. Travelling from here to Adjumani by *boda boda* and back is 14,000 shillings [approximately USD 5] – where do we refugees get that kind of money from?⁴³

In Nyumanzi, the situation was no better. One woman pointed to a hill where she said a number of children who had died of preventable illnesses had been buried:

Many children are sick mainly of malaria, typhoid, chicken pox and measles and many have died and are buried there. Even big people are sick and some have died. There are no mosquito nets at all. There is a health centre in Block B which is good, but not all the

³⁷ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

³⁸ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

³⁹ Interview with refugee man, Baratuku Settlement, 27 February 2015.

⁴⁰ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁴¹ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁴² Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁴³ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

necessary medication is there. However, the good thing is that [now] all children have been vaccinated.⁴⁴

A woman living in Baratuku expressed her concerns, not least over the lack of emergency health care in the camp: “There should be a provision for emergency cases at night because the health centre is very far. The other thing is that during the day, the health centre prioritises treatment of the host community.”⁴⁵

People are facing a similar struggle over access to education. In Boroli, refugees said that children had to walk five kilometres each way to school, often on empty stomachs – and even then, the education is not free: “Children can go to Boroli Primary School but it is far and they have to walk both ways. And we have to pay at least 9,000 shillings [approximately USD 3] per term.”⁴⁶ While this sum may seem low, when you have no money, even USD 3 can be an insurmountable challenge. In Baratuku, the school is further still:

The primary school is very far, six kilometres. The children have to walk there daily. And it is dangerous during the rainy season as they have to cross a “river”. And a lot of money is required: 7,000 shillings [approx. USD 2.50] for registration; 22,000 shillings [approx. USD 7.50] for uniform; 2,000 shillings [approx. USD 0.75] exam fees; 2,500 shillings [just under USD1] for the teachers association; etc... Worse still, they don’t provide any food to the kids.⁴⁷

In addition, there is minimal access to secondary education for those in the camps. As a result, people described a situation where many young people who are idle with nothing to do. Although work is being done to improve education, it is clear that a huge amount of resources would be needed to fill the current gaps.

Finally, refugees expressed concerns about the state of their shelters. Many of them leak when it rains and need repair. In some cases, the plastic sheeting which serves as a roof is blown away by the wind, which can be strong in Adjumani District. NFIs, like jerry cans, were not enough and in some cases refugees were using bowls or saucepans to collect water.

Nowhere to go

Within this context of unpredictable humanitarian assistance, limited access to land, inaccessible education and healthcare and poor housing, one of the key problems that people raised was the fact that the camp environment offers limited access to alternative livelihoods. Many people emphasised the fact that the camps create a closed economic system. While there is trade taking place, and there is some economic integration with the surrounding areas, the geographic isolation of the camps limits its scope. The response by a refugee woman living in Boroli when asked about her plans for the future summed up how many felt:

Plans? I do not have any plans. There is no business here so I have nothing to do. That is why I am not happy. I really plan to go back to my land and cultivate because there I can grow what to eat. But there is fighting there. I am used to growing my food and not begging and buying... I would prefer staying outside the camp if I can get something to do or dig because here I am just staying idle. Some of the non-food items [provided by humanitarian agencies] I had to sell in order to build [my home].⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Interview with refugee woman, Nyumanzi Settlement, 28 February 2015.

⁴⁵ Interview with refugee woman, Baratuku Settlement, 27 February 2015.

⁴⁶ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁴⁷ Interview with refugee woman, Baratuku Settlement, 27 February 2015.

⁴⁸ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

Over and over again interviewees stressed the fact that they want to support themselves and their families, but they are unable to break out of the dependant situation in which they have found themselves. There are almost no alternatives. One woman talked of how she wanted to send her eldest daughter to secondary school, but needed money in order to make money in order to be able to afford the fees to send her: “If I had capital, I would continue with my trade [from South Sudan], making and selling *mandazi* [a type of fried bread]... Instead, I just go to the forest to collect wood and sell it in the market. Otherwise, we don’t get enough food and the sorghum we receive needs grinding which costs money.”⁴⁹



Nyumanzi Settlement (© UNHCR / F.Noy)

Another woman, who has two children one of whom is disabled, told of how she tries to support herself in the camp by doing back-breaking work carrying water: “Apart from the distributions, I fetch water for people [from the host community] and they pay me 300 – 400 shillings per jerrycan [less than USD 0.25 per 20 litre jerrycan of water]. In a day I can make about 3,000 – 4,000 shillings [between USD 1.00 and 1.50]. I also dig for people and they pay me between 2,000 and 4,000 [just under US 1.00 to 1.50] a day but it is a lot of hard work for little pay.”⁵⁰

The problems associated with the camps are well known. However, it is vital to emphasise that one of the key problems with camps is their geographic isolation. Although camps need not necessarily be located in remote places, they generally are, because this is where large plots of land needed to host large numbers are typically available. Creating a genuine alternative to camps needs to address both of these forms of marginalisation in order to allow for the conditions for potential economic and social integration.

Why are people still in the camps despite the problems?

So why, despite these hardships, are so many people still in the camps? In answer to this question, the refugees talked repeatedly of the fact that you have to have something extra to be able to live outside of the camp – either extra resources, contacts, relatives, or something that enables you to make the move from total dependency within the camp to independence outside. Currently, humanitarian assistance is only being distributed within the camp – and to those registered there. Without this crucial assistance, people not only have to find their own food, but also to pay rent for their housing and for access to land if they wish to cultivate. Furthermore, those who do not speak the local language or have connections outside of the camps need to forge social relations.

A refugee woman summarised the dilemma facing so many:

The problem with staying out of the camp is that one has to cater for one’s self from accommodation to feeding – there is no assistance. The person has to rent and get means for getting food, which is very difficult. Those who are staying in town are those who already

⁴⁹ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁵⁰ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 25 February 2015.

have something. They are there because they have children who have to study while others are traders who are looking for markets for their goods.⁵¹

As one man said, “A refugee needs to be well prepared to stay outside the camp.”⁵² This was echoed again and again: “It is not good [to stay in the camp] but we are obliged. Staying outside the camp is too costly so there is the issue of affordability.”⁵³ “The only people who can leave the camp are those with money. One needs capital to start up something.”⁵⁴ “If we can be helped outside the camp, I would rather stay out.”⁵⁵ “I think it is not good to stay in a camp... But what else can I do with five children except go back to South Sudan?”⁵⁶

Most of those interviewed described their skills – whether making *mandazi*, or as qualified teachers. Yet they are unable to use these skills to support their families. One man told of how he had been taken to Adjumani and Moyo towns to do an electricity course sponsored by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). However, as he asked, “what good is that to me here? Who needs an electrician here [where there is no electricity]?”⁵⁷ Another man, a qualified teacher, said: “I could work if there was an opportunity but it is not easy for a refugee to work in Uganda... I trained as a teacher of social science, English and science.”⁵⁸

As one man said:

It is good [in the camp] just because we have security here and we are provided with the basic requirements for livelihood unlike South Sudan where people are just being killed. However, if there was a place in Uganda and not in camps where I can get something like business where one can get customers for one’s service like charging phones, it would be better because here there is limited market for business and people are poor generally.⁵⁹

Likewise a man who used to own two shops selling furniture in Juba, but who lost everything during the looting and hears his shop is now occupied by soldiers, said: “If someone does not have money or capital, it is better to stay in a camp. I am a businessman but what can I do outside a camp if I have no money? In a camp I can survive.”⁶⁰

As a result, many of those who have remained in the camps have done so because, without any extra help, it is impossible for them to leave: “I can’t think of leaving the camp. I have no money to survive outside the camp where I would have to pay rent, for example, and I wouldn’t be able to communicate with people. I don’t speak English or any local language.”⁶¹ Likewise a young man, who fled on his own, sees no alternative: “I came here because I wanted to go back to school because I was at the level of Primary 6... I am the only survivor in my family so I think I need to get education and think of what to do... I moved to Arua Settlement to study the different camp situation and compare it with here, but I found the situation is the same – there is no school in the camp.” When asked if he could think of an alternative to staying in Boroli Settlement, he replied “I cannot even think of an alternative because I have no skill and no contacts at all.”⁶² As an elderly man said, “If my

⁵¹ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 25 February 2015.

⁵² Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 25 February 2015.

⁵³ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 25 February 2015.

⁵⁴ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 25 February 2015.

⁵⁵ Interview with refugee woman, Nyumanzi Settlement, 28 February 2015.

⁵⁶ Interview with refugee woman, Baratuku Settlement, 27 February 2015.

⁵⁷ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 25 February 2015.

⁵⁸ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁵⁹ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁶⁰ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁶¹ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁶² Interview with 21 year old refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 25 February 2015.

relatives in South Sudan can send me some money, I can leave the camp and start a small business to sustain me.”⁶³

The camps, therefore, are for those who do not have alternatives without any additional assistance: “Those who are here [in the camp] now are staying because they do not have better alternatives. Those who had alternatives are out there studying and doing business.”⁶⁴ The new UNHCR policy offers a vision of an alternative approach to assistance for refugees that addresses many of these challenges. To do this, however, new forms of assistance that target the short-falls in the current system must be deployed in practice.

Ability to move freely? Constraints and opportunities

Key to enabling the outcomes envisaged in the UNHCR policy is the free movement of people. There are two aspects of freedom of movement: first, the legal/policy environment and second, the practical ability for people to move. In the Uganda context, this is a controversial issue because much has been made of the fact that refugees in Uganda are now free to move. However, the findings show that a more nuanced understanding of the policy environment for movement is necessary, and that constraints on the movement of people remain at both of these levels.

First, when asked if they were allowed to move out of the camps, people often had a similar answer: “People are free to move as long as one has a travel document from OPM.”⁶⁵ “We are free to move away, but with a traveling permit from OPM.”⁶⁶ “We are free to move anywhere. They demand permission if you are going to another town. Some refugees ignore this requirement but nothing happens to them.”⁶⁷ “Yes, we are free to move but we have to get permission from OPM.”⁶⁸ “You can move without, but it is better to have permission to move. I think they call it a movement permit. Without that permit, UNHCR would not support you if you got a problem outside the camp.”⁶⁹ Despite repeated attempts, both in the field and at the Kampala Headquarters, to meet with UNHCR to discuss the findings of the paper, UNHCR were unable to meet us and therefore we have been unable to confirm this assertion with them.

As these quotes demonstrate, people are, in general, not finding the legal restrictions to be a major barrier to their movement. However, the need to obtain permission features prominently in their consciousness and doing so requires time and often significant resources as refugees have to travel to the relevant offices. In addition, it is clear that they are aware of the vulnerabilities that they face if they do not obtain permission. Thus it seems clear that while the policy environment does not prohibit freedom of movement, it does not facilitate it either.

Second, and perhaps more significantly, regardless of the legal framework, all of those interviewed talked of how it is prohibitively expensive for people to move. This is in part due to the fact that the camps we visited are in isolated areas that are not served by strong local transport networks and in part due to the financial consequences of foregoing assistance. Again, there were similar responses from people when asked why, if they are allowed to move, they do not: “I don’t leave the camp because I have no money to move.”⁷⁰ “No, we don’t leave the camp because there is nowhere to go.

⁶³ Interview with elderly refugee man, Nyumanzi Settlement, 28 February 2015.

⁶⁴ Interview with elderly refugee woman, Nyumanzi I Settlement, 28 February 2015.

⁶⁵ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 27 February 2015.

⁶⁶ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁶⁷ Interview with refugee woman, Nyumanzi Settlement, 28 February 2015.

⁶⁸ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁶⁹ Interview with refugee woman, Adjumani town, 1 March 2015.

⁷⁰ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

I have no relatives anywhere in Uganda. I have no money. I only go to the health centre or hospital when the children are sick.”⁷¹

It is clear, therefore, that while people are undeniably moving in and out of the camps, the context in which this is happening is one in which people are constrained by the need for permission (and while, for the most part, people can get away with not asking permission, they remain vulnerable as a result), and one in which the isolation of the camps is making movement prohibitively expensive for many.

What enabled people to opt out of the camps?

The other side of the story is told by those who have opted out of the camp system, who have either foregone humanitarian assistance or found a way to access it and live outside of the camp. Those interviewed who are living in Adjumani town show that there is a possible alternative – but it is one that is constructed primarily by the refugees themselves. Their stories are varied. Some have built on relationships and resources they had developed in Uganda when they were displaced during the previous war in South Sudan. Others have started from scratch. Although the humanitarian structures remain focused on the camps, it was also encouraging to hear that some assistance is beginning to move with the refugees.

One woman told of how and why she had opted out of the camp system:

Our priority was to get our children educated here and find jobs, so that we can raise fees for our children. We plan to continue doing business and educating our children until they all complete Uganda Certificate of Education then we can plan for other things... At first we were in camps but then we moved out of the camp just to ensure that we can give our children better education from the schools of the citizens. We take them to schools here which are for the “nationals” and they study without any problem, only that we are required to pay their fees just like any other child going to that school... We only visit the camps to access food and other NFIs... In addition, we are involved in small business of buying and selling produce which we get from Amuru and sell here in the main Adjumani market. When we go to buy the produce is when we also buy our food stuff because it is cheap in the countryside there.⁷²

She went on to say that she had had no problem accessing healthcare at Adjumani Hospital and other government health centres, and that she had had no problem relating to the host community. “The host community is ok with the presence of refugees in their areas because it has caused the improvement of the health system which now has drugs and health-workers.”⁷³

Indeed, the two main factors that people emphasised that had led to them opting out of the camp environment, was access to education and access to work. “I think it would be preferable to stay within a town where there are jobs and many people.”⁷⁴

Another refugee woman said:

Our plan now is to educate our children up to the level we can afford... We will not go back to South Sudan until they have completed “O” level... We were at first in Ayilo camp. Then

⁷¹ Interview with refugee woman, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

⁷² Interview with self-settled refugee woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 1 March 2015.

⁷³ Interview with self-settled refugee woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁷⁴ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

we came here because we have these young children who have to go school. The previous experience taught us a lesson because those who were attending school during the first displacement are the ones who are now having jobs in South Sudan. So we also do not want to waste the future of our children like we wasted ours.⁷⁵

Interestingly, and somewhat counter-intuitively given the ongoing conflict, others told of how they receive money from relatives in South Sudan. As one woman said:

For food I collect from the camp [Ayilo] which was allocated to us and also my sister working in Juba sends us some money which we use for paying rent and whatever remains we use it for feeding such as buying milk. We also sell some of the sorghum given to us to change diet. On health, we depend on the government hospital in Adjumani here where we are given treatment for free just like the nationals. For education, our children are in the government schools here meant for citizens but we have been encouraged by UNHCR to take them to those schools except that we pay for them the full amount required at school.⁷⁶

A woman who had previously been in Olijj settlement in Adjumani District, had returned to South Sudan prior to its independence and then been re-displaced at the end of 2014, told of how she left the transit camp because the conditions were so bad. Her children are now going to the local school, and she has not had any problems with the local government officials – to whom she introduced herself. She supports herself by going “deep into the villages to cut grass for thatching houses”, which she then sells. When asked how she was able to do this, she replied: “My husband knew some people in this part of town and they helped me to settle in.”⁷⁷

Although the interviews only covered a small geographical area, it was also interesting that no-one among the self-settled refugees in Adjumani town reported tensions with the local government structures or the host population. One woman, when asked if the local officials accepted her presence replied: “That is a funny question. I don’t have any problem living here.”⁷⁸ Another woman said, “They know that I am South Sudanese but I am part of the community so I do not have any problem with them.”⁷⁹ Another interviewee talked of how she felt accepted by the local community. When asked why she thought that to be, she replied, “I don’t know why but may be because they know us as not bad people and that we are here because we want to take our children to school. This is because when we came they registered us and the landlord told the local authorities that we are here because we want our children to go to school.”⁸⁰

Finally, people emphasised that they felt more secure outside of the camps. One woman, who had experienced both being in a camp and living in Adjumani town, said:

Staying outside a refugee camp is better because in the camp there is a lot of overcrowding and services are poor because of too many people. Secondly, there is better security outside the camp, particularly if you have enemies. I have told you that four brothers of mine were killed by the SPLA suspecting them of collaborating with Khartoum. They also know me and could easily trace me in a camp. Outside the camp, there is some level of risk, but I am more anonymous. The police are also more effective outside the camps – in most of the camps there is almost no police presence.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Interview with self-settled refugee woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 1 March 2015.

⁷⁶ Interview with self-settled refugee woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁷⁷ Interview with self-settled (and unregistered) refugee woman, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁷⁸ Interview with self-settled refugee woman, Adjumani town, 2 March 2015.

⁷⁹ Interview with self-settled refugee woman, Adjumani town, 1 March 2015.

⁸⁰ Interview with self-settled refugee woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 1 March 2015.

⁸¹ Interview with self-settled refugee woman, Adjumani, 1 March 2015.

Interestingly, these perspectives differed from those in the camps who talked about the tense relationship they have with Ugandans in the area. As one woman said: “When we go to the forest to pick firewood the [local people] beat us up. They beat a man so badly that he was taken to Adjumani hospital. They also beat children. So we have to buy firewood or charcoal but where does a refugee get money from? One basin or small bucket of firewood is 14,000 shillings [under USD 5] for two people for two or three days.”⁸²

Perspectives from the host population

The perspectives of the refugees regarding their positive relationship with the host community were confirmed by those members of the host community that were interviewed. As one man said, “[The refugees here] live well with the community and we do not have problems with them. The only issue is language, if they are not Madi. Some speak only Dinka and Arabic and communication can be difficult.”⁸³ When asked what disadvantages he sees: “I don’t see many disadvantages. Perhaps I can say that the shortage of water is partly because of the increase in the numbers of urban dwellers, including refugees. This has an impact, but there are other factors as well. There is also the rise in prices of things. When you have refugees, prices rise and there is no bargaining.”⁸⁴ When asked if self-settled urban refugees receive any aid from UNHCR, he replied: “I am almost sure they do not receive anything from those agencies. They were not brought here by UNHCR but by themselves.”⁸⁵

This was echoed by another Ugandan man: “Those in camps are supported by UNHCR while those out of camps rely mostly on their own incomes, for accommodation most especially. The administration out here is also quite different from the camp management from whom one must get authority to move.”⁸⁶ It was clear that the problems identified by the camp inhabitants are clearly well known outside the camps at a local level: “Staying in camps may be good for those who need support, but as for me I would prefer to stay outside camps because camps do not have good facilities such as health units, schools and they are prone to disease outbreaks. There is lack of opportunities for employment, or doing serious business.”⁸⁷ Indeed, many of the Ugandans had a strong understanding of why refugees had chosen to self-settle in the area: “The refugees are here because they would like to make ends meet like in education and also just make a living like any other human being instead of suffering in their country due to war.”⁸⁸

In part, this acceptance is likely to be related to the fact that the area has a long history of migration – both forced and voluntary. As one woman said, “[w]e have had refugees here for a very long time. I also came and found them here [when I moved from Arua] and people say that it could have been since time immemorial because Sudan has been having problems ever since the Arabs began mistreating the blacks.”⁸⁹ As an elderly woman said, “[w]e are used to refugees – they have been here for a very long time and they continue coming because there is a saying that at one time some of us were refugees from South Sudan before we became citizens ourselves.”⁹⁰

Furthermore, some talked of the presence of refugees as being an economic benefit: “[t]he community here allows them because they get from them business in terms of increasing demand for goods and services. For example people now have market for their residential houses which they

⁸² Interview with refugee woman, Nyumanzi Settlement, 28 February 2015.

⁸³ Interview with Ugandan man, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁸⁴ Interview with Ugandan man, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁸⁵ Interview with Ugandan man, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁸⁶ Interview with Ugandan man, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁸⁷ Interview with Ugandan woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁸⁸ Interview with Ugandan woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁸⁹ Interview with Ugandan woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁹⁰ Interview with 70 year old Ugandan woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

rent to the refugees.”⁹¹ Others realised that the refugees had attracted some increase in humanitarian assistance, “[t]he presence of the refugees has done quite a lot for Adjumani [town], we now have drugs in the health units which benefits everyone. So their presence is also a blessing in this community.”⁹²

Of course, people also had concerns and saw disadvantages. The man cited above who talked about an increasing market for homes, went on to say, “but then again they cause shortages for certain social services such as water, competition for drugs (medicines) in health units.”⁹³ One woman talked of how the increase in population had led to higher demand and rising prices.⁹⁴ Furthermore, many stressed the need for services to be augmented to absorb the increased numbers of people: “There should be need to improve the services such as water supply for a bigger population and on prices, if the refugees are supplied with food and other essential commodities, the demand for such goods will fall and the prices shall be under control. This is because the refugees themselves might have to sell what they receive in order to acquire what they do not have.”⁹⁵

Furthermore, there was a strong sense that the local government could play a key role in managing the presence of refugees in collaboration with the host communities. As one woman said, “I really think [the local councils (LCs)] can manage when they are not overwhelmed, for example, they can register all refugees and if they coordinate with UNHCR and OPM, they can handle refugee issues.”⁹⁶ To date, local government structures remain a largely untapped resource for assisting refugees in such a way as to benefit not only refugees but also the host population.

The way forward?

In many respects, the way forward is already underway. People are voting with their feet against the camps – and have been for years – and UNHCR has brought out a new policy that reflects these realities. Most importantly, refugees themselves have many of the solutions:

I am planning to settle as a refugee and cultivate if I can get land somewhere outside of here. I want to network with friends and acquire land on-line but this will depend on our level of understanding each other... The next thing is if I am to get capital I would do business and lastly, upgrade for diploma in community service. I had been trained as a theologian and got a certificate affiliated to Uganda Christian University in Mukono district. About capital, it is a bit difficult but I have been trying to save by selling the food I have. Again I have heard that there is now an option of getting cash instead of the ration. I would opt for that.⁹⁷

As already stated, more needs to be done to help those who feel unable to move, and to ensure that Adjumani District as a whole benefits from its generosity in hosting refugees. Countries such as Uganda with considerably fewer resources; districts such as Adjumani that are themselves still recovering from decades of conflict; and communities such as Pavuraga where people are struggling to make ends meet, are accepting hundreds of thousands of refugees with minimal fuss. This acceptance needs to be built on and rewarded so that not only do refugees and hosts benefit from

⁹¹ Interview with Ugandan man, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁹² Interview with 70 year old Ugandan woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁹³ Interview with Ugandan man, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁹⁴ Interview with Ugandan woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁹⁵ Interview with Ugandan woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁹⁶ Interview with Ugandan woman, Pavuraga Village, Adjumani, 2 March 2015.

⁹⁷ Interview with refugee man, Boroli Settlement, 24 February 2015.

the resources that are available, but if and when refugees do go home, the infrastructure remains and the benefits continue to be felt by the host communities.

Ultimately, therefore, the launching of UNHCR's policy offers a unique opportunity for the government of Uganda and UNHCR to re-think their default positioning on refugee management. In a context of dwindling resources for humanitarian assistance, they owe it not only to the refugees, but to the people of Uganda, to ensure that refugees are given every opportunity to become an asset, rather than a drain, on the country.