
Understanding conflict dynamics around refugee settlements in northern Uganda

August 2019



About the International Refugee Rights Initiative

The International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) was founded in 2004 to inform and improve responses to the cycles of violence and displacement that are at the heart of large-scale human rights violations.

Over the last 14 years, we have developed a holistic approach to the protection of human rights before, during, and in the aftermath of displacement, by focusing on:

- identifying the violations that cause displacement and exile,
- protecting the rights of those who are displaced, and
- ensuring the solutions to their displacement are durable, rights respecting, safe and timely.

We work to ensure the voices of the displaced and conflict affected communities are not only heard but heeded at the international level through our evidence based advocacy that is built on solid field based research and analysis.

We are registered as a non-profit organization in the US, the UK, and Uganda.

www.refugee-rights.org

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Cover images: Activities in and around refugee settlements in northern Uganda. Taken February 2019, © IRRI/Naomi Kabarungi: 1 - Grass for roofing 2 - Water point 4 - Firewood for domestic use.

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Table of contents

Executive Summary.....	1
Recommendations	4
Map.....	6
Background	8
A history of conflict and displacement	8
Uganda's refugee policy	9
Methodology.....	10
Land negotiations and host community frustrations.....	12
Lack of clarity in negotiations	12
Unmet expectations.....	13
Difficult relations with government	14
Reinforcing existing fault lines within the host community	16
Consequences for refugees	17
Relations between refugees and host communities	18
Fights over natural resources.....	18
Competition over livelihoods and land.....	20
Stray animals	22
Jobs, jobs, jobs.....	23
Access to water	25
Crime and fights triggering community violence	26
Socio-cultural relations	27
Relations between refugees and host community in urban centres	29
Relations within the refugee community.....	30
Drawing lessons from previous incidents	30
Conflict related to the situation in South Sudan.....	31
Access to water, land and services	32
Incidents between refugees and international actors.....	34
Cross-border dynamics affecting refugees	35
The presence of conflict actors in the settlements	35
Recruitment	37
Response actors	39
Refugee and local leaders.....	39
Police and NGOs	41
Conclusion.....	43
Annex: research respondents	45

Executive Summary

Uganda hosts more than 800,000 refugees from South Sudan, most living in refugee settlements in the north of the country. Ugandan communities living close to these sites have given land to host these refugees, and overall maintain good relations with their neighbours. There are, however, tensions between refugees and their hosts over natural resources, livelihoods and land. These tensions have sparked a few violent incidents, and if not properly addressed could escalate into broader conflict.

Between December 2018 and May 2019, the International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) spoke with more than 470 refugees and members of host communities in Arua, Adjumani and Lamwo, all major refugee hosting districts. Based on these interviews and focus group discussions, this report describes the relations between South Sudanese refugees and Ugandan host communities, as well as the relationships among refugees themselves, and cross-border dynamics that affect them. While there were significant differences among the eight settlements where the research was conducted, several conflict trends and suggestions to address them emerged from the research.

Many respondents reported positive relations between the refugee and host communities, through sharing of services and social interaction. Previous experience of displacement and cultural similarities contributed to the willingness of host communities to allow the use of some of their land to the refugee settlements.

But hosts also expected development benefits in return for their generosity. Respondents appreciated the improvements the refugee presence had brought them, but had higher hopes for financial compensation, jobs, and assistance than were met. The refugee presence also seemed to have exacerbated some existing land conflicts among Ugandan communities and individuals. The frustration of host communities was mostly channelled towards the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), but also impacted on refugees. It is important to open a structural dialogue to address these frustrations, given the volume and protracted nature of the South Sudanese refugee presence in Uganda.

The conflict most often highlighted by refugees was competition over natural resources, especially firewood for cooking and grass for thatched roofs. Refugees claimed that the host community restricted their access to these resources and at times attacked those venturing out of the settlements to fetch them, in particular women. Host communities, in turn, complain that refugees did not seek their consent and that environmental degradation is spiralling out of control. Such competition over natural resources was amplified when refugees made bricks and charcoal to complement the assistance given to them.

There is an increased awareness among the Ugandan government and its international partners that environmental degradation and conflict over resources is rapidly escalating in refugee-hosting districts, but investments in tree planting and fuel alternatives are not sufficient to meet the challenge. Local leaders and organisations have set up dialogues to address tensions and conclude

arrangements responding to the needs and concerns of both refugee and host communities, but these structural issues need long-term, intensive action.

Because of the high number of refugees from South Sudan in Uganda, the size of plots of land allocated to them has significantly decreased, and the soil is often rocky and infertile. Refugees thus conclude agreements, often informally, with host community members to work on their land in exchange for, often monetary, compensation. While this has created economic interdependence, it has also created issues when agreements are not respected. Disputes over land delimitation and usage rights seem to be more limited. Importantly, more land must be allocated to refugees if they are to become self-reliant, as promoted by Ugandan policy, but it will prove challenging to convince the host communities to provide more land, given their needs and unmet expectations.

Other possible issues of contention include water and livelihood activities. Despite important efforts to increase supply, competition over inadequate water remains a serious challenge in some settlements and has sparked fights. Only a substantial increase in access to water will fundamentally alter these dynamics. Frustration about destruction of crops by stray animals, owned by both refugees and hosts, and the way it is being handled could result in more problems, and should be addressed by international NGOs distributing animals in livelihood projects.

The most contentious issue involving international NGOs, however, was access to jobs. Both communities, but in particular the host community, accused them of not sufficiently considering their people for low-skilled jobs. While many also recognise that not all skills are in sufficient supply around the settlements, failure to take on sufficient community members has already triggered incidents, and exacerbates frustrations around inadequate compensation for land. Efforts have been undertaken to address this, but more transparency and outreach to communities are needed.

Many of the issues outlined are not dramatic at the moment, but could nonetheless escalate into violence. In several settlements, incidents between a few individuals about crime or simple fights between schoolboys have at times escalated into larger clashes between refugee and host communities, to the extent that they paralysed life in the settlements and required the intervention of Ugandan security actors.

This is also the case among refugee communities. While most refugee communities live peacefully together, inter-community tensions existed in many settlements and have at times escalated into violence. A cocktail of frustration, unemployment, post-traumatic stress and alcohol abuse have the potential to escalate quarrels about access to services or fights between individuals. Tensions are fuelled by ethnic stereotyping and ongoing conflict in their home country. As a result, the Ugandan government and UNHCR have, in some settlements, deliberately separated communities to avoid incidents, while in other settlements the same communities are mixed, despite a tendency of individuals to reside among their own community.

Community dialogues and sensitisation by local leaders and NGOs have gone a long way in alleviating some of these problems. Investment in such efforts remains important, with a critical role for local NGOs and customary and religious leaders. The police could better assist these actors and respond to incidents if their capacity for community policing were bolstered and if they address accusations of bias from both sides.

An additional issue of concern is the presence in refugee settlements of individuals involved in the South Sudanese conflict. IRRI research confirmed that several parties to the conflict have

attempted to recruit refugees as combatants, but it remains difficult to establish the full scope of this practice, and to what extent it has persisted since the signing of a peace agreement in 2018. Members of the warring parties in South Sudan at times visit the refugee settlements, to reunite with their families but also to target political opponents. Despite the porous nature of the border, the Ugandan government can do more to track such cross-border movements, exclude combatants from protection and prevent abuses.

In sum, despite overall good relations, there are many pressure points in refugee hosting areas in northern Uganda which could escalate into serious conflict either between refugee and host communities, or within the refugee community. In a context in which ongoing insecurity in South Sudan is preventing large-scale refugee returns in the near future, environmental degradation is worsening, and financial responsibility-sharing remains insufficient, urgent action is needed. Early action can break the chain from individual incidents to broader mobilisation, which has been at the heart of the most serious incidents. Community leaders, local organisations and the police must be capacitated to monitor these issues and address them before escalating. The Ugandan government and its partners should also address structural issues around land and natural resources.

Recommendations

To the Ugandan government:

- Increase the numbers and resources of police in the refugee settlements, support training on refugee and host community relations, and strengthen the focus on community policing.
- Ensure adequate follow-up of promises made during the land negotiation process, and open a dialogue with host community members to address their grievances, clarify matters of concern and consider further negotiations on land use and compensation.
- Ensure transparency and inclusive participation of host communities and refugees alike in discussions about refugee policy, development programming and responses to conflict;
- Conduct a thorough investigation into recruitment and abuses against refugees by South Sudanese armed actors, and ensure individuals involved are arrested and prosecuted. Increase effective monitoring of former combatants living in, or visiting, the refugee settlements and ensure that individuals responsible for international crimes are excluded from refugee protection.

To UNHCR and international NGOs:

- Continue efforts to strengthen the capacity of refugee and host community leaders to promote peaceful co-existence and support dialogue and mediation between individuals and communities, both proactively and in response to particular incidents. Support teachers in managing and referring conflicts at schools and in carrying out peace education.
- Compile good practice on conflict prevention, management and resolution to ensure that positive examples in some settlements, including about natural resource management, land deals and water committees, get replicated in other settlements where problems might arise.
- Ensure that all humanitarian and development interventions avoid reinforcing existing fault lines by ensuring equitable access to services and conducting conflict assessment and sensitisation efforts before implementing projects, including those consisting of distribution of live-stock and seedlings.
- Strengthen efforts to dedicate at least 30% of all development interventions to host communities, especially those living in the vicinity of refugee settlements, and communicate pro-actively how those resources are deployed and the benefit for the community.
- Continue efforts to create more transparency about hiring procedures for jobs in and around the refugee settlements and encourage applications from host community members and refugees who might have the required skills for certain positions.
- Increase dedicated capacity for early warning and conflict analysis in refugee settlements, to detect possible triggers that can lead to violence, and dedicate experienced and well-trained

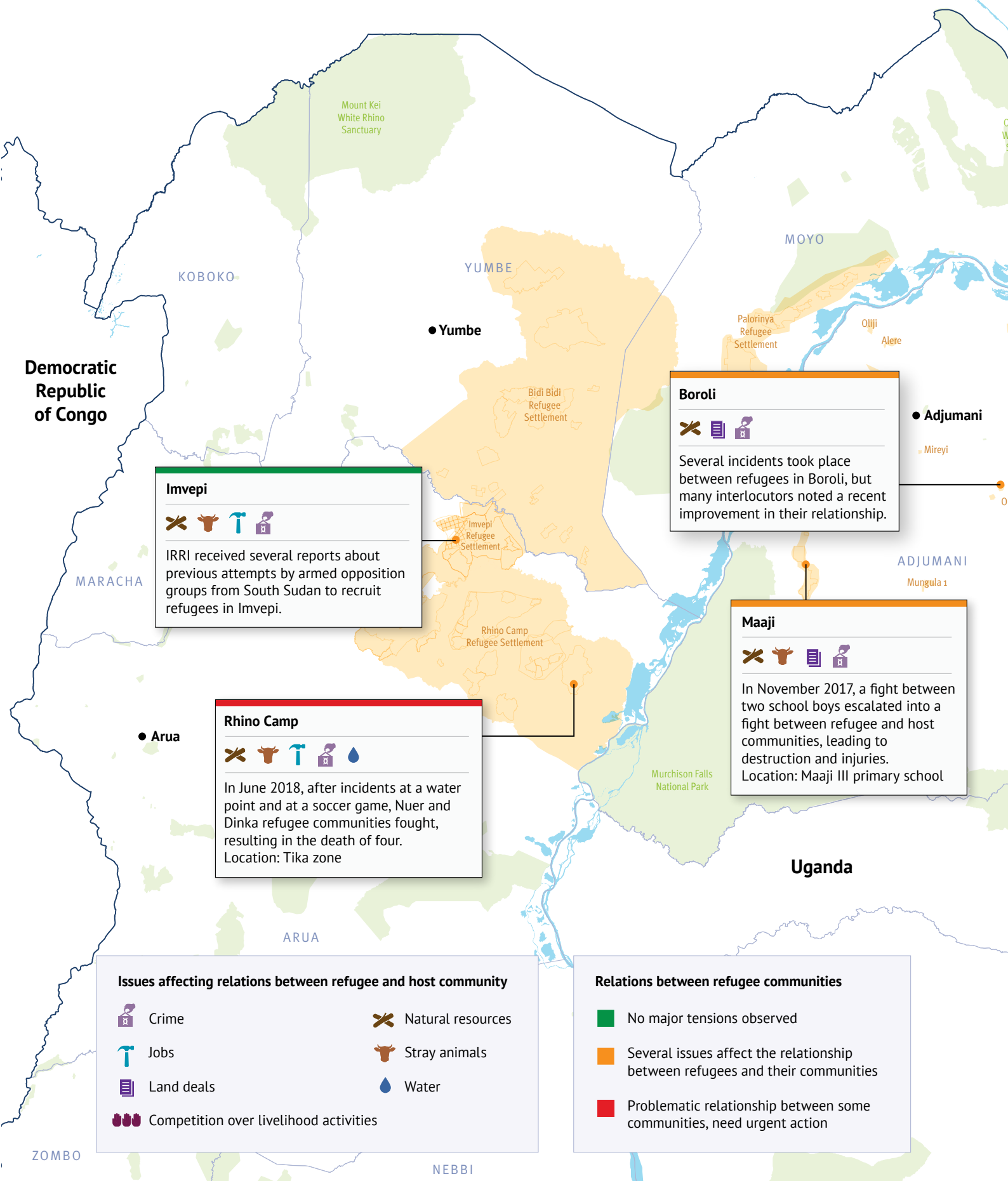
staff to conduct preventative actions as needed.

- Build on previous collaboration with customary and church leaders and community-based organisations to sensitise communities and conduct dialogue between and within communities, and assess which customary leaders are peace brokers or peace spoilers, and enhance or mitigate their influence as appropriate.
- Continue and replicate programmes which support social cohesion (sport, cultural or livelihood activities), peace and language education, psychological counselling and youth employment.
- Scale up existing efforts to provide seedlings, sensitisation and follow-up to tree planting, provision of energy-efficient stoves and alternative sources of fuel and roof sheeting.

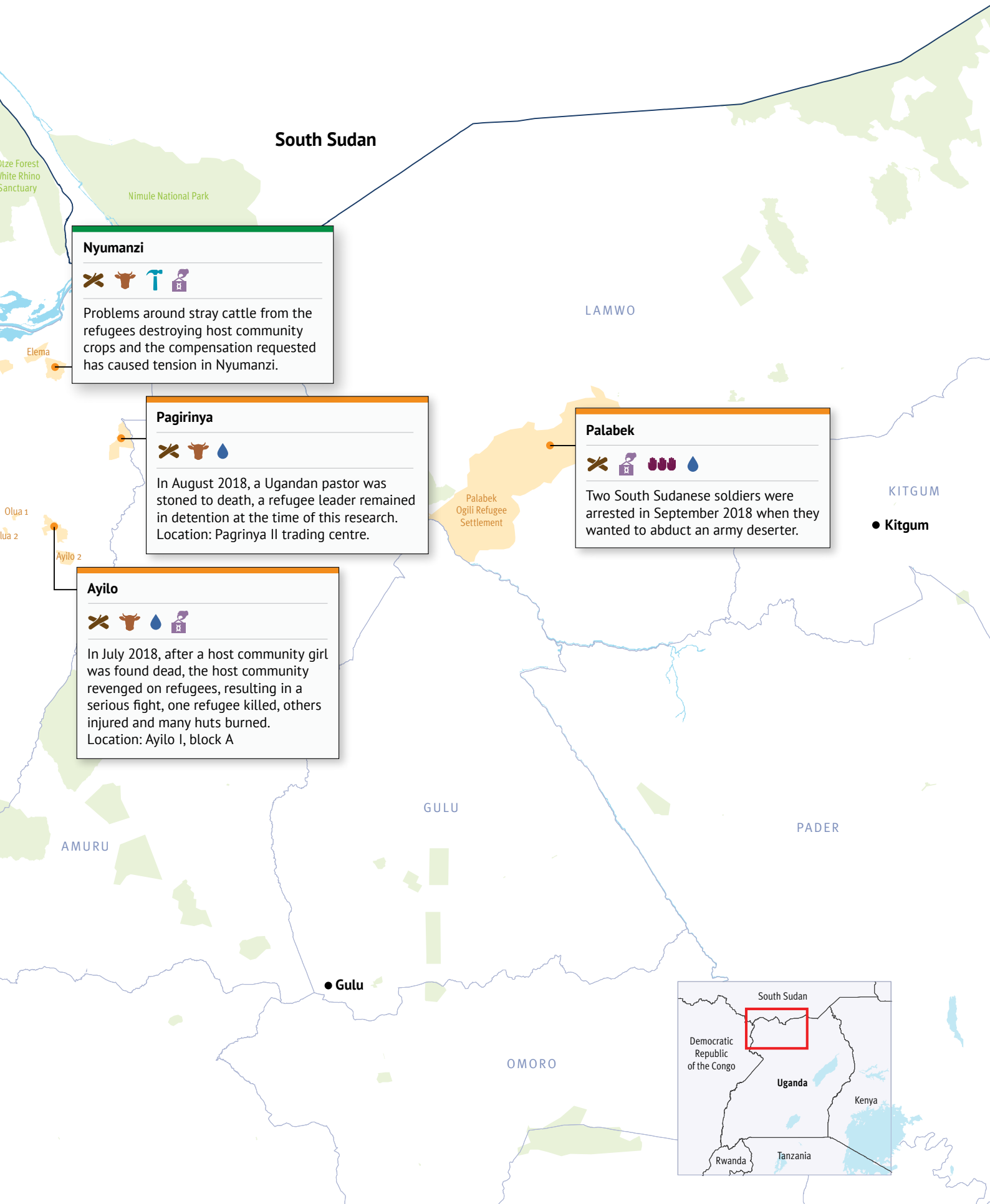
To donors:

- Increase funding for social cohesion programmes, peace and language education, capacity-building of local leaders, conflict assessments, reforestation, and alternative fuel sources.
- Increase general funding to the refugee response in Uganda in order to prevent any tensions around insufficient food distribution, water points and access to other services.
- Fund and support research looking into conflict dynamics around urban refugees and early warning mechanisms in refugee settlements.

Conflict dynamics around refugee settlements in northern Uganda



The data on the map are based on 430 interactions with respondents through interviews and focus group discussions conducted by International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) between December 2018 and May 2019, in Arua, Adjumani and Lamwo districts.



10 km



Protected Area



DISTRICT



Refugee Settlement

● Major town

Background

A history of conflict and displacement

Uganda currently hosts more than 833,000 refugees from South Sudan.¹ The vast majority live in refugee settlements in northern Uganda, particularly in the West Nile region, not far from the border with South Sudan. The three districts hosting the largest population of refugees in the country are Yumbe, Adjumani and Arua. In Adjumani district, the number of refugees exceeds the number of Ugandan citizens.² Other refugees live in nearby towns or in the capital, Kampala.

The border area between northern Uganda and South Sudan, where the settlements hosting South Sudanese refugees are located, has a long history of conflict and displacement. Since independence, conflict in both southern Sudan (now South Sudan) and Uganda has led to forced displacement in both directions. There have also been economic and other forms of migration. During the first Sudanese civil war (1956 to 1972), many Sudanese fled to Uganda because of fighting between southern Sudanese rebels and Sudanese government troops. Then the trend reversed: during the turbulent 1970s and early 1980s, particularly following the overthrowing of the Obote and Amin regimes, Ugandans fled to southern Sudan. Communities seen as supportive of these former leaders – who hailed from northern Uganda and West Nile region respectively – and of various rebellions were victims of reprisals by government forces.

When the situation in southern Sudan deteriorated again, many Ugandan refugees returned to northern Uganda beginning in 1986. However the region was victim to a long-standing conflict between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) beginning in 1987. The LRA carried out brutal attacks against civilians, particularly among Acholi communities in northern Uganda, while the Ugandan government was accused of failing to protect and support the civilian population, especially those living in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs). Ugandan returnees were soon joined by refugees fleeing the renewed civil war now pitting the Sudan government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), a southern rebel group fighting for regional autonomy. In 1996, close to 245,000 Sudanese refugees lived in Uganda.³ Most returned after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), between the Sudanese government and the SPLA in 2005.⁴

Internal conflict had however already plagued the country, and internal rifts among South

1 UNHCR & OPM, Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Portal, 30 June 2019, available at <https://ugandarefugees.org/en/country/uga> (accessed on 22 July 2019).

2 Ibid.

3 UNHCR, *Refugee Network*, edition 2(1), 2016.

4 For more detail, see International Refugee Rights Initiative, "Conflict in South Sudan: Refugees seek protection in Uganda and a way home", March 2014, available at <http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Conflict-in-South-Sudan-Refugees-seek-protection-in-Uganda-and-a-way-home.pdf> (accessed on 22 July 2019).

Sudanese were exacerbated after independence in 2011. In December 2013, a political dispute between President Salva Kiir (an ethnic Dinka) and his Vice-President Riek Machar (an ethnic Nuer) degenerated into open warfare. As violence spread and consistently targeted civilians, including on an ethnic basis, many crossed the border to neighbouring countries, including Uganda. A peace deal signed in late 2015 broke down in July 2016, when forces loyal to Kiir clashed in the capital, Juba, with those loyal to Machar, leader of the SPLM in Opposition (SPLM-IO). The conflict further spread throughout the country, including to the Equatoria region close to the border with Uganda.

Many people living in the Equatoria region sought refuge in Uganda. For many, this was the second or third time they fled to Uganda. In the year following the re-escalation of the conflict, an average 1,800 South Sudanese arrived in Uganda every day.⁵ Despite the signing of a new peace agreement in September 2018, refugees continue to arrive, fleeing fighting between government forces and the holdout rebels of the National Salvation Front (NAS) or the generalised insecurity that has prevailed since 2013. Only a small number have returned, facing insecurity and socio-economic challenges, while the majority seem to have little faith in the new peace deal.⁶ UNHCR also holds that “the security, rule of law and human rights situation that prevails today in South Sudan [stands] in the way of safe and dignified return for any person originating from South Sudan” and thus cannot facilitate or promote returns.⁷

Uganda’s refugee policy

Relative to many other countries across the globe and in the region, Uganda’s refugee policies are seen as a positive example. It has continuously kept its borders open for refugees from its unstable neighbouring countries, in particular from South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo. The Ugandan government has taken significant steps that promote freedom of movement, illustrated by its relabelling of ‘camps’ as ‘settlements’ and by allowing refugees to live in urban centres, even if assistance remains almost exclusively focused on the settlements. The government has championed self-reliance of refugees by giving out land plots, granting them access to work and has integrated refugees in national development plans and service delivery. The translation of these policies into practice has remained a challenge, however, as most refugees remain dependent on food distribution and other services offered, mainly, by UNHCR and international NGOs.⁸

The Ugandan government has aligned itself largely to international policy developments, and has been an active supporter of the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF), an international commitment to ease pressure on host countries, enhance self-reliance of refugees, and promote third-country solutions and voluntary returns to refugees’ countries of origin. Disappointment about the inability to raise enough international funding, linked to corruption allegations, and continuous arrivals due to the protracted conflicts in the region have, however,

5 UNHCR, “South Sudan refugees in Uganda pass 1 million mark, UNHCR renews call for help”, 17 August 2017, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/8/599457a34/south-sudan-refugees-uganda-pass-1-million-mark-unhcr-renews-call-help.html> (accessed on 22 July 2019).

6 International Refugee Rights Initiative, “We Do Not Honour Agreements: Dialogue and Peace Agreements in South Sudan”, November 2018, available at <http://refugee-rights.org/we-do-not-honour-agreements-dialogue-and-peace-agreements-in-south-sudan/> (accessed on 22 July 2019).

7 UNHCR, *Position on returns to South Sudan*, April 2019, available at <https://www.refworld.org/type,COUNTRY-POS,,,5cb4607c4,0.html> (accessed on 15 August 2019).

8 International Refugee Rights Initiative, “Uganda’s refugee policies: The history, the politics, the way forward”, October 2018, available at <http://refugee-rights.org/uganda-refugee-policies-the-history-the-politics-the-way-forward/> (accessed on 12 August 2019).

put a strain on Uganda's progressive refugee policy.⁹

Methodology

Between December 2018 and May 2019, IRRI conducted research in Arua, Lamwo and Adjumani districts. We held 49 individual interviews and eight focus group discussions in Arua district, in and around Rhino Camp and Imvepi refugee settlements. In Lamwo district, we conducted 176 individual interviews and six focus group discussions in and around Palabek refugee settlement. In Adjumani district, we conducted 36 individual interviews and eight focus group discussions in and around Pagrinya, Nyumanzi, Maaji, Ayilo and Boroli refugee settlements. IRRI attempted to get a wide range of perspectives from different gender, age and ethnic groups and conducted research in several zones of each settlement. Out of all 430 people IRRI spoke to during individual interviews and focus group discussions, 196 were women (45%) and 234 were men (55%). Most were adults between 18 and 72 years old. In both refugee and host communities, both community leaders and people without a leadership function were interviewed (see annex for more detailed information).

Interviews and focus group discussions were carried out using an interview map based on preliminary IRRI research and existing literature. When required, research assistants (members of the refugee or host community) provided translation. Interviews with refugees and host community members were complemented by interviews with 45 key informants, including OPM officials, police officers and NGO workers.

In May 2019, IRRI presented its preliminary findings to NGO staff, refugee and host community leaders, civil society, government officials and UNHCR during workshops in Palabek, Arua and Adjumani, and their feedback has been incorporated into this report. On 23 July 2019, IRRI shared a letter with the OPM with a summary of its findings and queries for additional information. Despite regular follow-up, IRRI received no response to this letter. Prior to commencing the research, IRRI informed OPM of its research intentions, and sought and obtained permission to access the refugee settlements.

This report intends to complement other studies.¹⁰ It is based on recent qualitative research, and thus helps to both nuance and update previous research. IRRI opted to focus on Adjumani, Arua and Lamwo districts in order to complement a report by the Danish Refugee Council on Bidibidi, which highlights many of the same dynamics described here.¹¹ The convergence of trends indicates that the conclusions in this report are likely relevant to other refugee areas hosting South Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda.

This report begins by describing the land negotiations process between the Ugandan government and host communities alongside the frustrations it has generated. It then focuses on the relations between the refugee and the host communities, in particular competition over natural resources,

9 Ibid.

10 Danish Refugee Council & Partners, *Conflict analysis assessment, Support Program to the refugee settlements and host communities in Northern Uganda*, January 2017, available at https://eutf.akvoapp.org/media/db/project/5455/document/DRC_EUTF%20Conflict%20Assessment%20Baseline%20Report_SuVrY5C.pdf (accessed on 31 July 2019) (hereafter DRC 2017); Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group, *Conflict Assessment Adjumani and Arua Refugee Settlements*, April 2015 (hereafter: DRC 2015); Danish Refugee Council, *Contested Refuge: The Political Economy and Conflict Dynamics in Uganda's Bidibidi Refugee Settlements*, 2018, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/contested-refuge-political-economy-and-conflict-dynamics-ugandas-bidi-bidi-refugee> (accessed on 31 July 2019) (hereafter DRC 2018).

11 DRC 2018.

jobs, land and services and other social factors. It describes the relationship between refugees and their respective communities, including what lessons can be drawn from previous incidents, conflicts related to the situation in South Sudan and those related to access to resources. Finally, it describes some cross-border dynamics affecting refugees, in particular the presence of individuals affiliated with conflict parties in the settlements and abuses and recruitment affecting refugees.

Land negotiations and host community frustrations

The most urgent concern raised by members of the host community living close to the refugee settlements is their unmet expectations of what host communities should receive for the land they gave for the refugee settlements.

Lack of clarity in negotiations

In northern Uganda, where the research was conducted, land is owned under customary tenure by indigenous communities and administered by customary structures, often clans and sub-clans. While individuals and households are entitled to use certain plots, ownership remains with the community.¹² The Ugandan government, in particular the OPM, responsible for refugee matters, thus negotiated with the community structures, often through local leaders, to get their consent to create refugee settlements.

During our research, however, this negotiation process was criticised by many involved. Some community members said they had not been consulted, despite their claims on the land. Some respondents even said that an IRRI focus group discussion was the first time they had been asked about the refugee presence and the land negotiations.¹³ Local authorities, who are closely involved in selecting land where refugees can be hosted, were accused of giving permission to host refugees in their zones without sufficient consultation with other stakeholders.¹⁴ In other settings, respondents said that OPM rather preferred to deal directly with individual households and excluded existing customary structures.¹⁵

Others said they had insufficient knowledge about the terms of the memoranda of understanding concluded as a result of these negotiations, including their duration, the boundaries of land handed over and the future of the land after the end of the agreement or when refugees return.¹⁶ The overall arrangement is that host community members can repossess the land as soon as refugees have left and no longer have usage rights, unless public infrastructure has been built on this land.

12 International Refugee Rights Initiative, “My Children Should Stand Strong to Make Sure We Get Our Land Back”: Host Community Perspectives of Uganda’s Lamwo Refugee Settlement, Rights in Exile policy paper, March 2018, available at <http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Lamwo-policy-paper-FINAL.pdf> (accessed on 1 August 2019).

13 Focus group discussion with host community members, Amuru village (close to Rhino camp refugee settlement), 13 December 2018.

14 This was the case in Arua district, for example. Focus group discussion with host community members, Lugbari Parish, 19 January 2019.

15 This was the case in Adjumani district. Interview with elders forum, Adjumani, 15 January 2019. It seems, however, that in Lamwo, the Rwot (Acholi traditional leader) was involved in the process.

16 The overall arrangement is that host community members can repossess the land as soon as refugees have left and no longer have user rights. But there is considerable concern amongst host communities that the government might use the land for other purposes or redistribute it to politically connected individuals, as has happened before related to refugee and IDP sites.

But there is considerable concern amongst host communities that the government might use the land for other purposes or redistribute it to politically connected individuals, as has happened before in relation to refugee and IDP sites.¹⁷ As a landowner – these are usually elders or family heads who decide on customary land matters – living close to Palabek refugee settlement told IRRI: “No proper information was given to us, or even [any information on] future plans. That’s why I now regret giving my land.”¹⁸ Written agreements have been concluded with landowners, but several actors complained they did not have a copy of such agreements. Even local elected leaders – some of whom had been replaced during recent elections – complained they did not have copies of these documents.¹⁹

Unmet expectations

In most cases, host community members gave their land willingly and without receiving financial compensation. Previous personal experiences of conflict and displacement contributed to their willingness to do this.

But many clearly also had expectations that in return for giving land to refugees, they would receive significant financial and development benefits.²⁰ Many host community members live in abject poverty, feeling ignored by both government and donors in development initiatives.²¹ A refugee observed: “They often complain that they have been here suffering, all this time, and that nothing was being done to help them.”²² Their previous experience of displacement created a sense of solidarity, but also made them aware of some of the gains that could potentially come with refugee presence.

Many host community members appreciate the improvements the refugee presence has brought. For instance, in most areas adjacent to refugee settlements, access to schools, health centres, water points and markets has significantly improved. Others also cited improved infrastructure, their inclusion in NGO-supported livelihood programmes and increased security due to more police presence, although some also complained about negative developments in the same areas.

Despite the gains, many Ugandans living close to the settlements had anticipated more significant benefits. Some had expected to receive livestock, housing for their elders or other vulnerable people, or jobs for their youth (see below) in return for the use of their land, concessions that would bring significant benefits, particularly for those living in poverty. Several respondents mentioned that they felt that host community members did not receive the 30% of services earmarked for the host community in development projects designated in the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHoPE) framework strategy.²³ Many host communities clearly had

17 International Refugee Rights Initiative, March 2018; UNDP, *Understanding Land Dynamics and Livelihood in Refugee Hosting Districts of Northern Uganda*, 2018, available at http://www.ug.undp.org/content/uganda/en/home/library/human_development/Understanding_Land_Dynamics_and_Livelihood_in_Refugee_hosting_Districts_of_Northern_Uganda.html (accessed on 16 August 2019).

18 Participant in focus group discussion with host community members, Palabek refugee settlement, March 2019.

19 Interview with local leaders, Lugbari parish, 18 January 2019, and with LC3, Arua district, 13 December 2018.

20 UNDP, 2018.

21 Northern Uganda is the poorest region of the country, with 33% of people living below the poverty line, compared to a national average of 21% in 2017. Poverty did however decrease from 44%. See World Bank, *Ugandan overview*, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uganda/overview> (accessed on 16 August 2019).

22 Interview with refugees, Palabek refugee settlement, 21 February 2019.

23 The Refugee and Host Population Empowerment framework (ReHoPE), the main donor strategy for refugee

high expectations about what this 30% would entail, and had little awareness that food distribution and other forms of humanitarian relief were not included in this arrangement. Some had clearly also hoped for financial “appreciation” for their land, despite a stated government policy against paying communities. As a local representative observed: “Some leaders had high expectations. They were hoping for good employment and for payment. But they became disgruntled, and started saying they can spoil everything.”²⁴

Some reported that such expectations were nourished by promises OPM made during the negotiation process. As a Ugandan living close to Imvepi refugee settlement said: “Before the refugees [settled here], they came to the elders. They said they would give something for the elders, but it didn’t come.”²⁵ Other promises reported included compensation for the destruction of crops during the settlement preparation process, livestock and financial support. In each case, the support was reportedly either not received at all or was much less than promised. A local elected chairman said: “Land was given, free of charge. But they said they would give compensation after the settlement of refugees. [...] I tell the landowners that it is OPM who deceived them.”²⁶ Others put it more bluntly, saying that “OPM sweettalked the landowners”²⁷ or “told lies when getting land from them.”²⁸

Host community members also decried benefits given exclusively to refugees. For instance, houses were built for persons with special needs (PSN) in the refugee community while the same was not done for vulnerable people in the host community (despite reported promises).²⁹ Others complained that Ugandans are excluded from food distribution, despite their food insecurity and granting of land for hosting refugees. Previously some Ugandans living around the settlements benefited from food distribution by registering as refugees, but this has drastically reduced since a verification exercise in 2018, which was initiated to address such erroneous registrations of Ugandans as well as (other) corrupt practices.³⁰

Difficult relations with government

Most of the host communities frustrations about flawed negotiations and unmet expectations were levelled against OPM. Host community members feel that OPM deceived and insufficiently

interventions in Uganda, states that “Within refugee interventions, as a guiding principle, 30 percent of the humanitarian response for refugees should support the needs of the host communities.” See “ReHoPE – Refugee and Host Population Empowerment Strategic Framework – Uganda”, June 2017, available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/64166_0.pdf (accessed on 24 July 2019). The same frustrations were included in a previous conflict assessment. Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group, *Conflict Assessment Adjumani and Arua Refugee Settlements*, April 2015.

24 Interview with LC5, Lamwo district, 21 May 2019.

25 Participant in a focus group discussion with host community members close to Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018.

26 Interview with host community leader, Boroli refugee settlement, 8 January 2019.

27 Participant in validation workshop, Adjumani, 23 May 2019.

28 Participant in validation workshop, Palabek refugee settlement, 20 May 2019.

29 See also Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group, *Conflict Assessment Adjumani and Arua Refugee Settlements*, April 2015.

30 Government of Uganda, World Food Programme, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *OPM and UNHCR complete countrywide biometric refugee verification exercise*, joint press release, 30 October 2018, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/opm-and-unhcr-complete-countrywide-biometric-refugee-verification-exercise> (accessed on 5 August 2018); S. Okiror, “Inquiry finds refugee numbers were exaggerated by 300,000 in Uganda” in *The Guardian* 30 October 2018, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/oct/30/inquiry-finds-refugee-numbers-exaggerated-in-uganda> (accessed on 5 August 2019).

consulted them, and relations between them have been jeopardised as a result. When frustrations are raised in meetings with OPM, host communities report that complaints are rarely addressed, or if they were, commitments were not followed through. As a Ugandan woman living close to Palabek refugee settlement said:

I feel there is a communication gap between the host community and the government leaders. There is a big problem regarding land issues which the leaders are not addressing. The local authorities didn't consult the host community, we were surprised to see the refugees being brought here. Only leaders at district level were informed of the arrival of the refugees. And only one meeting was called by OPM to announce the arrival of the refugees and not all community members were involved. The OPM and district authorities are now only dealing with NGOs without involving the local host community.³¹

Such difficult relations also must be seen against the backdrop of unresolved grievances around previous rounds of conflict and displacement, which created a deep mistrust between many people in northern Uganda and the central government. This is particularly true when it comes to land, which not only is the main source of income and survival for most households, but also holds deep cultural value. Many are afraid that, due to the unclear terms of the agreement, the government could use some of the land for other purposes after the eventual departure of refugees.³² "Acholi are deeply suspicious about the government taking land," a local leader in Lamwo district told IRRI.³³

In some areas, particularly in Lamwo district, landowners and local leaders also blamed the district leadership for failing to consult and compensate them: "Local and village leaders and the landowners are being side-lined by the district leaders. We are not even invited to meetings anymore, yet these meetings are about our land."³⁴ The districts also receive a part of the development support allocated to the host community, as the impact of the refugee presence on the wider district is considered, rather than only on the neighbouring communities. But this is the object of contestation between local and district leaders, with the former claiming that they do not see the benefits that were promised by the latter.³⁵

This creates tensions between the different levels of leadership, each advocating for the allocation of resources and blaming others for the lack of redistribution. District leaders and OPM were blamed by local leaders for ignoring the simmering frustration about the lack of compensation of the host community for the land they gave to refugees. Some of those leaders recognised they need to do more.³⁶

In addition, politicians at the national level were accused of trying to position themselves to benefit from these processes: those with government positions try to favour their own communities and interests, while opposition members surf on waves of discontent to gain support.³⁷ As an

31 Participant in a focus group discussion with host community women, Palabek (close to Palabek refugee settlement), March 2019.

32 IRRI, 2018.

33 Participant in validation workshop, Palabek refugee settlement, 20 May 2019.

34 Participant in a focus group discussion with host community men, Palabek (close to Palabek refugee settlement), March 2019.

35 Participant in validation workshop, Palabek refugee settlement, 20 May 2019.

36 Interview with LC5, Lamwo district, 21 May 2019.

37 Some accused Hassan Fungaroo, MP in Moyo district – now Obongi district – and member of opposition party Forum

OPM official said: “We address these problems as they come. Only when politicians come in, they explode.”³⁸

Reinforcing existing fault lines within the host community

In some areas, the contested land negotiations process has also reinforced existing fault lines within host communities living close to the settlements. Some said there were disagreements between elders who agreed with the land deals, and young people frustrated about the lack of jobs.³⁹ In Adjumani, some elders were not even welcome anymore in the communities close to the settlements because of their involvement in the land proceedings.⁴⁰

The refugee presence has also reinforced existing land conflicts among Ugandan communities, as various groups hoped to get benefits from giving their land to the refugee settlements. Different groups (based along ethnic, clan or parish lines) dispute ownership of land used for refugee services and claim not to have been consulted when land was given to the refugee settlement.⁴¹ As a former local chairman said: “It was not so much [a problem in the past], but now, refugees are on [the land] and everyone wants to be the landowner, because maybe they would be given something. This explains the struggle.”⁴² In some cases, the land allocation process has also created conflicts within families, for example when one brother gave his consent for land to be used for hosting refugees, without the agreement of the other brother.⁴³ In Bidibidi (which fell outside of the scope of this research), two individuals have even gone to court claiming ownership over the land.⁴⁴

There have been complaints that some Ugandan communities received more support than others, because most of the lands where refugees are settled belong to them, while adjacent communities have been largely ignored.⁴⁵ NGOs, by being seen as giving assistance to some, while excluding other Ugandans, “have created problems, by extending benefits to the nearby families [...]. When they ran out and go back to their brothers beyond the settlement, they are alienated and seen as ‘beneficiaries’.”⁴⁶

In Arua district, where Rhino Camp and Imvepi settlements are located, the benefits resulting from the refugee presence have also been the subject of political contention around the creation of a new Madi district. As this district hosts many refugees, it could potentially benefit from significant resources from the refugee response, as some funds are channelled through districts where refugee settlements are located.⁴⁷

for Democratic Change (FDC), in particular of stirring up tensions. Interview with Lamwo RDC, 21 May 2019 and with OPM official, Arua, 18 December 2018.

38 Interview with OPM official, Arua, 18 December 2018.

39 Interview with OPM official, Arua, 10 December 2018.

40 Interview with elder, Adjumani, 15 January 2019.

41 Disputes concern the land used for the Imvepi OPM office and base camp, for the Imvepi secondary school, and a school in Odobu, in Arua district. Focus group discussions with host community members, Lugbari Parish, 19 January & interviews with host community leaders, Lugbari Parish, 18 January 2019 & Imvepi Parish, 20 January 2019. Interview with CBO representatives, Arua, 16 December 2018.

42 Interview with community elders, Imvepi Parish, 20 January 2019.

43 Interviews with host community leader, Lugbari Parish, 18 January 2019.

44 UNDP, 2018.

45 Interviews with local leaders, Lamwo district, 21 May 2019 and validation workshop, Arua, 24 May 2019.

46 Interview with elder representative, Adjumani, 16 January 2019.

47 Validation workshop, Arua, 24 May 2019. J. Odama, “Locals demand for transparency as Madi Okollo district takes off” in *West Nile Web*, 7 May 2019, available at <https://www.westnileweb.com/news-a-analysis/arua/>

Consequences for refugees

How are these issues impacting the lives of refugees? While most of our interlocutors were not alarmist, others warned that “something nasty is going to happen. [...] It destabilises peaceful co-existence.”⁴⁸ A representative of an international organisation was equally serious: “There were expectations that were not met. And thus they [the host community] say: ‘If you don’t do this, I will ask the refugees to leave.’”⁴⁹ In Adjumani district, a landowner has already asked OPM to ensure that refugees leave his land. The Adjumani Elders Forum (ADEFO) was asked to intervene: “We try to uphold peace. But it is shaky. Anything can happen any day.”⁵⁰

While refugees are generally not the primary target of such frustrations, they feel the consequences. A representative from a refugee-led organisation described the impact: “There are issues with groups who want to be consulted about who’s the owner of the place. They cannot reach UNHCR or OPM, so they become angry with refugees.”⁵¹ As a consequence, some host community members have reacted by restricting access to natural resources or income-generating activities for refugees, with significant impact for the livelihoods of the refugee community.

In discussions with IRRI, refugees therefore called for the issue of compensation to be addressed. One said that “if Ugandans had been compensated for their land it would solve the conflicts between the host community and the refugees. We [the refugees] are between two big elephants: the landowners on one side, and the government on the other side. We are the ones that suffer.”⁵² Refugees therefore at times advocate that UNHCR implementing partners increase support for host communities.⁵³ A refugee in Maaji II refugee settlement said: “Vulnerable people from the host community also must be helped, just like us. They have given us free land but when they get no benefit, it causes conflict.”⁵⁴

[locals-demand-for-transparency-as-madi-okollo-district-takes-off](#) (accessed on 9 August 2019).

48 Participant in validation workshop, Adjumani, 23 May 2019.

49 Participant in validation workshop, Arua, 24 May 2019.

50 Interview with elders forum, 15 January 2019.

51 Interview with CBO representatives, Arua, 16 December 2018.

52 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 21 February 2019.

53 Interview with elder representative, Adjumani, 15 January 2019.

54 Interview with refugee, Maaji II refugee settlement, 15 January 2019.

Relations between refugees and host communities

Relations between refugees and host community members are complex and differ from place to place. There are many examples of good relations between the two groups, which particularly manifested themselves in peaceful interactions at shared health centres, schools, markets and joint livelihood support groups. Complaints from Ugandans that they felt side-lined in service-delivery, or from both groups about discrimination at markets, seem not to be widespread.

There are, however, observable frictions between the two groups, which could generate conflict if not adequately addressed. Such issues include access to natural resources, competition over livelihood activities, water and land, and problems with stray animals and jobs. Disputes between individuals about these issues have sometimes triggered larger fights between communities. At the same time, the many forms of interaction between refugees and hosts are reinforcing the social fabric in and around the settlements.

Fights over natural resources

The research found that the issue that affects refugee – host community relations most profoundly is competition over natural resources, especially firewood for cooking, grass for thatched roofing, and, to a more limited extent, poles for construction and shelter.⁵⁵ In northern Uganda, humanitarian agencies do not provide cooking fuel or roofing material to refugees, and there are no designated locations where refugees can collect them. Consequently, refugees have to negotiate with the host community on a daily basis to access such resources outside of the designated refugee settlement area.

While the situation varies depending on location, host communities often deny refugees access to these resources. In some cases, they have even burnt grass prematurely to force refugees to buy grass from the host community. In many settlements, there is an understanding that refugees are not allowed to cut specific trees (sometimes marked to that effect) or any trees at all, and that they should seek the host community's consent before collecting any resource, but this is often not respected. Because of limited availability, many refugees pay, in cash or in kind (usually with their food rations) for firewood or grass. Some refugees do not have the means or will to do so, and are accused of stealing. A host community member near Palabek refugee settlement said: "The relations between us, the host community, and the refugees is poor, because the refugees steal and cut our wood and grass without requesting permission."⁵⁶

55 This is confirmed by quantitative assessments, which listed natural resources as some of the conflict triggers mostly witnessed by respondents in Adjumani district and in Rhino camp refugee settlement, followed by conflicts over aid, and respectively land and access to social services. See DRC 2017.

56 Participant in focus group discussion with host community members, Palabek (close to Palabek refugee settlement), March 2019.

As a result, host communities are deeply concerned about environmental degradation because of the refugee presence.⁵⁷ A leader explained why: “The refugees are too many and are increasing. Because of grass harvesting and tree cutting, they have depleted our resources. We don’t mind sharing, but look at our place now. We are going to create a desert.”⁵⁸ An assessment by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) confirmed that “[t]he refugee influx from South Sudan has led to an increase in the rate of degradation and tree loss, both inside the West Nile refugee settlements and around their boundaries. [...] The refugee presence has added to the existing pressure on the environment, causing a high risk of degradation due to increased demand for wood as cooking fuel.”⁵⁹

In most of the settlements visited, competition over natural resources has resulted in incidents in which Ugandans chase away refugees fetching resources. As a 30-year old refugee woman in Maaji refugee settlement told IRRI: “They chased me when I had already cut grass, but they did not allow us to take what we had already cut. The man was just scaring us so that we would run.”⁶⁰ A young refugee woman living in Palabek refugee settlement, where IRRI documented many incidents, said: “In December 2018, we had gone to pick firewood and a Ugandan man came towards us with a panga. I think his intention was to harm us, we were two women. We ran away back to the camp and the man was never arrested.”⁶¹

On some occasions, refugees have been physically attacked. Several refugees, often women, have been arrested when cutting grass or trees and have had some of their tools confiscated, but they are usually released soon after.⁶² There were reports that some children have been beaten by host community members.⁶³ Due to language or cultural differences, there might also have been cases of miscommunication, in which refugees interpret reactions by host community members as a threat, where they may not have been intended as such.

As women are mostly responsible for fetching such resources, and constitute most of the adult South Sudanese refugee population, they are particularly affected. There have been several reports of sexual abuse against women seeking resources outside of the settlement.⁶⁴ In Palabek refugee settlement, for example, IRRI spoke to a refugee woman who had been raped by a Ugandan man when fetching firewood, which was confirmed by other witnesses, and received information on several other cases.⁶⁵

Because of hostile reactions by host community members, refugees often move in a group to

57 UNDP estimates the loss of ecosystem due to the refugee presence at 90,7 million USD for the period 2016 – 2017. UNDP, 2018.

58 Interview with host community leader, near Ayilo refugee settlement, 10 January 2019.

59 World Bank & FAO, *Rapid Assessment of Natural Resources Degradation in Areas Impacted by the South Sudan Refugee Influx in Northern Uganda*, October 2018, available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/620681548863607633/Rapid-Assessment-of-Natural-Resources-Degradation-in-Areas-Impacted-by-the-South-Sudan-Refugee-Influx-in-Northern-Uganda> (accessed on 31 July 2019).

60 Participant in focus group discussion with refugees in Maaji II refugee settlement, 15 January 2019.

61 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 3 March 2019.

62 Interviews with refugee leaders, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018 and 20 January 2019, and with host community leader, Imvepi Parish, 20 January 2019.

63 Focus group discussion with refugees in Maaji II refugee settlement, 15 January 2019, interview with refugee in Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 12 December 2018.

64 Interview with police officer, Pagrinya refugee settlement, 8 January 2019, and intervention of police officer, validation workshop, Adjumani, 23 May 2019.

65 Interviews with refugees, Palabek refugee settlement, 21 February 2019 & 2 – 3 March 2019.

collect resources, and are in turn accused by members of the host community of being aggressive.⁶⁶ A host community member told IRRI: “They now move with men and women together. Their men provide protection to their women. So as one person, you can only sometimes stop them from removing wood or grass.”⁶⁷

There are clear links between the problems around natural resources on the one hand, and host community frustration about unmet expectations and scarcity related to land on the other hand. A refugee living in Boroli refugee settlement said that a Ugandan member of the host community told him: “You refugees, you are being brought here. All services are being provided for you, even food. Why do you cut natural resources? UNHCR should provide you with that.”⁶⁸ Other refugees saw themselves refused access by host community members who were disgruntled about the insufficient benefit in exchange for the land they offered to refugees.⁶⁹

There is increased awareness among national and international actors working on the refugee response about the severity of environmental degradation and competition over natural resources. Some have distributed tree seedlings to refugees and Ugandans living close to the settlement, but respondents said this is still insufficient to address the structural problem of deforestation and environmental degradation. There were also concerns that not enough was being done to ensure that refugees and host community members were consulted and sensitised about how to care for the newly planted trees.⁷⁰ Other respondents recommended that the provision of fuel and energy-efficient stoves, which is ongoing but insufficient, be expanded to reduce pressure on resources. Other measures that are currently being implemented include briquette production. Environmental degradation is prominent on the policy agenda of both the Ugandan government and UNHCR, as shown through dedicated meetings and response plans.

Competition over livelihoods and land

The problems related to natural resources are amplified when refugees start making bricks or charcoal to generate income and supplement the humanitarian support they receive. For brick-making, land, firewood and water are all needed, all of which can be scarce and contested. Local leaders have attempted to address the tension around brick and charcoal making, in some cases by barring refugees from these activities, or in other situations by encouraging them not to bake bricks before selling, in order to reduce the use of firewood.⁷¹ In some settlements, there is also contestation about whether refugees can be involved in quarrying stones, in others an agreement not to sell stones to outsiders has decreased tensions.⁷² In some settlements, landowners demanded payment from refugees who engaged in brickmaking or in stone quarrying.⁷³

Such disagreements about livelihoods have, on several occasions, also degenerated into violence.

66 Interview with two host community leaders and a refugee, Maaji II refugee settlement, 15 January 2019.

67 Focus group discussion with host community members, close to Palabek refugee settlement, 27 February 2019.

68 Interview with refugees, Boroli refugee settlement, 8 January 2019.

69 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 21 February 2019.

70 Interview with LC5, Lamwo district, 21 May 2019.

71 The LCIII responsible for the area around Imvepi refugee settlements sent a letter to the RWCIII in that regard. Interview with host community elder, Imvepi Parish, 20 January 2019. In Rhino Camp, meetings have been held and refugees have been told not to burn charcoal, but this is not fully being respected.

72 Validation workshop, Adjumani, 23 May 2019.

73 Interviews with refugees in Palabek refugee settlement, 28 February 2019, 4 March 2019, 6 March 2019.

Near Maaji III refugee settlement, for example, a refugee man was allegedly killed for burning charcoal after he had cut down trees without permission. Suspects had been arrested and were being detained in Adjumani at the time of the research.⁷⁴ IRRI also interviewed a refugee boy who recounted being attacked by a host community member because he refused share the profits of the bricks he made and sold. The host community told the boy that he had to pay him because he was using the soil of his land, while the refugee held it was refugee land and he could use the soil.⁷⁵

There were a number of other reports of refugees encroaching on host community land without permission, “causing tension and friction between refugees and the host community.”⁷⁶ Refugees are often unaware of boundaries between the refugee settlement and the host community land, including because of insufficient or unclear land demarcation. This issue has caused serious tensions in parts of Rhino Camp refugee settlement⁷⁷ and “is likely to cause conflict between host communities and refugees if left unchecked.”⁷⁸

But there is also a deeper disagreement about the purpose and nature of land allocated to refugees. Host community members have complained that refugees claim the land is theirs, “so they can do whatever they want”,⁷⁹ while refugees said host community members at times tried to block them from using land for income-generating activities. As one refugee said with regards to brickmaking, “the landowner came and quarrelled with the boys [doing bricklaying]. He was saying that even though they [the landowners] had given the land to refugees, the land is only for settlement and agriculture. Any other activities, like bricklaying, on his land must first get permission from the landowner.”⁸⁰ This has also been an issue when international NGOs distributed seedlings, as host community members have at times protested about refugees planting fruit trees on ‘their’ land without consulting them, while refugees said “the land is already given to us, and the trees will remain for him.”⁸¹ Some interlocutors even went further, said the land given to refugees was only for settlement, not for agriculture, going against government policy to grant land both for settlement as well as for agricultural activities, to promote self-reliance.⁸²

These problems were the exception rather than the rule, however, and many arrangements exist to allow refugees to do agricultural work on land belonging to the host community. Land plots allocated to refugees have reduced in size considerably due to the high influx, and much of the land is infertile and rocky, although there is significant variations among the settlements.⁸³ Consequently,

74 Focus group discussions with refugee men, Maaji III refugee settlement, 15 January 2019; Individual interviews with host community leaders, Maaji III refugee settlement, 15 January 2019.

75 Interview with refugee, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 13 December 2018.

76 Focus group discussion with host community members, Pagrinya village (close to Pagrinya refugee settlement), 22 January 2019.

77 Participants in validation workshops, Palabek, 20 May 2019, and Arua, 23 May 2019. Previous studies had suggested that Rhino Camp had fewer issues because of the absence of an “indigenous” host community and less land scarcity, but our study seems to indicate otherwise – although land issues seem to be less prominent there than in other settlements. Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group, *Conflict Assessment Adjumani and Arua Refugee Settlements*, April 2015.

78 UNDP, 2018.

79 Participant in focus group discussion with host community members, Palabek, March 2019.

80 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 6 March 2019.

81 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 6 March 2019. Confirmed in validation workshop, 20 May 2019.

82 Interview with district politician, Adjumani, 16 January 2019.

83 A UNDP study stated that 50 percent received plots measuring 30*30, while others received larger land plots. Consequently, reportedly, in 83 percent of the settlement visited for that assessment, refugees had fully used the land given to them and thus require additional land. UNDP, 2018.

many refugees asked, on an individual or group basis, for agricultural land from the host community.⁸⁴ While some Ugandan landowners provide refugees with land free of charge, most must pay or share part of the proceeds. This has created a degree of economic interdependence with mutual benefits, and several interlocutors said they were satisfied with the arrangements.

But there have also been problems. Some Ugandan landowners re-claimed the land they had given to refugees after the latter had done hard work to prepare it for cultivation and harvested the crops refugees had planted.⁸⁵ A refugee from Ayilo refugee settlement said: “When they take back their land [after one agricultural season], we feel cheated. After tedious work of opening the land, we were expecting good harvest in the second season.”⁸⁶ Sometimes refugees made a deal with one host community member, only to be approached afterwards by another one claiming ownership over the same plot. As described above, the potential to benefit from refugee presence has exacerbated some land disputes between Ugandans, within families or between different groups. At times, too, refugees have also failed to provide the compensation agreed upon.⁸⁷

Local village chairmen in various locations in Adjumani district told IRRI that they advised refugees and Ugandans engaging in such deals to sign written agreements, detailing the length of the arrangement, with the local chairman as witness, to avoid such problems. Good practices can be replicated to avoid such disputes from escalating. While land disputes are not alarming at this point, they are not “negligible” either, as cited in other assessments.⁸⁸ Combined with other frustrations in both refugee and host communities, they could result in significant problems.

Ongoing efforts to find additional agricultural land for refugees, either through joint farmer groups or new negotiations with landowners, should thus be welcomed. This is also particularly relevant to translate Uganda’s policy of self-reliance into practice, as the current size of land plots do not allow refugees to be self-sufficient and work towards food security.⁸⁹ Because of the frustration and tense relationships around land described above, however, securing additional land for agriculture is unlikely to materialise on a wide scale.⁹⁰

Stray animals

The problem of animals straying into agricultural land are particularly relevant as some members of the host community are starting to complain about scarcity of land for grazing, hunting and agriculture. “Refugees have brought hunger for the locals, because we have our animals. We used to dig near here and we raised animals far,” a host community leader told IRRI.⁹¹ Some say they can no longer take their animals to the watering places where they used to go, as they would have to cross refugee land, risking the destruction of refugee crops.⁹² “The refugees brought in their

84 According to a quantitative assessment, 34,5% of respondents in Adjumani and 17,9% of respondents in Rhino Camp refugee settlement rented land. DRC 2017. Such arrangements are in place in 80% of the settlement areas. UNDP 2018.

85 This was a major issue in Boroli refugee settlement, for example. Focus group discussion with host community members, close to Boroli refugee settlement, 22 January 2019.

86 Interview with refugee, Ayilo refugee settlement, 10 January 2019.

87 Participant in validation workshop, Adjumani, 23 May 2019.

88 DRC & partners, 2017, p. 5.

89 UNDP, 2018.

90 Interview with NGO worker, 10 January 2019.

91 Participant in a focus group discussion with host community members, Lugbara Parish, 19 January 2019.

92 Focus group discussion with host community, Lugbari Parish, 19 January 2019.

cattle in the settlement and there is no grazing land for the animals, so refugee animals trespass and destroy our crops,” one said.⁹³

Refugee and host communities both raised concern about destruction of crops by stray cattle in some of the settlements, although some confined it to particular zones with larger settlements.⁹⁴ Some refugees told IRRI they had not planted seeds distributed to them, as they would be eaten or destroyed by stray cattle from the host community.⁹⁵

This has been a particular issue in settlements with many refugees from cattle-keeping communities, such as Ayilo and Nyumanzi, who brought their cattle from South Sudan to Uganda without authorisation, prompting several host communities to raise protests to OPM. In Ayilo refugee settlement, angry host communities killed several cows which had destroyed their plants. In other cases, cattle have been “arrested” until arrangements are made for compensation by the owner for damaged crops. This can further fuel frustration, as refugees at times feel that the monetary compensation demanded is excessive.⁹⁶ A local leader said that “this has brought tension and misunderstanding with the refugees, who claim that the host population are stealing their animals and are fraudulently extorting money from them.”⁹⁷ There have been allegations of animal theft from both sides. Refugees have, on occasion, gone in groups to reclaim their detained animals. In the context of existing tensions within some refugee settlements, in particular in Ayilo (see below), this has the potential to generate violence.

Several international NGOs have been distributing small livestock to refugees, without necessarily taking steps to prevent conflicts that they may trigger.⁹⁸ A host community leader said that international NGOs “gave too many animals to refugees, while the locals didn’t get any. These animals are destroying the farms of the locals.”⁹⁹ A representative of the Adjumani Elders forum linked this to different understandings about the usage rights of the land: “The host community says they gave land for people, and not for animals. [But] NGOs have given refugees animals, including pigs and chickens. Yet OPM gave [refugees] only a plot for settlement. Now, animal trespassing is an issue.”¹⁰⁰ As is the case for agriculture, refugees also complained of insufficient land, but some deals with the host community for grazing land also ended in disagreements.¹⁰¹

Jobs, jobs, jobs

As previously noted, Ugandans who agreed to cede land to the settlements expected to be offered

93 Focus group discussion with host community, Nyumanzi settlement, 16 January 2019.

94 In Rhino Camp refugee settlement, for example, in Omugo it is mostly refugees complaining about the matter, while in other areas, it is the host community. Interview with CBO representatives, Arua, 16 December 2018.

95 Interview with refugee community workers, 14 December 2018 and 17 January 2019; Focus group discussion with refugees, Imvepi refugee settlement, 19 December 2018; Interview with host community member, Imvepi Parish, 20 January 2019.

96 Interview with refugee leaders, Maaji II refugee settlement, 15 January 2019 & Imvepi refugee settlement, 17 January 2019. Focus group with host community members, close to Nyumanzi refugee settlement, 16 January 2019. Interview with senior police officer, Adjumani district, 16 January 2019.

97 Interview with refugee leaders, Maaji II refugee settlement, 15 January 2019 & Imvepi refugee settlement, 17 January 2019. Focus group with host community members, close to Nyumanzi refugee settlement, 16 January 2019.

98 Interview with CBO representatives, Arua, 16 December 2018, with NGO worker, Adjumani, 10 January 2019.

99 Interview with host community leader, Ayilo village (close to refugee settlements Ayilo I & II), 10 January 2019.

100 Interview with elders forum, Adjumani, 15 January 2019.

101 Refugees apparently would bring much more cattle than previously agreed upon with the host community. Interview with elders forum, Adjumani, 15 January 2019.

jobs in return, but many of these hopes have since been dashed. Local leaders described the lack of employment as a “very, very big challenge”¹⁰² or a “very hot issue.”¹⁰³ Many host community members are frustrated that Ugandans from other parts of the country are being recruited for jobs at the refugee settlements, thus in their area, instead of locals. A Ugandan living close to Imvepi refugee settlement told IRRI:

Some [of our youth] don’t get jobs because they are not from the same tribe [as INGO staff], who are from western or eastern Uganda. They call someone from their home area, despite the advert. This results into bitterness. [...] It should be changed. Jobs are based on relations; you will not get a job [if you don’t have good relations with INGO staff]. They should consider people from around [the refugee settlements].¹⁰⁴

While there was some recognition that not all skills and professional profiles were available around the settlements, frustration about insufficient and unequal job opportunities has led to incidents near some refugee settlements. Angry Ugandan youth, for example, blocked roads near Rhino Camp and Imvepi settlements in Arua district in 2017, demanding an increase in jobs and a dialogue with OPM.¹⁰⁵ There have been efforts to address this, both at the settlement and national level. Some said the situation had improved, but IRRI still encountered strong resentment about insufficient efforts by international NGOs and OPM to address this. As a local leader near Pagrinya refugee settlement said:

They should also give the opportunity to the sons of the soil to get jobs. This will help the community. Our villages have professionals, but they are not being catered for. [...] We are seriously angry towards NGOs, but we have no problem with refugees.¹⁰⁶

At the same time, refugees also complained about insufficient job opportunities, saying that they only get selected for volunteer jobs, while Ugandans are favoured in hiring processes for real jobs, despite the fact that “the services are for the refugees.”¹⁰⁷ Several international NGO contractors were accused of not paying salaries on time, or at all, when hiring refugees.¹⁰⁸ In general, both refugee and host community members direct this antagonism at international NGOs and their demands for jobs are not in direct competition. In some cases, however, there has been competition between the refugee and host communities. A Ugandan living close to Palabek refugee settlement, for example, said: “Some of our people have given land and their children are educated but they are not employed by NGO. They employ refugees and ignore us.”¹⁰⁹ Some incidents occurred as a result of competition for jobs, including a scuffle between a refugee leader and host community members about access to low-skilled jobs.¹¹⁰

102 Interview with host community leader, Odruaku village (close to Rhino camp refugee settlement), 13 December 2019.

103 Local leader during validation workshop, Arua, 24 May 2019.

104 Participant in a focus group discussion with host community members close to Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018.

105 B. Okethwangu, “Arua youth riot over refugees, accuse aid agencies of marginalisation” in *Daily Monitor*, on file.

106 Participant in a focus group discussion with host community members, Pawinyo village (close to Pagrinya refugee settlement), 9 January 2019.

107 Interview with refugee, Ayilo refugee settlement, 10 January 2019.

108 Validation workshop, Arua, 24 May 2019.

109 Participant in a focus group discussion with host community members in Apyetta, close to Palabek refugee settlement, February 2019.

110 In Imvepi, a refugee leader was apparently slapped by a host community member who complained that refugees were favoured for construction jobs. Interview with police officer, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 January 2019.

Access to water

In some of the settlements visited for this research, competition over inadequate water supply was a serious problem. In Ayilo II refugee settlement, it was described as the major source of conflict between the two groups.¹¹¹ Refugees and Ugandans accuse each other of trying to jump the water queues, and this has resulted in sporadic scuffles between individuals, particularly women and children who are often responsible for fetching water. Such problems are most prominent where water is scarce, as long queues and waiting times increase tensions.¹¹² A refugee boy in Rhino Camp refugee settlement illustrated the situation to IRRI:

I have witnessed incidents at the water point. The truck comes and pours water, and everybody comes and fights to get water first. Everybody fights. They fear the water will get finished before they get [what they need]. It happens once a day.¹¹³

As with other services, refugees claiming “ownership” have also left the host community frustrated: “They [refugees] say it is their water, and their authority.”¹¹⁴ In some settlements, both groups said the other had restricted access to water points.¹¹⁵ To address this, in some settlements water committees have been created, composed of representatives of both refugee and host communities. Those committees seem to be making useful contributions in organising access to water, and to a more limited extent in conflict resolution, in collaboration with refugee and host community leaders. In some settlements, they have been trained and provided with means of transport. This has led to improvements, but issues remain, especially when access to water is insufficient, particularly during the dry season.¹¹⁶

Near Pagrinya, host community members also complained about a water pond that has been spoiled by refugees using it to bathe and for their animals. While these issues were not mentioned in other settlements, it illustrates how tensions can build up, but also how violent outbreaks can be prevented by increasing access to water. Host community members told IRRI:

There is no open violence yet, but this is a problem. [...] We, the Madi, are known for accumulating frustration. Violence can break out, but we are trying to avoid it. We are asking to put another borehole, so refugees can leave the pond, and there is peaceful resolution. We try to mobilise [our people] to stay peaceful. If one of them is attacked, this can lead to another disaster. [The authorities] are aware about the tensions, but nothing is being done.¹¹⁷

It is important that such warning signs are not ignored, but rather acted upon quickly to prevent tensions from escalating into violent conflict.

111 Interview with refugee leader, Ayilo II, 10 January 2019.

112 This was the case in Imvepi and Rhino camp refugees settlements. See F. Draku, “Uganda: Water Crisis Hits Refugee Camps” in *Daily Monitor*, 19 February 2019, available at <https://allafrica.com/stories/201902190687.html> (accessed on 23 July 2019).

113 Interview with refugee, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 12 December 2018.

114 Particularly in Imvepi and Rhino Camp refugee settlements. Participant in a focus group discussion with host community members close to Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018. See also Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group, *Conflict Assessment Adjumani and Arua Refugee Settlements*, April 2015.

115 For example in Palabek. Validation workshop in Palabek refugee settlement, 20 May 2019.

116 Interview with CBO representatives, Arua, 16 December 2018.

117 Participant in a focus group discussion with host community members, Pawinyo village (near Pagrinya refugee settlement), 9 January 2019.

Crime and fights triggering community violence

Lessons should be learned from the failure to respond to warning signs and to engage in preventative efforts in Ayilo refugee settlement, where in July 2018 the most serious incident documented by IRRI took place. After a Ugandan girl was found dead in the bush close to the settlement, allegedly sexually abused and strangled, Ugandans attacked refugees, whom they accused of being the perpetrators. One refugee was killed, three were injured and one reported missing, while several houses – of both refugees and Ugandans – were burned.¹¹⁸

There had previously been tension between refugees and hosts around Ayilo. A refugee told IRRI that, prior to the attacks, a Ugandan had threatened refugees in a meeting he attended, saying “We can kill you all. I can kill 10 people with arrows.”¹¹⁹ It seems the girl’s death in July 2018 was the spark that ignited an already explosive situation. IRRI interviewed a refugee who shared the host community’s Madi ethnicity and tried to diffuse the situation, only partially successfully.¹²⁰

Since then, there have been several attempts to reconcile refugees and Ugandans, but a refugee told IRRI that “only by the will of God, it won’t happen again.”¹²¹ People involved in sensitisation after the incident said members of both communities failed to show up: “On peace day, we mobilised and they did not appear, both refugees and the host in that area. [...]. There is no sign of peace, just hypocrisy.”¹²²

While this was the most serious incident reported so far, others have occurred in other settlements, a number of which have reportedly taken place in schools. In 2017, at a primary school around Maaji III refugee settlement, a fight between a refugee and Ugandan boy escalated into tensions between the two groups. Angry Ugandans attacked refugees, damaged the school building and burned property requiring the intervention of local leaders, police, UNHCR and OPM.¹²³ Similarly at schools in Nyumanzi and Boroli refugee settlements refugees allegedly mobilised and attacked host community members, prompting the same actors to respond.¹²⁴

Other incidents take place at night. Fighting in a disco hall in Imvepi refugee settlement in 2018 resulted in several days of police intervention and left several people injured.¹²⁵ In Palabek refugee settlement, both Ugandans and refugees have been beaten up when returning home from a bar.¹²⁶ Both groups have accused each other of stealing, fighting, sexual misconduct and alcohol abuse. Although such incidents are not common, there is always a risk that such incidents could spark broader conflict as the sides may mobilise along ethnic/community lines.

118 Eye Radio, *Adjumani: Refugees attacked over alleged rape*, 2018, available at <https://eyeradio.org/adjumani-refugees-at-tacked-alleged-rape/> (accessed on 15 August 2019).

119 Interview with refugee, Ayilo refugee settlement, 10 January 2019.

120 Interview with refugee, Ayilo refugee settlement, 10 January 2019.

121 Interview with refugee, Ayilo refugee settlement, 10 January 2019.

122 Interview with elder representative, Adjumani, 15 January 2019.

123 Two focus group discussions with refugees, Maaji III refugee settlement, 15 January 2019; Interview with teachers, Maaji III refugee settlement, 8 February 2019; Interview with host community leaders, close to Maaji III refugee settlement, 15 January 2019. See JRS, *Uganda: Healing and Reconciliation in Maaji III*, 22 December 2017, available at http://www.jrsea.org/news_detail?TN=NEWS-20171222011419 (accessed on 15 August 2019).

124 Focus group discussion with members of the host community, Egge village (close to Nyumanzi refugee settlement), 16 January 2019. Focus group discussion with refugees, Boroli refugee settlement, 21 January 2019.

125 Interview with refugee community worker, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2019.

126 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 13 March 2019 and focus group discussion with host community, Palabek.

Socio-cultural relations

Such incidents are more concentrated where cultural and language barriers between refugees and the host community are greater, in particular when refugees originate from areas further away from the border or from particularly isolated communities. A host community member said: “I do not interact with refugees due to the language barrier.”¹²⁷ Cultural differences and communication barriers can contribute to misunderstandings, and potentially lead to violence. As a refugee from Imvepi refugee settlement put it: “We do not understand each other, making us feel that the other is talking bad things [about us].”¹²⁸

Host community members often accuse refugees of having a “difficult temper” and of not respecting Uganda’s laws and norms. Alcohol abuse and accusations of witchcraft only aggravate the problem. Ugandans stereotyped particular groups, especially those living further away from the border and having less cultural similarity with Ugandans, including the Dinka, Nuer and Murle, and accused them of arrogance and violence. Some had expected that only refugees from the same or similar ethnic communities – most Ugandan communities in the districts visited identify as Madi, Lugbara or Acholi – would be hosted on their lands and in their vicinity, which they thought would have eased their integration.

Despite stereotypes and linguistic/cultural barriers, the vast majority of refugees and Ugandans we interviewed spoke of good social relations. Ugandans often referred to their own personal experiences of displacement to explain their tolerance and solidarity. As a Ugandan living close to Palabek refugee settlement said: “During the war in northern Uganda, I was also affected and lived in the [IDP] camp for about 18 years. That is why I try to compromise with the refugees sometimes.”¹²⁹ Because of previous displacement, both Ugandans and South Sudanese have learned languages that allow them to communicate with many ethnic groups on both sides of the border.

Positive relations are further reinforced by the sharing of schools, churches and humanitarian services, as well as active efforts by NGOs to bring communities together through joint livelihood projects or cultural and sporting events. Some interlocutors have noted a gradual improvement in inter-community relations. Intermarriages have further cemented linkages between refugees and Ugandans, but there have also been tensions related to such practices. Refugee communities often practice different customs related to marriage, which are not always compatible with customary and legal norms in Uganda. Not all communities accept intermarriage, and IRRI received reports of repercussions for both Ugandan and refugee men accused of having relationships with a woman of the other group.¹³⁰

One issue with potential to generate future, localised conflict relates to where refugees should bury their dead. Many refugees prefer to bury their loved ones close to their homes, and many refugees have also taken their deceased family members back to South Sudan. Others, however, want to bury them close to their homes in the settlement, but health workers and host community members may object. Ugandans feel that the spiritual consequences of burying strangers may

127 Interview with host community member, 12 December 2018.

128 Participant in a focus group discussion with refugees in Imvepi refugee settlement, 19 January 2019.

129 Interview with member of host community, Apyeta (close to Palabek refugee settlement), 24 February 2019.

130 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 22 February 2019; Focus group discussions with host community members, Palabek (close to Palabek refugee settlement), 26 February 2019.

prohibit the use of the land for any other purpose after the departure of refugees. Refugees, on the other hand, have complained about limited and inadequate burial grounds.¹³¹ To address this, there have been specific compensation arrangements for landowners who offered burial grounds, but IRRI was informed about one landowner withdrawing his land because compensation was not disbursed as promised.¹³²

131 Interview with CBO representatives, Arua, 16 December 2018.

132 Interview with refugee leaders, Palabek refugee settlement, February 2019, and validation workshop, Palabek, 21 May 2019.

Relations between refugees and host community in urban centres

While falling outside the main scope of this report, relations between refugees and Ugandans in urban centres are also important. Uganda hosts 64,848 refugees and asylum seekers in urban centres, many of whom are South Sudanese.¹³³ Most live in Kampala or in urban centres in northern Uganda, such as Arua, Gulu or Koboko, and arrived either during the previous refugee influx in the nineties, or since 2013.

Interviews with local leaders in Arua and Adjumani town demonstrated that the presence of refugees in these areas has not caused any serious tensions. As around the settlements, many pointed out that refugee and host communities share services, economic activities and cultural celebrations. Ugandans benefit from renting or selling property to refugees.

The situation is not without risk, however. The refugee presence has, however, increased pressure on already under-resourced services, in particular health and educational facilities. Increased demand has driven up prices of water, housing, land and food at times, and there have been allegations of discrimination against refugees at service points and in markets. In Adjumani, there were complaints about limited availability of land for agriculture and housing, and water shortages have provoked several incidents.¹³⁴ And there have been security concerns. In Arua town, for example, there have been incidents between Nuer and Dinka refugees, attempts to recruit young refugees to fight in South Sudan, and attempted kidnappings of individuals accused of belonging to opposition groups.¹³⁵

Local leaders complain that donors and international NGOs largely ignore urban refugees. Indeed, urban refugees continue to be largely excluded from any assistance beyond legal status determination and protection work, despite increasing attention.¹³⁶ This also affects the host community, as there are fewer benefits available to be shared with them. There is need for additional research into refugee-host relations in towns with a large refugee presence, including to identify conflict prevention and mitigation interventions underway and any gaps in them.

133 46,111 are registered refugees, 18,737 are registered asylum seekers. UNHCR, “Monthly Protection Update Urban Protection Response”, May 2019, available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/70330> (accessed on 30 July 2019).

134 Interviews with local elected leaders, Arua, 18 December 2018 and Adjumani, 17 January & 6 February 2019. Interview with refugees in Adjumani town, 17 January 2019. Interview with journalist, Adjumani, 16 January 2019.

135 Interviews with local elected leaders and with senior police office, Arua, 18 December 2018. Interview with refugee, Rhino Camp refugee settlement,

136 See International Refugee Rights Initiative, *Uganda's refugee policies: The history, the politics, the way forward*, Rights in Exile policy paper, October 2018, available at <http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/IRRI-Uganda-policy-paper-October-2018-Paper.pdf> (accessed on 30 July 2019).

Relations within the refugee community

Relations within the refugee community, in particular between different ethnic communities, varied greatly among the refugee settlements visited by IRRI. In most settlements, there were reports of inter-community tensions, but no major conflicts had so far erupted. The fact that there are intercommunity tensions is hardly surprising considering the way that ethnic identities have been manipulated and polarised in the conduct of the war in South Sudan more broadly. Although ethnic identity is not inherently problematic, it can be, and indeed has been exploited and manipulated as a tool for mobilisation in the conduct of the South Sudan war.

Drawing lessons from previous incidents

The notable exception is Rhino Camp refugee settlement in Arua district, where on 17 June 2018 there was a major incident between the Nuer and Dinka communities in Tika zone, resulting in four deaths and more than a dozen wounded.¹³⁷ It was triggered by a fight between young men watching a World Cup soccer game, and preceded by quarrels between women at a water point. Previous warning signs had been ignored, a Nuer refugee previously living in Tika zone told IRRI: “Some people who chased us from South Sudan were doing the same things here. [...] We said that once we would react, there would be consequences. We told them [OPM], but there was no reaction.”¹³⁸

Fifteen people were arrested after the clashes, and one elder remained in jail at the time of this research. Other people involved in the fight, however, remained in the settlement or had returned to South Sudan (as has been the case after other incidents). OPM decided to separate the two communities, relocating the Nuer to another side of Rhino Camp. Since then, several efforts have been made to reconcile the two communities, but the tension remained palpable when IRRI visited. A Nuer refugee told IRRI: “If there would be Dinka here [in this part of the settlement], we would kill them all.”¹³⁹

This was not the only incident in Rhino Camp. Previous clashes, for example between Dinka and Kakwa refugees, had already occurred. In other settlements, several incidents rapidly escalated along community lines. As a refugee described it: “There is friction, and only a small thing can trigger it. The problems of South Sudan are in our minds.”¹⁴⁰ Even in Imvepi refugee settlement, where most refugees speak the same language and come from similar communities, fights among school children have escalated. As a teacher explained: “When children play together and one

137 UNHCR, “UNHCR condemns violence that leaves four refugees dead in Rhino Camp, Uganda”, 21 June 2018, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/press/2018/6/5b2b40784/unhcr-condemns-violence-that-leaves-four-refugees-dead-in-rhino-camp-uganda.html> (accessed on 25 July 2019).

138 Interview with refugee, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 13 December 2018.

139 Interview with refugee, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 13 December 2018.

140 Participant in a focus group discussion with refugees, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 11 December 2018.

is injured, for example a Kakwa and an Avokaya, they [their parents] fight. We try to settle such cases and refer them to refugee leaders.”¹⁴¹ Similar school fights escalating into a larger inter-community conflict took place in Palabek refugee settlement between Dinka and Acholi and between Lotuku and Nuer.¹⁴² As a refugee explained: “Any small problem can spark a tribal conflict. Even just children fighting among themselves draws the attention of the other, older people from the tribes from which they come.”¹⁴³ In Boroli refugee settlement, there was reference to a number of incidents that took place a few years previously, but many noted an improvement since then.¹⁴⁴

Conflict related to the situation in South Sudan

Explaining such incidents only by looking at inter-ethnic and political frictions would overlook many other factors that fuel escalation, including youth unemployment, frustrations about refugee life, personal trauma and alcohol abuse.

Some incidents, however, are directly rooted in the conflict in South Sudan, for example when refugees accuse each other of supporting an opposing party to the conflict. This was especially the case between Dinka and Nuer, or between both groups and other ethnic groups from Equatoria. Rumours about the situation in South Sudan spread quickly and can lead to conflict. In Rhino camp, for example, rumours about a minister joining the opposition put his family residing in the settlement at odds with the families of other government officials. Another example was the rumour that General Tomas Cirillo (leader of NAS) would target members of the Nuer community, prompting members of that community in the refugee settlement to threaten revenge against NAS supporters in the settlements.¹⁴⁵

Such rifts exist not only between ethnic groups, but also between clans within them, as in the case of Acholi clans in Pagrinya. The war in South Sudan has exacerbated tensions between the Panyikwar and Pajok clans, who accuse each other of starting the war in South Sudan and of supporting opposed armed forces.¹⁴⁶

In some cases, personal stories of abuse from the conflict in South Sudan spill over to the refugee settlements. In Palabek refugee settlement, a 2017 incident took place after an Acholi refugee recognised the killer of his father, a Dinka. In the fight between the two groups that followed, several

141 Participant in a focus group discussion with refugees, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018.

142 Interview with local leader, Lamwo district, and community worker, Palabek refugee settlement, March 2019. Confirmed in Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group, *Conflict Assessment Adjumani and Arua Refugee Settlements*, April 2015.

143 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 16 March 2019.

144 In April 2014, a fight between Murle and Madi after a dispute about a seat at a video hall resulted in the death of a Murle. According to a peacebuilding NGO, “[m]atters were aggravated by the late operation of the video hall, consumption of alcohol and under-currents of resentment about claims of citizens registered as refugees.” In 2015, a conflict between Anyuak and Murle ethnic groups resulted in several injuries and arrests. Other incidents have taken place since, often including Murle, Dinka and Lotuku groups. Acord, “Inter-tribal conflict among refugees: The case of South Sudanese refugees in Boroli refugee settlement - Adjumani district, Northern Uganda”, unknown date, available at <http://www.acordinternational.org/our-work/where/uganda/inter-tribal-conflict-among-refugees-the-case-of-south-sudanese-refugees-in-boroli-refugee-settlement--adjumani-district-northern-uganda/> (accessed on 24 July 2019). UNHCR, “Update for the South Sudan emergency”, 19-31 August 2015, available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/download/30388> (accessed on 24 July 2019).

145 Interview with representatives CBO, Arua, 16 December 2018.

146 Interviews with refugees in Palabek refugee settlement, 21 February - 19 March 2019, with NGO worker, Palabek refugee settlement, March 2019.

were wounded, and others fled into the bush.¹⁴⁷

As was the case for the host community, many stereotypes also exist within refugee communities, and certain ethnic groups are accused of arrogance, aggressiveness or theft. At times such stereotypes are exacerbated by widespread problems of domestic violence, alcohol abuse, and crime in the refugee settlements, spilling over into larger incidents between communities. Several communities have their own customary ways of solving conflict, but these are not necessarily compatible with customs of other groups represented in the settlements or with Ugandan law.

Some communities have been separated by UNHCR and OPM, sometimes prompted by an incident, sometimes not. Some individuals involved in the Tika incident said this should have been done from the beginning: “OPM could have avoided this. If they were serious, they would not have taken us to the same place.”¹⁴⁸ In other settlements, communities are still alongside each other. In Palabek, after an incident happened involving Dinka refugees, there were discussions about relocating them. A senior official said: “But we said no, let them learn how to live in harmony [with other refugees]. We have to work on deep-rooted problems.”¹⁴⁹

Despite official decisions for several settlements to be ethnically mixed, many refugees have decided to live in more or less exclusive ethnic or clan groups. Some have even moved from the land initially allocated to them to other parts of the settlement in order to do so. This may, to a certain extent, be related to whether they lived in more or less homogeneous communities at home. Refugees themselves also tried to separate from groups viewed as hostile by attempting to chase them away from their settlements, for example against Dinka refugees in Imvepi.¹⁵⁰ However, many interviewees noted improvements since the first arrival of refugees, particularly because of efforts by refugee leaders and NGOs to sensitise refugees about peaceful co-existence.

Access to water, land and services

As conflicts over access to water have arisen between refugee and host communities, they have also arisen among refugees, particularly in Maaji, Palabek or Pagrinya.¹⁵¹ In Palabek, a refugee said: “There is a big problem of water, the population is too high for only one borehole [in one zone], which has brought a lot of conflicts and quarrels at the water point.”¹⁵² In May 2017, a fight between two minors in Palabek about who should get water first escalated into a fight between adults from the Acholi and Dinka ethnic groups. The police had to use teargas to stop the violence.¹⁵³ In some settlements, there have been improvements. While in Boroli refugee settlement, for example, water was a source of conflict in the past, this has reportedly improved, because of improved access and sensitisation.¹⁵⁴ The Tika incident described above, however, demonstrates

147 UNHCR security note, 31 May 2017, on file; C. Makumbi, “Ethnic tension erupts among South Sudanese refugees Lamwo, two injured”, 1 June 2017, available at <https://mobile.monitor.co.ug/News/Ethnic-tension-South-Sudanese-refugees-Lamwo-two-injured/2466686-3952082-format-xhtml-14lutqg/index.html> (accessed on 26 July 2019).

148 Interview with refugee, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 13 December 2018.

149 Interview with LC5, Lamwo district, 21 May 2019.

150 Focus group discussion with refugees, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018 & 19 January 2019; Interview with refugee leader, 18 January 2019.

151 Interview with refugee elder, Maaji refugee settlement, 15 January 2019. Focus group discussion with refugees, Maaji refugee settlement, 15 January 2019.

152 Participant in focus group discussion with refugees, Palabek refugee settlement, March 2019.

153 UNHCR, security note, 31 May 2017.

154 Acord, “Inter - tribal conflict among refugees: The case of South Sudanese refugees in Boroli refugee settlement

the inherent risks of insufficient access to water on inter-community conflicts.

Interviewees said that several incidents were triggered by tension due to the overcrowding of health centres or the limited availability of land. While those conflicts are not widespread and can be addressed, every issue can lead to wider inter-community conflict, as an OPM official told IRRI: “At various points, at school, boreholes, etcetera, fights may start out of small issues and then escalates along ethnic lines. Groups come in to support their side, [...] and it becomes a tribal issue.”¹⁵⁵

As previously described in relation to host and refugee community relations, international actors intervening in the refugee settlements must ensure that they are not seen as favouring one or the other group. A refugee leader in Palabek said:

They give more attention to areas where there are new arrivals. That can create conflict with other groups in those zones. Maybe this is related to the belief that those who arrived a long time ago can be self-sufficient, or with other reasons. Both the host community and the refugee have the impression that they are being left aside.¹⁵⁶

There were also complaints that some livelihood partners supported several groups multiple times, while side-lining other parts of the settlement.¹⁵⁷

- Adjumani district, Northern Uganda”, unknown date, available at <http://www.acordinternational.org/our-work/where/uganda/inter-tribal-conflict-among-refugees-the-case-of-south-sudanese-refugees-in-boroli-refugee-settlement-adjumani-district-northern-uganda/> (accessed on 24 July 2019).

155 Interview with OPM official, 11 December 2018.

156 Participant in validation workshop, Palabek refugee settlement, 20 May 2019.

157 Ibid. This was also a conclusion of a DDG-DRC conflict assessment, which however makes a simplified assertion about ethnic majorities in Arua and Adjumani districts: “Unequal (or perceived unequal) distribution of benefits from livelihood projects is a major source of tension. In Adjumani the Dinkas are the majority and hence dominate the political leadership [...] while in Rhino Camp the Nuer take this position. According to all the non-Dinka groups in Adjumani and non-Nuer groups in Rhino Camp, majority ethnic communities tend to benefit more from various livelihoods related projects because of their political representation and larger community influence.” Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group, *Conflict Assessment Adjumani and Arua Refugee Settlements*, April 2015.

Incidents between refugees and international actors

After recent scandals where food destined for refugees went missing, the World Food Programme (WFP) changed its food distribution policy. Following biometric verification of refugees (to exclude “ghost” refugees and nationals), it installed a more controlled system for food distribution, in more limited locations. Consequently, a significant number of refugees in Bidibidi refugee settlement said there were delays in food distribution, while many others had to walk long distances to get it. Such concerns were shared with the international agencies involved, but there was limited response.¹⁵⁸ On 21 December 2018, refugees in Bidibidi broke into WFP food stores, looted goods and reportedly injured humanitarian staff.¹⁵⁹ Security forces, including the army, came in to restore order and secure WFP staff who completed the food distribution, including in temporarily added distribution points, in January and February 2019. Similar incidents took place in other settlements. Three suspects, including two refugee chairmen, have been arrested and were on trial during IRRRI’s research.

There have been other incidents in the refugee settlements, where staff of international organisations have been injured or threatened because of refugee discontent with the services provided or wider frustrations. As funding pressures increase, due to global developments and corruption scandals in Uganda, this may negatively impact the provision of services, and increase the likelihood of such incidents occurring.¹⁶⁰ Reductions in food distribution will not only impact refugees’ daily meals, but also on their ability to use their food rations to buy other, necessary goods and services, including firewood.

158 Interview with representative for refugee-led community organisation, via telephone, 19 August 2019.

159 R. Ariaka, “Refugees strike over lack of food” in *New Vision*, 23 December 2018, available at https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1491681/refugees-strike-lack-food (accessed on 31 July 2019).

160 According to UNHCR, “In 2018, only 57 per cent of the refugee response budget was funded, leaving many unmet needs. The contributions in 2019 have been particularly slow with less than 20 per cent of the necessary funds received so far.” UNHCR, OPM, UNHCR and partners call for more funding to support refugees and host communities, as more people continue to flee to Uganda”, 28 May 2019, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/press/2019/5/5ced20c04/opm-unhcr-and-partners-call-for-more-funding-to-support-refugees-and-host.html> (accessed on 2 August 2019).

Cross-border dynamics affecting refugees

Cross-border dynamics also impact refugee settlements, in particular through the presence of South Sudanese armed actors, abuses against refugees by individuals from South Sudan, and recruitment by armed groups. Because of the sensitivity surrounding such dynamics, however, it was difficult to establish their scope.

The presence of conflict actors in the settlements

In most settlements, the presence of individuals involved with the armed conflict in South Sudan, from government forces and from opposition armed groups, is undeniable. Some only come to visit their families. Others, including senior figures, reside for longer periods of time in the settlements.¹⁶¹ Ugandan government actors are aware of this – for example a South Sudanese government soldier was disarmed at the border on his way to visit his family in a refugee settlement.¹⁶² Such presence generates fear amongst refugees, many of whom have already been victimised by these groups. Host community members are also afraid of being caught up in any incident. Rumours about such presence rapidly spread among these communities.¹⁶³

Security officials in the districts where IRRI carried out its research confirmed that they had arrested armed South Sudanese who had moved undetected into Uganda and were headed to the refugee settlements.¹⁶⁴ Two soldiers were arrested in September 2018 attempting to arrest an army deserter in Palabek.¹⁶⁵ Several interviewees said they had witnessed the presence of members of the South Sudanese military, in civilian or military clothing, in refugee settlements.¹⁶⁶

Armed elements, especially those aligned to the South Sudanese government, have been responsible for a number of abuses against refugees accused of deserting the government army and/or supporting the opposition. Local media reported that in Palorinya refugee settlement (Moyo district), which fell outside the scope of this research, a gunman killed a former government soldier who had defected to the rebels.¹⁶⁷ A refugee residing in Imvepi settlement told IRRI he had been

161 A general aligned to SPLA-IO, for example lives in Palabek refugee settlement. Interview with Lamwo RDC, 21 May 2019.

162 Interview with OPM official, Adjumani district, 7 January 2019.

163 Tembo FM, “Lamwo district residents in fear. They allege foreign troops go through their villages” in *Deutsche Welle*, 4 April 2018, available at <https://training.dw.com/cbn/lamwo-district-residents-in-fear-they-allege-foreign-troops-go-through-their-villages/> (accessed on 26 July 2019).

164 Interview with Lamwo RDC, 21 May 2019, with police, Arua, 18 December 2018. At least four were arrested in Lamwo district.

165 Interview with Lamwo RDC, 21 May 2019. Confirmed by UNHCR. See G. Asiimwe, “South Sudan military intelligence agents sneak into Uganda, attempt to abduct refugee” in *Chimpreports*, 10 September 2018, available at <https://chimpreports.com/south-sudan-military-intelligence-agents-sneak-into-uganda-attempt-to-abduct-refugee/> (accessed on 26 July 2019).

166 Interview with refugees, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018 & 14 January 2019. Focus group discussion with refugees, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 11 December 2018.

167 S. Iceta, “Gunman kills refugee linked to South Sudan rebels” in *Daily Monitor*, 24 July 2018, available at <https://www.>

abducted and forcibly returned to South Sudan from Palorinya.¹⁶⁸ A former intelligence agent said former colleagues had attempted to arrest him.¹⁶⁹

The presence of former or active combatants is contrary to international norms, which state that former fighters should not be granted *prima facie* refugee status, and that “persons identified as [active] fighters or combatants cannot be admitted into refugee status determination procedures until such time that they have genuinely and permanently renounced such activities, and sought international protection.”¹⁷⁰

Given the high levels of suspicion, trauma and rumours in the settlements, it is unsurprising that individuals have been accused by fellow refugees of being government spies and/or plotting against refugees who sympathise with the opposition. In Rhino Camp, for example, IRRI received information about a Dinka woman with a Nuer husband who was threatened because she was suspected of “being hired to kill people.”¹⁷¹

The movement in and out of Uganda of individuals involved in the war has been facilitated by the porous and long borders between Uganda and South Sudan, and the relative freedom of movement for refugees. This has also facilitated arms trafficking, including by refugees and to refugee settlements. In a few cases, weapons have been uncovered and refugees sanctioned for possessing them.¹⁷² Security actors and host communities have linked a resurgence in gun-related crime with the increased availability of arms in the border area and in refugee settlements.

Of course other factors have also negatively impacted security, including South Sudanese military claiming land in Uganda (in Lamwo district), causing a stand-off with Ugandan military, and raids resulting in the killing and wounding of several Ugandan citizens and the stealing of cattle.¹⁷³ There have been reports of South Sudanese military movements on Ugandan soil, denied by both the governments of South Sudan and Uganda.¹⁷⁴ It is, however, a well-established fact that the Ugandan military has supported South Sudanese government forces in the conflict.¹⁷⁵

These intergovernmental relations are strained by pressure placed on local authorities in Uganda by their South Sudanese counterparts, who accuse Uganda of harbouring criminals, rebels and providing a support networks.¹⁷⁶ “They see this as a ground for the opposition to seek safety, to

monitor.co.ug/News/National/Gunman-refugee-South-Sudan-rebels--Moyo-Palorinya/688334-4677812-b0acn4/index.html (accessed on 26 July 2019).

168 Interview with refugee, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018.

169 Such dynamics were also reported during previous the previous influx of refugees from southern Sudan. See L. Hovil, *Refugees and the security situation in Adjumani district*, Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 2, June 2001, available at https://www.refugeelawproject.org/files/working_papers/RLP.WP02.pdf (accessed on 9 August 2019).

170 UNHCR, *Guidance note on maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum*, December 2018, available at <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/452b9bca2.pdf> (accessed on 5 August 2019).

171 Interview with refugee, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 10 January 2019.

172 Interview with police officer, Palabek refugee settlement, 25 February 2019.

173 UNDSS, “Fatality Reported following Cross-Border Attack in Lutuku, Lamwo District”, 11 May 2017, on file; UNDSS, security note, 14 March 2018, on file.

174 E. Biryabarema, “Rebels say South Sudan’s use of Uganda territory could spread instability” in *Reuters*, 30 August 2017, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southsudan-uganda/rebels-say-south-sudans-use-of-uganda-territory-could-spread-instability-idUSKCN1BA216> (accessed on 30 July 2019).

175 In particular during the 2016 clashes, but this presence has continued. See UN panel of experts, *Final report of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan submitted pursuant to resolution 2428 (2018)*, 9 April 2019, available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/S_2019_301_E.pdf (accessed on 15 August 2019).

176 Interview with RDC and with local leader, Lamwo district, 21 May 2019.

locate their family and to use for recruitment.”¹⁷⁷ The South Sudanese government has repeatedly asked for access to the refugee settlements, which the Ugandan government has – rightly – denied, at least publicly and since the current refugee influx.¹⁷⁸

Recruitment

IRRI received credible information about recruitment by South Sudanese warring parties in the settlements. As a Catholic priest said: “Recruitment is a fact. Youth who are engaged in school are stable. But a huge majority [of youth] are redundant and engage in self-destructive behaviour. They are targeted. Some even go by themselves. Some are being convinced.” The link between their desperation and vulnerability to recruitment was reiterated by a refugee in Palabek, who told IRRI: “If I was approached [by recruiters], I would accept, because when they recruit you, they pay very well.”¹⁷⁹

Recruitment does not seem to be a widespread phenomenon, but implicated South Sudan’s key conflict parties. According to information received, government forces, the SPLM-IO and NAS have all recruited fighters in the refugee settlements in Uganda.¹⁸⁰ A senior police officer said: “Recruitment from both sides [of the South Sudan conflict] is a serious problem. They come and recruit boys from the camp. It happens often, when the time is there. We have arrested some of them, from the government side, and taken them to court martial in Gulu.”¹⁸¹ At times, those involved have been arrested, but often they return to South Sudan or disappear off the official radar.¹⁸²

The level of recruitment, and the actors engaged, seem to vary based on the refugee population in each settlement. In Imvepi refugee settlement, for example, NAS is reputed to have a strong support base, but SPLM-IO has also recruited there in the past. Several interviewees said they knew of individuals from that settlement who had left for South Sudan to join armed groups, but had been killed.¹⁸³ One young man in Imvepi said he escaped forced recruitment by the SPLM-IO by fleeing to Uganda, but had been approached multiple times by recruiters in the settlement, who offered money if he would go and fight in South Sudan.¹⁸⁴ Several also said that they had been approached for recruitment in Palorinya refugee settlement (Moyo district), but this settlement fell outside the scope of this research project.¹⁸⁵ Most recruitment mentioned to IRRI took place in 2016 and 2017. It seems to have gone down since, according to some because of the negotiations leading up

177 Interview with Lamwo RDC, 21 May 2019.

178 D. Opoka & C. Makumba, “South Sudan asks to pursue criminals into Lamwo camps”, in Daily Monitor, 24 July 2019, available at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/criminals-South-Sudan-refugee-camps-Lamwo-Khulang-Jarif-Chuol/688334-5207876-r9a6y2/index.html> (accessed on 26 July 2019).

179 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 25 February 2019.

180 The current government and the SPLM-IO are supposed to form a unity government, as part of the 2018 peace deal, but this has been postponed in May 2019. See International Crisis Group, *A Critical Six Months for South Sudan*, 8 May 2019, available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/south-sudan/critical-six-months-south-sudan> (accessed on 2 August 2019).

181 Interview with senior police officer, Arua, 18 December 2018.

182 Interview with senior police officer, Arua, 18 December 2018. Participant in validation workshop, Adjumani, 22 May 2019.

183 Focus group discussion with refugees, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018; interview with refugees, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018 & 18 January 2019.

184 Interview with refugee, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018.

185 Interview with refugees, Imvepi refugee settlement, 14 December 2018.

to the September 2018 peace agreement.¹⁸⁶

It remains difficult to establish the scope of this issue, because of the secrecy surrounding it and a lack of information. Several respondents refused to provide detailed information, fearing repercussions, such as a refugee in Boroli refugee settlement: “I know of a family in another block whose son was targeted, but he refused to go. I would not tell you his details, because they will put me in trouble if they know I said something about it.”¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, several members of ethnic groups have in the past accused refugees from other groups of supporting armed movements in South Sudan, which further complicates investigation.

186 Interview with refugee, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 19 December 2018.

187 Interview with refugee, Boroli refugee settlement, 8 January 2019.

Response actors

This section describes the role of different response actors and how they are perceived by research respondents. It does not include the role of OPM and district authorities, as their role in relation to the host communities was discussed in the previous sections. The paper first discusses the role of refugee and host community leaders and then the role of the police and international NGOs.

Refugee and local leaders

When issues between refugees, or with members of the host community erupt, the first responders are often the local and refugee leaders, respectively the local chairman on village (LCI), parish (LCII) and sub-country (LCIII) level, or the Refugee Welfare Committee (RWC) chairman at village (RWCI), cluster (RWCII) or zone level (RWCIII). The RWCs have similar mandates and structures as the LC system. LCs and RWCs are the main interlocutors for national and international actors and solve disputes. RWCs have a major role in settling differences within the refugee community and in sensitisation.

When an issue affects both refugees and Ugandans, refugees and the host community usually try to meet and discuss the issue between themselves and with the affected parties. An RWC member described the process: “For any case involving both the refugee and the host community, I inform the LCI and he sends representatives. When we pass a judgement, elders from both sides are present. We only mediate or give a minor punishment.”¹⁸⁸ While this can often result in a suitable outcome for both sides and has helped to diffuse tensions and improve the situation in many settlements, some respondents expressed frustration that it does not always produce the change they want to see.¹⁸⁹ Dialogues between communities are critical to address incidents, but might be ill-adapted to address more structural issues, such as environmental degradation or host community compensation, especially when they involve outside actors (including the central government or donors).

Others criticised the leadership capacity, representation, and the leverage over their communities of RWCs and LCs, but this was highly dependent on the location or even on individuals.¹⁹⁰ There have been several efforts by NGOs to reinforce the capacity of these leaders, with positive results, but much more can still be done, especially at lower levels, to support leaders in addressing often complex conflicts. Furthermore, not all these leaders have good relations with their counterparts from the other community, and there have been cases in which leaders have undermined each other’s efforts.¹⁹¹

188 Interview with RWC member, Rhino camp refugee settlement, 31 January 2019.

189 During a focus group discussion with host community members in Lugbara Parish, in Arua District, all 10 participants agreed unison this form of conflict resolution did not durably resolve their problems. Focus group discussion with host community members, Lugbara Parish, 19 January 2019.

190 Interview with CBO representatives, 16 December 2018.

191 Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group, *Conflict Assessment Adjumani and Arua Refugee Settlements*, April

While previous reports have stated that biased leadership is “a source of great tension”, pointing at unequal representation of ethnic groups in the RWCs, this was not very prominent in our discussions with refugees.¹⁹² However, several leaders were said to side with their ethnic kin when it came to conflict resolution or positions, as a block leader recognised: “Some tribes accused us, leaders, of siding with our own tribesmates during problem-solving.”¹⁹³ Several respondents agreed that some ethnic groups refused to show up at community meetings or other activities if they knew they would be dominated by people of the other group.¹⁹⁴ Divisions (within RWCs) and contestations of their legitimacy have undermined the leverage of these leaders over the different communities.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, all RWCs are dominated by men, despite women constituting the majority of refugees.

An incident that occurred in Pagrinya in August 2018 highlights some of the risks of insufficient relations between refugee leaders and the police. When a riot erupted and resulted in the murder of a preacher,¹⁹⁶ a RWCII chairman who was at the scene to calm the situation was arrested by the police. His arrest was based on the presence of his name on an attendance list of a previous meeting. Several questioned his involvement in the scuffle, but he remained in detention.¹⁹⁷ After violent incidents in Bidibidi refugee settlement (see box 2), refugee leaders were arrested. While it is difficult to establish what their exact role was in the violence, such arrests might make other refugee leaders less inclined to intervene when confronted with violent incidents.

Religious and customary leaders, including elders, are often involved in addressing community conflicts, although some of their roles have also been eroded because of dynamics described above.¹⁹⁸ In many parts of South Sudan, where state presence is limited, and in Uganda, chiefs have an important role in mediation and resolving conflicts.¹⁹⁹ Some refugee elders said that refugees approach them, even before seeing the RWCs, to address incidents between individual refugees or even between refugee communities.²⁰⁰ One of the refugee leaders said he even used traditional Acholi mechanisms, which are known for their application for the reintegration of former LRA combatants in northern Uganda, to address conflicts:

We as refugees have tried to involve clan leaders, religious leaders and elders in our ranks to try and sort out whatever problem, peacefully without causing any escalation. We also encourage *Mato Oput*, [a practice] in Acholi culture where a person who wrongs another

2015.

192 Ibid.

193 Interview with refugee leader, Palabek refugee settlement, 4 March 2019. Interview with refugee at Ayilo refugee settlement.

194 Participant in validation workshop, Palabek refugee settlement, 20 May 2019; interview with Lamwo RDC, 21 May 2019. In other reports, there were claims that refugee leaders did not mobilise among refugees who did not belong to the dominant ethnic groups to which most RWC members belongs. See Danish Refugee Council & Danish Demining Group, *Conflict Assessment Adjumani and Arua Refugee Settlements*, April 2015.

195 Minutes of a community dialogue meeting, Omugo, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, June 2019.

196 It remains unclear what the source of the dispute was. Some claim it was a dispute over religion, while others said the women had spread pessimistic prophecies about the situation in South Sudan.

197 Focus group discussion, Pagrinya village, 22 January 2019; interview with OPM official, Pagrinya, 8 January 2019; and interview with journalist, Adjumani, 7 January 2019.

198 Participant in validation workshop, Adjumani, 23 May 2019.

199 Interview with refugee, Maaji II refugee settlement, 17 January 2019.

200 Interview with refugee, Pagrinya refugee settlement, 9 January 2019, Maaji refugee settlement, 15 January 2019, Palabek refugee settlement, February 2019. In Palabek, traditional elders from Acholi clans have tried to mediate inter-clan conflicts.

makes peace and pays for the damage, after which the wronged person must not seek revenge.²⁰¹

At times, traditional leaders from both refugee and host communities have met to address problems, for example regarding inter-community relationships between refugees and Ugandans.²⁰² Some structures have also been supported by international NGOs to do so, although a significant distance remains in place between these different actors. Such distance is in part due to negative experiences involving elders. There have been incidents where elders were accused of stirring up violence: after the June 2018 incident in Rhino Camp, several elders were arrested, and a chief remains in detention.²⁰³ A community worker said: “Elders are respected but continue to promote bitterness. We must focus on them. They should be talked to properly.”²⁰⁴

Police and NGOs

When issues escalate into violence or criminal acts, the police often get involved. Many respondents said they have good relations with the police, but others complained about insufficient police capacity and suggested an increase in deployment. “I think more police posts must be put up in all blocks or zones, to help curb crime,” a refugee in Palabek refugee settlement said.²⁰⁵ This is particularly important to keep up with what is happening in the settlements, instead of only being reactive, as a senior police official acknowledged: “The problem is not the riots, but the day-to-day policing. We don’t have enough capacity to effectively do community policing.”²⁰⁶

Both host and refugee communities accuse the police of bias, slow reactions and early releases.²⁰⁷ This was illustrated by the testimony of a refugee in Palabek refugee settlement: “When we called the police to follow up on an attempted defilement case, they spent about two days before they came. After the case was sorted, the man [suspected of committing the crime] was released. They didn’t give us any feedback.”²⁰⁸ Refugees claim that the police do not adequately investigate incidents involving the host community, and release perpetrators too quickly (but of course there are legal limits about how long the Ugandan police can keep a suspect in detention without judicial review, which has been a documented issue in host communities in West Nile as well). A refugee leader said: “They favour the other side, and no matter how hard we struggle, our voice will not be heard.”²⁰⁹ Host community members, however, also voiced similar concerns of refugees being favoured by police.

In other, more serious, cases, international NGOs, especially those involved in refugee protection or in promoting peaceful co-existence get involved. Several INGOs have included peaceful co-existence in their portfolio, including Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Oxfam. National organisations and

201 Interview with refugee leader, Palabek refugee settlement, 4 March 2019.

202 Interview with several refugees, Palabek refugee settlement, February 2019.

203 Interview with refugee, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 13 December 2018.

204 Interview with CBO, Arua, 15 December 2018.

205 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 23 February 2019.

206 Interview with senior police officer, Arua, 18 December 2018.

207 Quantitative studies have shown that of all responders, refugees have the least faith in the police. See DRC 2017, p. 33 – 34 & p. 46.

208 Interview with refugee, Palabek refugee settlement, 4 March 2019.

209 Interview with female refugee leader, 18 January 2019.

community-based organisations (CBOs) have also been involved in organising community dialogues, sensitisation activities and social cohesion activities.

However, the multitude of actors involved has spurred accusations by some of the interviewees of a lack of coordination by local stakeholders. Furthermore, these actors do not touch on issues between the host community and the Ugandan government, which, as shown, are crucial and, if unresolved, can lead to negative repercussions for refugees.²¹⁰ In some cases, especially when it comes to jobs or access to services, international NGOs have been part of those blamed by frustrated refugees and Ugandans (see above).

When grave security incidents have taken place, the Ugandan military at times has entered the refugee settlements to address them, or to keep an eye on cross-border security threats. While most security agents interviewed by IRRI confirmed the general cross-border dynamics described above, they struggle to acquire objective information and prevent security threats. The Ugandan government has increased its intelligence capacity in this area, including by deploying intelligence agents in the refugee settlements and by creating a network of informants. While such reinforcement can help in increasing the information available to tackle cross-border risks, it is also important to uphold neutrality vis-à-vis the South Sudanese conflict and prevent anxiety amongst refugees who have been victims of abuses by military in their home country.

210 DRC 2018, p. 5.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this research suggest that Ugandans living in proximity to settlements and refugees maintain cordial relations with other communities and undertake efforts to maintain these positive relations.

There are, however, several potential risk factors that need to be addressed urgently. The frustration among host community members about unmet expectations, in terms of development benefits and jobs, is palpable. Many feel that the process in which they gave their consent to host refugees on their community land was not transparent and that their voices continue to be ignored.

For Uganda and its partners to sustain the progressive refugee policies that exist, it is important to find ways to accommodate these disgruntled voices. As an elder in Adjumani said, communities in northern Uganda should feel that they also benefit from the international support and acclaim that Uganda receives: “Uganda has got a good name on refugee policy because of us. But the Madi [community in northern Uganda] are not recognised. When we are welcoming and supporting refugees, we are here alone. When they [the international community] are clapping hands, they [government] are up there alone.”²¹¹ The recently approved World Bank grant to support the Development Response to Displacement Impact Project (DRDIP) provides opportunities to do so, if done with full participation of the communities concerned.

Those same communities are also experiencing the brunt of the increasing environmental degradation around the refugee presence, and will only share their resources with refugees if they feel they get something in return. Unless the rising sense of urgency is matched by more efforts to fight environmental degradation, conflicts between refugees and Ugandans about natural resources are only going to increase. Many already described those conflicts as a major issue of contention between the two communities. Dialogue and sensitisation of communities has helped in calming tensions, but are not adapted to address such structural issues.

Tackling the sources of these tensions requires a significant investment by the Ugandan government and its international donors. Measures to re-establish trust and accountability must be followed by renewed donor engagement. For instance, the current, insufficient funding has contributed to avoidable incidents around water scarcity and competition over livelihoods. More dedicated support is needed for efforts to reinforce social cohesion, empower leaders to deal with conflicts and increase capacity to analyse possible triggers.

It is also important to draw lessons from situations that escalated between communities, and about how community leaders, government agencies and international actors responded. Many incidents started from small, isolated incidents between two individuals, often children or young men. But the violence that ensued demonstrates that fault lines from the war in South Sudan are

²¹¹ Interview with elders representative, Adjumani, 15 January 2019.

also present in the settlements – many immediately take the side of individuals from their ethnic community. The circulation of rumours and individuals linked to warring factions only contribute to this problem. It is important to find ways to break the links between individual incidents and community grievances related to the South Sudan conflict.

The need to ensure peaceful co-existence in exile is even more important as there have only been limited improvements in South Sudan since the signing of a revised peace deal in 2018. With on-going security risks and socio-economic challenges in South Sudan, many refugees are unlikely to return to South Sudan any time soon. It is therefore better to invest in long-term efforts to ensure good relations and gradual integration of refugees and Ugandans in the north.

Annex: research respondents

Settlement	N focus group discussions	N individual interviews	Arrival refugee interviewees	Origin of refugee interviewees	Gender
Rhino Camp	2 with refugees, 2 with HC	8 with refugees, 4 with HC	2016 – 2017 1993	Central Equatoria, particularly Yei and Juba. Dinka, Nuer, Equatorian groups.	7 women, 30 men
Imvepi	2 with refugees, 2 with HC	27 with refugees, 5 with HC	2013 - 2018	Various Equatorian ethnic groups mostly from central and eastern Equatoria and Jonglei.	15 women, 26 men
Palabek	4 with refugees women, 2 with HC	176 with refugees, 30 with HC	2017	Most from eastern Equatoria. Many Acholi, but also Didinga, Dinka, Kakwa, Lango, Luo, Lutuku, Nuer	117 women, 89 men
Pagrinya	2 with HC	4 with refugees	2016	Mostly from eastern Equatoria	11 women, 20 men
Nyumanzi	One with refugees, one with HC	2 with refugees, 2 with HC	2014	Mostly Dinka from Jonglei	20 women, 24 men
Maaji (II & III)	2 with refugees	6 with refugees, 2 with HC	2014 – 2017	Dinka-Bor, Madi, Kakwa, Lotuko and Lopit ethnic groups, mostly from, central and eastern Equatoria and Jonglei.	12 women, 17 men
Ayilo I & II	No FGD	8 with refugees, 3 with HC	2014 – 2018	Dinka & Madi, from Jonglei, Upper Nile and eastern Equatoria.	2 women, 9 men
Boroli	One with refugees, and one with HC	9 with refugees, 2 with HC	2013 - 2106	Kuku, Madi, Lolubo, Murle, Mundari, Bari, Lotuko, Lopit, Kakwa and Dinka, from central and eastern Equatoria, and Jonglei	12 women, 19 men

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