

# UNDERSTANDING SELF-RELIANCE IN CONTEMPORARY REFUGEE PROTECTION IN UGANDA

Rights in Exile Policy Paper Series



IRRI has teamed up with researcher Andreas Muff Kristiansen to produce a series of articles on Self-reliance for Refugees that delve deeper into the notion of self-reliance, and explore what it has meant in both policy and practice in refugee responses in Uganda. There are lessons to be learned from the Ugandan government which has been implementing a self-reliance strategy for refugee response for nearly two (2) decades.

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## 1. What Is Self-Reliance?

In March 2017, Uganda adopted the, at that time brand new, UN-strategy on refugees: *Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework* (CRRF). The CRRF was first presented as an annex to the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which was adopted by all UN-member states by September 19 2016. UNHCR hailed this as “a milestone for global solidarity and refugee protection.”<sup>1</sup> In Uganda, the core of CRRF has been adopted as these four objectives of which the second is of particular interest to this paper: <sup>2</sup>

### CRRF's objectives in Uganda

- ✓ Support Government policy and protect asylum space
- ✓ Support resilience and self-reliance of refugees and host communities
- ✓ Expand solutions, including third country options
- ✓ Support Uganda's role in the region and invest in human capital and transferrable skills

So, what is self-reliance? According to UNHCR, self-reliance is defined as:

the ability of individuals, households or communities to meet their essential needs and enjoy their human rights in a sustainable manner and to live with dignity. Self-reliant persons of concern lead independent and productive lives and are better able to enjoy their rights, while also contributing to their host societies.<sup>3</sup>

On the surface, this definition appears unproblematic and, as such, it is. However, this definition does not represent the full story of self-reliance. It is actually argued that there is no “coherent theory or universal definition of self-reliance”.<sup>4</sup> This leads to situations where the focal points of self-reliance strategies and initiatives may vary depending on the involved actors. As will be discussed later on, UNHCR tend to regard refugees as self-reliant when they survive without external assistance. On the other side of the spectrum, The *Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative*<sup>5</sup> identifies 12 different domains within a definition of self-reliance resembling the one provided above. They simply just expand the understanding of self-reliance to specifically include areas such as education, health and housing. In that sense, even though the concept may be defined on similar general perceptions, various actors may understand it differently. Thus, it could be said that there is a lack of consensus regarding self-reliance.

In order to fully grasp this concept, it is imperative to consider the impact of underlying assumptions on achieving the desirable state of self-reliance. In other words, a definition is not enough; we need to understand how to get there i.e. self-reliant refugees living lives with dignity. Before venturing into that, it is important to mention *resilience* which is often coupled together with self-reliance, as in the Ugandan version of CRRF, objective 2. About the relationship between the two concepts, junior professor in forced migration and refugee studies Ulrike Krause and sociologist Hannah Schmidt state: “whereas self-reliance mainly suggests that refugees can support themselves, resilience indicates their broader ability to absorb and deal

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, "Global Compact on Refugees: Platform," 2019 available at <http://www.globalcrrf.org/es/>.

<sup>2</sup> OPM, "Uganda National Action Plan to Implement the Global Compact on Refugees and Its Comprehensive Refugee Response Plan," 2019.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, "Resilience and self-reliance from a protection and solutions perspective," 2017

<sup>4</sup> Ibrahim, M. B., & Zulu, L. C., "Development without Intervention: A Successful Self-Reliance Initiative of Rural Development and Urban Growth in The Sudan," *Geographical Review*, 104(4), 2014, 483, available at <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2014.1203>

<sup>5</sup> A global association of NGOs, government agencies, academics and other partners. <https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/>

with difficult situations and crises.”<sup>6</sup> The main focus in this paper is on self-reliance, but resilience is closely related and thus it will be considered and discussed to some degree as well.

### *The trajectory of self-reliance: not a new theme on the agenda*

Despite it sometimes being presented as such, self-reliance is actually not a novel concept. In Uganda, it was introduced officially as an overall strategy in 1999 with *The Self-Reliance Strategy for Refugee Hosting Districts of Adjumani, Moyo, and Arua* (SRS). By 2001, the Government of Uganda (GoU) had adopted the strategy as the primary framework for refugee assistance and ordered districts to proceed with implementation. In that sense, self-reliance as a strategy to solve the refugee situation was formalised in Uganda more than two decades ago. In the CRRF, as already illuminated, self-reliance carries an important role as well. However, self-reliance has been on the agenda from the very beginning of the institutionalized response to forced migration. It is argued that self-reliance actually dates back to the 1920’s, before the creation of UNHCR, with the Greek refugees from Asia Minor.<sup>7</sup> UNHCR has been interested in the concept of self-reliance since the 1960’s and 1970’s, where refugees were commonly placed in large agricultural settlements that were expected to become self-reliant quickly whereupon responsibility would be handed over to local authorities.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980’s an increased recognition of protracted refugee situations led to various attempts to bridge the humanitarian development gap to promote self-reliance.<sup>9</sup> Due to limited success, UNHCR’s focus on livelihoods and self-reliance decreased.<sup>10</sup> Scholars Tony Binns and Etienne Nel claim that self-reliance gained prominence within development theory in the 1980’s and 1990’s due to Western development strategies’ failure to deliver meaningful poverty reduction in the Global South.<sup>11</sup> Around the millennium, interest in self-reliance was renewed with UNHCR.<sup>12</sup> Since then, self-reliance appears to have gained even more attention, and it is now an eminent interest of the international refugee regime.

In this paper we will explore how self-reliance is promoted, and thus understood, in the context of refugees in Uganda. The paper is composed of three main sections: the first section critically explores the concept of self-reliance aiming to put forward a more nuanced comprehension. The second section has a particular focus on Uganda, and self-reliance will be further explored through an analysis of selected relevant policy documents. The final section concludes the paper and suggest recommendations for the future.

## **2. What is problematic about self-reliance?**

In spite of the long trajectory of the concept, few programmes have led to larger refugee populations becoming self-reliant.<sup>13</sup> Easton-Calabria and Omata claim that the lack of successful outcomes is due to

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<sup>6</sup> Krause, U., & Schmidt, H. "Refugees as Actors? Critical Reflections on Global Refugee Policies on Self-reliance and Resilience," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2019, 1–20, available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fez059>

<sup>7</sup> Easton-Calabria, E., & Omata, N. "Panacea for the refugee crisis? Rethinking the promotion of 'self-reliance' for refugees," *Third World Quarterly*, 39(8), 2018, 1458–1474, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.14583011458-1459>

<sup>8</sup> Crisp, J., "UNHCR, refugee livelihoods and self-reliance: a brief history," 2003, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/research/eval/3f978a894/unhcr-refugee-livelihoods-self-reliance-brief-history.html>

<sup>9</sup> Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018, p. 1460

<sup>10</sup> Crisp, 2003

<sup>11</sup> Binns, T., & Nel, E., "Beyond the development impasse: The role of local economic development and community self-reliance in rural South Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37(3), 1999, 389–408, available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X99003067>

<sup>12</sup> Crisp, 2003

<sup>13</sup> See *inter alia* Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018; Hunter, M. "The Failure of Self-Reliance in refugee Settlements," *POLIS Journal*, 2(Winter), 2009 1–46; Hunter, 2009; Ilcan, S., Oliver, M., & Conroy, L., "Humanitarian assistance and the politics of self-reliance: Uganda’s Nakivale Refugee Settlement," *CIGI Papers*, (86), 2015, 1–18; Meyer, S., "The 'refugee aid and development' approach in

limited opportunities for legal pathways to work, restricted rights, limited land for agriculture, lack of administrative planning and poor host economies. In a legal sense, refugees in Uganda have the right to work, to conduct business, and to freedom of movement. That being said, simply *having* rights is not necessarily enough to *exercise* them. Refugees face *de facto barriers* to exercising rights which will be explored in a subsequent article in this series.

It is also relevant to highlight that a common feature of self-reliance practices is the preoccupation with “refugees’ ability to support themselves with little to no external assistance from humanitarian and development agencies”.<sup>14</sup> In that sense, refugees are expected not only to be self-reliant, but do so with no, or at least declining, assistance. Krause & Schmidt note in the context of Uganda that self-reliance policies have a focus on the reduction of aid. Refugee experts Amy Slaughter and Kellie Leeson point out that despite the extended promotion of self-reliance, studies on the matter use different ways of measuring it hampering comparability.<sup>15</sup> This is perhaps unsurprising given the lack of consensus concerning what self-reliance actually means, as noted in the introduction. Further, Omata claims that given the absence of “systematic and rigorous criteria for measuring refugee self-reliance,” UNHCR often see refugees as “self-reliant” when they are living without external assistance.<sup>16</sup> All in all, with little consensus on self-reliance as a concept or how to measure it, dependence on external assistance becomes a reference point. This is problematic because it places self-reliance in opposition to external assistance. The focus of interventions is thus at the reduction of funds rather than on the people of concern – the refugees in this context. Consequently, short term financial savings may be prioritized over creating systems of real self-reliance and resilience. Naturally, we don’t argue that there are not any problems related to refugees being dependent on external assistance. However, we want to stress that in order for refugees to be self-reliant, a system in which that is possible needs to be created. Such a system may have to be maintained. To illustrate, the welfare systems in the Global North, where people are able to be “self-reliant”, are costly to run and it may even be said that (some) people are dependent on them!

### *Shaping self-reliance*

Scholars Binns and Nel argue that self-reliance grew in popularity from the 1990’s because it was seen to support the neoliberal ideology dominating the international political system.<sup>17</sup> Easton-Calabria and Omata argue that the contemporary understanding of self-reliance has been shaped by neoliberalism and its political and economic hegemony. They further argue that the primacy of markets and focus on individual responsibility and independence are basis for contemporary self-reliance.<sup>18</sup> In the same manner, scholars have also established a connection between resilience and neoliberalism: i.e. Emeritus Professor Mark Duffield talks about resilience as an ideology accommodating the uncertainties of a neoliberal economy.<sup>19</sup> Professor of Politics and International Relations Jonathan Joseph claims that resilience, as concerned with sustaining day-to-day life for individuals or communities, is a form of neoliberal governmentality emphasising the responsibility of the individual.<sup>20</sup> These established links point towards issues that are relevant to discuss, but largely omitted from the high-level discussion as well as in the general guiding policy papers. By focusing on the primacy of markets, it appears that there is a goal of integrating economically self-reliant refugees

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Uganda: empowerment and self-reliance of refugees in practice,” Policy Development and Evaluation Service Policy Development and Evaluation Service United Nations High Commissioner (New Issues in Refugee Research), 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018, p. 1460

<sup>15</sup> Easton-Calabria, E., Krause, U., Field, J., Tiwari, A., Mookherjee, Y., Wake, C., Leeson, K. “Refugee Self-Reliance Moving Beyond the Marketplace ( And why does this matter ?),” *RSC Research Brief 7* Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University, 2017, p.5

<sup>16</sup> Omata, N, *The myth of self-reliance: economic lives inside a Liberian refugee camp*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017)

<sup>17</sup> Binns & Nel, 1999

<sup>18</sup> Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018, p. 1461-1462

<sup>19</sup> Duffield, M, *Environmental Terror : Uncertainty , Resilience and the Bunker*, International Studies, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph, J. “Resilience as embedded neoliberalism: a governmentality approach,” *Resilience*, 1(1), 2013, 38–52, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.765741>

into the global economy. This is done with a focus on individuals rather than structural and systemic issues. Consequently, the solution is expected to be found with the individual refugee to satisfy a general goal of economic integration and independence.

Interestingly, and related hereto, is also how the discourses about refugees have changed. Marc Welsh talks about subjects as “prudent autonomous and entrepreneurial”, which, as argued by Easton-Calabria and Omata, is how relief organisations currently are framing refugees in the promotion of self-reliance. This represents a shift from previously where refugees are now seen as responsible economic actors instead of “vulnerable victims.”<sup>21</sup> It could be argued that this shift empowers the people of concern and actually gives refugees some of their agency back. However, refugees are like other people, different. It was not advantageous to regard refugees simply as victims, and likewise it is not to regard them simply as entrepreneurs. This new trend within the framing of refugees is connected to an overemphasis on income generation. As a result, there is a lacking focus on whether refugees have adequate access to services like education, housing and health care. Instead, refugees are regarded as entrepreneurs and successful self-reliance is seen within the realm of entrepreneurship. Not only does this create a limited understanding of self-reliance, it also fails to cater properly for non-entrepreneurial refugees.

The situation in Uganda right now is that all refugees in the settlements (the vast majority of the refugee population in Uganda) receive aid from WFP as either food or cash, which is indeed a costly activity to carry out month after month. After the introduction of biometric verification systems in all refugee settlements during autumn 2018, all settlement-based refugees are now eligible for distribution. Previously the amounts distributed differed from person to person, but now everyone gets the same. In the future it is expected that the previous model based on an assessment of needs will be effective again.<sup>22</sup> Focusing primarily on income generation in the determination of self-reliance, one could imagine a situation with a refugee family, where one parent has a job supporting the whole family making them ineligible for assistance since they may be perceived to be self-reliant. However, the other parent could be sick, the kids may not be in school, the house where they live may be very small in size, to mention just a few rather common problems faced by refugees in Uganda. Given that the income from the job might be wholly inadequate to address these problems, is the refugee family then to be considered as self-reliant? Let us continue our exploration into the problematics of self-reliance by looking more at dependency.

### *Self-reliance as the opposite of dependence?*

Within the global refugee regime, the focus on self-reliance has for decades been aimed at reducing expenses on humanitarian intervention and avoiding dependency.<sup>23</sup> Omata argues that policy-makers commonly position self-reliance in opposition to dependency.<sup>24</sup> Although dependency is ill defined, it is often considered as “the act of constantly relying on others to make a living, to make decisions and to take action to address challenges.”<sup>25</sup> It is argued that the refugee regime in general presents aid as something negative, and frequently as “failed self-reliance”. On that note, Assistant Professor Sarah Meyer suggests that regarding self-reliance and aid as polar opposites, creates a simplistic understanding of the relationship whereby self-reliance will be defined as “a process of reduction of external inputs and support for refugees.”<sup>26</sup> This framing of self-reliance and dependency may justify reduced assistance to refugees. In the

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<sup>21</sup> Easton-Calabria and Omata, 2018, p. 1462

<sup>22</sup> Interview with WFP team leader, Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, May [13](#) 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Easton-Calabria et al., 2017; Omata, 2017

<sup>24</sup> Omata, 2017

<sup>25</sup> Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018, p. 1463

<sup>26</sup> Meyer, S. "The 'refugee aid and development' approach in Uganda: empowerment and self-reliance of refugees in practice," Policy Development and Evaluation Service Policy Development and Evaluation Service, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, New issues in refugee Research, 2006, p.14

context of Uganda, Meyer further notes that after the implementation of the SRS, refugees experienced a reduction in food rations and decreased provision of health and community services. This illustrates the risks in regarding self-reliance solely as an economic issue as well as the insufficiency in opposing it with dependency on assistance. Duffield uses the distinction of “insured” and “uninsured” life to unfold this issue.<sup>27</sup> By that he means that populations of the Global North are insured by welfare systems and thus do not have to be self-reliant since it is accepted to depend upon these systems. The uninsured population of the Global South are, on the other hand, expected to rely solely on their own resources. These ideas, as proposed by Duffield, will only be reproduced when the focus is solely on the individual and economic factors rather than on systemic and structural issues. The motive behind the welfare states appear to be that short term investments (here it is not called aid) are necessary for long term gains in the form of independence and productivity. We urgently need to understand self-reliance for refugees in the same manner. We need to understand it more broadly capturing the nuances of the concept if, and it should be, the actual goal is a more humane and functional global refugee protection.

It is evident that self-reliance is a complex concept serving several interests. Although it is desirable for people to be able “to meet their essential needs and enjoy their human rights in a sustainable manner and to live with dignity” (taken from the UNHCR definition), self-reliance can also be used to lower, or even eliminate, the provision of external assistance. In the following section, we want to discuss self-reliance in the context of Uganda by analyzing how it is approached in two selected policy documents.

### **3. Self-reliance for refugees in Uganda: a critical look into the policy framework**

Before venturing into the analysis, let us just briefly look at the general way the Ugandan refugee hosting system, commonly referred to as “The Uganda Model”, is working. Upon arrival, refugees who settle in a refugee settlement will be provided with a piece of land, where they can construct a house and engage in agricultural work. Urban refugees don’t enjoy this assistance, and can only get assistance from WFP in rare cases. As a consequence of the large influx of refugees coming to Uganda during the last five years, many refugees now struggle to sustain themselves. Newly arrived refugees are given a small plot of land, and those who arrived earlier are told to give up land that they have previously cultivated. Naturally, the whole system is affected by the large number of refugees seeking protection in Uganda, which in turn affects their lives and prospects for self-reliance. In the next article in this series, we will explore how refugees’ lived realities are affected by a system under pressure. Now, let’s delve into the policy framework guiding The Uganda Model.

This review will focus on two distinct policy documents. First, the so-called *National Action Plan* (NAP) is imperative to consider since it is the general document delineating the vision of the CRRF in Uganda and it functions as a statement of commitment. The NAP is the overall guiding document for the refugee response in Uganda. The second document is one of the NAP’s related sector-plans:<sup>28</sup> *The Jobs and Livelihood Integrated Response Plan* (JLIRP). The JLIRP is specifically mentioned as crucial in the NAP and several experts highlighted its importance in terms of self-reliance.<sup>29</sup>

#### *The National Action Plan*

Naturally, the NAP is more general in nature and since our focus is on self-reliance, this paper will only highlight the relevant portions. The first thing to underline is the focus on refugees as important stakeholders.

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<sup>27</sup> Duffield, M., *Development, security and unending war*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), p.17

<sup>28</sup> Sector plans are related to a specific sector i.e. *health or jobs and livelihoods*, and they outline and specify where intervention is needed. Moreover, they function as a fundraising tool (Interview with Country Director Danish Church Aid, Kampala, March 6 2019.)

<sup>29</sup> Interviews with Senior Advisor at the Royal Danish Embassy, Kampala, 3 April 2019; Country Director Danish Refugee Council, Kampala, 21 May 2019; and Representative from the CRRF Secretariat, Kampala, 23 May 2019.

They are labelled “agents of change” in what NAP describes as a:

paradigm shift from a mainly humanitarian focus to developing integrated services for the long term for the benefit of both refugee and host communities and advancing socioeconomic growth and development in hosting areas.<sup>30</sup>

This marks a change from seeing refugees as “vulnerable victims” and resonates with what Ilcan and Rygiel label “self-governing and entrepreneurial refugee subjects who will be responsible for their futures.”<sup>31</sup> In that sense, responsibility is transferred to the refugees themselves, a reality touched upon in a *Refugee Studies Centre* (RSC) brief that says: “By defining refugees as actors in self-reliance projects, humanitarian organizations also transfer prime responsibility to refugees.”<sup>32</sup> Whereas empowerment and agency are desirable for human beings, this shifting responsibility may prove inadequate given that systemic and structural issues are part of the problem too. Moreover, the aforementioned binary constellation of self-reliance and dependency could lead to a reduction in funds and actually undermine the goal of self-reliance. Into the bargain, Krause & Schmidt note that transferring the responsibility of becoming self-reliant and resilient to refugees “correlates with the neo-liberal paradigm that directs the focus away from governmental measures for changing structural problems towards the individual’s responsibility to finding solutions.”<sup>33</sup> Following these thoughts, it could be argued that the paradigm shift implies a depoliticization of structural issues understood in the sense that instead of being solved institutionally, the responsibility for finding solutions are placed on refugees themselves.

#### The fourth “durable solution”

The *Global Compact on Refugees* (GCR) §100 introduced a new durable solution as “other local solutions”.<sup>34</sup> NAP seeks to advance these local solutions, aiming “toward integration to foster inclusive economic growth for host communities and refugees and promote economic opportunities, decent work, job creation and entrepreneurship programmes for host community members and refugees.”<sup>35</sup> In this statement, the notion of refugees as entrepreneurs reoccurs, and the value of economic growth is championed. Moreover, it is suggested that mere economic inclusion in society is sufficient to be regarded as a durable solution. Previously, local integration was only regarded as a durable situation given that the refugee in question was also provided citizenship in that country (Naturalization). That Uganda is going for this “other solution” was confirmed during an interview with the CRRF Secretariat.<sup>36</sup> The way the NAP envisions to build self-reliance and resilience is as follows:

Without prejudice to eventual durable solutions that may become available, local solutions toward integration will be attained through implementation of the comprehensive plan for jobs and livelihoods which targets both refugees and hosting communities to improve resilience and self-reliance.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> OPM, 2019, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Ilcan, S., & Rygiel, K. “Resiliency Humanitarianism’: Responsibilizing Refugees through Humanitarian Emergency Governance in the Camp,” *International Political Sociology*, 9(4), 2015, 333–351, available at <https://doi.org/10.1111/ips.12101>

<sup>32</sup> Easton-Calabria et al., 2017, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Krause, U., & Schmidt, H. “Refugees as Actors? Critical Reflections on Global Refugee Policies on Self-reliance and Resilience,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 0(0), 2019, 1–20, available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fez059>.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations, “Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Part II Global compact on refugees,” High Commissioner for Refugees, Fifty-fourth session, Supplement No. 12, 2018 at 26.

<sup>35</sup> OPM, 2019, p. 38

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Representative from the CRRF Secretariat, Kampala, 23 May 2019.

<sup>37</sup> OPM, 2019, p. 49



Evidently, self-reliance and resilience are strongly linked to jobs and livelihoods. However, this understanding of self-reliance is not thorough and a broader and more nuanced understanding should be adopted. As mentioned previously, The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative defines 12 different aspects of self-reliance<sup>38</sup>. Investigating these domains deeply is not possible here, but their multiplicity marks a much farther-reaching understanding of self-reliance than the one provided in the NAP. The primary focus on economic factors is a narrow and inadequate understanding of the concept, and can undermine the real goal of achieving genuine self-reliance. Instead the goal becomes to make sure that refugees can support themselves financially with little consideration to essential areas such as education, health, and housing as part self-reliance. It is problematic that being “integrated locally” implies, first and foremost, economic independence and to a lesser extent, cultural integration. Legal rights and status are not considered. In the case of Uganda, refugees are not being given the opportunity to become citizens of the country or given other permanent legal status. In this sense regarding these “other solutions” as a durable solution undermines the content of the original definition and places insufficient emphasis on legal rights.

#### *The Jobs and Livelihood Integrated Response Plan*

The JLIRP was expected to be launched in 2019,<sup>39</sup> but to our knowledge it has not been as of August 2020<sup>40</sup>. The vision of the JLIRP is to have resilient and self-reliant refugees and host communities<sup>41</sup> and jobs and livelihoods are seen as the way to achieve this. This represents a pronounced focus on the economic aspects of self-reliance. The purpose of the sector plan is described as addressing existing shortfalls in implementation of livelihood interventions as well as widening the scope of the sector.<sup>42</sup> From this it can be interpreted that the shortfalls in livelihood interventions are deemed to be the major problem to be solved. This corresponds well with the fact that the sector plans are meant to be used as a fundraising tool, stressing where intervention is needed.<sup>43</sup> Further, the JLIRP seeks to expand the interventions to cover a broader spectrum of activities. It should be noted though, that this is a continuation of an existing pattern of expansion. Whereas the SRS mainly focused on agricultural livelihoods for refugees, its successor *Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR)* recognised the need to expand that focus, both in terms of legal frameworks as well as widening the scope of livelihoods.<sup>44</sup>

#### Enhanced employability as a solution?

The plan seeks to “ensure that the social and economic ability of individuals, households and communities of refugee hosting districts meet essential needs through enhancing employability and livelihoods.”<sup>45</sup> This formulation indicates that enhancing employability and livelihood is seen as the solution to the anticipated problem: that people do not have the ability to meet essential needs. However, interventions focused on individual skills and employability are likely to have limited impact if structural issues limiting job availability as a whole are not also addressed. The JLIRP reinforces this individual focus by stating that self-reliance should be achieved through “strengthening of livelihood for persons of concern, and reducing their vulnerability and long-term reliance on humanitarian/external assistance.”<sup>46</sup> Although strengthening

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<sup>38</sup> The 12 domains are: housing, food, education, health care, health status, safety, employment, financial resources, assistance, debt, savings, and social capital.

<sup>39</sup> OPM, 2019, p. 16

<sup>40</sup> We were able to get the newest draft of the JLIRP, which is the basis for the analysis presented here.

<sup>41</sup> The Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social development, “Jobs and Livelihood Integrated Response Plan For Refugee Hosting Districts in Uganda (Draft),” Not published, 2019, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> MGLSD, 2019: p. 1

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Country Director Danish Church Aid, Kampala, 6 March 2019.

<sup>44</sup> UNHCR, “Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) Programmes,” in A. T. Jallow & S. M. Malik, eds., *Handbook for Planning and Implementing*, 2005

<sup>45</sup> MGLSD, 2019: p. 1

<sup>46</sup> MGLSD, 2019: p. 8

refugees' livelihoods is generally positive, the approach in the JLIRP fails to address contextual barriers to livelihoods. Instead the problem is framed as one of "persons of concern" rather than institutional.

#### Self-reliance as a reason to reduce funding

The explicit statement "reducing long-term reliance on humanitarian/external assistance" in the JLIRP opposes self-reliance and assistance, be it humanitarian or external, thus creating justification to reduce funding. However, Meyer argues that actually more resources rather than fewer are needed to create self-reliance.<sup>47</sup> Although successful self-reliance initiatives may reduce demand for assistance in the long term, pushing cuts before there is a reduction in demand is problematic. It is unrealistic to expect inadequately funded projects to produce self-reliance.

The early promotion of livelihoods is explicitly framed as "a proactive approach of coping with budget constraints along the donor fatigue curve."<sup>48</sup> Considering that the sector plans function partly as a fundraising tool, it may not be surprising that the JLIRP seeks to address donors and funding in general. That being said, rather than focusing on creating resilient and sustainable development projects aiming to create conditions in which refugees can achieve genuine self-reliance, the focus of the JLIRP is on achieving self-reliance solely in economic terms with as little funding as possible. With that approach, how can we expect good results?

#### Adverting dependency seems more important than good projects!

It is further argued that the promotion of self-reliance and resilience should be initiated from the beginning<sup>49</sup> as the means to provide durable solutions by averting "the dependency mentality."<sup>50</sup> This assumes that a dependency mentality exists and is something to be combatted. Philosopher Martha Fineman discusses the complexity of dependency and highlights that it cannot simply be seen as one single relationship.<sup>51</sup> Dependency is used here in a negative sense, and the combination of self-reliance and averting the dependency mentality is regarded as a durable solution.<sup>52</sup> One could easily get the impression that as long as refugees are financially able to survive, it is to be regarded as a durable solution to their flight! This fear of dependency is further underlined by the statement that there is "a need for a shift away from the traditional way of giving hand outs".<sup>53</sup> The GCR, CRRF, and NAP all advocate for a more comprehensive and streamlined refugee response where humanitarian and development actors coordinate their interventions from the very beginning. By focusing on donor fatigue, these documents accept that development interventions should be planned with an expectation of declining funding. For example, the JLIRP notes that "Donors' interest is usually stronger at the beginning of a refugee crisis, and decreases gradually to the expectation of self-reliance to emerge."<sup>54</sup> However, Easton-Calabria and Omata argue that "If self-reliance aims to liberate refugees from dependency, the promotion of refugees' self-reliance should in theory lead to a shift from traditional relief aid to developmental assistance."<sup>55</sup> It is unrealistic to expect self-reliance to organically emerge as a response to declining funding. We must create strong, adequately-funded projects that can, and should, be down scaled when people start to become self-reliant, not after an arbitrary decided amount of time.

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<sup>47</sup> Meyer, 2006

<sup>48</sup> MGLSD, 2019: p. 11

<sup>49</sup> MGLSD, 2019: p. 6

<sup>50</sup> MGLSD, 2019: p. 10

<sup>51</sup> Fineman, M. A., "Dependency and Social Debt," in R. Grusky, David B; Kanbur eds., *Poverty and Inequality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>52</sup> MGLSD, 2019: p.10

<sup>53</sup> MGLSD, 2019, p. 6

<sup>54</sup> MGLSD, 2019, p. 11

<sup>55</sup> Easton-Calabria and Omata, 2018, p. 1464

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

This paper has attempted to put forward a nuanced understanding of self-reliance, which undeniably is an important concept in contemporary refugee protection. Although it is sometimes framed as new, support for refugees' self-reliance has been around since the birth of the refugee regime. It has, however, been shaped by ideas of neoliberalism within development theory and in the refugee regime.

Within the Uganda refugee response framework specifically, the NAP and the JLIRP connect self-reliance and resilience to jobs and livelihoods. In that sense, the policy framework promotes a narrow understanding of self-reliance overemphasizing the importance of merely economic factors. Refugees are envisioned as entrepreneurs and thus responsibility is transferred to them as individuals. Refugees are regarded as actors in creating their own livelihoods with the expectation that this will make them both resilient and self-reliant in terms of not receiving external assistance. The problem here is not viewing refugees as autonomous people and giving them agency. Rather, the problems arise in the failure to focus on structural and systemic causes for, and related to, the problems. The focus on primarily the economic aspect of self-reliance illustrates how neoliberal ideas permeate the policies, which leads to one-sided ideas lacking nuance about self-reliance that in turn fails to comprehend the bigger picture. Moreover, these two policies indicate that being self-reliant in the sense of being economically included in the local society is to be regarded as a durable solution. This implies that instead of self-reliance being the means to achieve a durable solution, it becomes the durable solution in itself!

### *Recommendations*

As the final remarks on this paper, we want to put forward the following recommendations:

#### **1. A more nuanced view at self-reliance should be adopted**

In order to profoundly understand and thus combat the actual challenges refugees face to become self-reliant, we need to widen the scope beyond solely economic factors. The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative's 12 domains does widen the scope, and it displays a broadly perceived contemporary understanding of self-reliance exceeding the narrow comprehension presented in NAP and JLIRP. Only the future will tell if this specific take on self-reliance will catch on within the refugee regime. The essential point here, and what we advocate for, is that self-reliance should be viewed holistically taking in *all* factors relevant for refugees' self-reliance. We need to understand self-reliance as a multifaceted spectrum rather than a dichotomy between being financially self-reliant or being dependent on external assistance. By solely focusing on economic factors and income generation, only part of the picture is covered, and therefore only part of the solution to real self-reliance will be reached.

#### **2. Focus on structural and systemic issues in addition to the individual**

An emerging focus on structural and systemic issues hindering refugees from becoming self-reliant has to be adopted as well. Transferring all the responsibility to the individual is not going to solve the problems that occur at other levels. In the context of Uganda, refugees face de facto barriers to exercise essential rights such as freedom of movement and the right to conduct business. To give an example, if refugees physically can't reach jobs, close to nothing will be achieved by only focusing on the employability of the individual. Whereas the increased focus on and recognition of refugees as essential stakeholders, which likely leads to empowerment and agency, is indeed commendable, it needs to be complimented with an as important increased focus on structural and systemic issues. Instead of placing (nearly) all responsibility on the individual, as suggested in the NAP and JLIRP, we need to create a system with structures in which individuals can take responsibility for their own lives. As long as systemic and structural issues are determining the opportunities people have, more responsibility at the individual level is not going to wholly solve the challenges refugees face.

### **3. Adequate funding is needed**

Even if the narrow understanding of self-reliance as merely an economic issue is going to be the main approach forwardly, more funding is needed to realize the implementation of initiatives such as those accounted for in the JLIRP. Obviously, it is not possible or realistic to carry out sustainable and well-functioning projects and initiatives without the needed funding. Self-reliance should be regarded as an investment with long term goals. If we don't do it properly in the short term, there will never be the anticipated drop in demand for external aid. The goal must be to create a system that works and in which individuals can create their own genuine self-reliance. When that system is in place, we can start to develop ways to run and maintain it the best way possible. Including effective and realistic cost-management. If less and decreased funding remains as the most important issues to consider, this system will never be established. As a result, finances will be spent to achieve short term rather than long term goals, and a malfunctioning system in which only the most resourceful individuals will be able to achieve real self-reliance will be upheld.