# Challenges and Emerging Issues Affecting the Management of Refugees in Uganda

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## Abstract

*Uganda is well known globally for its favourable refugee policies and now hosts over one million of them. However, this has come with many complex refugee management challenges especially given that most of these refugees entered the country sporadically in 2016 after the outbreak of fighting in South Sudan. This article uses secondary sources and primary data gathered from refugees, refugees' host communities, the government, development partners, UN refugee agencies and NGOs to examine these challenges. Key among them are logistical difficulties; high costs of access to services by refugees in the face of limited resources; syndicated corruption within core refugee management institutions; emerging conflicts between host communities and refugees over access to scarce resources especially firewood, water, land for cultivation, health services and schools; bureaucratic challenges that stifle reunification of refugees who came later with their families; security threats to refugees, especially illegal kidnaps and repatriation but also terrorists and spies disguising as refugees. The most sustainable solution echoed by refugees, government officials, aid workers and host communities is resolving conflicts in the countries generating them, especially within the region.*

**Keywords:** Challenges, Refugees, Management, Conflict, Repatriation

## Introduction

Uganda is not alone in receiving a huge influx and hosting of protracted refugees (those staying for a period above five years) in recent years. By the year 2010, it was estimated that 15.2 million people were refugees outside their country of nationality or country of habitual residence globally (Gomez and Christensen, 2010). By 2018, this number had increased to 22 million mainly because of the protracted conflict in the Palestinian territories and wars in countries such as Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan and South Sudan. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention stated voluntary repatriation, third country resettlement, and local integration as equal, complementary and durable solutions for protracted refugee situations (Kibreab, 1989; Jacobsen, 2001). However, concerns about the negative economic, cultural, environmental, and security impacts of large-scale refugee populations in their countries led developed countries to renege on their share of responsibility to receive refugees for resettlement in favour of repatriation or settlement in countries next to those producing the refugees (Crisp, 2003, 2004). In more recent years, the rise of nationalist leaders and parties in the United States and in Europe, especially in Hungary, Austria, Poland, Greece, Italy, France and Spain, have significantly complicated resettlement or receiving of refugees in these countries. As a result, many developing countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Pakistan, Jordan, and Turkey, among others, have been left with a huge burden of hosting refugees from South Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Palestine and Syria respectively. However, even these developing countries have different capacities and face different challenges in their ability to host and manage refugees in

their territories. Uganda has a lot of experience in hosting refugees extending back to the 1940s when Polish refugees were settled at Nyabyeya (in Masindi District) and Koja (in Mukono District) before resettlement in Australia, Britain and Canada. In the mid 1950s, another wave of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sierra-Leone, Senegal, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe also started arriving in Uganda (Pirou, 1988). Continuous political and military upheavals, especially in Burundi, the DRC and South Sudan, resulted in a continuous influx of refugees into Uganda. With support from the international community, Uganda was coping well with hosting refugees up to 2016 and received constant praise globally for its progressive refugee policies (Vogelsang, 2017). However, in July 2016, a new war manifesting terrible fighting erupted in South Sudan and millions of people fled for their lives, with an estimated one million refugees thought to have poured into Uganda in a period of less than one year. This was an unprecedented experience and it came with new challenges and new issues have since emerged. This article specifically examines these challenges and emerging issues in the management of refugees in Uganda now. The article includes a literature review, a methodology, concurrent presentation and discussion of findings, recommendations, conclusion and references.

## Literature Review

Most refugees in Uganda live and are managed in established refugee settlements at Nakivale, Oruchinga, Kyaka II, Kyangwali, Rhino Camp, Imvepi, Kali, Palorinya, Acholpii, Nyeu, Nyumanzi I, Nyumanzi II, Oliji, Ukusijioni, Ramogi, Robidire, Umwiya, Uhirijoni, Obilikogo, Kolididi, Maaji Alere I, Alere II, Arra, Baratuku, Biyaya, Elema, Ibibiaworo; Keyo I, Keyo II, Keyo III, Magburu, Mongola and the transitory camp of Miriye, all scattered in different regions of the country. While they are considered a minority compared to the overall refugee numbers, there is quite a huge urban refugee population in Uganda that live on their own and get no or very limited day-to-day services from refugee agencies. This is mainly due to the fact that according to the Ugandan government's policy, refugees opting to live outside the settlement are undocumented 'aliens' who do not get protection or recognition by the UNHCR and therefore receive no direct or indirect assistance (Vogelsang, 2017). Studies have indicated that refugees do not know whether their future lies in their home country, host country or a third country for seventeen years on average (Jacobsen, 2002b). Between 1999 and 2013, the number of protracted refugee situations – those that last more than five years increased significantly (Kreibaum, 2016). And yet they live (especially those in Africa) in insecure, neglected, peripheral border areas with harsh climatic conditions, and are usually people with special needs (Crisp, 2004). Due to limited international attention as a consequence of donor fatigue, restricted refugees' rights and limited possibilities for local integration, local settlement and self-reliance strategies, which cut costs for humanitarian donors when providing essential needs to refugee populations, became an alternative strategy to cope with protracted refugee situations (Kaiser, 2005). In Uganda, with support from the UNHCR, the government began implementing the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS) in 1999 by integrating services between refugees and nationals into regular government structures and policies and systematically tried to move away from relief to development by providing refugees with a starter's kit of non-food items, plots of land for shelter and agricultural production especially in settlements, food aid that is gradually withdrawn over a period of four years except for

people with special needs (PSNs), allowing refugees to settle with freedom of movement, integration with the local communities, have the right to work, establish businesses and access to social services *(Refugee Act 2006*; Hunter, 2009; *Refugee Regulations 2010*; Kreibaum, 2016). The major achievements of the SRS have been in the foundations laid for integrated programming, improved service delivery by refugee-hosting district local governments and an improved legal regime all of which have earned Uganda praise from the international community (Vogelsang, 2017). However, several scholars have consistently described Uganda's settlement approach and SRS as a failure because it is predominantly used to serve the political agenda of the Government of Uganda, the UNHCR, the donor community, and does not necessarily improve the lives of refugees in Uganda (Crisp, 2003; Hovil, 2007). Others have argued that it is the refugee assistance that is integrated rather than refugees themselves (Kaiser, 2005). Internationally, from the very outset, the SRS was deliberately and solely designed to serve the interests of UNHCR and the international donors by decreasing material output and costs, which left refugees disempowered (Meyer, 2006; Hunter, 2009). Domestically, it has been pointed out that the government of Uganda and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) allocate refugees land that is neither adequate for nutritional self-sufficiency and deliberately locate settlements in sparsely populated rural areas that in many ways reinforce differences, make refugees socially and economically vulnerable and unable to access key services such as healthcare yet they are at a high risk of experiencing high-profile epidemics such as malaria, hepatitis B, measles, typhoid and cholera, among others (Pommier, 2014; Schmidt, 2014; Darby, 2015; Hovil and Kigozi, 2015; Ambroso, 2016; Amvesi, 2016).

As Uganda and its refugee managing stakeholders were dealing with the day-to-day issues of refugees; a new refugee crisis erupted in 2016 when fresh fighting broke out in South Sudan and millions of people fled the country. It is estimated that over a million people sought refuge in Uganda and the entire process of receiving, settling and taking care of them created new challenges. New issues have since emerged including emergency creation of new settlements irrespective of the previous challenges with settlements (Jacobsen, 2002a; Hunter, 2009). For example, Bidi Bidi which was largely an empty overgrown savannah land in Yumbe District quickly became a sprawling settlement hosting some 272,000 refugees in period of four months (August – November 2016) making it one of the largest refugee-hosting sites worldwide (Boyce and Vigaud-Walsh, 2017). Besides very huge and expensive operation costs for providing basic services such as water, which was estimated between US$200,000 and US$400,000 per month (Uganda Response Plan, 2017), this kind of rapid and very huge settlement creation comes with devastating environmental and ecological challenges and issues as witnessed in previous refugee crises. For instance, during the 1990-1994 Rwandese war and following the genocide, many Rwandese refugees (close to 2 million) ended up in DRC, Tanzania and Uganda with devastating impact on the environment (forest and water resources, biodiversity and protected areas) of the places they settled on. Those that fled to DRC were settled in five large camps of Kibumba, Mugunga, Katale and Lac Vert and Kahindo in or around Virunga National Park. At the beginning of the crisis, 40,000 people on average entered the park every day in search of wood, which led to an average harvest of wood of 1,000 tonnes per day. These refugees remained on the edge of the Park for more than two years and within this period, 105 square kilometres of forestland were impacted by deforestation and

thirty-five square kilometres were totally denuded. The Rwandan refugee crisis posed such an unprecedented threat to Virunga National Park that the World Heritage Committee placed the park on its list of endangered World Heritage sites. An estimated 524,000 people fled to the Ngara area of northern Tanzania, which became the second largest town in Tanzania after Dar es Salaam as a result of this refugee influx. Within six months of these people's arrival, tree resources within 5 km of the four Ngara camps had been cut down and the average distance for getting fuel was 10 km or more by June 1995. The thousands of cattle, sheep and goats that came along with the refugees had seriously overgrazed much of the pastureland in the vicinity of the camps and there was acute shortage of water and serious pollution of water resources (soil and groundwater). In some places the vegetation was completely cleared for refugee settlements and over 47,000 hectares of forest reserves in Gagoya in Ngara District, Kasogeye, Nyantakaraya and Biharamulo were overexploited. Between 1994 and 1996 a total of 570 square kilometres of forest in Tanzania was affected, of which 167 square kilometres was severely deforested (Mark van Dorp, 2009). Thus, the environment impact from the sprawling Bidi Bidi, Imvepi, Rhino Camp, Kali, Palorinya, Acholpii, and Nyeu refugee settlements is going to be devastating (see Jacobsen, 1997). Besides the obvious and expected environmental devastation, there are other challenges and issues that have emerged from hosting such huge refugee numbers but have not been academically researched. This research was undertaken to untangle the challenges and emerging issues faced by different stakeholders including refugees themselves, host communities, governments, NGOs and UN agencies in the management of refugees in Uganda.

## Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative case study design to obtain detailed information from stakeholders (Yin, 1987; Levy, 2008) focusing on the current challenges and emerging issues affecting the management of refugees in Uganda, especially the processes and explanations of current institutional position on refugee matters. The whole process from receiving, registering and settling refugees was investigated mainly focusing on the 2016 refugee crisis. On sampling, a multiple case study approach was adopted with Bidi Bidi, Rhino Camp and Invepi refugee settlements in the West Nile selected because they are hosting the highest number of refugees in the country at the moment. The multiple case study approach was considered because it enhances external generalization of the study, establishes wider data analysis in one context and helps to raise the level of confidence in the robustness of the method (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Baškarada, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Khan, 2014). In-depth interviews were conducted in April with members of staff of the UNHCR, OPM, NGOs and host communities, business people, local leaders and refugees in the sampled settlements. Because of the sensitivity of the subject, respondents' names or identifying features remained confidential. Primary data was supplemented with content analysis, a method that involves detailed and systematic examination of contents of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying common patterns, themes, biases in order to come up with an accurately analyzed qualitative article (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001).

## Findings

While the challenges and emerging issues are presented and discussed at different points in this article for easy analysis, it is important to emphasize that in real life they are complexly intertwined and usually go hand in hand. Therefore, any kind of solution must be comprehensive and holistic so as to have any kind of effect.

### Failure to register refugees at entry points

The OPM and UNCHR in Uganda require that all refugees must be screened and initially registered at their first point of entry. Initial registration of refugees at the border is important because it helps to protect refugees from arbitrary arrests, detention, forced return, establish genuine refugees and protect the system from abuse by people who are not refugees but would want to register as refugees, especially those that understand the language, culture and even share the same ethnicity with the refugees or had lived or have relatives in those countries where refugees are coming from such as Rwanda, DRC and South Sudan. It is also during this initial registration that health screening is done to prevent and manage epidemic outbreaks. Normally refugee populations are vulnerable to communicable diseases, as they often travel through endemic areas and reside in crowded refugee settlements where infections are easily spread. For instance Uganda has to screen refugees coming from DRC during Ebola outbreaks. Between August and September 2016, a cholera outbreak occurred in refugee reception facilities in Pagirinya, Boroli, Maaji and in Bidi Bidi settlement that was linked to the cholera outbreak in South Sudan from where refugees were trekking. While this was contained, sporadic cases continued to be reported; requiring continued preventive measures to reduce the risks of further outbreaks (Uganda Response Plan, 2017). The Ugandan government through its refugee department in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the UN country team has a fairly efficient and effective system that receives, processes and settles refugees at various entry points in new or already existing settlements. However, the experience of 2016 when over a million South Sudanese refugees flocked into the country running away from appalling acts of violence (Boyce and Vigaud-Walsh, 2017) demonstrated that the personnel tasked with the responsibility of registering refugees at the border could not cope with huge numbers of refugees mainly due to thin facilities at the reception centres, inadequate staff and lack of appropriate skills to handle refugees from different social, political and economic grounds. The high number of arriving refugees overwhelmed the staff and, as a result, many mistakes were made, including multiple registrations and failure to register many of the refugees and these have had severe consequences in the day-to-day management of refugees. Many refugees that were not registered at the border later showed up in the refugee settlements. Yet as a rule, the OPM and UNCHR cannot allocate a plot, give building materials, attestation or food ration cards to people who just turn up in settlements and were not registered at the borders. Genuine refugees who had not been initially registered at the Uganda-South Sudan border were requested and others are still being requested to go back to the border for initial screening and registration. Many especially pregnant women or those with babies, unaccompanied children and the elderly have failed to do so and remain unregistered and unable to access refugee services. Many are languishing in the settlements, depending on registered refugees for food, beddings and shelter. This complicates life considering that even those who are registered as refugees receive limited resources.

## Capacity and Coordination Challenges

The state in Uganda does not have enough financial, human, technological and equipment capacity to manage refugees on its own. This lack of capacity is not accidental but actually rooted in the neo-liberal orthodoxy of the last thirty years that deliberately reduced the role of the state in the economy and service provision while promoting the growth of NGOs as key providers of humanitarian services in developing countries on the argument that NGOs are cost-effective in providing better welfare services to those who cannot be reached through markets (see Colclough and Manor, 1991; Meyer, 1992; Robinson, 1993; Edwards and Hulme, 1997; Tvedt, 1998). Uganda embraced this development thinking and it is no surprise that most of the management of refugees in Uganda is delegated to other stakeholders other than the state. The overall inter-agency planning and implementation of refugee emergency situation is coordinated by the department for refugees in the Office of the Prime Minister and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. At the field level, the OPM and UNCHR are supported by District Local Governments (DLGs), other United Nations agencies (UNICEF, FAO, IOM, UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, WFP and WHO) and over 40 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to carry out refugee responses (UNDAF 2016-2020). It sounds fantastic to have over 40 NGOs doing or acting like they are doing a great job to support vulnerable refugees. However, there is a lot of costly duplication of roles evidenced in the operation of more than one NGO dealing in the same activity or service in a particular area, which is a huge strain to the already meager resources. Apart from the duplication of roles and activities, delegating the direct role of providing most refugees' services to NGOs comes with many challenges. The OPM lacks financial, technological and human resources to effectively supervise these NGOs. Thus, in most cases they rely on reports provided to them by the very NGOs they are supposed to supervise. This makes it difficult to unearth vices against refugees done by some elements within NGOs including sexual exploitation of female refugees. Cases of terrible sexual exploitation and concealment of these activities by NGO officials are very common in such crises as evidenced in recent revelations where senior officials in respected organizations such as Oxfam have participated in sexual exploitation of vulnerable people and their organization concealed these activities (Gayle, 2018; Elgot and McVeigh, 2018). Besides, most of the NGOs are not accountable to the refugees or the OPM because they come with or raise their own resources and others are accountable to their funders or foreign governments, many of whom may have different interests. The government did a lot of fundraising and donors came together in 2017 at the peak of the refugees' crisis and promised a lot of money to support them in Uganda (Bwambale, 2017). However, in recent days, government has expressed a lot of frustration over donors' non-committal of the promised funds and channeling funds through non-governmental organizations because of corruption in government (Ahabwe, 2018).

## Overstretching Meager Resources

The OPM, UN agencies supporting refugees, NGOs, host communities and development partners have invested tremendous amount of resources including money, medicines, food, land and clothing, among others, to ensure that refugees access basic services and settle with dignity in Uganda. However, unlike highly developed countries like Germany that absorbed

over a million refugees from Syria in 2015, Uganda is a low-income country struggling to provide even basic services or opportunities to its own citizens, especially in areas where most refugees are hosted such as in Yumbe, Arua, Moyo and Adjumani, and thus cannot meet the educational, health care, housing, energy/firewood, nutritional/food needs of huge numbers of refugees, especially those in the settlements. There are few health centers in the refugee settlements and they are understaffed, operate with a limited supply of drugs and on average receive over 4000 patients monthly.

The limited drugs, diagnosis equipment and other hospital facilities have made treatment of diseases like hypertension, eye and ear problems, cancer, C-section deliveries impossible tasks in refugee settlement health centres. Most cases and operations are referred to hospitals in Arua or Gulu, Kampala, which are very far from most refugee settlements and very costly. For example, refugees are required to travel to Arua if they are to do an ultra-scan and one ambulance serving the whole settlement is not sufficient to carry all the refugees in need of the service. Education provisions in the settlements are inadequate with few schools and teachers, especially for science subjects. This is worsened by the limited education facilities like science laboratories, libraries, computer laboratories and the limited subject combinations. Many refugees at secondary school and tertiary institution levels are finding difficulty being accepted in the Ugandan school system. For instance, when the latest wave of violence first broke out in South Sudan in July 2016, most people simply ran for their lives, leaving behind most of their important academic documents. Yet to be accepted in Ugandan secondary and tertiary institutions of learning requires proof of one's previous education. Thus most students who have failed to show documentation of their previous education have dropped out of school. Those who are accepted in schools find it difficult to cope due to lack of basic requirements; failure to concentrate on their studies; and difficulty to get along with other students due to the aggressiveness and trauma emanating from the horrors of war in their country.

The collective food bill for refugees is massive. Some of the reasons for this costly bill are logistical. Suppliers source for this food from different parts of the country and sometimes import it to provide food to feed the refugees. It is expensive to put all the logistics together because of the distance involved and the storage facilities needed. To reduce this burden, the government and other partners suggested that refugees should be provided with land to cultivate and indeed land has been provided by government and host communities. The land provided by host communities to refugees collectively is huge. However, individually or at refugee household level, the land apportioned is small (a 30 x 30 feet plot) and is insufficient to provide space for accommodation and cultivation.

This has left refugees totally dependent on monthly food handouts from refugee-managing stakeholders. While the stakeholders are trying their best in difficult circumstances, the food provided leaves most refugees struggling to survive. Each refugee is given 12 kg of maize or sorghum and 12 kg of beans per month that are not enough and also do not meet the nutritional diet requirements especially for children. In addition, many refugees complained that even the containers used to measure food are not accurate and they are cheated in the process. Others complained that the suppliers do not bring people to offload the items from the trucks, leaving the refugees at the mercy of predatory offloading porters that charge two kilograms of food items from each refugee. A child of four years gets the same food per

month as an adult of forty. Yet their food and diet requirements are significantly different. Because of these challenges many refugees registered themselves multiple times or changed their family sizes by registering other people's children as their own purposely to receive more food and non-food items. Upon realizing this problem the OPM and UNCHR decided to do a re-verification exercise to establish the actual numbers of refugees and their appropriate family sizes. Most refugees whose multiple registration trick has been discovered and thus can no longer get more food through this method have also decided to go back to South Sudan like their fellow countrymen and die there than starve in Uganda (see MSF, 2017). Several aid workers have been arrested, sacked or prosecuted for stealing food and other supplies meant for refugees in refugee settlements (AFP, 2018). Resultantly, there is now growing debate and trial experiments in other parts of the world are ongoing to try and change the current Government-UNCHR-NGO model to a Government-UNCHR-Private Sector model where private sector players such as banks, telecommunication and technology companies can suggest innovative and efficient ways to reduce the inefficiencies in refugee services.

One of the suggested innovations is provision of refugees with cash to purchase food of their own choice on the open market. If the model works, then other aspects can be tried. This is still a debatable suggestion in Uganda and on trial in other places like Jordan and Lebanon (Lutaya, 2016; Bolton Consulting Group, 2017; Seetashma, 2018; BBC, n.d.). Most stakeholders interviewed in Uganda -- including refugees, host community members and NGOs -- were mostly opposed to this kind of arrangement. The main argument given is that the money given may not be enough; refugees live in areas such as Bidi Bidi and Invepi that have food production and supply stress because of climate, distance and transport problems. Private sector players may take advantage to hike prices. Most women refugees emphasized that if food supplies were substituted with cash, most men would waste the money on alcohol or use it for purposes other than supporting their families. Thus if there are to be any kind of innovations or changes in the current refugee management regime in areas such as food supply, these changes have to be incremental, well thought out and implemented in ways that do not benefit NGOs and profit-making companies at the expense of refugees.

## Low Morale among Employees

For most employees, especially graduates, the excitement of working with big-name organizations such as UNCHR, Oxfam, World Vision, among others, quickly fades when the reality of the difficult conditions in these settlements sinks in. This results in high work turnover, low morale and poor service provision among workers. On the other hand, while these challenges were common among NGO workers in the settlements, unemployed refugees seriously complain about unemployment and job discrimination practices by several NGOs. Most working-age refugees in the settlement are idle with nothing to do other than loiter around the settlements. Many complained that even the petty jobs like digging pit latrines or looking after refugee children in safe centers in the settlements are reserved for Ugandans. This leaves them with nothing to support themselves or their families except to become totally dependent on other people, which in itself is humiliating. Many who have failed to come to terms with this form of existence have gone back to their countries; others have entered into other forms of survival such as prostitution and cases of suicide are regular in settlements. Part

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For special consideration, most NGO projects in the settlements mainly focus on People with Special Needs (PSNs) like the pregnant women, orphans, the elderly, leaving out other categories of people like the youth and adult males, yet these are the majority and would actually support the PSNs if they were empowered to work. High unemployment among refugee populations can be a serious challenge as studies have indicated that it results in most refugees being forced into unregulated work sectors with limited protection including domestic work and prostitution (Alexander, 2008; Buscher and Heller, 2010).

## Corruption among Refugee-managing Stakeholders

For over twenty years now, corruption has been a systemic problem in Uganda affecting most government institutions including the OPM that oversees refugees' responses in the country (see UDN, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013; Tangri and Mwenda, 2013; Badru and Muhumuza, 2017). Corruption came out strongly from both secondary and primary data sources as a serious challenge affecting current refugee management in Uganda. Some corruption practices affecting refugees are grand in nature perpetrated by high-ranking individuals in government or non-government institutions. For instance, in February 2018, reports emerged that senior government officials in the OPM colluded with staff from the UN refugee agencies -- UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) -- to inflate refugee figures purposely to swindle money and it is believed that millions of dollars in aid have been lost as a result. These officials were also accused of stealing relief items meant for refugees, appropriating government land meant for refugees, trafficking refugee women and interfering with the election of community leaders (Okiror, 2018; Onyulo, 2018; Sserunjogi, 2018). In March 2018, the Commission of Inquiry into Land Matters discovered that in 2016, senior officials in the OPM colluded to forcefully evict people and acquire huge chunks of land for themselves claiming that it was meant for refugees.

This scandal involved the Principal Settlement Officer in the Office of the Prime Minister, Mr. Charles Bafaki, who was alleged to have colluded with other senior officials in the OPM to violently evict Mr. Stephen Irumba the former Tooro Prime Minister from a 200-acre farmland in Kazinga Village, Rwentuha Sub-county in Kyegeggwa District in 2016, claiming that the land belonged to Kyaka I Refugee Settlement and was needed to settle Ugandans who had been expelled from Tanzania. However, Bafaki and his accomplices who have also been implicated in the eviction of more than 60,000 people from 28 villages in Kyangwali, Hoima

District, failed to present evidence and respond to questions on how the disputed refugee camp was established or to show the actual boundaries of the camp (Kasozi and Namyalo, 2018). Other corruption practices affecting refugees are carried out by individual public officials on their own and they are petty or bureaucratic in nature but nonetheless have a detrimental effect on the overall management of refugees and service delivery. For instance, many refugees were able to register themselves or increase their family sizes after offering bribes to officials conducting registration. Similar allegations were made that non-refugees in the host communities get access to refugee's food and other items through bribery. This has serious cost implications for those responsible for providing these items to the refugees. Other acts of individual or collusive corruption where public officials abuse their entrusted authority have been cited to affect refugees not in a settlement setting. For instance, Senior Ugandan police officers have been prosecuted for working with foreign governments to repatriate refugees back to countries that they ran away from, putting their lives in harm's way (URN, 2018). Other cases where foreigners, especially those of Asian and Middle Eastern origin who are not refugees but with business interest in Uganda managed to acquire refugee status in Uganda have been reported. Ugandans and non-Ugandans who are not refugees have registered as refugees through corruption specifically to benefit in resettlement schemes to countries such as Canada, UK, USA and Australia, among others.

## Conflicts between Refugees and Host Communities

Studies on protracted refugee-hosting experiences (hosting refugees for more than five years) in other developing countries have indicated that right from the moment of arrival, refugees compete with local citizens for scarce resources such as water, food, housing, firewood, grazing land, transportation services, sanitation and medical services (UNHCR, 2004). Competition and misunderstandings between refugees and host communities emanating from the sharing, ownership or use of resources, especially land, water and fire, have resulted in serious conflicts, animosity and in many areas threaten the coexistence of these different groups (see Summers, 2017). For instance, in most refugee-hosting communities in the West Nile region, tensions over sharing resources, especially firewood, are getting out of hand. Firewood or charcoal constitutes more than 90% of cooking energy for Uganda's rural population. For most of the rural population, family members -- especially women and children -- collect this firewood more often from distant and risky places, while other families buy firewood or charcoal. When you move around West Nile, especially in places around refugee settlements you see large swathes of land full of would-be firewood or charcoal. Probably these vast lands may have guided the government or UNHCR's assumption that refugees could easily access firewood. However, these vast pieces of land are not without owners and all refugees interviewed during this study revealed that access to firewood is their biggest nightmare forcing many to relocate back to South Sudan. Every attempt to fetch firewood is repulsed by host communities sometimes with bows, machetes or sticks. Women are threatened with rape and many children have experienced several abuses. Members of the host community and local government officials in the area interviewed during this study acknowledged awareness of this challenge.

Many host communities, especially in the West Nile region, gave out their land to the refugees on the promise that the government would compensate them with other pieces of land for grazing, cultivation and firewood collection; they would receive 30% of all the resources

intended to benefit refugees; and get business and employment opportunities from ongoing refugee settlement activities. However, most of these promises and expectations have not come to fruition and this has generated frustration among the host communities and refugees. Cases of competition and violence over scarce resources between host communities and refugees have been reported and worsened by the fact that authorities, including the police and development actors tend to ignore refugees because they view settlements as temporary phenomena (Pommier, 2014; Darby, 2015; Krause, 2016).

In other instances, tensions between refugees and host communities arise because of the perception that refugees are privileged in accessing resources unavailable to the local host population such as opportunity for education, literacy, vocational training, health, sanitation, basic livelihood and these are a source of tensions (Betts, 2009). Refugees that are not in settlements such as Somali refugees in Kampala, still experience deep animosity or fear to integrate with the local communities because of previous experiences such as the savage terror attacks that killed many Ugandan during the 2010 World Cup finals masterminded by Somali Al Shabab terrorists. It is not true that Somali refugees are Al Shabab agents or sympathizers but as one African proverb says that when one girl becomes pregnant, all the girls in that village are accused of fornication. Thus like in Kenya where Al Shabab terrorist have disguised as refugees and later caused mayhem, in Uganda, Somalis are viewed skeptically and most Ugandans keep a distance from Somali refugees in Uganda (Hovil, 2017). It has also been revealed that there are foreign spies who disguise and register as refugees but with a purpose of carrying out espionage or disrupting the security of the country (Mukombozi, 2018). Given the recent wave of atrocious killing of Ugandans by highly sophisticated murderers using motorcycles, one cannot rule out that terrorists from non-friendly countries may disguise as refugees and carry out these heinous crimes.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

While the Ugandan government, refugee agencies, NGOs, host communities and generally the Ugandan population have tried and are still trying their best to make sure that people who seek refuge in Uganda feel welcome and settle in a dignified manner, the entire process is very complicated and imbued with a lot of challenges especially when overwhelming numbers flock in at a short time. Some of the challenges come from genuine constraints regarding resources while others such as corruption come from the way these resources are managed and processes handled. While recommendations such as reducing corruption in the country; giving refugees more land; and increasing resources especially by the UN and other aid agencies are surely made, the most sustainable solution echoed by refugees, government officials, aid workers and host communities is resolving conflicts in the countries generating the refugees especially within the region.

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