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Improving women and children refugees' livelihoods through self-reliance at Nakivale settlement, south western Uganda

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ABSTRACT

UNHCR reports that of the 82.4 million people who have been forced into displacement, over half are women and children. The East African region hosts one of the highest levels of refugees in the world. Refugees in Camps in Africa are confronted with a number of challenges, one of them being over-reliance on food aid. In Uganda and particularly Nakivale settlement, a number of strategies have been undertaken to improve women and children refugees through self-reliance initiatives. This study examined how women and children refugees' livelihoods can be improved through self-reliance strategies. The study employed a triangulation design to collect and analyze data. The study population for this study was 39523 women and children refugees (12 -17) and (18-59) gotten from a study population of 104,009 women and children refugees. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis, the findings revealed that refugees' livelihoods can be improved through improved access to financial services and skills enhancement training. The study concluded that access to financing services would improve women and children refugees' livelihood. The study thus, recommends that refugees be trained in different skills and later can be provided with capital to enable them start to businesses or other self-reliance activities instead of relying on handouts.

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Introduction

Unlike economic migrants, refugees are considered migrants or displaced persons. According to the UN, as of February 2020, women and children comprised 80 percent of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPS) (UNHCR, 2021). This may be a result of the loss of husbands, parents, death of family relations, total or mass destruction of livelihood, imprisonment in warfare (IOM, 2021). Due to this global migration of refugees, whether voluntary or forced, refugees' livelihoods need to be improved.

The livelihoods of these refugees through self-reliance strategies sometimes deviate from those of the host countries because of differences in policies, vulnerabilities, socio-economic status, and access to health services before, during and after the migration (Ohene-Bekoe, 2017). Women and children's livelihoods issues are not unique to refugees, but women and children are confronted with challenges ranging from health to gender based violence, education, housing, food, and work (UNHCR 2020b).

Refugees face multiple and additional concerns of external factors such as lack of access to health care facilities, high population density in refugee camps, low levels of education, gender inequality, and limited mobility within refugee camps (Hadija & George, 2019).

UNHCR reports that of the 82.4 million people who have been forced into displacement, over half are women and children. Women are often the first respondents when a crisis hits yet their voices are often left out of policies that are designed to protect them. In addition to poverty and other issues that all refugees may face, women and children have an added layer of oppression from gender discrimination (Women for Women International, 2021). Women and children refugees suffer marginalization, sexual and gender-based violence, and child marriage. Some experience sexual and gender based violence as they flee conflict. In camps or due to poverty, some women and children may be kidnapped, trafficked or forced into marriage. (Women for Women International, 2021). Uganda's long history of providing asylum to refugees dates back as far as the Second World War when the country opened its doors to 7000 refugees from Poland fleeing the violence in Europe (Watera, et al., 2017). Currently Uganda is the fourth refugee hosting country in the world with 1.4 million refugees, with Turkey being the top refugee hosting country with 3.7 million refugees, Colombia 1.7 million refugees, Pakistan 1.4 million and then Germany with 1.2 million refugees (UNHCR, 2021). 81 percent of the refugee population in Uganda are women and children with half of the children coming to Uganda as unaccompanied minors. Given their disadvantaged position in society owed to lack of resources, disease prone, lower skill level, cultural biases among others, refugee women and children face greater challenges and risks as opposed to their male counterparts in Uganda (Alupo, 2017).

This study was conducted at Nakivale settlement. Nakivale settlement is one of the oldest refugee settlements in Africa, opened in 1958 to host the Tutsi refugees fleeing the civil war in Rwanda. As of February, 2021, the settlement hosted 135,998 refugees and out of these 104009 refugees were women and children (76 percent) (UNHCR, 2021b). In Nakivale settlement, SRS stresses the responsibility of refugees to care for and support themselves, in situations that are in actual fact quite complex. The concept and practice of self-reliance also position refugees as a dependent, lacking initiative or possessing poor attitude. However, research is largely silent on how this approach - impacts on the largest group of refugees: women and children. As of April, 2020, at least 82 percent of the refugees are women and children (UNHCR, 2020), and women often find themselves as the primary caretakers and breadwinners of their families (Watera et al., 2017). Thus research on the impact of SRS on displaced people's livelihoods especially women and children is highly needed.

Literature review

Self-reliance, women and children's refugees' livelihoods

Refugees can and do make a difference in the host communities where they seek refuge and their action count. UNHCR, defines self-reliance 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 (UNHCR, 2020).

Self-reliance

Uganda is a signatory of the 1951 Convention connected to the status of refugees and the protocol of 167 as well as the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (Dantaile, 2018).

The SRS was designed and implemented by the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the UNHCR Kampala Branch in 1999 (Meyer, 2006). The SRS aimed to empower refugees and allow them to become self-reliant and reduce their dependence on humanitarian aid. The UNHCR's 2005 Hand book for self-reliance defines self-reliance as "the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or community to meet essential needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity. Self-reliance as a programme approach, refers to developing and strengthening livelihoods of persons of concern, and reducing their vulnerability and long-term reliance on humanitarian/external assistance" (UNHCR, 2005b).

Initially, the SRS was developed in 1999 to respond to complex refugee situations in particular, the Sudanese refugee influx in the West Nile districts of Arua, Adjumani and Moyo (Ilcan et al., 2015). Countless national and district officials saw the introduction of the SRS as an overall development strategy and the means to address broader post-conflict development needs (Meyer, 2006). The principle goal of the SRS was to integrate the services provided to refugees into regular government structures and policies by a shift from relief to development (Ilcan et al., 2015). After gaining acceptance in 2002, the SRS was adopted across the country as part of the UNHCR's broader global Strategy of Development Assistance for Refugees and the Refugee and Host Community Empowerment (ReHOPE) program and extended to other refugee nationalities including; Somalis, Burundians, Rwandans and Congolese in all the refugee settlements across Uganda (Ilcan et al., 2015).

Women and children refugees

An increasing number of refugees worldwide are women and children. In many cases, they are forced to leave their homes due to armed conflicts, insecurity or generalized violence. For women and girls, their migration experience is shaped by some particular features, the roots of which lie in the gendered forms of violence they may face throughout their journey (Freeman, 2015). Some may leave their country of origin because of experiences of gender-based violence or in fear of such violence, while others may seek to escape the threat of female genital mutilation or forced marriage. Without regular pathways to reach a country where they can seek international protection, women often have to resort to dangerous routes. During their journey, they are exposed to sexual and gender-based violence, including; rape, sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment, psychological violence, trafficking, early and forced marriage, transactional sex and domestic violence (UN Refugee Agency, et al., 2016). Women travelling alone and those only accompanied by their children are particularly at risk of abuse, as are pregnant women, adolescent girls, unaccompanied minors and women with disabilities.

The issues of refugee children became important only after 1989 when the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) was formulated. Article 22 specifically is concerned with protection and assistance. Goodwin –Gill (1996) argues that the Convention has no general derogation for times of emergency and may ensure that in some circumstances children are better protected than adults.

Nearly half of all refugees are children, and almost one in three children outside their country of birth is a refugee (Emily, et al., 2016). These numbers encompass children whose refugee status has been formally confirmed as well as children in refugee like situations. Women refugees constitute the majority of the displaced persons of the contemporary world (UNHCR, 2000) and form the basis of this study. They raise particular interest because of the gender-specific problems they face and the mechanisms they devise for survival amidst the daunting challenges of refugee situations and their own position in society. Refugees generally do not have an automatic claim to basic needs and income generation. But even among these fragile groups can be found, even others that are even more deprived; that is, unaccompanied women, children, the handicapped and the aged. Women refugees, who also care for the other vulnerable household members, are in this respect exposed in a multifaceted fashion. First, they have to find their place among the various power relations, which exist in all societies, but are more poignant in refugee situations (Mulumba, 2005).

Methodology

The research adopted a mixed methods approach, using in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions and Participatory Mapping to explore and quantify how self-reliance can improve women and children refugees' livelihoods in Nakivaale Refugee Settlement. Participatory mapping activities were carried out with different groups separated by age and refugee status. Key informant interviews were held with stakeholders at local and (inter)national levels, including government, agencies and NGOs and these will be supplemented with FGDs with refugees and host communities as per the refugee policy which requires that for any activity carried out in a refugee settlement, 30% should be from the host communities.

Sample size and sampling techniques

As of February 2021, women and children comprised of almost 76% of Nakivale total population and of this percentage, just over half (52%) were children below 18 years. Of 104,009 women and children, 24962 were adult women aged from 18-59, and 14561 were adolescents aged between 12-17 and these were the population.

For the qualitative study the "sample" was purposive i.e. those individuals were selected since they were considered an important source of information. To draw a purposive sample, the researcher selected participants from their sampling frame because they had characteristics that the researcher desired. Thus the respondents for the qualitative information were first stratified according to age group and zone of residence. For the focus group discussions, after getting the desired sample size and age categories, respondents were mobilized at random through the community mobilizer (Refugee welfare council). In all three zones, 11 focus group discussions (FGD) of women and children refugees (104) and 16 key informants' interviews were held.

For quantitative data, the researcher used multi-stage sampling (the taking of samples in stages using smaller and smaller sampling units at each stage) the researcher took all three zones; Base camp, Rubondo and Juru. To collect the quantitative data, the researcher used stratified sampling, where he categorized the women and children according to age ranges of 12-17 and 18-59. Using simple random sampling, the researcher interviewed 20 children ages 12-17, and 60 women between ages 18-59. The data was collected from women and children refugees residing in all three zones of the settlement.

Sample size determination

The sample of this quantitative data was calculated using Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1973) formula with a 95% confidence level and 10% precision. The population of women and children (children age range 12-17 and women with age range 18-59) were 39523 women and children refugees got from UNHCR (2021) fact sheet. Therefore using the formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{I + N(e)^2}$$

From the formula

n = sample size
 N = Total population
 e = level of precision (0.1)

Therefore

$$n = \frac{39523}{1 + 39523(0.1)^2}$$

$$\frac{39523}{1 + 39523 * 0.01}$$

$$\frac{39523}{396}$$

n = 100

Based on the calculation above the sample size were 100 women and children refugees.

Data Analysis

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of the survey data to obtain a number of indicator ways of improving women and children refugees' livelihood activities. With qualitative data, content synthesis and description of themes from focus group information was used to supplement the preliminary indications.

Results

Improving refugees' livelihoods through self-reliance strategy

Several socio-economic challenges were observed to have affected the SRS in refugee management as described in the preceding tables. To overcome such challenges, different ways were assessed and the results are as discussed below;

Improved access to financial services

Access to financial services is considered one of the most important solutions to the socio economic challenges in refugee management. The results show that 32% of the households access financial services through VSLAs while only 1.4% have financial access through loans (Table 1). Focus group discussion information indicates that access to finance like direct cash aid is much better than any other aid because, money can be used to purchase several food items and any balance can meet other needs like school fees for the children and medication in case you visit a private clinic.

With access to financial services, such as mobile money, SACCOs, VSLAs, and banks, refugees have been able to save as little as they can so that they can access loans to capitalize on their businesses. Saving associations have helped women refugees in times of emergency like sickness or funerals, thus;

We only have access to VSLA because they are efficient for us. Even if you save 1000/= or 2000/= a day or a week. By saving you can get a loan of 10,000/= for an emergency like sickness or funerals. These VSLAs have saved us a lot (woman refugee, Kabahinda, Juru, 30/02/2020).

During the discussion, some women revealed that they save their money on mobile money and some use their small wooden boxes and in case of emergencies where they cannot wait for humanitarian aid, they break and get their money. Another respondent revealed how VSLA has been of great help to them, thus;

Even if we don't have access to micro finances, we can save with VSLA where it has been very helpful to us. One of us had been saving with VSLA where she used to save 500/= daily and unfortunately her child got sick and was admitted, it is then that she realized how VSLAs was important because it saves her in paying the medical bills. If we are capable, we would surely be saving with VSLAs because they are more efficient within us women refugees................................. no need of transport, VSLAs are more accessed than the microfinance, and mobile money services (woman refugee, Kashojwa, Base camp, 01/02/2020).

Commercial banks and microfinance institutions have also come in to help improve the accessibility of financial services among the refugees. According to the Assistant commandant, Juru sub camp, banks like Centenary Bank, Equity Bank, and BOBAN (Moral Brotherhood and Neighborhood) SACCO, refugees have been able to get loans.

Table1: Financial services accessed by refugees.

Financial Service	No. of House holds	Percentage
None	19	23.2
Mobile Money	12	14.6
Mobile Money And VSLA	4	4.9
Microfinance	3	3.7
Access to Loans	2	1.4
VSLA	27	32.9
Others	15	18.3
Total	82	100.0

Source: Field study, 2020

From the table above, 15% of the households accessed financial services through other means including borrowing from friends and using savings from the home wooden boxes. The different financial services are accessed by means of group set, business support set up, savings and access to development table 1.

Table 2: Pathways involved in accessing financial services

Way of financial access	No. of households	Percentage
None	32	39.0
Group set up and development	3	3.7
Business support set up	6	7.3
Savings and access to development	41	50
Total	82	100.0

Source: Field study, 2020

Households that access financial services via savings and access to development are accounted for by 41% while 32% represent households that do not have any distinguished path way of accessing financial services. It was observed from focus group discussions that in addition to the financial support from developmental organizations like UNHCR, households save cash in wooden boxes, VSLAs and on phones in form of mobile money which they later withdraw in case of need arises.

Skills enhancement trainings

Skills enhancement training is another factor that significantly contributes to solving some of the socio - economic challenges during the implementation of self-reliance strategies. This was also observed during the focus group discussion where some women preferred to be trained in skill rather than being given handouts, thus;

"......It would be better for the UNHCR or OPM to start providing us with vocational skills, educating us on how to survive on our own, rather than giving us monthly handouts which are not useful to us" (woman refugee, Nyakagando, Rubondo sub camp, 25/01/2020).

It was noted that most household members of productive age lack minimum skills required for success in any self-reliance strategy under taken. Different trainings that would enhance proper implementation of SRS included Financial Literacy, entrepreneurial skills and vocational skills (Table 3).

UNHCR (2016) suggested that enhancing access to financial services is key to building sustainable livelihoods for refugees. A study of refugee livelihood training in Kampala by Easton- Calabria, (2016), also found different types of livelihoods training targeting different skills for achieving refugee self-reliance.

Intersectional theory as a tool of analysis, advocacy and policy development, was used to address some of the challenges that refugee women and children face in their pursuing of self-reliance. Since refugee women and children face discrimination in the settlements, intersectionality theory was employed to address and help in understanding how different sets of identities impact on access to rights and opportunities (Women's Rights & Economic Change, 2004). For this study, such rights and opportunities included; access to finances, skills trainings and education aiming at improving women and children refugees' livelihoods.

Table 3: Areas of training needed

Training needed	No. of Households	Percent
None	4	4.9
Financial Literacy	10	12.2
Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship skills	4	4.9
Financial Literacy and vocational skills	2	2.4
Entrepreneurship Skills	33	40.2
Entrepreneurship skills and Vocational skills	2	2.4
Vocational Skills	27	32.9
Total	82	100.0

Source: Field study, 2020

Comparing households that were interested in skills enhancement trainings, 40.2%, 32.9% and 12.2 % needed entrepreneurial skills only, vocational skills only and financial skills only respectively while the others were interested in double skills. These skills are believed to enhance the capacity of refugees to perform better in self-reliance activities that would later reduce dependence on hand outs. Results of cross tabulation indicate that of the 11 households that received agricultural trainings 9 of them had their yields per acre improved (Table 4).

Table 4: Cross Tabulation of Agricultural training and increase in yields per acre.

		training increased/improved yields per acre		Total
		No	yes	
Received agricultural related training	No	71	0	71
	yes	2	9	11
Total		73	9	82

Source: Field study, 2020

Therefore, if the other households received such agricultural trainings, the subsequent increase in yields would improve food security.

Discussion during FGD revealed the willingness of refugees themselves to be trained in vocational skills and other different trainings that can see them move away from relying on handouts. They were interested in skills like charcoal making, tailoring, entrepreneurship and bakery. Through scholarships especially from implementing partners like Windle Trust, refugees have been trained in different skills. School going refugee children have been sponsored and those who have not sponsored access relatively free education. It was also observed that children refugees also benefit from the Universal primary education (UPE) just like the nationals do.

Discussion

This article is discussed based on Intersectionality theory which emphasizes that multiple factors simultaneously intersect to produce transformation and contribute to the unique experience of livelihoods outcomes for different individuals and groups (Hankivsky, 2016). Study findings indicate how it was difficult for refugees especially women to access financial services to enable them carry out self-reliance activities. Study findings revealed that 1.4% accessed loans and 23.2 never has any access to financial services that were available in Nakivale settlement. With 32.9% accessing VSLAs meant that these refugee women and children had to have some earnings so that they save with VSLAs and later borrow.

Easton-Calabria and Omata, (2016) argue that while the promotion of self-reliance embraces refugees' entrepreneurship, refugees in the South are usually excluded from the official institutions providing credit and loans for refugees. They further argue that upon completing livelihoods training programs, refugees struggle to find capital to a start business, as well as to find markets in which to sell their goods and services. Given these constraints, the promotion of self-reliance based on neoliberal tenets such as minimal state intervention, unregulated markets and individualism as a viable solution for refugees deserves scrutiny (Easton-Calabria and Omata, 2016). This concurs with what the study found out to be the solution for the challenges associated with social economic activities in Nakivale.

The study found that most household members of productive age lacked minimum vocational skills required for success in any self-reliance strategy under taken. Those who would engage in agriculture have no land for cultivation. Different trainings that would enhance proper implementation of SRS included Financial Literacy, entrepreneurial skills and vocational skills. Discussion during FGD revealed the willingness of refugees themselves to be trained in vocational skills and other different trainings that can see them move away from relying on handouts. They were interested in skills like charcoal making, tailoring, entrepreneurship and bakery. Furthermore, a study carried out by Easton-Calabria, (2016) in Kampala, found that skills gained through livelihoods trainings provide a foundation for self-reliance. Different types of livelihoods training that targeted different skills were proposed and included; basic business skills, computer literacy and vocation training. However, while those offering the training were able to offer general figures on participants' ability to become employed or self-employed after training, overall it was clear that completing skills training does not directly lead refugees into employment. (Easton-Cabaria, 2016).

As part of empowering refugees' self-reliance, there should be a conducive business environment for the refugees to operate in. Several socio-economic challenges were observed to have affected self-reliance strategy in refugee management, thus a need to assess how such challenges can be solved. UNHCR should also guarantee refugees who are able to work and these can always be easily traced in case they want to voluntarily return back home. UNHCR (2016) argues that the success of refugee entrepreneur depends on enabling environment and business development services, including training and access to tools, raw materials and other productive assets, as well as to financial services, including credit and savings facilities. Thus, these facilities will enable refugees to actively engage in economic activities.

Access to financial services was considered as one of the most important solutions to the socio- economic challenges in the refugee management. The results indicate that 32 percent of the households access financial services through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) while only 1.4 percent have financial access to loans. UNHCR (2016) also suggests that enhancing access to financial services is key to building sustainable livelihoods for refugees. Refugees often have little access to savings or credit to guard against shocks or invest in the business (Krause-Vilmar, 2011). In addition, refugees are often not able to access loans as a result of financial providers excluding them to fears that they will default (UNHCR, 2016).

In addition to promoting agricultural activities as the primary means for refugee self-reliance, the UNHCR also encourages refugees to become active participants in the small-scale market initiatives. For instance, in Nakaivale the Nsamizi Training Institute for Social Development (UNHCR's implementing partner for livelihood programming) provides refugees with training and small amounts of capital to engage in small business enterprises such restaurants, saloons, phone charging centers and local shops that sell merchandise not readily available in the settlement.

A study carried out in Kyangwari refugee settlement by Betts, et al., (2014), it was found that some refugees have managed to collectively negotiate entry to a wider Ugandan market through setting up the Kyangwali Progressive Farmers Limited (KFP). Their aim according to Betts, et al., (2014) is to bypass Ugandan intermediaries to get a better deal directly from wholesales in Hoima and Kampala. However, KFP has faced challenges as most large-scale Ugandan companies are generally very cautious about signing direct contracts with the collective because they fear refugees might return to their country of origin (Betts, et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Access to financial services is considered as one of the most important solutions to the social economic challenges in refugee management with 32 percent of the households accessing financial services through Village Savings Loans Associations (VSLAs) and only 1.4 percent accessing loans. Accessing finance, for example, direct cash aid, referred to as cash for food is much better than any other aid because the money received can purchase several food items instead of maize and beans that are always distributed. Money can as well meet other needs like school fees for the children and medication if one prefers to go to a private clinic.

Skills enhancement training is another factor that significantly contributes to solving some of the socio-economic challenges during implanting self-reliance. Most households' members of productive age were found to be lacking skills required for the success of any self-reliance strategy undertaken. There were many refugee women who showed interest and were willing to be trained in vocational trainings that can see them move away from relying on handouts.

Recommendations

As part of empowering refugees' self-reliance, there should be a conducive business environment for the refugees to operate in.

Several socio-economic challenges were observed to have affected self-reliance strategy in refugee management, thus a need to assess how such challenges can be solved.

The study recommends that the United Nations High Commissioner Refugees (UNHCR) or Office Prime Minister (OPM) should start providing vocational skills rather than giving out monthly handouts.

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