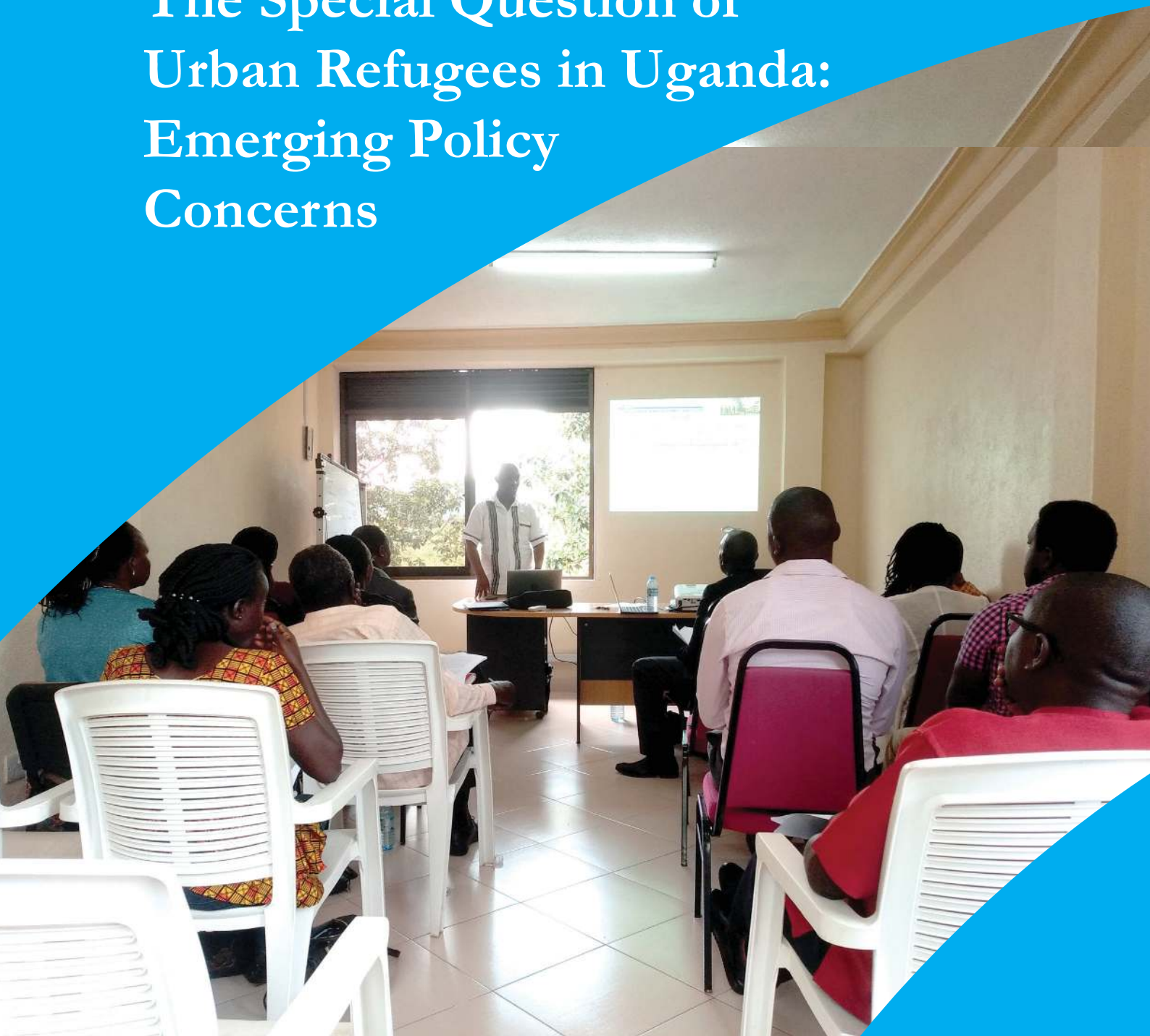


The Special Question of Urban Refugees in Uganda: Emerging Policy Concerns



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Executive Summary

As the number of displaced persons exceeded the Second World War spike, the international community and host governments continue to grapple for durable solutions. Uganda faces the problem of surging number of refugees from 690,000 in 2015 to 1.5 million in 2018 (UNHCR, 2018), 100,000 of whom have opted for urban centres yet conventional refugee response is based on rural settlement (Hovil 2007). While government of Uganda has committed about 900km² of land for rural refugee settlement, the swelling number of asylum seekers and refugees in urban¹ non-settlement settings demands innovative approaches to ease the burden on financial and natural resources (Dryden-Petersen 2006). The objective of this policy brief is to raise awareness about emerging issues in management of refugees and to influence public policy on management of refugees in the country. The policy brief presents policy suggestions emerging from a study titled *'The special question of urban refugees in Uganda'* commissioned by Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI) and triggered by parliamentary debate on the matter in reference to the parliamentary hansard in April, March and May 2018 which resulted into recommendations to review the process of management of refugees in the country. The study was conducted in partnership with Inter-Aid Uganda among refugees living in the jurisdiction of Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and aimed at identifying and prescribing solutions to emerging issues affecting urban refugees. The study entailed document review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with beneficiaries and practitioners of existing refugee policy. Findings were validated by a public policy dialogue organised by Uganda Development Policy Management Forum (UDPMF) at Uganda Management Institute (UMI) and AFLI.

This policy brief recommends that;

1. Refugee services including *direct* and *indirect* cost per refugee be guided by comprehensive evidence-based policy enabled by intensification of electronic management of refugees.
2. Reliable up-to-date data capturing refugee activity including arrival and exit be used to monitor their movement and security and to estimate resources for refugee response.
3. Services for urban refugees should extend to urbanities beyond Kampala Capital City Authority.
4. Livelihood projects be introduced to improve quality of life for low skilled urban refugees and to augment their contribution Gross Domestic Product.

¹City, town and their suburban areas

Background

Uganda's reputation as a peaceful, democratic, and liberal economy has endeared it to asylum seekers escaping internal strife in their countries of origin. Uganda is currently number one destination for refugees in Africa and third among refugee host countries globally (UNHCR March 2018). Intermittent escalation of conflict in neighbouring countries has over the last three years contributed to a high number of asylum seekers in Uganda who eventually obtain refugee status.

According to the regular UNHCR fact sheet, the number of people of concern in Uganda increased from 694,158 in 2015 to 1,444,873 in March 2018 with South Sudan alone contributing 1,053,598 (UNHCR 2018). This historic rise has exerted a heavy burden on the resources traditionally allocated to refugees. For instance, government has gazetted a total 350 square miles of land for refugee settlement in a number of districts. Uganda's hospitality to people of concern (PoCs) in urban non-settlement settings antedates the first UNHCR Comprehensive Policy on Urban Refugees of 1997, later updated in 2009, considering that Inter Aid Uganda has rendered refugee protection and other services to urban refugees in Kampala Capital City since 1995 including medical referrals from rural settlements by other humanitarian Implementing Agencies (IPs). This was nonetheless in general compliance with international conventions such as the League of Nations of 1926, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) of 1943, the International Refugee Organization



Participants at the Policy Forum Discussion on 28th June 2018



Officials from Office of the Prime Minister and other participants at the Policy Discussion Forum on Refugees at Uganda Management Institute (UMI)

(IRO) of 1946, United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR) of 1951 and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) of 1963.

The conventions offer general guidelines and have tended to focus on provision for persons in settlements. For Uganda, the *Uganda Control of Alien Refugee Act* 1964 forbade free movement of refugees outside the settlements and penalized nationals who would host them. This was the context of refugee management in the country until government of Uganda permitted asylum seekers and refugees to reside in urban areas in the wake of Rwandan genocide after 1994 upon which incidence Inter Aid initiated the Urban Refugee Project in Kampala. The project has been a tripartite partnership between Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), UNHCR and Inter Aid. Some of the lessons learned from it were tenets around which both the UNHCR's *Comprehensive Policy on Urban Refugees of 1997* and *UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas* of 2009 were built. This policy brief therefore points to the urgency of a national refugee policy element dedicated to the urban refugee response question in Uganda.

Approach and Results

Approach to the study

The study which informed this policy brief examined cross-border movement of large numbers of people into urban areas from conflict-affected countries. The investigation also included referrals from rural settlements particularly for health and education services. The focus was on resilience of state facilities in the face of high prevalence of forced displacements. The study restricted itself to only refugees “receiving material assistance” in Kampala Capital City. More than 100,000 urban refugees are spread around Kampala Capital City and urbanities like Wakiso, Mukono, Mpigi, Mbale, Busia, Tororo, Soroti, Masindi, Fort Portal, Mbarara among others. Asylum seekers and refugees who may be living in urban areas and rural areas anonymously outside the purview of Uganda Government and UNHCR, were not part of the study.

The research drew on multiple methods including literature review; interviews with beneficiaries and experiential interactions with Uganda Government and UNHCR officials as leaders of an Urban Refugee project in Kampala City. The study transcended literature that assumes models of assistance as a dichotomy in terms of gazetted settlements on one hand and urban non-gazetted settlements on the other. The study took a revisionist approach for planning, evaluating, and managing refugee crises in urban settings.

Findings and observations

1. While about 70,000 refugees are on the list of “receiving material assistance” the number of asylum seekers and refugees living in urban areas is not known. Many refugees are living in the urban areas anonymously.
2. While government strategies such as Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in response to the **Settlement Transformative Agenda (STA)** embedded in National Development Plan II mean well for government planning purposes, operationalization remains constrained by inadequate data including ascertaining what government currently spends on each registered refugee.
3. Contrary to original belief that those in urban areas are the savvy and able to eke out a decent living on their own, many are unable which could explain the number of urban refugees engaged in prostitution and other disallowed trades.
4. There is a high proportion of young persons of concern. On the Inter Aid assistance register, 61% are children of 1-18 years and 2% aged over 60 years.
5. While every refugee in a settlement is assisted with land for residential and agricultural use, the equivalent is not offered to those in urban areas.
6. Refugee host communities are indeterminate to be targeted to benefit from CRRF as is the case with rural settlements.



Participants attending the Policy Forum discussion at UMI, a process that contributed to production of the Policy Brief



AFLI Executive Director Hon. David Pulkol welcoming members to the presentation of the Policy Brief at AFLI Headquarters

7. While integration of urban refugees is paramount to enable them to work and enjoy social services, barriers remain due to the low level of transferable and sellable skills in their possession.

Conclusion

Overall, it was found that although government of Uganda and indeed UNHCR have supported Urban Refugee project for Kampala Capital City, the Urban refugee question has not been holistically addressed as is the case with settlements and integration in rural areas. The quest for accurate data that constrains effective planning remains a major barrier to comprehensive refugee response in urban areas. Evidence based response policy framework and programming is critical in all ways.

Implications and recommendations

Implications

While the world is experiencing unprecedented levels of urbanisation, it is particularly high for Africa. It is projected that in less than fifteen (15) years, the current 60 percent rural population will have been transformed into over 50 percent urban by 2030, implying a projected in urban refugees. Uganda, among the most urbanizing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa at a rate of 5.43% compared to Sub-Saharan rate of 3.6%, will be over 50% urbanised by 2050. Government should plan for this advent now than wait to be overwhelmed while these shifts take place.

Recommendations

Arising from the research and the public dialogue, it is recommended that the strategy to deal with the urban refugee question must be more comprehensive than it is at present to include evidence-based policy development where accurate data is critical. The national registration system should institute a procedure of community based registration to update current data for national planning. In particular, this should aid the following:

1. Enlarge livelihood support for urban refugees by helping them acquire transferable and sellable vocational skills in addition to education.
2. Facilitate refugees to work, contribute to the gross domestic product (GDP) of host countries and enhance their quality of life
3. Deliberately support refugees who have successful entrepreneurship with capacity to employ other refugees.
4. Government and humanitarian response partners to base targeted support on complete direct and indirect costs of hosting a refugee in their context for a given duration.
5. Manage the data securely to enhance national security, law and order including regular updates when a refugee returns home or is resettled.
6. Plan for resilient social service delivery systems with emergency provision to refugees based on appropriate data.



Participants attending the Inter-Agency Steering Committee to critique the Policy Brief on Refugees



Dr Gerald Werikhe Wanzala presenting on the relevance of CSO input in policy influence



Teopista Kiiza, head of programs at Africa Youth Development Link (AYDL) making a contribution

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