Conflict-induced migration and local development: The socio-economic dynamics of a refugee-hosting area in Uganda

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Abstract
For decades, Uganda has been a favourable destination for refugees. Between the late 1980s and the 1990s, violent conflicts in northern Uganda and southern Sudan caused complex patterns of human movement, including internal and cross-border migration. In addition, a mass influx of refugees from South Sudan occurred in late 2013. Uganda hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa, taking a progressive refugee management approach aimed at self-reliance and the peaceful coexistence of refugees and the host population. This paper reveals how South Sudanese refugees and the host population, most of whom consist of people who were displaced during the regional armed conflict, navigate life in new social and economic conditions in and around a refugee settlement in mid-western Uganda. Refugees have long been looked upon as a burden to host countries. Recent studies on the refugee economy, however, reveal that refugees can contribute to the Ugandan economy. I analyse how a refugee-hosting area saw economic development and urbanisation in a relatively short period. On the other hand, local people, whether refugees or Ugandan nationals, have been struggling to cope with the depletion of resources, including food, land, and firewood. Finally, I discuss the social and economic impact of conflict-induced migration in refugee-hosting areas.

Keywords: conflict, migration, refugee–host relations, refugee policy, Uganda, South Sudan

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1. Introduction

1.1. Aim: the social and economic impact of refugee influx

Taking the case of the socio-economic dynamics in and around the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement (Kiryandongo R. S.) in mid-western Uganda as an example, this paper aims to illustrate how South Sudanese refugees and Ugandan nationals in a refugee-hosting area interact with each other to make a living and how refugee-hosting areas become urbanised.

There is considerable literature on the social, economic, and environmental impact of refugees and forced migrants on host countries in Africa. Much of the previous literature addresses constrained livelihood opportunities, competition over resources between refugees and the host population, and the depletion of the environment (Martin 2005, Kalyango 2006). Recent studies on refugee economies emphasise refugee–host networks through employment and market activities, and refugees' contribution to the local economy (Jacobsen 2002a, Werker 2007, Betts *et al*. 2014; 2017, Taylor *et al.* 2016).

Chambers is one of the scholars who emphasises the need to look at the socio-economic impact of refugee influx on host populations in African countries. He has criticised refugee-centrism in humanitarian assistance, which refers to aid organisations being more concerned with refugees than hosts (Chambers 1986). Focusing on the social and economic inequalities in host populations, he points out that in rural refugee-hosting areas, the livelihoods of the poorer hosts are adversely affected due to scarce land and the depletion of resources, while the better-off and more visible hosts usually gain from the presence of refugees and from refugee aid programmes. Jacobsen (2002b) also explores the challenges and opportunities for African states from the double impact of refugee-generated resources. According to her, 'While refugees impose a variety of security, economic and environmental burdens on host countries, they also embody a significant flow of resources in the form of international humanitarian assistance, economic assets and human capital' (Jacobsen 2002b:577). She refers to these material, social, and political resources that refugees bring as 'refugee resources', which potentially represent an important state-building contribution to the host state.

Although academic studies pay attention to both the benefits and risks that refugee influx can bring to refugee-hosting areas, host countries, donor countries, and aid organisations have regarded refugees as an economic, environmental, and security burden. Recent studies on refugee economies, in which the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) of Oxford University has taken the initiative, challenge the common assumption that refugees are entirely dependent on aid and stress refugees' productive and entrepreneurial activities, based on their findings in Ugandan refugee settlements and Kampala (Betts *et al*. 2014; 2017). Betts *et al*. (2014) argue that although refugees are economically diverse and have significant levels of internal inequality, they often make a positive contribution to the host state economy through networks within settlements and outside settlements with Ugandan traders.

Based on the discourse on the social and economic impact of refugee influx, this paper discusses

economic development and urbanisation in the refugee-hosting area of Kiryandongo district, focusing on the socio-economic relations between refugees and hosts, and the impact of refugee assistance programmes.

1.2. Conflict-induced migration in northern Uganda and the Ugandan refugee policy

Uganda has a decades-long history of welcoming refugees from neighbouring conflict-affected areas. The country's earliest refugee settlements, except for two settlements for Polish refugees under British colonial rule, were established in southwestern Uganda in the late 1950s to host Tutsi exiles fleeing Rwanda.[1]

After gaining independence in 1962, Uganda hosted refugees from many African countries, including Rwanda, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Burundi. Most people who fled countries and crossed borders have been hosted or have self-settled in the western and northern regions. Northern Uganda, including the West Nile region and the Acholi sub-region, has been one of the favoured destinations among South Sudanese refugees due to its proximity and the transborder network that was built among border communities since the first arrival of Sudanese refugees in Uganda in 1955 when the First Sudanese Civil War broke out. Following the signing of the Addis Ababa agreement in 1972 between the Government of Sudan and the southern rebel army Anyanya, most of the Sudanese refugees were repatriated to southern Sudan. In 1983, fighting between the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and the Government of Sudan began in southern Sudan, followed by the 22-year internal conflict that was the Second Sudanese Civil War.

In Uganda, after the fall of the Idi Amin regime in 1979, most of the soldiers and residents that hailed from West Nile fled to southern Sudan. They began to return to Uganda in the late 1980s when security deteriorated in southern Sudan. In 1986, when the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) took power in the government, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), organised under its leader Joseph Kony, who hailed from Acholi, began military activities in the Acholi sub-region to topple the NRM/A regime led by Yoweri Museveni. At the peak of the LRA insurgency, over 1.5 million Ugandans were estimated to have been forced out of their homes as internally displaced persons (IDPs). The large-scale displacement in northern Uganda was partly caused by the government's decision in 1996 to force civilians into IDP camps, which were referred to as 'protected villages', in order to keep the LRA rebels at bay and increase protection for local residents (Mulumba and Olema 2009:13). Many local residents had little choice but to reside in IDP camps, while others decided to move to other districts or remain in their villages.

In the 1990s, when the SPLM/A was split and inter-factional fighting intensified in southern Sudan,

[1] The Nakivale Refugee Settlement and the Oruchinga Refugee Settlement are the oldest refugee settlements in Africa.

hundreds of thousands of Sudanese fled home to seek asylum in Uganda. They crossed the border en masse into northern Uganda at the beginning of the 1990s, settling in several refugee settlements in northern and mid-western Uganda. In January 2005, when the Government of Sudan and the SPLM signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), a little less than 200,000 Sudanese refugees remained in Uganda (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] 2006a). Most of them were repatriated to southern Sudan by the 2011 referendum on the self-determination of southern Sudan.

In July 2011, South Sudan gained independence from Sudan with the overwhelming support of the South Sudanese. Peace, however, was short-lived due to unstable local security and political unrest in the government. Military clashes that occurred between the presidential guards in December 2013 devolved into armed conflicts along ethnic lines. Deadly conflicts between the government forces of South Sudan (SPLA) and the rebels loyal to the former vice president or the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO) continued for five years. During this new civil war, nearly four million people, equivalent to one third of the entire nation, were displaced internally and externally. The Government of South Sudan signed a peace deal with SPLA-IO in September 2018, which led to the establishment of a unity government in February 2020. Nevertheless, a large number of refugees still remain in Uganda and are unwilling to return home due to security concerns, lack of infrastructure, and food insecurity in South Sudan. As of 2020, Uganda hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa, including over 800,000 South Sudanese refugees, representing 61% of the total refugee population (UNHCR 2020). South Sundanese refugees are living in the existing and new refugee settlements in six districts in northern and mid-western Uganda as well as in Kampala.[2]

Uganda has been praised as one of the countries with a progressive and hospitable refugee management scheme. In Uganda, a large number of refugees are held in settlements rather than in camps and are said to be 'self-reliant' through agriculture and self-employed works, while the rest are permitted to live in Kampala without any in-kind assistance from the UNHCR in Uganda, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or the Ugandan authorities. In refugee settlements, the government's Refugee Department allocates land for housing and farming to every refugee household.[3] As such, Uganda's refugee management scheme has been called the 'local settlement policy'.

In 1999, the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the UNHCR in Uganda embarked on the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS) in West Nile to respond to the protracted refugee situation in refugee settlements. 'Self-reliance' is defined as 'the ability of an individual, household or community to depend on their own resources (physical, social and natural capital or assets), judgement and capabilities with

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[2] After July 2016, nine refugee settlements were opened in the West Nile region and the Acholi sub-region. In 2018, the Bidibidi Refugee Settlement in Yumbe district became host to over 25,000 refugees, the largest number of refugees in Africa.

[3] Currently, the Ugandan government's Refugee Department is placed under the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

minimal external assistance in meeting basic needs, and without resorting to activities that irreversibly deplete the household or community resource base' (UNHCR 2006b). Under the SRS, refugees are not just encouraged to be self-reliant, but are expected to promote the host country's economy as 'agents of development'. In addition, refugees are allowed to access social services in host communities, such as healthcare and education, based on the integration of social services in refugee settlements and host communities.

In Uganda, regarding the legal protection of refugees, the Refugees Act of 2006 and the Refugees Regulations of 2010 stipulate that refugees have the right of free movement and employment within the country. They can pursue livelihood opportunities on their own, including participating in the labour market and running businesses. After a new influx of South Sudanese refugees, the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHoPE) Strategic Framework was launched, with the aim of bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in a harmonised and cohesive manner to more effectively promote the resilience and self-reliance of the entire population of refugee-hosting areas. It is a key component in the application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), as stipulated in the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants (19 September 2016). As stated in the ReHoPE (GoU *et al*. 2017), one of the main goals is to foster sustainable livelihoods for refugees and host communities, thereby contributing to socioeconomic growth and increased individual income.

2. Research and method

This paper is based on archival historical research and 6 months of fieldwork between August 2014 and August 2016 in Kiryandongo R. S. and its adjacent town in the host community, Bweyale, to reveal refugee livelihoods and trading networks between refugees and hosts. During my fieldwork, I collected data using non-structured interviews with refugees and Ugandan traders, a household survey on refugee livelihoods, and literature collection on local history.

The research area is the refugee-hosting area of Kiryandongo district, as shown below (Figure 1). In 1991, the Kiryandongo R. S. was established in the Masindi district (present-day Kiryandongo district)[4] in the western region, approximately 230 km north of the capital, Kampala, and 110 km south of the northern central town of Gulu. It is a 3-hour drive by taxi[5] to Bweyale, which is the town that is the nearest to Kiryandongo R. S. The total area of the Kiryandongo R. S. is 3,725 hectares, divided into three clusters: Ranches 1, 18, and 37 (Figure 2). Ranches 1 and 37 are allocated to asylum seekers and refugees from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, and others, while Ranch 18 is mainly allocated to the IDPs from the Bududa district of the eastern region of Uganda who survived

[4] Kiryandongo district was established in 2010, separate from Masindi district.
[5] This term refers to the privately-owned minibus taxis that are commonly available in Uganda.

the landslide disaster of 2010.[6]

It is located on the routes connecting Kampala and Gulu, and further across the border to Juba, the capital of South Sudan. In the implementation of refugee assistance programmes, Bweyale Town, which has a trading centre, is the host community surrounding the settlement. The population of Bweyale Town is approximately 31,000 (UBOS 2014), while that of Kiryandongo R. S. is estimated to be over 55,000 (UNHCR 2019).[7] The distance between the Bweyale trading centre and the Kiryandongo R. S. is only about 5 km. Compared with other refugee-hosting districts where local towns are located far away from the settlement, the distance between the two locations in Kiryandongo is relatively short. In this paper, the refugee-hosting area in Kiryandongo district refers to the geographical area that includes both Bweyale and Kiryandongo R. S.

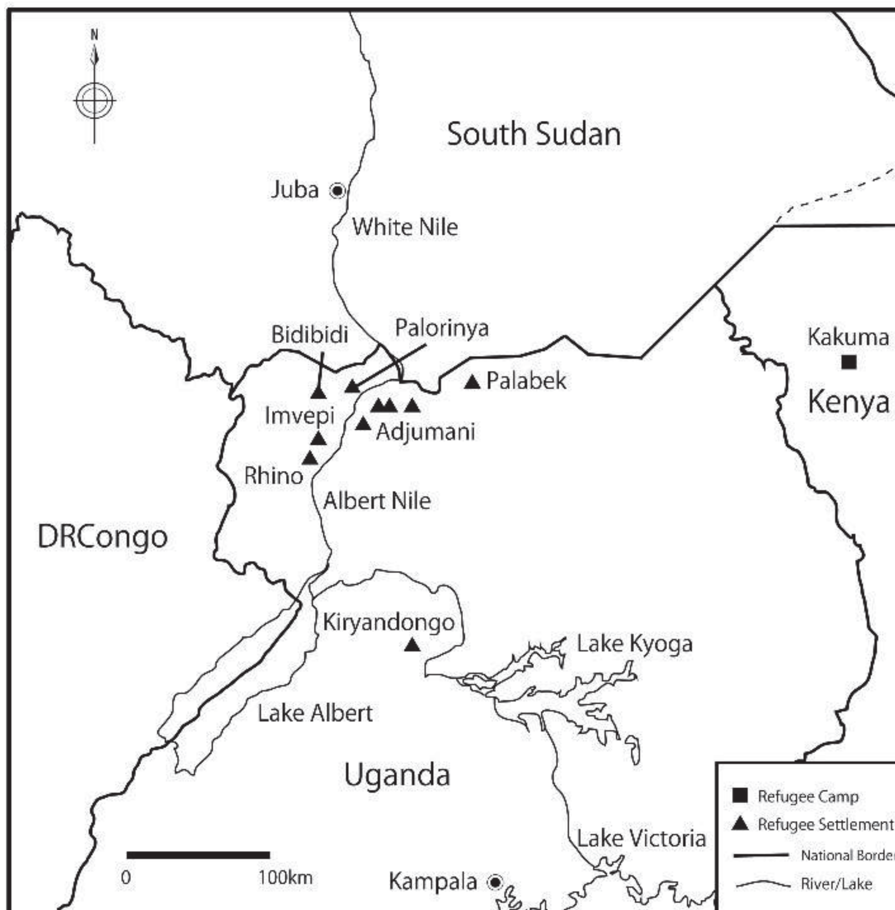

Figure 1. Map of refugee settlements in northern Uganda
Source: UNHCR Uganda (2017).

[6] The IDPs residing in Ranch 18 are called 'Bududa' after their origin, Bududa district.
[7] The refugee number that the UNHCR publicises represents those who register with the organisation in Kiryandongo R. S. The actual population of the settlement may be less, considering that many South Sudanese refugees are practically living in Bweyale.

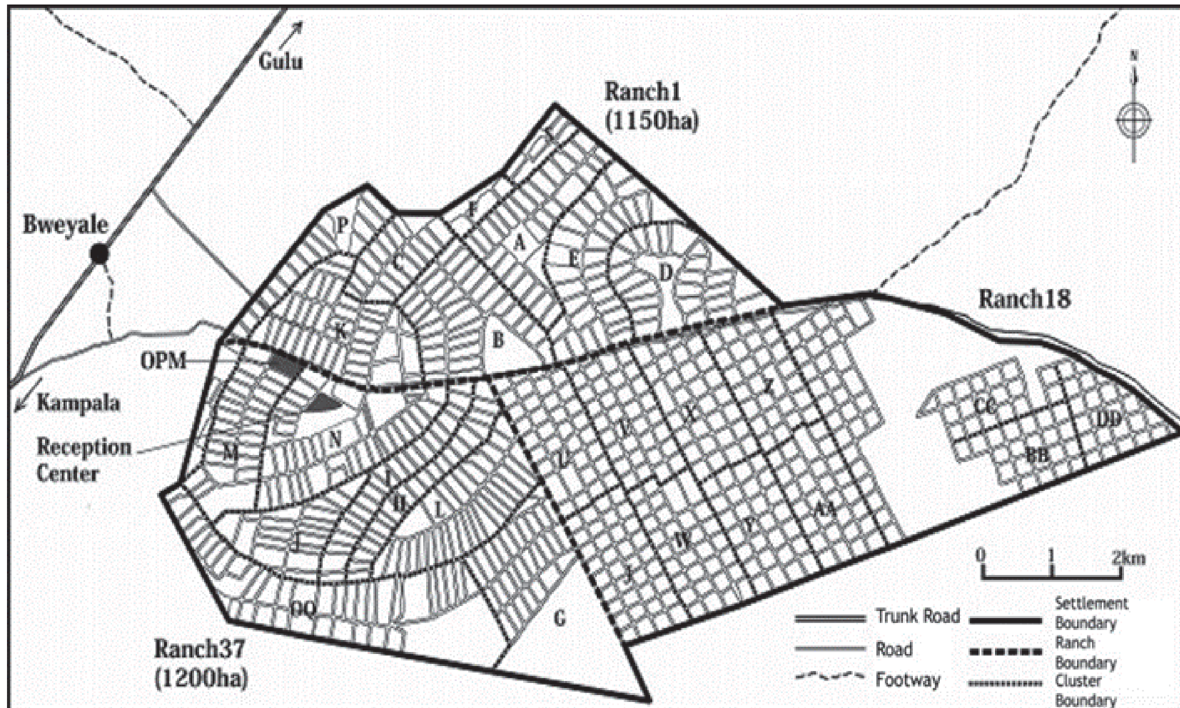

Figure 2. Map of Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement and Bweyale Town

Note: Produced by author on the basis of the map composed by the OPM.

3. Local development of refugee-hosting areas

3.1. Demographic changes in refugee-hosting areas

Most refugee settlements in Uganda have been established in underdeveloped and sparsely populated areas close to the national border, game reserves, and lakes. Nabuguzi dubbed this 'bureaucratic fencing' (Nabuguzi 1998:61) in reference to refugee settlements' location in isolated areas, far away from local Ugandan towns, where they are bureaucratically segregated from host communities, so that refugees cannot integrate into local communities. Before the enactment of the Refugees Act of 2006, all refugees who registered with the UNHCR were required to reside in government-designated settlements, not in towns. They needed to obtain travel permits from the GoU to leave the settlements temporarily.

Refugees in Uganda have been subject to various formal and informal constraints in terms of making a living; in reality, many refugees cross the refugee–host boundary to sustain themselves and improve their livelihoods through extra-settlement activities, such as trade and paid manual labour. Here, I demonstrate how refugees, specifically internally displaced Ugandan Acholi, and other migrants have built socio-economic relations to pursue livelihoods in and around the Kiryandongo R. S. for decades after its establishment.

The Kiryandongo R. S. dates back to the GoU and the UNHCR's establishment of a transit centre to host about 14,000 Sudanese refugees who fled Eastern Equatoria in southern Sudan due to an attack by the SPLA on Torit and the border towns in the 1980s. While this group of refugees arrived in Uganda

from various areas of Sudan, the majority were Sudanese Acholi. They were hosted in a transit camp in the Kitgum district of northern Uganda. Shortly after they came, they were harassed by the LRA. In 1990, the Ugandan government gazetted the land in the Masindi district for use by refugees and set up a transit centre to fulfil the UNHCR's request that Sudanese refugees be transferred to a safer location. Part of the land was utilised as a ranch under the Idi Amin regime during the 1970s; this land fell into disuse after the regime's collapse (Kaiser 2000:3). In 1991, the GoU and the UNHCR formalised the establishment of the Kiryandongo R. S. and allocated land to refugees the next year. Each refugee family was allocated a plot of land in proportion to the number of family members (Mulumba 2010:192).[8] The following comment is from a South Sudanese refugee who has been in Kiryandongo R. S. since 1990:[9]

> At the beginning of April 1990, when we were transferred to Kiryandongo from Kitgum, we did not find any water. First, we had to dig the boreholes ourselves. We brought water up to a water tank by truck from Karuma or Masindi port day and night.[10] We run water (through a pipe) from the OPM's office up to the clinic, called the Panyadoli Health Centre. All the areas around the refugee settlement were covered in deep forests. We cleared land to make farmland. In those days, Bweyale had only one police post and a small cotton trading post where Indian traders occasionally came from Kampala to collect cotton.

During the 1990s, the UNHCR and the GoU were responsible for determining the number of people that needed to be fed, and the World Food Programme (WFP) was in charge of providing food rations for refugees. Land allocation to almost all refugees was completed in 1995 in Kiryandongo R. S. By the mid-1990s, the WFP cut food assistance to almost all refugees on the basis of the UNHCR's evaluation that many of the refugees had already achieved 'self-reliance', which prompted the UNHCR to phase out its assistance. The repatriation and new influx of South Sudanese refugees between 2005 and 2017 changed the demographic composition.

After the political crisis that took place in Juba in December 2013, the South Sudanese who fled Juba or other towns registered at Kiryandongo R. S. The majority were Dinka and Nuer, which are the two largest ethnic groups in South Sudan. Some refugees have relatives in Kampala. When another round of fighting broke out in Juba in July 2016, the 'Equatorians', who hail from the three Equatoria regions, constituted the majority of new arrivals. In August 2017, the GoU and the UNHCR officially announced the suspension of refugee registration in Kiryandongo on the grounds that the acceptance of more refugees could cause a lack of land for allocation; it was therefore recommended that new arrivals

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[8] 1.2 hectares to 1.4 hectares of land was provided to Sudanese refugees in Kiryandongo R. S.
[9] The author interviewed with him in October 2015. The interviewee, who hailed from Lotuho in Sudan, was in charge of a school as a volunteer in Kiryandongo R. S. during the 1990s.
[10] Both locations are over 30 km away from the settlement.

register in newly-established settlements in West Nile. As of July 2017, the refugee population of Kiryandongo was estimated to be approximately 56,000 (UNHCR Uganda 2017). Approximately 99% of the total number of refugees had fled from South Sudan, while the rest had fled from the DRC, Kenya, Burundi, and Rwanda. Women and children under 18 accounted for 84% of the residents, and children made up 64%.

Although the OPM and the UNHCR in Uganda do not publicise the ethnic breakdown of South Sudanese refugees,[11] the demographics and socio-economic data collected by the Danish Refugee Councils and its partners in Kiryandongo R. S. (Khadka 2017) suggest that more than 75% of the refugees are from Equatoria, with Acholi accounting for the highest proportion, followed by Kakwa, Kuku, and Madi; the Dinka account for about 30%, and the Nuer account for less than 10%. There were about 3,000 refugees in addition to the new arrivals who registered after December 2013; among these, the Acholi had the highest repatriation rejection rate and many remained in Kiryandongo R. S. These refugees are hosted in Ranches 1 and 37. Approximately 4,000 Ugandan IDPs from Bududa reside in Ranch 18 (Figure 2).[12]

Like the residents of Kiyrandongo R. S., the host communities in refugee-hosting areas are not homogenous; rather, they consist of multi-ethnic 'communities'. I illustrate how an influx of refugees and migrants has changed the local economy and demographic configuration, taking the two towns of Kigumba and Bweyale as an example.

Historically, the Kiryandongo district was part of the ancient kingdom of Bunyoro.[13] Its original inhabitants are the Banyoro, who speak Runyoro. Since the mid-1950s, this district has received many migrants from other parts of the country, as well as from Kenya, Sudan, and the DRC. As early as 1954, Kenyan refugees were resettled by the British in Kigumba as a result of the Mau Mau Uprising (Ginyera-Pinycwa 1998). Starting in 1957, Kenyan Luiyas started to settle in Kigumba under a settlement scheme (Charlsley 1974:339). These Kenyan migrants introduced maize cultivation to the area. In the mid- and late 1960s, migrants from West Nile and refugees from southern Sudan settled in Kigumba to seek livelihood opportunities. Maize became a staple food and the main cash crop for settlers due to the generous, well-distributed rainfall in the area and reasonably fertile soil.

During the 1990s, the district saw a rapid and significant influx of Acholi from the areas around Gulu and Kitgum, the two towns hit hardest by the LRA's activities (Kaiser 2000:5). These IDPs are characterised by their wide economic differentiation. Some persons from powerful and prosperous

[11] The OPM and the UNHCR in Uganda stopped counting the refugee population by ethnicity in 2014. The statistics and survey conducted by the Danish Refugee Council show the ethnic breakdown of 190 sampled individuals from all 17 clusters in Kiryandongo R. S.
[12] This figure is an estimate, taking account into the OPM's announcement that about 10% of 10,000 affected households were resettled in Kiyrandongo district after the 2010 landslide disaster (Rukundo *et al*. 2015)
[13] Bunyoro Kingdom was established by the Banyoro, a Bantu-speaking people. The powerful kingdom has ruled a large area in western and central Uganda since the 14th century, until it was defeated by the British in the late 19th century.

families with many resources started or continued successful business ventures, while others were displaced with little property. Many obtained land for settlement in Bweyale through negotiations with the town council, and they were able to make a living without external assistance.

From the 1990s to the early the 2000s, Bweyale became a larger town, a key public transportation hub, and a trading centre. Its economic development attracted traders and labour migrants seeking better opportunities for business from various areas, particularly West Nile and Kampala. Its unique location, connecting Kampala and the Ugandan border towns, coupled with its relative safety encouraged refugees, IDPs, and other migrants to start businesses. In addition, the Refugee Affected Area (RAA) approach has been taken very seriously in Uganda. It is estimated that 40% of the assistance disbursed by the UNHCR in Uganda has been directed to the area surrounding the settlement in order to facilitate a general improvement in living conditions and mitigate the Ugandan population's possible resentment of refugees (Kaiser 2000:6). Humanitarian assistance for the host community led to improvements in infrastructure and social services. Bweyale's rapid development is clear at a glance when Bweyale is compared with Kiryandongo Town, which has served as the district headquarters. Bweyale is currently the most bustling town in the district, given that it is a trade centre that hosts numerous economic activities. On the other hand, Kiryandongo is a less busy town and the site of relatively little economic activity.

Today, there is no single dominant population or language in Bweyale. It is estimated that over 55 languages, including Acholi, Madi, Alur, Kiswahili, Runyoro, and English, are spoken there. Similarly, the Kiryandongo R. S. is a refugee-hosting area representing a heterogeneous, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual 'community'. Contrary to the popular conception of refugees as 'outsiders' hosted by local 'native' citizens, the host community of the Kiryandongo district developed significantly after the establishment of the refugee settlement and the influx of various migrants.

3.2. Refugee livelihoods and refugee–host relations

Regarding the general characteristics of refugee–host relations, Bøås states 'Whereas refugees seek to improve their livelihoods through extra-settlement activities, the nationals that live in the areas close to the camp seek to improve their livelihoods by deepening their integration into the services that the settlement provides such as education and health centres' (Bøås 2015:127). This is accurate in the case of the relationship between the Kiryandongo R. S. and Bweyale. Here, I illustrate how refugees have built socio-economic relations with host populations by pursuing livelihood pathways.

First, the words 'refugees' and 'host' should be explained. In Ugandan refugee aid programmes in the Kiryandongo district, the term 'refugees' refers to the foreign nationals who obtain or seek refugee status and is therefore equivalent to the terms 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers' in official use, while 'host population' includes any Ugandan nationals living next to refugees, whether or not they are urban

dwellers, including Ugandan Acholi IDPs or IDPs from Bududa in the settlement. This distinction indicates that 'refugees' are divided from 'hosts' according to nationality differences and not based on residential location. In that sense, the divide between 'refugees' and 'hosts' is clarified in the refugee–host framework, in which diverse relief activities come into operation; the divide is also visualised geographically by hosting refugees in a government-designated refugee settlement. However, as Turner (2016) points out, the social and geographical boundary between refugees and Ugandans, which is designed to create a division between 'us' and 'others', is constantly transgressed by both refugees and members of the host population, both of whom actively seek opportunities in and around the settlement in terms of trading, business, educational access, health care, etc. These everyday activities of both refugees and hosts have formed a particular pattern of migration, economies, and socialities in refugee-hosting areas.

In the Kiryandongo R. S., social and economic links have been fairly well established between refugees and the host population over the past three decades. According to an investment profile compiled by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Uganda, at the district level, over 70% of refugees are involved in economic activities. Among these, agriculture is the main activity, accounting for 50%, while other activities include retail and *lejaleja,* meaning casual labourers or piecework to generate income (UNDP Uganda and Uganda Investment Authority [UIA] 2017). The majority of refugees now live on crops that they are able to grow for self-consumption and sale.

Land usage, livelihood strategies, and entrepreneurship vary according to nationality and ethnicity; however, maize cultivation is a major agricultural activity for food and cash income irrespective of the nationalities of both refugees and their Ugandan hosts. Mulumba's (2010:298-307) case study of the Kiryandongo R. S. suggests that the livelihood strategies used by refugees in the early 2000s do not differ much from those that are being utilised at present, although the demographic composition of the settlement changed considerably after a new refugee influx in 2013.[14] Gender roles among refugees can change due to protracted displacement. According to a female refugee who has lived in the settlement for 30 years, Acholi women had to take on the previously male agricultural activity of digging due to their husbands' long absences from the settlement for the purpose of seeking casual work in other districts that are far away from the Kiryandongo R. S.

In the Kiryandongo R. S., most South Sudanese cattle keepers, including Dinka and Nuer, lost their livestock during the fighting or kept them in remote villages in their home areas. Since it is impossible to continue large-scale animal husbandry on a small plot in the settlement, many former cattle keepers lend their plots to other refugees, including 'Equatorian' refugees, a majority of whom are agricultural peoples residing in Bweyale. In general, 'Equatorian' refugees and other refugees from Kenya and the

[14] In the early 2000s, Sudanese Acholi accounted for almost 70% of the total number of refugees in the Kiryandongo R. S., with only a few refugees from Dinka and Nuer.

DRC are keen on securing access to land and producing crops. The agricultural products that Ugandan hosts cultivate are more diverse than those produced by refugees due to the amount of available arable land. In addition to maize, cassava, bananas, beans, tobacco, groundnuts, sesame, and rice are popular cash crops among host communities.

Generally, all refugee families cultivate maize, while some also organise mutual aid groups and borrow land from other refugees and the host population. A self-organised group of Moru refugees, one of the ethnic communities vigorously engaged in agricultural activities, borrows unused land from a family of Dinka refugees and utilises it as common land. The group's leader sells the harvested maize to raise funds to build a church.

Entrepreneurial refugees cultivate a variety of agricultural products, such as beans, groundnuts, sesame, tubers, vegetables, and fruits for self-consumption and sale (Murahashi 2018). Refugees are also encouraged to engage in income-generating activities, such as operating a local brewery, making and selling snacks and light meals like chapatti and cassava chips, rearing poultry, managing a small-scale business, and working as a casual labourer. In protracted refugee situations where refugees are not provided with food assistance, they tend to diversify their piecework both inside and outside the settlement.

Once maize is harvested and stored in a granary, it is used for self-consumption and sale. I interviewed 100 refugee households to ascertain the annual amount of yield, self-consumption, and sales (including maize scheduled to be sold) in October 2015. The results show that the average yield is 712 kg per household, while 422 kg is to be sold (Figure 3). In general, refugees decided to sell about 60% of the harvested maize. Household yield varies depending on the actual size and fertility of their land. Some refugees cultivate larger tracts of land by borrowing land from neighbours, relatives, or friends. Most South Sudanese refugees cultivate maize without any fertiliser or pesticides, as they used to do in their homeland, although some began using them in Uganda.

In order to save on transport costs between the settlement and Bweyale,[15] instead of going to the trading centre at Bweyale, most refugees sell their harvested maize to Ugandan traders who collect it by lorry (Figure 4). The past decades have seen the formation of a well-established trading network that connects the settlement with Bweyale and other Ugandan markets. New arrivals, long-term refugees, and Ugandan host populations buy and sell commodities and goods using this networked trade route.

Ugandan traders can sell the maize they buy from refugees at higher prices in border towns or in Kampala. Maize can be sold at two to three times its Kiryandongo purchase price in the Kenya–Uganda border town of Busia and in the South Sudan–Uganda border town of Elegu. The price of maize varies

[15] If maize is transported by motorcycle taxi (*bodaboda*) between the settlement and Bweyale, it costs about UGX 3,000 to UGX 5,000 (approximately US $0.8 to US $1.3) per 100 kg sack. UGX is the currency code for the Ugandan Shilling.

by season and year, depending on the supply and demand in the maize market. A good harvest, therefore, does not necessarily mean that a maize producer can obtain a sufficient income to make a living, given selling price fluctuations.[16] Refugees often seek out the opportune time to sell their maize in order to cope with uncertain market prices and earn a higher income.

It is not just agricultural activity that creates a particular type of refugee–host economy; humanitarian assistance can also become a commodity for exchange in refugee–host trading. For instance, refugees sell a large portion of the monthly food rations they receive from the WFP for cash. The main crop in the rations is sorghum, which refugees do not readily eat, partly because Ugandan red sorghum is believed to be of poor quality and is also thought to be indigestible. Ugandan traders buy food rations, such as farm products, from refugees to resell.

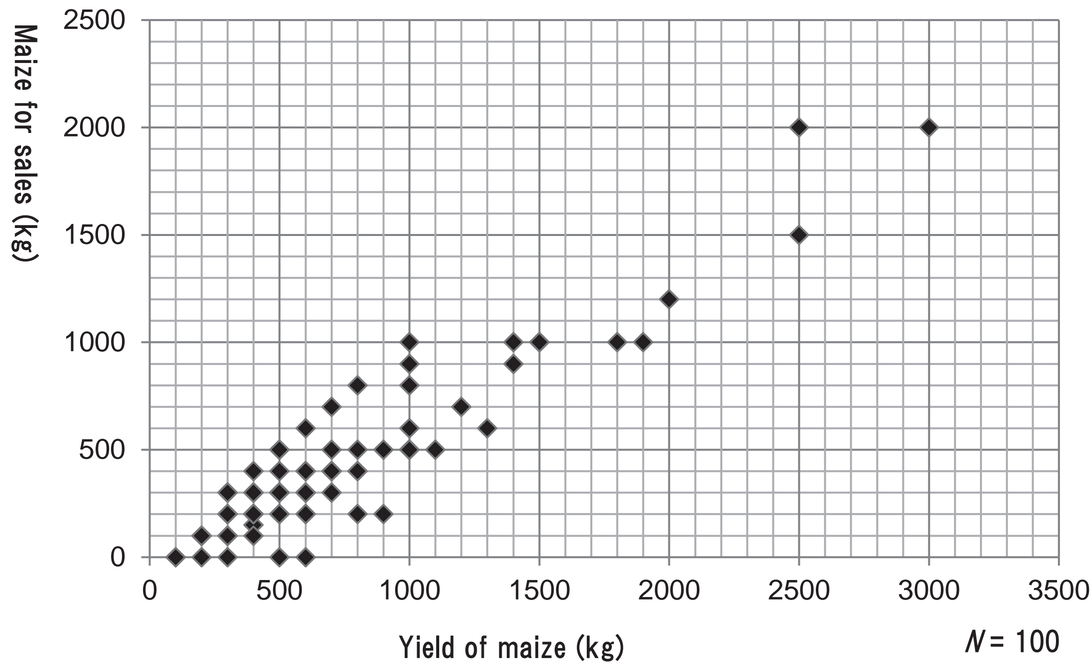

Figure 3. Yield and sales of maize in the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement

Source: Author, Data collected in September 2015.

[16] In 2016, when the yield of crops was at the normal average, the selling price per kilogram was between UGX 300 and UGX 500. In 2017, when damage by a harmful insect affected the maize yield, the price went up to UGX 3,000. In 2018, when the refugees had a good harvest, the selling price fell to UGX 300.

Figure 4. Ugandan trader loading sacks of maize at the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement
Source: Author, September 2015.

Casual paid work, such as making bricks, house construction, and contract digging, is also a source of income for refugees, although many of these activities are done within the settlement and not in the host community. However, apart from running self-employed businesses, including a small-scale retail enterprise called a *kiosk*, some refugees can find short-term paid work in the host community, such as harvesting work on a large farm close to the settlement or road construction,

Here, I take a young South Sundanese refugee as an example of a refugee who is making a livelihood pathway in the host community. He was born in a border town in southern Sudan during the 1980s and raised by a family of Catholic priests in the Kiryandongo R. S. after his parents were killed during the Second Sudanese Civil War. He grew up like a son to the host family, until he returned to Juba after the signing of the CPA in 2005. In December 2013, after narrowly escaping the fighting and soldiers' atrocities against civilians in Juba, he sought asylum in Uganda once again. When he returned to Kiryandongo, he rented a house in Bweyale and established a small-scale business without being registered by the UNHCR in Uganda. His business offers the service of taking photographs of customers with a small digital camera he borrowed from his friend; the photos are developed and edited in Kampala and sold to the customers. There are no photo studios in Bweyale, although there has been high demand among local people for identification card photographs and family mementos. He told me that he became a mobile photographer to survive, i.e. to earn money to cover his living costs and save for his education. For him, Bweyale is the better place to run his mobile business because he can expect more customers on the ground than he can in the Kiryandongo R. S. Further, Bweyale provides access to Kampala. Like

him, some refugees prefer to live in Bweyale, whether they register or not, in order to gain better access to social services and capitalise on livelihood opportunities.

3.3 Scarce resources and economic hardship

While refugee acceptance can benefit the host economy in some ways, the presence of an unprecedented number of refugees inevitably causes the depletion of resources shared between refugees and host populations in refugee-hosting areas. Taking into account the protracted nature of the refugee situation in Uganda, land is a major resource for refugees and Ugandan nationals alike, as both groups need it to sustain their livelihoods and achieve self-reliance in the long run.

However, because of the continuous influx of refugees from South Sudan, Burundi, and the DRC, and the increased population of Ugandan nationals in host communities, arable land has decreased in refugee-hosting districts. In the refugee settlements in northern Uganda,[17] the amount of land per refugee household has already been reduced from 50 m × 50 m (2,500 m^2) to about 30 m × 30 m (900 m^2) in order to accommodate new arrivals.

Furthermore, other materials that refugees need to cook meals and build housing, such as firewood, poles, and thatch, have also become scarce. As Poole (2019) reports, most refugees gain a little income through the sale of ‘bush products’, such as fish, brick, and firewood, while receiving food aid to cope with serious food shortages. Refugees often search for these materials in the host community without permission from local Ugandans, which leads to conflicts between refugees and host populations (Dawa 2018, Poole 2019, Van Laer 2019).

As is the case in northern Uganda, quarrels over land, natural resources, and access to social services have been seen in the Kiryandongo R. S. to a lesser degree. According to Khadka (2017), the three main causes of conflict in the Kiryandongo R.S. are related to natural resources, aid, and access to social services. About 70% of the respondents in an inquiry about the frequency of conflicts over natural resources in the past month indicated that 42% were related to aid, 26% were related to access to social services, and 19% were related to land. In particular, water and firewood shortages within the settlement are a major driver of conflict.

The land allocations are too small for refugees to generate a sufficient income to cover their living costs, school fees, and medical expenses. Nearly 80% of the refugees own a plot of land that is less than 1,000 m^2, while only 13% own a larger plot that is between 1,200 m^2 and 5,000 m^2 (Khadka 2017:18). Refugees often cope with the land shortage by negotiating with other refugees or with members of the host community in order to gain access to more plots of land. Land allocation reduction has had a

[17] There are several refugee settlements in Adjumani, Moyo, Yumbe, and Arua in the West Nile region, as well as in the Lamwo district of the Acholi sub-region. Established in August 2016, the Bidibidi Refugee Settlement in Yumbe district hosts the most refugees in Uganda.

negative impact on food security and income-generating activities. In recent years, both refugees and host communities have been vulnerable to adverse conditions, such as erratic rainfall, prolonged drought, land exhaustion, and pests. Several refugees who are able to cultivate a significant amount of land by renting and buying additional land engage in various types of commercial agriculture. A model farmer who receives NGO grants has been keen on cultivating various cash crops with the use of fertilisers and pesticides; such farmers can make a profit by selling their harvested crops within settlements.

Most of the refugees are married, but not many have their spouse present in the settlement. There is a general tendency of men leaving the settlement temporarily to seek job opportunities and women remaining in the settlement, caring for their families as bona fide household heads. Women play a pivotal role in income-generating activities at the household level. They are engaged in multiple economic activities, such as selling vegetables, making and selling snacks, brewing and selling homemade alcohol, and selling clothes and daily necessities. Vegetables are cultivated and foodstuffs are made in their houses, while Ugandan wholesalers from Kampala bring other commodities, such as used clothes and shoes, and notebooks and stationery for schooling.

Remittance is a transnational network that supports refugees economically. In East Africa, including Uganda, it is well known that Somali refugees have built and taken advantage of the global network of remittance through which they link with diasporas living in wealthy industrialised countries. Some South Sundanese refugees whose families, relatives, and friends resettled in Australia and the United States in the early 2000s are the constant beneficiaries of overseas remittances. However, most gain little financial support. Even those receiving remittances from South Sudan have suffered due to the continued decline in the exchange rate of the South Sudanese pound due to dire economic collapse.

4. Concluding remarks

This paper reveals the relationship between conflict-induced migration and local development, focusing on a particular type of economy emerging through refugee–host relations. As Betts *et al.* (2014) point out, the flexibility of asylum policy in Uganda has allowed refugees to become integrated into trade and labour economies with local peoples, thus stimulating the Ugandan economy and creating opportunities for refugees to work and build self-sustainable livelihoods.

As the local development of refugee-hosting areas such as the Kiryandongo R. S. and the economic integration of refugees with hosts show, it is safe to say that contrary to the popular assumption that refugee acceptance is a burden on refugee-hosting countries, refugee hosting and humanitarian assistance have boosted Uganda’s local economy and improved infrastructure and social services in refugee-hosting areas. The ‘birth’ of Bweyale Town as a host community and its expansion of urban space represent how refugee resources, as Jacobsen (2002b) points out, are the pull factors that attract various people, i.e. refugees, IDPs, and domestic migrants, to live in politically stable and food-rich

areas. In and around refugee settlements, a particular refugee–host economy has emerged. Refugees put their labour into their land to produce food for self-consumption and income generation. In relation to the host community, refugees are also customers, in addition to providers of labour. Ugandan nationals who settled in towns surrounding the settlement came in search of livelihood opportunities, better infrastructure, and social services; many have started a business or secured employment with the UNHCR in Uganda or an NGO. The refugee economy is linked to the host country's broader economy through the exchange of goods and commodities. Agricultural products, such as maize, are major items to be exchanged between refugees and hosts, while daily necessities, such as used clothes and shoes, are brought from outside into refugee settlements (Figure 5). Such networked economic activities interconnect refugee settlements with host communities and even with neighbouring countries and the refugees' countries of origin.

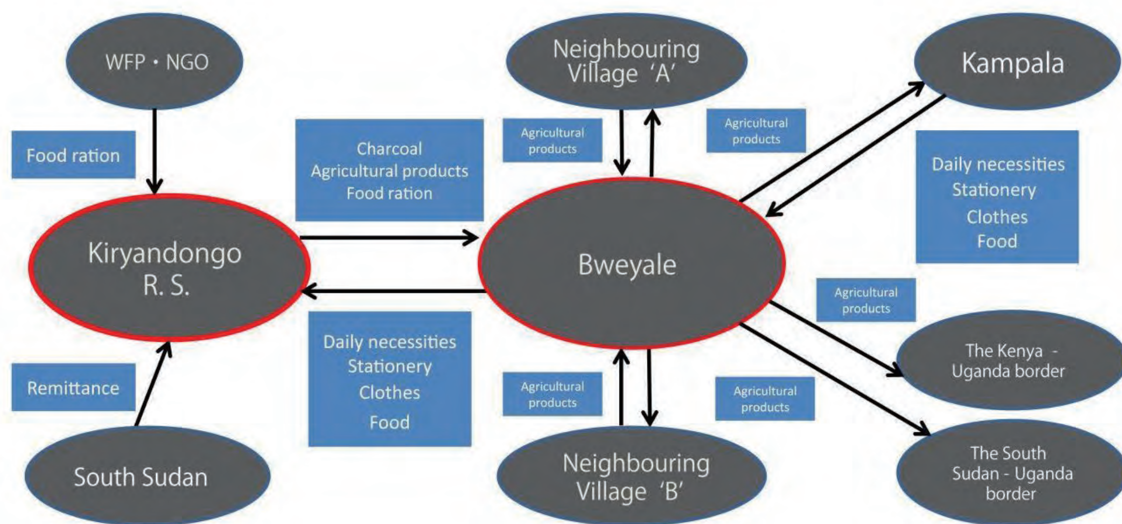

Figure 5. The flow of commodities and goods in a networked refugee–host economy

Source: Author.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to examine the empirical experiences of the refugees and the host population who have been engaged in subsistence agriculture, self-employed business, and short-term casual work. A survey conducted by the UNHCR in Uganda, the OPM, and the WFP in 2017 demonstrated that 69% of refugees are living on less than UGX 2,000, which is equivalent to US $1.68 per day in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms and is below the threshold for internationally-recognised extreme poverty, while only a small number of refugees have household per capita expenditures amounting to UGX 5,000, which may indicate some form of 'self-reliance' (Development Pathways 2020:vii). In fact, refugees are much more likely to live in poverty than host populations, even though the former receive food assistance (ibid.viii). Even in the Kiryandongo R. S., which has more favourable

conditions for refugees to pursue livelihood pathways than other settlements in northern Uganda, many refugees stated during my fieldwork that they maintain their dignified life and envision a future without humanitarian assistance.

Uganda has been praised as a hospitable country with open and progressive refugee policies and laws. However, in reality, Uganda is faced with big challenges in the implementation of refugee aid programmes due to the unprecedented number of refugees, limited resources to meet the demands of refugees and hosts, and insufficient international support. Despite international donors' high expectations that refugees are gradually weaning off the aid programme and will achieve self-reliance in the near future, there is little hard evidence indicating that the Ugandan refugee policy has been working successfully, except among a very small portion of refugees. It is therefore necessary to thoroughly examine the benefits and challenges of refugee hosting in the political and social contexts.

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