

Cities as partners: the case of Kampala

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The arrival of large numbers of refugees in western European cities since 2015 has spurred widespread endorsement of the role of these city governments in addressing displacement. Displacement to cities in other countries worldwide, however, also demands attention.

Displacement to cities is not a new phenomenon. Though the international community is now working with a number of European cities as partners in supporting refugees, other cities like Kampala, Amman or Jalalabad have been hosting far more refugees for far longer – with fewer resources and without the same international backing. To support cities in creating inclusive communities for the urban displaced, the international community (including humanitarian and development actors, multinational corporations and UN agencies) must approach the ‘Mogadishus’ of the world in the same way that it approaches the ‘Berlins’: as partners whose voices matter and whose efforts it should help to strengthen through investment, technical support and collaboration.

In 2018 the International Rescue Committee (IRC) undertook research in 23 host cities around the world. Covering cities as diverse as Agadez, New York, Mogadishu, Montréal and Jalalabad, the findings indicate that 19 of the cities have prioritised partnerships with the international community in order to address their migration challenges. More needs to be done within such cities to ensure that city governments are supported by partnerships and resources from the humanitarian community. Practically speaking, this means moving beyond simply offering cities a seat at the table in policy discussions to investing in cities as equal partners in current responses to displacement and empowering them to plan for future displacement and growth.

Consider Kampala

While Kampala, for example, is a member of international initiatives such as the Mayors Migration Council and the Global Alliance

for Urban Crises, humanitarian actors have only just begun to view Kampala’s governing body, the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) as a viable partner.

The IRC approached KCCA to co-host a 2017 multi-stakeholder workshop focusing on long-term approaches to displacement within the city. During the workshop, a KCCA representative sarcastically presented a blank slide to reflect the absence of any mention of refugees in Kampala’s strategic plan. Despite hosting an estimated 100,000 refugees, the KCCA had no plans for how better to serve them. Though the KCCA is at fault, the humanitarian community also shares the blame. While Kampala has hosted refugees for decades, to the point where longstanding Somali and Congolese neighbourhoods are now welcoming newly arrived South Sudanese refugees, humanitarian project funding has historically been concentrated on the refugee settlements just inside Uganda’s borders.

According to Uganda’s Office of the Prime Minister, as of September 2017 Kampala hosted 98,300 refugees from 25 countries.¹ These numbers relate to those refugees who are registered in Kampala, and do not take account of those who are registered in settlements but nonetheless spend considerable amounts of time living in Kampala. (Refugees in Uganda are eligible for land and support if they settle in rural areas but despite this the hope of work draws many to live precariously in urban areas.) The numbers also do not include persons of concern with similar characteristics to refugees, including household members of refugee families who have not gone through the official asylum process. Taking these numbers into consideration, KCCA estimates that 300,000 of Kampala’s residents have a refugee background or affiliation.

At the same time, Kampala is rapidly urbanising. The city's night-time population is currently 1.6 million (swelling to 3.8 million during working hours) and is growing annually by nearly 4%. This growth is occurring predominantly within Kampala's low-income and/or informal areas, where approximately 32% of the city population lives. A recent report estimates that approximately 6% of these residents are refugees, higher than the city-wide average.² All residents of these low-income/informal areas experience insecurity, lack of economic opportunities, and poor sanitation. They are also more vulnerable to climate-related events, such as flooding or extreme temperatures, despite climate variability also being, for many, the initial cause of their displacement.

Since its initial engagement with IRC in 2017, KCCA has significantly increased its coordination with humanitarian, development and private sector partners to support the city's marginalised and displaced residents, regardless of their migration status. The city views itself as a 'Kampala for All', most notably through the creation of the Kampala Coordination Forum for Displacement, Migration and Urban Refugees (the #KampalaForAll forum), modelled on a similar forum created in Athens. The forum brings together all refugee-response actors in the city, including government agencies, UN agencies, multilateral development actors, national and international NGOs, and community-level actors, to harmonise responses, prioritise interventions, and share information.

KCCA has very clear ideas on what needs to be done but until those plans are funded, they do not mean much. The current focus for donors is, justifiably, where the needs are more immediate – that is, along Uganda's border. But the long-term needs are just as serious, and the city cannot operate in emergency response mode for decades. Urban response calls for a longer, developmental approach – one that considers permanent fixes, particularly in increasing access to housing, health care, education and livelihood opportunities for refugees and the urban poor living in informal settlements. And

these fixes need to be developed through meaningful partnership with KCCA.

The difficulties in establishing meaningful partnerships with KCCA are many, and challenging. They include donor incentives to focus on refugee settlement services, competing mandates and territorialism among major international agencies and Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister, and the frequently encountered view among humanitarian practitioners that city government partnerships require extra work and risk diluting programme quality. But these challenges are far from insurmountable. Successful partnerships in other cities show positive results, such as that between UNHCR and the Municipality of Athens where a collaborative programme has housed over 40,000 refugees in urban housing stock.³ Similar European and American examples abound – which we hope can be replicated not only in Kampala but in all host cities where partnership is most needed.

Guidance for international actors

Based on their experiences within KCCA and the international community, the authors propose the following recommendations for the international humanitarian community, including practitioners and donors:⁴

1. Partner with city governments in policy and in practice

- Require field staff to engage in dialogue with local municipal authorities to determine if there are any opportunities for meaningful collaboration around shared outcome areas. The dialogue should go beyond formal meetings or workshops to a level where informal visits to each other's offices are accepted as a normal way of working together, and capacities are shared on an ongoing basis.
- Earmark 25% of grant funding related to urban displacement for city government collaboration and/or local capacity strengthening, in compliance with the commitments of the Grand Bargain.⁵
- Include city governments as core constituents in the implementation of

February 2020

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international agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Compact on Refugees and its associated Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

2. Use humanitarian interventions to support urban development outcomes

Rather than deliver programmes in sector-specific silos, the humanitarian community must reconsider humanitarian intervention as a resource for solving urban challenges exacerbated by displacement. This means taking a community- or area-based and multi-sectoral approach to programming, while also engaging in meaningful partnerships with other organisations, including non-traditional humanitarian partners and the private sector, to safeguard the specific rights of refugees and internally displaced persons. Specific actions include:

- Determine whether the relevant city or town has a pre-existing master plan or documented development goals, and work to align programmatic outcomes with these.
- Use technical expertise to help city governments improve their understanding of the needs and preferences of displaced residents in relation to the overall population, specifically through urban context analysis, technical assistance and data sharing, and use this understanding

to ensure the inclusion of displaced and marginalised residents in municipal services.

- Fund area-based approaches focused on addressing the overlaps between urban displacement, geographic marginality, and urbanisation.

In order to address urban displacement, the international community must adapt its practices – and mindset – to allow for collaboration and must unify its support of city leadership, regardless of a city's location.

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1. Statements made during the September 2017 Urban Practitioner Workshop co-hosted by IRC.
2. AGORA (2018) *Understanding the needs of refugees and host communities residing in vulnerable neighborhoods of Kampala* bit.ly/AGORA-Kampala-2018
3. UNHCR (2017) 'Greek Mayors Seek Future Refugee Accommodation Programme Beyond 2018' bit.ly/UNHCR-Greek-housing-Dec2017
4. This article was adapted from IRC's 2018 report *Urban Refuge: How Cities Are Building Inclusive Communities*, published with the support of Citi. Note that the report also includes recommendations for city governments and private sector stakeholders. bit.ly/IRC-UrbanRefuge-2018
5. The Grand Bargain <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>