

Limitations of development-oriented assistance in Uganda

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In camp-like settlements, the aid provided by aid agencies with a development orientation can do little more than improve livelihood conditions.

The idea of linking refugee protection and assistance programmes with development aid is far from a new idea, with its potential as a win-win situation for donors and asylum states and, in theory at least, for refugees as well. As long ago as the 1960s, UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) tried to link its refugee assistance programmes with development aid. It moved from an 'integrated zonal approach' during the 1960s to Refugee Aid and Development in the 1980s and Returnee Aid and Development in the 1980s and '90s. Since the new millennium, Targeted Development Assistance (TDA) and the Transitional Solutions Initiative (TSI) have been used to make the link.

What all these approaches have in common is the attempt to link short-term refugee aid with medium-term development projects, offering both refugees and the host

population access to services, and using a local settlement approach instead of camps. Yet, each approach did it differently. Since the 1980s, the idea has been promoted of refugees becoming self-reliant especially through agriculture, a concept that is related to recent debates about resilience and is still used today.¹ In the 1990s, quick impact projects (QIPs) were used to promote efforts through small-scale and short-term measures.

Although the approaches had benefits and disadvantages, the main reasons for failure were similar in each approach: insufficient support by and cooperation of humanitarian and development agencies, ineffective (short-term) programme planning, polarised positions between Northern donor states and Southern refugee-hosting states, lack of political will and insufficient funding.² Hence, despite these initiatives over several

decades, refugee protection and assistance are still characterised as humanitarian, short-term emergency assistance, differentiated from medium- and long-term development aid. Ironically, these 'short-term' interventions are – given the global trends of protracted refugee situations – lasting for an average of nearly twenty years.

The case of Uganda

Refugee assistance in Uganda is seen as progressive due to a new refugee policy and its development orientation. The new refugee policy entered into force in 2009 and included a number of revisions to the previous relatively restrictive policy. For example, refugees now have rights to property, work, agriculture and freedom of movement.³ In recent years, the Government of Uganda has also included refugees in its national development and poverty-reduction plans.

Since the 1960s, Uganda has hosted refugees especially from neighbouring countries, with refugees located in rural settlements close to the borders in northern and western Uganda. Refugee assistance in Uganda has development-oriented components as evidenced by the nationwide use of local rural settlement for which the government has allocated more than 3,300 km².

There are three explicit strategies outlining the development orientation of refugee aid: the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), the Development Assistance for Refugee Hosting Areas (DAR) strategy and the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHOPE) strategy. SRS was established in 1999 and aims to promote refugees and nationals living in refugee-hosting areas to be able to support themselves, as well as to integrate local service structures into national systems. Building on SRS, DAR was established in 2003 and targets improving the living conditions of refugees and nationals. The more recent ReHOPE strategy also aims to empower refugees to become self-reliant through livelihood measures.

All three strategies therefore are directed at integrating service structures into national systems and promoting

refugees to become independent from aid structures and deliveries. The integration of local services not only allows nationals to have access to services such as education or medical care established in a humanitarian context but also to sustain such facilities on a long-term basis even after refugees have repatriated to their countries of origin. Refugees' independence from aid structures is especially pursued through agricultural approaches. For that, refugees receive two plots of land – one to live on, one to farm – as well as the necessary means to work the land.

The refugee settlements are all relatively extensive. For example, Rhino Camp Settlement in the North West, established in 1992, has a carrying capacity of 32,000 refugees and covers an area of about 225 km². Kyaka II Refugee Settlement in central Uganda was established in 1983 with an area of about 84 km² and a capacity of 17,000 refugees. The settlements are village-like where refugees live side by side with nationals and both are able to access the services provided by aid agencies. Several primary schools (although very few secondary schools) are spread throughout the settlements. In each settlement, there are markets where refugees and nationals can buy and sell harvest and other products. Rhino Camp also has a skills training centre where a certain number of refugees and nationals received vocational training in, among other skills, carpentry, tailoring, tinsmithing and blacksmithing. In Kyaka II, refugees produce locally made sanitary pads, MakaPads.⁴

Constraints

However, these settlements are geographically limited spaces in remote rural regions which are relatively isolated from flourishing urban areas. The land was allocated because it was sparsely populated before the refugees settled there. Notwithstanding the development orientation of refugee aid that aims to improve livelihoods, refugees still face various restrictions and limitations in the settlements, and despite the revised refugee policy, the refugees are unable to manage without external aid. They have few opportunities to find formal employment,

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restricted in how far they can travel due to decisions made by the Office of the Prime Minister's local office and the high travelling costs; the allocated plots are too small and the soil quality is often too poor to yield a sufficient harvest; and the area is also too small to leave parts fallow for a season, which is necessary for long-term production. Hence, refugees remain partly dependent on aid.

In spite of the development orientation, aid agencies' programme-planning cycles are annual which does not adequately allow for medium-term planning. Also, the assistance in settlements is mainly carried out by implementing partners of UNHCR, not by development agencies, which leads to the question of where these agencies are. If the work is supposed to be development-oriented, why are there seemingly no or very few development agencies implementing programmes? Thus, the kind of aid that has been provided remains similar to humanitarian aid rather than medium-term development aid.

At a policy and strategy level, criticism could be levelled at programmes which work for the integration of services into the national system locally but not for the integration of refugees. Politically the aim is the repatriation of the refugees – rather than allowing them to stay and integrate locally – while the service structures remain for the locals.

More questions than answers?

The refugee assistance strategies in these settlements in Uganda reveal a certain political willingness and an interest in linking refugee protection with development aid. However, challenges remain which render the whole structure questionable.

It may initially seem obvious that refugee-hosting regions should benefit from development measures such as improving infrastructure and service delivery. But do refugees benefit from such measures? Despite the village-like rural settlements, in effect refugees remain encamped, facing restrictive living conditions and with a certain dependency on external aid. Moreover, by focusing on agriculture as a means to become self-reliant, refugees are implicitly assumed

all to be farmers but their diverse interests, capacities and competences are neglected.

There seems to remain an overall question unanswered: why are aid agencies, donors and asylum countries interested in linking refugee and development aid?

It seems that each of them is pursuing specific goals which may not overlap with each other. For refugee aid organisations suffering from limited funding especially in protracted situations, the development orientation offers a way to access other funding pots or possibly to reduce costs. While donor countries may provide additional funds, they may also be trying to find ways to keep refugees in the Global South. Countries of asylum such as Uganda use the approach in a smart way to improve the infrastructure of the refugee-hosting region which is often remote and neglected. And as for the development agencies, they were reluctant to factor in refugees in order to promote sustainable development, although several of them have been showing more interest and commitment in recent initiatives such as TSI.

These institutional discrepancies reveal that it is not clear whether the aim of development-oriented refugee assistance in the case of the settlements in Uganda is to develop a region, to improve the living conditions of refugees in camps and settlements, or to enhance programming efforts in protracted situations. For as long as the overall aim is unclear, the potential to make effective linkages will be thwarted.

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1. See also Easton-Calabria E E (2014) 'Innovation and refugee livelihoods: a historical perspective', *Forced Migration Review* Innovation & Refugees supplement www.fmreview.org/innovation/eastoncalabria
2. Krause U (2013) *Linking Refugee Protection with Development Assistance. Analyses with a Case Study in Uganda*. Nomos.
3. Uganda (2006) The Refugees Act 2006. www.refworld.org/docid/4b7baba52.html
4. Musazzi M (2014) 'Technology, production and partnership innovation in Uganda', *Forced Migration Review* Innovation & Refugees supplement www.fmreview.org/innovation/musazzi