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Refugee Self-Reliance in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Uganda

Erik Svedberg
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Refugee Self-Reliance in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Uganda

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Abstract

One of the key tenets of Ugandan refugee policy is the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), a policy that expects refugees to economically support themselves by utilizing a given plot of land to develop a livelihood based on subsistence agriculture. Although many have hailed this policy as being progressive and beneficial for the refugees, others have pointed out the flaws and deficiencies in the policy and in its implementation. The research utilizes a case-study of Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Western Uganda to assess the implementation and impacts of the SRS in Uganda. Semi-structured interviews with refugees, settlement officials, aid workers, and academics form the basis for the collected data and present a multi-layered approach to analyzing the topic. Furthermore, participant observation as an intern with the Office of the Prime Minister and various other organizations within the settlement further informed the research with first-hand experience in the implementation of the SRS. The study demonstrates that although the policy has had success within the settlement, its narrow focus on subsistence agriculture makes it inadequate for many refugees due to their diverse cultural, occupational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, the agricultural expectation of the SRS is undermined by inadequate land and unpredictable weather, and as a result the policy has failed to create food security for refugees. Furthermore, investigation into the dynamics of refugee livelihoods in the settlement finds that official efforts to promote self-reliance have had difficulties overcoming the inherent restrictions of the settlement system. The research concludes with recommendations for improving refugee self-reliance, many of which underscore the need to refine the agricultural requirements of the policy as well as allowing refugees to more easily pursue alternative sources of livelihood.

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Acronyms

ARC	American Refugee Committee
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FRC	Finnish Refugee Council
GoU	Government of Uganda
IP	Implementing partner
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OP	Operating partner
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
SRS	Self-Reliance Strategy
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN	United Nations

Introduction

Uganda has historically been a host country for international refugees from multiple countries in East and Central Africa. Fleeing conflicts that are characterized by long-term volatility and destruction (particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC], Rwanda, and Somalia), these refugees often stay in Uganda for many years, creating multiple long-term refugee situations and presenting a number of challenges for effective refugee assistance. In response to these issues, the Government of Uganda (GoU), in conjunction with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has based its refugee policy on the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), a policy which aims to provide refugees the means to economically support themselves while at the same time lessening their dependence on humanitarian assistance. Within this system, refugees are granted a small plot of land upon which they are expected to practice subsistence agriculture. Proponents of the policy have lauded it as being a progressive step forward in making refugee assistance more sustainable and beneficial for refugees while critics have pointed out concerning flaws in its implementation.

This research seeks to investigate and analyze the effectiveness and application of the SRS in Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Isingiro District, Western Uganda. Nakivale is one of the oldest refugee settlements in the country and is home to 60,000 long-term refugees, primarily from the DRC, Rwanda, and Somalia (UNHCR, 2014b). There are a number of well-established organizations in the settlement working to promote self-reliance and as a result many of its refugees have well-established subsistence agriculture. The research takes a multi-leveled approach to investigating refugee self-reliance in Nakivale, engaging with refugees, non-governmental organization (NGO) workers, camp leaders, and policy experts. Data collected from these various sources help to clarify the impacts of the policy within the settlement and is synthesized in recommendations for policymakers, settlement officials, and future research. In addition to direct data collection, the project also included an internship with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the branch of the GoU that is in charge of directly administering the settlements. With this internship position, the researcher had direct access to UNHCR and the other organizations working within the settlement, experiences which gave the research unique insight in to the official efforts to promote refugee self-reliance within the settlement. This in-depth study of Nakivale refugee settlement will seek to connect analysis of the policy and its

effects on the ground as well as provide recommendations on how the policy could be improved to better support refugee welfare.

Background

Refugees in Uganda

Uganda has hosted refugees since the end of the Second World War and is currently a safe haven for around 190,000 refugees who have fled violent conflicts in East and Central Africa, particularly in Rwanda, the DRC, South Sudan, and Somalia (UNHCR, 2014b). Refugee issues in Uganda are currently particularly salient and although unrest in the region has been a problem for decades, the last two decades have “seen a greater influx of refugee than at any time in the past” (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004, p.28). Many refugees in Uganda are considered to be in “protracted refugee situations”, which are defined by UNHCR as a situation where refugees “have lived in exile for more than five years, and when they still have no immediate prospect of finding a durable solution to their plight” (Crisp, 2003, p.1). This classification is frequently used in the legal and political frameworks of UNHCR, and has particular implications for the assistance these refugees receive. UNHCR (2004a) explains that these situations are characterized by a state of perpetual dependence:

Refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile. A refugee in this situation is often unable to break free from enforced reliance on external assistance. (p. 1)

This dependency and the long-term nature of these situations not only create huge financial burdens for the host states, but also often lead to negligence of rights of the refugees. Despite the extensive research on the issue, UNHCR has struggled to devise a constructive solution, especially in the case of Uganda.

Refugee policy analysts and scholars have identified three main “durable solutions” to these protracted refugee situations: repatriation, integration, and resettlement (Crisp, 2003, p. 1). Repatriation, which is contingent upon the cessation of conflict in the refugees’ country of origin, continues to be impossible for many of the refugees in Uganda, particularly for those from Somalia and the DRC. Integration, although hailed by many scholars as a viable option for both refugees and the host country, is often disregarded as a threat to domestic security and detrimental to the host economy, a perception that is especially prevalent in Ugandan policy (Jacobsen, 2001; Hovil, 2007; Walker, 2008). Although UNHCR promotes local integration as a practicable and beneficial solution, the Ugandan government continues to be resistant to this

approach for many reasons (Walker, 2008). Resettlement, where refugees are relocated more permanently to a safe third country (Kneebone, 2008), is attractive to both the refugees and the host country but is becoming increasingly rare and difficult, as Crisp (2003) explains: “Very few of Africa's long-term refugees are likely to be accepted for resettlement, which is in any case a relatively complex and costly way of finding solutions to refugee problems” (p. 25).

A fourth and well-researched alternative is the *self-settling* of refugees, in which refugees “opt out of the settlement structure” and live in other areas of the country, interacting freely with nationals socially and economically (Hovil, 2007, p. 601). However, these refugees, as a result of their self-exclusion from the system, forsake many of the benefits and rights afforded to them as refugees, a harmful consequence which has been well documented by past scholarship (Refugee Law Project, 2002; Omata & Kaplan, 2013). Although many have argued that the varying successes of self-settled refugees are testaments to the viability of local integration as a beneficial solution to protracted refugee situations (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; Hovil, 2007), there remains “considerable ambiguity surrounding the status of self-settled refugees” and this alternative continues to be excluded from the official dialogue regarding solutions to Uganda’s refugee issues (Hovil, 2007, p. 601).

Thus, among the three “durable solutions” to refugee situations (and one unofficial solution), none are both desired and practical in Uganda. Without any other alternative, Uganda has resorted in the short, medium, and long term to place refugees within settlements (Bagenda, Naggaga, & Smith, 2003). These settlements, as compared to refugee camps which “are often spontaneous and temporary creations in which refugees almost exclusively depend on relief handouts”, place a greater focus on long-term accommodation and are “characterised by infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, brick buildings, boreholes etc.” (Bagenda et al., 2003, p. 5). The settlements are “of a more permanent nature” and with allocated land for residence and agriculture, “refugees are expected to become self-sufficient over time” (Bagenda et al., 2003, p. 5). Thus, the settlement system serves to “provide greater livelihood opportunities for refugee families to achieve socio-economic security,” but also to lessen their dependency on long-term humanitarian assistance and subsequently reduce the burden placed on the host state (UNHCR, 2014a, p. 1). The benefits of the settlement system have been well documented in official reports and research (Bagenda et al., 2003; UNHCR, 2004b, 2014b)

Although the system contains multiple advantages for the host country, many have alleged that this comes at the cost of the welfare and rights of the refugees. One of the main issues with the system is the separation that it creates between the refugees and the host society. Bagenda et al. (2003) explain that the settlement system forces refugees to be “isolated from mainstream society” and that it is “structured such that refugee freedom is inherently constrained” (p. 5). Many critics have supported this assertion, often alleging that the “settlement system contravenes the government’s international obligations with reference to the freedom of movement of refugees in their country of exile,” a right protected by international refugee law (Kaiser, 2006, p. 604). Not only does this seclusion infringe upon the rights of the refugees, but it also undermines refugees’ ability to become self-reliant. One scholar asserts that the settlement structure severely handicaps the ability of refugees to be economically productive and that the system “itself is a contributing factor to the protracted nature of refugee situations” (Hovil, 2007, p. 618).

Emergence of the Self-Reliance Strategy

Beginning in the mid-1980s, due primarily to a number of urgent international emergencies, UNHCR involvement in refugee affairs was characterized by a “lack of engagement with the issue of livelihoods” (De Vriese, 2006, p. 5). Without any other viable alternatives, “the principal members of the international refugee regime (host and donor countries, UNHCR and NGOs) chose to implement long-term ‘care-and-maintenance’ programmes which did little or nothing to promote self-reliance amongst refugees or to facilitate positive interactions between the exiled and local populations” (Crisp, 2003, p. 4). This focus carried its own inherent problems however. As the number of refugees in protracted refugee situations grew, international donors became “increasingly frustrated by the expense and waste associated with long-term ‘care and maintenance’ programmes for long-term refugees” (Kaiser, 2005, p. 355). Because of these frustrations, humanitarian aid for refugees was often (and continues to be) “undependable, erratic, and inadequate,” causing great challenges for ongoing refugee assistance (Harrell-Bond, 2000, p. 5). In the context of this unreliable external funding, Kaiser (2007) contends that in the absence of alternative livelihoods for refugees, “budget constraints, political impediments and other obstacles mean that refugees would surely perish if they relied exclusively on the largesse of aid providers” (p. 219).

In response to these realities, UNHCR and the GoU formulated a new strategy to address refugee maintenance which would take a more development-centered approach to refugee support. The new policy would aim to ease the two biggest issues caused by the protracted refugee situations in Uganda: refugee dependence on humanitarian assistance and the growing financial burden that this aid placed upon the host country. In achieving these goals, the new program sought to achieve the “reduction of expenses associated with increasingly unpopular 'care and maintenance' programmes” and create “an opportunity to contribute to the sustainable development of refugee hosting areas in Uganda and the chance for refugees to 'manage their own lives and share socio-economic services with the nationals’” (Kaiser, 2005, p. 355).

The result was the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), a new philosophy and approach to refugee support that was initially implemented in 1999 in settlements in the West Nile sub-region of Uganda (Meyer, 2006, p. 19). This new strategy made promoting refugee *self-reliance* the foundation for Uganda refugee policy. This term is defined by the UNHCR’s Handbook for Self-Reliance (2005) as the basis for refugee wellbeing:

Self-reliance is the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a 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. (p. 1)

The policy itself, as dictated by the UNHCR and OPM, aims “[to empower] refugees and nationals in the area to the extent that they would be able to support themselves” and “to establish mechanisms that will ensure integration of services for the refugees with those of the nationals” (UNHCR, 2003, p. 3).

In order to promote refugee self-reliance, the SRS utilizes subsistence agriculture as the basis for its objectives. Refugees are allocated a small piece of land that they are expected to cultivate for personal consumption. In conjunction with this responsibility, refugee food rations are decreased in relation to the amount of time they have spent in the settlement. Ideally, this arrangement will provide refugees adequate time to establish reliable agriculture and they will not experience a lack of food when rations are reduced. This arrangement aims to both help

refugees support themselves and to lessen the burden on aid-providing agencies (UNHCR 2003, 2004b).

Since its implementation, scholars and policymakers have documented the numerous successes of the SRS in Uganda. UNHCR (2003) claims that “food self-sufficiency, albeit affected by intermittent dry spells, has been achieved for the majority of the refugees” (p. 4). Official accounts explain that the policy has been successful in transforming refugees into agents for their own welfare: “refugees are now seen as potential for development. SRS, over time has also helped in ‘attitude change’ amongst refugees and host communities alike – from free handouts to self-help and capacity building” (UNHCR, 2003, p. 3). However, most of the academic appraisals of the Ugandan SRS have demonstrated that, although the ideas behind the approach are generally quite progressive, the structure and implementation of the policy leave much to be desired (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; UNHCR, 2004b; Kaiser, 2005, 2006; Meyer, 2006).

Critiques of the SRS

Lengthy scholarship has documented the past and current injustices and inefficiencies of the SRS and has established that basic rights, most notably freedom of movement, are essential to the success of refugee self-reliance but are often neglected in Uganda (Kaiser, 2005, 2006; Hovil, 2007). Some contend that the neglect of these rights results from the GoU’s view of refugees as threats to national security, and that it attempts to reinforce the settlement system in order to contain them (respondent B, personal communication, April 7, 2014; Bagenda et al., 2003; UNHCR, 2004b; Hovil, 2007). One scholar pointed out that the GoU largely acts under the prejudicial “presumption that asylum is temporary” and has historically resisted attempts by refugees to leave the settlements or to integrate into Ugandan society (respondent B, personal communication, April 7, 2014). In contrast to this view, there has been extensive scholarship that refutes the assumption that refugees cause a threat to national security or are detrimental to the host economy (Jacobsen, 2001; Hovil, 2007; Walker, 2008). Although restrictions to freedom of movement have been greatly lessened with the implementation of the 2006 Refugees Act, integration is still ignored as a solution to Uganda’s refugee situation, regardless of its established benefits for the host state (UNHCR, 2004b; Kaiser, 2006; Hovil, 2007; Walker, 2008).

Many analysts have demonstrated that the SRS does little to address the economic and social isolation of refugees in Uganda. This is perhaps by design, as the Uganda government is very careful in navigating this delicate domestic issue (P. Omach, personal communication, May 7, 2014). Scholars have concluded that “a programme of social integration is far from being the objective of the strategy” (Kaiser, 2005, p. 355). Nevertheless, there do exist clear injustices within the policy, which have been investigated extensively in recent scholarship. Dryden-Peterson and Hovil (2004) elaborate further on this flaw, explaining that the SRS and the settlement structure it perpetuates create both “economic isolation” and “social seclusion” for the refugees (p. 29). They conclude that the consequences of these exclusions are profound, stating that “by divorcing the... integration of services and social integration... rather than acknowledging that they are mutually dependent, the SRS ensures that it cannot bring about self-reliance” (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004, p. 30).

Furthermore, there exists significant scholarship demonstrating that in many instances, the SRS has failed to achieve the promised gains in efficiency. One often-critiqued failure of SRS is that the unification of refugee support and development activities has not been realized. One UNHCR report concludes that “there have been very limited linkages between SRS and development activities in general, and the programme continues to rely almost exclusively on UNHCR funds, which have been declining since the inception of the SRS” (UNHCR, 2004b, p. vii). Along these same lines, others contend that the creation of the SRS is meant to hide the weaknesses of the GoU in providing for refugees (P. Omach, personal communication, April 7, 2014). Additionally, although the government has been able to muster great resources for the refugees it has hosted over the past decades, it has always run the risk of favoring refugees more than its nationals, for whom the Ugandan government has also struggled to provide services (P. Omach, personal communication, April 7, 2014). The Refugee Law Project (2005) asserts that there are multiple indications that the SRS is designed to “derive developmental advantage for refugee hosting districts” and “neglects to address key questions relating to refugee livelihood, and thus protection, in the short term” (p. 7). Others have alleged that the GoU views the SRS as “a way to achieve ‘burden-sharing’ and ensure that their ‘generosity’ to refugees is repaid with developmental benefits for host communities before repatriation” (Meyer, 2006, p. 17).

There remain serious questions about the viability of the SRS in Uganda. Although there has been extensive scholarship in to the policy’s effectiveness, the majority of these studies have

been focused upon refugee settlements in the north, underscoring the need for further research into settlements in other areas, which are distinct in a number of different ways. Furthermore, there have been few evaluations of the SRS since the implementation of the 2006 Refugees Act, which was a significant overhaul of previous refugee policy. Among other things, the law granted refugees formal freedom of movement and expanded their independence to seek alternative livelihoods, developments that are crucial to the success of SRS (Refugee Law Project, 2006). There has been some research examining the legal aspects of this new law (Refugee Law Project, 2006, 2007; Walker, 2008; Omata & Kaplan, 2013), but few which examine its long-term practical impacts.

Challenges of the SRS in Nakivale

Although there are a number of activities in place to promote the SRS, there still remain serious concerns about the viability of the policy in Nakivale. The limited area of the settlement and the great size of its refugee population place great strain on the land that is allocated to it. There has been a long history of land conflict with Ugandan nationals around the settlement and this conflict has many implications for the viability of the SRS in the settlement. Bagenda et al. (2003) conclude that the settlement is not well suited for the SRS due to the “area’s land scarcity and social conflict” (p. 4). This history of conflict has many implications for the feasibility of the SRS in Nakivale and “raises questions of the viability of refugee protection within the existing policy of local settlement, which removes refugee communities from their hosts, under the auspices that integration into Ugandan society could be economically and politically destabilizing” (Bagenda et al., 2003, p. 3). Indeed, Bagenda et al. (2003) conclude that the SRS in Nakivale needs to have “an emphasis on integration, thus facilitating harmonious interaction between refugees and their national hosts” (p. 4). However, the settlement is far from local trading centers in Isingiro and Mbarara, and the populations of its three zones are quite isolated from each other and from Ugandan society. These conditions are counterintuitive to the established requirements for self-reliance. Meyer (2006) explains that any effective implementation of SRS must ensure that “refugees are able to exercise agency in the local context, negotiating with the range of local-level, national-level and international social actors, to improve their situation, meet their own needs or access ways of meeting these needs in the same way as local host community members” (p. 33). With these considerations in mind, there are

multiple factors which cause great concern in assessing the viability and effectiveness of the SRS in Nakivale Refugee Settlement.

Justification

This study aims to provide context for the complex and multilayered issues facing contemporary refugee policy in Uganda. Although great efforts have been made by actors on many levels to provide better support for refugees, the study will strive to identify ways that the policy and its implementation could be improved. By doing this, the study hopes to influence, in even a minor way, contemporary views regarding refugees and the efforts to assist them.

Research Objectives

This research endeavors to:

- Assess the effectiveness of Uganda's Self-Reliance Strategy for refugees in Nakivale Refugee Settlement;
- Investigate the limitations of the policy's implementation specifically in the context of a long-term refugee settlement;
- Identify areas in which refugee policy and implementation can be improved to better promote the well-being of refugees.

Methods

Study Location and Population

This research is based primarily in Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Isingiro District, Western Uganda. This settlement was chosen because it is one of the oldest settlements in Uganda and subsequently has especially well-established organizations and refugee assistance infrastructure. Many of its refugees have been in the settlement for a number of years, providing a perfect environment for analyzing long-term refugee self-reliance. Additionally, pre-existing relationships that SIT has with settlement officials and refugees made research in the settlement easy to carry out, even with the limited duration of the research period. Data was also collected in Kampala, where academics and refugee policy analysts were consulted to give greater context for research conducted in the settlement. Official permission for the project was obtained from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. Locally, permission to serve an internship and to conduct research in the settlement was obtained from both OPM and later from UNHCR. This permission as well as formal introductions with organization leaders by the assistant camp commandant made getting involved with the organizations very easy. Everybody was very helpful and offered many opportunities to further the study.

The research primarily utilizes a case-study to analyze the effectiveness of the SRS in the context of a single settlement. The case-study approach was utilized because it would allow the research to not only gain an in-depth understanding of the issues in the settlement, but would also allow the research to offer lessons for broader refugee policy. Furthermore, during the course of the research period, an internship was carried out with OPM. During this internship, almost full access was granted to observe and work with all of the organizations within the

settlement. Extensive work was done with the main livelihoods organizations within the settlement, Nsamizi and American Refugee Committee (ARC), as well as supplementary data collection with Finnish Refugee Council (FRC), Samaritan's Purse (the IP in the settlement that manages food distribution), and directly with UNHCR itself. The internship supplemented the data collected from refugees and camp officials with a firsthand view of the impacts and limitations of official efforts to promote refugee self-reliance.

During the research 49 interviews were conducted with 154 respondents. Of these, 138 were refugees, 11 were aid workers in the settlement, and four were academics in Kampala. I also spoke extensively with the Mark Mutaawe, the Assistant Camp Commandant of Nakivale.¹

Data collection methods

The main methods used to collect data in this study were interviews, participant observation, and non-participant observation. The methods will be discussed in that order.

Interviews

During this study, data was primarily collected via face-to-face interviews. This included one-on-one interviews (mainly conducted with camp officials and academics) group interviews (which were mainly with refugees), and informal interviews (which occurred during time spent in the internship with the various organizations). These interviews were often semi-structured, which allowed conversation to flow freely while also holding to an agenda of pertinent topics. With these methods the research was able to expand and adapt in response to the information gathered in the settlement.

The study focuses on refugees and how their needs are being met within Nakivale Refugee Settlement and it attempted to engage with all levels of the settlement in order to gain an in-depth understanding of self-reliance in the camp. Although this is supplemented by the testimony and expertise of outside experts, the bulk of the substantial data collected is from within the settlement. Academics consulted represented a very small sampling of the many policy analysts and politicians involved in refugee affairs in Uganda, and their testimony is meant to give context for what data was collected in Nakivale. Numerous camp and organization officials were consulted during the research and the diversity of their positions and expertise was helpful in drawing useful conclusions regarding official efforts to promote the SRS. Among refugees, extensive data was collected from a number of different sources. The researcher

¹ Informed consent obtained from these informants is discussed in "Ethical Considerations," p. 21

endeavored to obtain data that would be representative of the refugees in the settlement. However, the scope and duration of the study made it impossible to adequately engage with all of the various nationalities and socioeconomic conditions of the refugees and as a result the research primarily focused on Somali, Ethiopian, and Eritrean refugees. These groups were chosen because of their proclivity not to become involved in agriculture, thus presenting a unique situation to examine under the SRS. Various other nationalities were consulted during the course of the research, but these informants were not selected based on their ethnicity, but rather on their engagement in livelihood activities and official efforts to promote the SRS. Overall, the refugees surveyed provided an adequately diverse sampling of the refugees in the settlement, but unavoidably many perspectives and experiences were not included in the research.

Interviews were often conducted in English with camp officials and academics. However, few of the refugee respondents spoke English and for their interviews a Somali translator was utilized. The translator also spoke fluent Swahili, so she was able to translate for respondents of other nationalities. Focus group interviews and group interviews were also conducted with community groups supported by ARC and with participants in educational classes supported by FRC. These groups were chosen due to their participation with these organizations and they gave a perspective in to the substance and impact of these programs.

Participant observation

Primarily as a part of the researcher's internship, participant observation was also utilized throughout the study period. These activities ranged from aiding in food and non-food item distribution (plastic sheeting, housewares, soap, etc.) to observing meetings between organization representatives and community leaders. These observations and experiences helped to provide a firsthand and nuanced understanding of not only the official efforts to promote refugee self-reliance but also the relationship between refugees and the aid organizations in the settlement.

Observation

To a lesser extent, non-participant observation was utilized in organization activities where the researcher lacked the skills or responsibilities to become involved with. This method allowed the researcher to learn about more complex and long-term refugee assistance projects.

Effectiveness and Limitations

The methods employed in the research were quite effective. All of those consulted were both very eager to participate and provided valuable information. The focused approach on Nakivale allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive view of most of the livelihood activities within the settlement. Nevertheless, the limited length of the research period inherently limited the researcher's ability to fully understand and analyze the incredibly complex dynamics and issues at play within the settlement but the depth of the collected data helps to mitigate this concern.

Furthermore, refugee dependency, a topic commented upon by the research and which is an important part in understanding refugee self-reliance, was not fully explored because it lies outside of the scope of this research. This omission does not cause raise significant issues for the current research but it is important to recognize its role in refugee policy.

Another limitation of the research is a lack of meaningful engagement with upper-level refugee officials and policymakers. Although these potential respondents were contacted, scheduling issues prevented them from taking part in the research. The inclusion of their expertise would have been helpful in expanding and enriching the greater context of the SRS in Nakivale. Nevertheless, this limitation was mitigated because data gathered from local officials was adequate to provide a comprehensive look at the official aspects of the SRS and its implementation.

The data collected is able to form a moderately comprehensive portrait of self-reliance within the settlement, but nevertheless the great complexity of the issue and the limited scope and length of the research period unavoidably left many of the complicated nuances and hidden dynamics of the topic not fully explored in the research. Furthermore, although the research draws conclusions about the effectiveness of the SRS policy within the settlement, its application to other settlements within Uganda must take careful consideration of the different attributes of the refugee situation in Nakivale as well as the settlement to which it is being applied. No refugee settlements are the same, and especially in the case of Uganda, the complexities and subtleties of each settlement must be carefully considered when applying this research to other cases. Specific conditions relating to climate, refugee nationalities, funding, and organizational activities must be accounted for in applying this research to other settlements.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were particularly important in this study, due to its extensive engagement with refugees, an inherently vulnerable population. Refugees who participated are protected by anonymization of their identities and all refugees provided informed consent for the research. Regardless, all informants were enthusiastic to participate.

One potential issue that had to be taken into consideration during the research was the inherent responsibilities and role that the researcher had in the settlement, as both a researcher and as a foreigner. Refugees, being a heavily-researched population, have been subject to much engagement and research by foreigners, many of whom work with one of the organizations within the settlement. This research addressed this issue by making clear that refugee participation was completely voluntary and that there would not necessarily be any benefits from participating in the research. Furthermore, participants in the study were selected mainly based on their interest in taking part in the research, to make sure that refugees wary of outside researchers would not feel pressured to participate.

Another potential ethical issue was managing refugee expectations that the research would directly benefit them. To address this, the researcher took particular care to make clear to all participants that he was a student conducting research for a strictly academic project, and although serving an internship with OPM and the organizations, he was not officially involved in the planning of the programs of these organizations. He also made it clear that the impact that the research would have on their situation in the camp was uncertain and most likely would not affect them in the future.

In regards to compensation of the participants, the translator that was used received a small payment for the services she provided, but other than that no compensation was given to any of the participants. This included private overtures to the researcher for assistance, which were politely denied and to which was explained that the researcher was merely a student and was not in any position to give support, monetary or otherwise.

For those whose full names and distinct distinguishing characteristics are used, written consent to participate in the research was obtained. The researcher clearly explained how their testimony could be used in the research report as well as how the research would eventually be presented.

Access to the settlement as both an intern and a researcher was carefully obtained from all the appropriate authorities, both national and local. From national authorities, official permission to conduct research was obtained from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. Subsequently, the researcher received written permission from OPM to conduct an internship and research in Nakivale. Later, formal permission was also granted by UNHCR to have access to their IPs and activities as well as gather data from their representatives. This data is anonymized in the final report. While in the settlement, the researcher operated directly under the authority of OPM, and all activities related to the internship were carried out with the permission and guidance of Mark Mutaawe, the Assistant Camp Commandant. Mr. Mutaawe gave the researcher permission to work with all organizations within the camp as well as with all refugees. The researcher was introduced to all refugee respondents who participated in the research by either organization staff or a Somali community worker.

Research Findings and Analysis

The presentation of the findings of this research is organized based on the various levels of the SRS. The section begins with a description and analysis of the many actors in the official implementation of the SRS in Nakivale, the different programs that these organizations organize to promote the SRS, and the effectiveness of these efforts. The report then transitions to the challenges faced by refugees in pursuing their self-reliance through both agricultural and alternative means. The research findings conclude with recommendations for future policy making, settlement administration, and research.

Organizational Structure of the SRS in Nakivale

Nakivale Refugee Settlement is 71 square miles and rests in Isingiro District in Western Uganda. Split in to three zones (Juru, Rubondo, and Base Camp), the settlement is home to approximately 60,000 refugees of primarily Congolese and Rwandan origin. There are also smaller but significant populations of refugees from Somalia, South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Burundi and Liberia. The camp is governed cooperatively by OPM and UNHCR. OPM is in charge of the physical security of the camp and has legal authority over all other organizations who work in the camp (M. Mutaawe, personal communication, April 9, 2014). UNHCR, working cooperatively with OPM, oversees the wellbeing of the refugees and supervises the operations of the various implementing partners (IPs), who directly carry out livelihoods projects and provide services in the settlement. With backing and guidance from UNHCR, IPs distribute food and non-food items, provide social and medical services, and most pertinent to this research, support refugee livelihoods activities (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 23, 2014). Refugee livelihoods, for the purposes of this paper are defined as “the means used to maintain and sustain life” (De Vriese, 2006, p. 1). Within the settlement, this generally entails all activities that refugees carry out to obtain food or income. This includes not only basic activities, such as subsistence agricultural, but also commercial activities, such as running small businesses. This focus on livelihoods in Nakivale directly supports the SRS, and by focusing on promoting refugee livelihood activities, “relief can better prepare displaced people for one of the durable solutions while avoiding the creation of a dependency-syndrome” (De Vriese, 2006, p. 2).

The SRS in Nakivale, in line with the national policy, is based primarily on agriculture. Each refugee household is entitled to a small plot of land (50 meters x 100 meters) which they are expected to cultivate for personal consumption (M. Mutaawe, personal communication, April

9, 2014). In conjunction, food rations are also scaled down over time: Refugees who have been in the settlement between six and seven years have their ration scaled down to 60 percent and those who have stayed more than seven years only receive 50 percent (respondent #25, personal communication, April 29, 2014). However, these cutbacks do not apply to persons with specific needs (PSNs) who are identified by UNHCR, such as disabled or otherwise vulnerable refugees. Regardless of cuts, refugees are always entitled to food aid, and all refugees in Nakivale receive some form of food support (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 23, 2014). This detail is particularly telling of the limitations of the SRS in Nakivale. This food aid is still essential for the majority of the refugees but they are able to supplement it with other agriculture or income. Although not full *self-reliance*, this situation is an important indicator of both the viability of the policy and also the need for further refinements to reach its goals.

Nsamizi is the main livelihoods IP of UNHCR and almost exclusively supports refugee livelihood activities within the settlement (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 23, 2014; M. Mutaawe, personal communication, April 9, 2014). Obbo Raphael, the Livelihoods Field Assistant for Nsamizi in Nakivale, explained that, in line with the SRS, the organization promotes refugee agriculture as the primary way to achieve self-reliance within the settlement. These agricultural activities, which account for approximately 80 percent of the organization's livelihoods programming, range from the provision of seeds to would-be agriculturalists to providing courses and trainings in advanced agricultural practices such as crop rotation and sustainable animal-rearing (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 23, 2014). Furthermore, the organization supports group agricultural initiatives, through which refugees can form groups of 8 to 14 members and receive a large plot of land to grow crops for commercial sale. One representative of the Refugee Law Project explained that these group initiatives have often become quite successful, many being able to export their crops to neighboring Ugandan communities and markets for sale (respondent B, personal communication, April 7, 2014). These commercial operations generally act as a supplement to small-scale farming which refugees carry out for their personal consumption (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 23, 2014).

In addition to agriculture, the organization promotes multiple alternative livelihoods, even though these are not the main focus of the SRS. Nsamizi funds multiple vocational training programs that seek to promote practical "skills development," including for professions ranging from butchery and goat rearing to more technical disciplines such as tailoring, hair cutting,

mobile phone repair, and restaurant management (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 23, 2014). These courses are geared towards giving refugees skills that they can use to create small businesses within the settlement, initiatives that Nsamizi also offer funding for. Raphael explained that although supporting these professions is not as economically efficient as promoting agriculture (a sewing machine for a small tailoring business costs the same as providing seeds for ten personal farms), these programs are vital to providing a diversity of opportunities for refugees to work towards their self-reliance (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 23, 2014). Nsamizi's efforts have been quite successful, and by walking through the central thoroughfares of the settlement, one can see a bustling scene of small shops, groceries, pool halls, and restaurants. Nevertheless, the success of these efforts is limited in scope by the economic restrictions that are inherent to operating in a settlement.²

The biggest IP in the settlement is American Refugee Committee (ARC), a U.S.-based organization that also works to promote refugee livelihoods, but in a less direct capacity than Nsamizi (M. Mutaawe, personal communication, April 9, 2014). ARC primarily promotes refugee protection and maintains access to clean water, but its community services department is in charge of distributing non-food items to refugees. These non-food items are aimed at providing refugees with the things they need to establish a household such as soap, washing bins, baby shawls, etc. (A. Lan, personal communication, April 17, 2014).

Finnish Refugee Council (FRC) is another aid organization in the settlement which handles services for vulnerable persons and provides other livelihoods programs. As an Operating Partner (OP) it works independently of UNHCR, but still coordinates its efforts with the other IPs within the settlement. FRC provides vocational classes that focus on business skills, functional adult literacy, English, French, civic engagement, and youth empowerment. These courses, although not as hands-on as those of Nsamizi, lay the foundations for many refugees to become more active in pursuing their livelihoods. In addition to these trainings, FRC provides minor monetary support for group business or savings initiatives (P. Rwabwogo, personal communication, April 14, 2014). FRC's programming, although not as expansively involved as Nsamizi, helps to provide opportunities for refugees to pursue alternative livelihoods.

² These limitations are discussed further "Difficulties in Pursuing Alternative Livelihoods", p. 37

Challenges in Implementation

Regardless of the often-successful initiatives by OPM, UNHCR, FRC, and the various IPs to promote refugee livelihoods in Nakivale, these efforts continue to face great challenges. One of the most pressing issues to consider when evaluating refugee livelihoods and self-reliance is recognizing the role of refugee dependence on humanitarian aid. This trend, in which refugees' motivation to work and create livelihoods for themselves is stifled because all necessities are provided free-of-charge, is in essence the antithesis of self-reliance. This issue has been well researched in the past (Bagenda et al., 2003; De Vriese, 2006; UNHCR, 2004a, 2004b) and a representative of the RLP asserted that in Uganda, it is "fundamental" for humanitarian efforts to work to reduce "dependence on organizations" (respondent B, personal communication, April 7, 2014). Likewise, Obbo Raphael of Nsamizi explained that in order for refugees to begin to work towards their own self-reliance, a change in attitude and perspective is necessary to embrace their own potential and agency in their lives (personal communication, April 23, 2014).

Many settlement officials contended that refugee dependency detracts from the success of the SRS in Nakivale (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 23, 2014; respondent #15, personal communication, April 14-23, 2014). A representative of UNHCR viewed this problem with concern, stating that the mindset of dependency fostered by many refugees seriously undermines refugee motivation to become self-reliant (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). These negative attitudes often manifest themselves in nonproductive ways. Raphael reported that in the past refugees have even gone so far as to intentionally limit their agricultural production so that they would not be deprived of future food rations (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 23, 2014). Similarly, as a UNHCR representative explained, farmers in recent years have been resistant to UNHCR efforts to create food storage facilities due to a fear that if they utilize the facilities, the created surplus will lead to further food ration reductions (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). These attitudes, although understandable - and in some ways natural - are huge obstacles to refugee self-reliance.

These feelings of dependency can be attributed to a number of different social and economic factors. A UNHCR representative explained that many refugees come from conflict-ridden countries and these troubled backgrounds have created within them a mindset of vulnerability and victimization (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). This negative viewpoint of one's agency is of course highly detrimental to one's motivation and

confidence in becoming self-reliant. Another potential explanation for this perceived dependence is that refugees are often resistant to the SRS simply because many lack knowledge of the motivations behind and of the potential benefits of the policy. One representative of the Refugee Law Project explained that refugees often interpret the SRS as an effort by the Ugandan government to renege on its responsibilities to provide aid to the refugees (respondent B, personal communication, April 7, 2014). Without understanding that there are viable alternatives, it is unsurprising that refugees resist reductions in humanitarian aid such as those included in the SRS.

To lay the framework for the SRS, camp officials routinely attempt to raise refugee awareness of the policy and to alleviate concerns regarding the reduction of aid. While providing various services or distributing goods, UNHCR attempts to make it very clear that these sorts of handouts will not be routine and that their purpose is to help refugees start to work to provide for themselves (respondent #15, personal communication, April 14-23). Additionally, they try to structure their programs in order to naturally lead refugees toward self-reliance. UNHCR will often reward particularly enterprising farmers with additional seeds and land in order to create role models for others to follow as motivation to pursue self-reliance (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). Furthermore, Nsamizi is beginning to require that after a full agricultural season refugees must return previously distributed agricultural inputs, such as seeds or breeding animals. A UNHCR representative contextualized these measures within a larger framework of more rigorous UNHCR policies in Nakivale that have the dual purpose of accomplishing more with ever-decreasing funding and also making handouts conditional on refugee efforts towards self-reliance (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014).

Lack of funding and government support

Another often-mentioned limitation to efforts promoting refugee self-reliance is lack of support from the GoU and international donors. It should be recognized that the refugee responsibilities the GoU has taken on over the past decades are truly huge, especially considering the protracted nature of these situations (respondent A, personal communication, April 4, 2014). Being a developing country itself, Uganda has understandably struggled to adequately meet its international obligations as a host of refugees. In the context of a detrimentally underfinanced OPM, Paul Omach questioned the current material ability of Uganda to meet the international standards for refugee protection (P. Omach, personal communication, April 7, 2014).

Compounding the issue, some contend that it is extremely difficult to adequately provide for Uganda's thousands of refugees considering that many of its own citizens are in desperate need of funding and support as well (respondent C, personal communication, April 8, 2014). In this context it is not surprising that the GoU has struggled to meet its legal and financial obligations in hosting refugees.

However, this lack of government support is troubling for the potential success of the SRS. A representative of the Refugee Law Project explained that the GoU must provide "extensive support" for the implementation of the SRS, and without such guidance it would be "useless" for refugees (respondent B, personal communication, April 7, 2014). Within Nakivale, funding for projects carried out by UNHCR and its IPs is inadequate. Leading staff members of a number of different organizations, with responsibilities ranging from drilling boreholes for clean water to providing non-food items, cited budget as one of the main limitations to their initiatives within the settlement (A. Lan, personal communication, April 17, 2014; O. Raphael, personal communication, April 23, 2014; respondent #24, personal communication, April 23, 2014). This issue is particularly prevalent in programs targeting self-reliance. Anthony Lawot Lan, the head of the Community Services Department of ARC, explained that the funding provided is not enough to provide for the livelihoods of the refugees in Nakivale (A. Lan, personal communication, April 17, 2014).

As a possible explanation for this lack of government support, many have suggested that the policy is designed to primarily serve the interests of the GoU, not those of the refugees. The strategy's reduction of food aid and oversimplification of refugee capacities are seen by one academic as an "abdication of responsibility" on the part of the GoU (P. Omach, personal communication, April 7, 2014). By placing the responsibility of self-reliance on the refugees, often without giving them the freedoms and capacities to meet these expectations, the SRS serves to significantly decrease the financial obligation of the GoU, a benefit which was in fact one of the leading influences on the policy's design (respondent A, personal communication, April 4, 2014). One lawyer viewed the SRS as something which is specifically designed to shield the Uganda government from the financial implications of its refugee responsibilities and that without this buffer, the Ugandan government would be forced to refine and reform the SRS policy by giving the refugees more freedoms in their pursuit of self-reliance (respondent A, personal communication, April 4, 2014). There is clear evidence that the policy was created

partially to decrease the funding needs of the refugees, but it is unfair to blame the government for wanting to lessen the burden that refugees create for the country. The important thing is to ensure that these efforts to ease these obligations respect the rights and welfare of the refugees. It is questionable whether the GoU is making adequate efforts to carry this out.

Challenges for Refugees in Becoming Self-Reliant

Agricultural challenges

Inadequate land

The SRS is based primarily on agriculture and as a result, the foundation of the policy, both symbolically and literally, is the land which refugees are expected to cultivate. However, the land provided to refugees in Nakivale is inadequate in multiple aspects. Many respondents, including academics, camp officials, and refugees, agreed that even if it is cultivated fully (which is often not possible due to weather or lack of inputs) the land given to refugees in Nakivale is often not sufficient to meet 100 percent of a refugee household's food needs (A. Lan, personal communication, April 17, 2014; O. Raphael, personal communication, April 30, 2014; respondent B, personal communication, April 7, 2014; respondent #22, personal communication, April 21, 2014; respondent #35, personal communication, May 3, 2014). Compounding this, the land allocation does not increase in relation to family size, so the many refugees who have large families are additionally disadvantaged.

There are many reasons that the land provided is not enough. As Anthony Lawot Lan explained, this inadequacy is due partially to the conservative approach that OPM takes towards land distribution (A. Lan, personal communication, April 17, 2014). With a history of land conflict with neighboring nationals as well as the 2008 influx of refugees that nearly doubled the settlement's population, OPM has been careful not to overextend the boundaries of the settlement and to save land for future influxes of refugees (Bagenda et al., 2003). Lan explained that although "there is enough land," the GoU's policy in land distribution is based on the expectation that there will be future influxes of refugees (A. Lan, personal communication, April 17, 2014). There are multiple consequences for this conservatism. A Refugee Law Project report explains that land shortages are inherent to trying to implement the SRS in a settlement and that, in Nakivale in particular, the SRS "is likely to fail to cope with the area's land scarcity and social conflict unless it is detached from the local settlement structure" (Bagenda et al., 2003).

Regardless of the amount of land available for allocation in the settlement, there is consensus that the land given to refugees is not enough for self-reliance. In addition to the already concerning status of land allocation in the settlement, a UNHCR representative anticipated that even the current apportionment will be further cut in the near future, a reduction which could lessen the land allocation by as much as half (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). This cut would make the land unquestionably inadequate to create refugee self-reliance as currently encouraged in the SRS.

Furthermore, Raphael explained how it is often difficult for refugees to maintain the integrity of the soil of their plots. The small plot of land that refugees are given is central to their food supply, and they normally cannot afford to implement crop rotation or to allow the soil to lay fallow and rest when its nutrients have been depleted (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 30, 2014). This inherent dilemma in agriculture-based self-reliance has also been documented in past research (UNHCR, 2004). Without more land and without the ability to practice crop rotation, refugee subsistence agriculture will not be sustainable.

The allocated land can be deficient in other ways as well. One respondent explained that the land he was given was too far for him to cultivate efficiently (respondent #23, personal communication, April 21, 2014). This distance and relative isolation can leave fields vulnerable to encroachment and damage by grazing cattle, an issue that has been alleviated in recent years, but is still a significant issue for refugees (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014; respondent #22, personal communication, April 21, 2014). The lack of accessible land fundamentally undermines the viability of the SRS in Nakivale. Although there are many obstacles in the way of ensuring that all refugees have access to adequate land for their self-reliance, it should be viewed as the top priority in efforts to promote the SRS.

Refugees have found a number of different ways to cope with land scarcity. Lan explained that wealthier refugees will often rent the land of others in order to expand their farming capacities (A. Lan, personal communication, April 17, 2014). This practice remains outside of formal channels, however. Formally, refugees can obtain more land by forming groups and creating commercial agricultural enterprises, but it is difficult to form these initiatives for a number of reasons.³ Similarly, refugees often supplement their allocation with bequeathed land from friends or family who have been resettled to a third country (respondent #13, personal

³ These difficulties are discussed further “Challenges in starting small businesses”, p. 38

communication, April 17, 2014). Many refugees utilize this land to expand their agriculture or to open up shops or other businesses, a trend which is especially prominent amongst Somali refugees (respondent #12, personal communication, April 13, 2014; respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014). With this additional land, the SRS is much more practicable and has led to many refugees to have great success in becoming self-reliant. Additional personal acquisitions have allowed multiple farmers to reach even commercial levels of production, exporting their surplus crops for sale outside of the settlement (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Food instability and lack of supplemental income

The agricultural focus of the SRS is naturally dependent on the weather. In Nakivale however, conditions often seriously hinder refugee efforts to create agricultural livelihoods. A representative of UNHCR explained that the fickle and undependable weather of Nakivale can seriously impede the creation of sustainable and dependable food sources from refugee agricultural plots (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). The representative further described the settlement as almost semi-arid and explained that its outlying zones frequently receive very little rain (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). For example, in 2013 there was so little rain that among the households who utilized crop seeds from Nsamizi, almost half of these farms failed (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 30, 2014). When refugees depend on the food that these small plots of land provide, a spell of bad weather can virtually destroy their hopes of being self-reliant. Lan explained that one of the greatest obstacles to refugee self-reliance is the weather and that its volatility in turn creates refugee dependence on food aid (A. Lan, personal communication, April 17, 2014).

Poor weather and other external shocks seriously undermine food security for refugees and in Nakivale, food insecurity is one of the most serious problems facing refugee wellbeing (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014; respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014). Obbo Raphael of Nsamizi explained that one of the chief objectives of the SRS is to give refugees a cushion against future reductions in food rations (personal communication, April 23, 2014). These reductions are a central part of the SRS, and in Nakivale they are routine (O. Raphael, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Almost all refugees who were a part of the study bemoaned the lack of food that they are given. Even Obbo Raphael of Nsamizi admitted that, in reality, the food ration given is about a quarter of the food

that a family needs (personal communication, April 23, 2014). Furthermore, the food given lacks variety, detracting from its nutritional substance and making it impossible for refugees to survive on it alone (respondent #24, personal communication, April 29, 2014; respondent #25, personal communication, April 29, 2014). Refugees supported these concerns: One explained that even with successful agriculture, they are still dependent on food rations (respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014). To deal with this dependency, the many refugees who lack sufficient agriculture are reliant on support from others in and outside of the settlement (respondent #25, personal communication, April 29, 2014). One refugee explained that this support network is central to refugees being able to support themselves and that those who have been resettled to third countries provide invaluable assistance to refugees still in the settlement (respondent #35, personal communication, May 3, 2014).

Even those who owned small businesses often explained that all the money they made from these commercial ventures would have to be used entirely for food (respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014). This trend highlights one of the fundamental problems that the SRS faces in Nakivale: Refugees who lack food security are unable to save and reinvest their income, one of the pillars of creating sustainable self-reliance. One refugee explained that a group he had formed even refused a microloan from an NGO to form a business because they knew that the money would out of necessity be used for food for their families (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014). Additionally, those who find themselves able to set aside some money for savings often times are compelled to use the money to help others in need. One Somali refugee explained that Somali refugees are often unable to save money because they too quickly give it away to others who are in need of food or medical attention, a tendency that is viewed positively and as a central part to Somali culture (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014; respondent #13, personal communication, April 13, 2014). In addition to sharing their saved income, a few business owners reported that they would sometimes even be cheated out of their earned money by those who would ask for a loan and never repay or who would eat in their restaurant and then leave without paying the bill (respondent #5, personal communication, April 12, 2014; respondent #10, personal communication, April 13, 2014). Food insecurity not only threatens refugee survival, but it and these other challenges hamstring the ability of refugees to save and reinvest their income, a

practice which should be central in any refugee efforts to create sustainable livelihoods and self-reliance.

Struggles in adapting to the agricultural requirements of the SRS

The great diversity of refugees in Nakivale creates a number of problems for effective implementation of the SRS. Although the strategy focuses on promoting self-reliance through agriculture, the reality is that many refugees are not agriculturalists. The majority of Somalis, Ethiopians, and Eritreans have little background in agriculture and have found it difficult to adapt to the expectations placed upon them by SRS (respondent #13, personal communication, April 17, 2014). Anthony Lawot Lan explained that this inability to adapt has placed these ethnicities and other non-agriculturalists at a distinct disadvantage when pursuing self-reliance (A. Lan, personal communication, April 17, 2014). However, other NGO workers view this less as an inability and more of an unwillingness. Patrick Rwabwogo, the Field Coordinator and Business Trainer for FRC suggests that in order for refugees to be able to become self-reliant in the settlement they must be able to adapt to agriculture, something which some refugees have been unable to do (P. Rwabwogo, personal communication, April 14, 2014). Regardless of these different perceptions of refugees, the fact remains that they remain disadvantaged within the framework of the SRS.

In response to these difficulties, Assistant Camp Commandant Mark Mutaawe explained that these refugees are helped to become self-reliant primarily via support for business and community livelihoods groups (M. Mutaawe, personal communication, April 9, 2014). Obbo Raphael explained that the activities of Nsamizi are based on the reality that not all refugees can farm and that they need “alternatives” to agriculture (personal communication, April 23, 2014).

A representative of UNHCR explained that it has been very challenging for Somali refugees to adapt to the agricultural expectations of the SRS (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). Although a very small minority, three Somali households have been able to begin practicing agriculture (respondent #14, personal communication, April 9-21, 2014). The experiences of these new Somali agriculturalists are mixed. Those consulted stated that they began to farm out of necessity, but they claim not to have received any assistance in starting their agriculture (respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014; respondent #22, personal communication, April 21, 2014). These farmers faced great difficulties in starting their agriculture and one explained that although it helps them to survive and is “very important,”

she holds that practicing agriculture is “not the way [she] want[s]” to live (respondent #22, personal communication, April 21, 2014). Similarly, another Somali agriculturalist reports that her agricultural initiatives have been met with hostility from other ethnicities and have been damaged by petty theft (respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014). All of these farmers are still dependent on food rations (respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014; respondent #22, personal communication, April 21, 2014). Although it is possible for refugees to adapt to agriculture, forcing them to do so, as the current focus of the SRS largely does, is not only disrespectful but also harms their natural capacity to be self-reliant.

Difficulty accessing services

Within the settlement, UNHCR, OPM, and IPs have a number of livelihoods services and programs, but refugees are frequently unaware of these services or find them difficult to access. Indicative of this lack of knowledge, multiple informants asserted that there were no programs that could benefit their livelihoods (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014; respondent #7, personal communication, April 12, 2014; respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014). One female farmer reported that when she first started her farm, she was unaware that she was even entitled to a plot of land from OPM (respondent #22, personal communication, April 21, 2014). Many other refugees stated that they were aware of certain livelihoods programs, but were unaware of how to access them (respondent #6, personal communication, April 12, 2014; respondent #22, personal communication, April 21, 2014). Furthermore, many reported that there was a language barrier in being able to access services. Multiple participants in English courses provided by FRC stated that one of the main benefits they would receive from knowing English is enhanced access to services and opportunities at the offices of UNHCR, OPM, and the IPs (respondent #17, personal communication, April 16, 2014; respondent #18, personal communication, April 16, 2014; respondent #19, personal communication, April 17, 2014). This belief ignores refugee access to translation services.

In addition to lacking knowledge of certain programs, many refugees explained that some very important facilities are simply too far to access. One often cited example is the vocational school, which is a product of a collaboration between Windle Trust Uganda and UNHCR and provides training for refugees in various skills, most notably tailoring, carpentry, and advanced agriculture. The facility is well-furnished and it holds great promise in providing refugees with the skills necessary to pursue alternative livelihoods. However, many refugees bemoaned the fact

that the school was too far from base camp, and that transportation to and from the vocational school was both expensive and dangerous (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014; respondent #6, personal communication, April 12, 2014). A similar issue exists with the settlement's secondary school. These sorts of oversights in settlement planning are highly detrimental to the livelihood of refugees and should be addressed at once.

Focus on resettlement

One of the biggest obstacles to refugee self-reliance in Nakivale is a mindset which is focused primarily on resettlement to a third-country. Of those refugees interviewed, almost all expressed a desire to be resettled to a third country, most often the United States. The collected data (respondent #21, personal communication, April 21, 2014; P. Omach, personal communication, May 7, 2014) and past scholarship (De Vriese, 2006) clearly demonstrate this trend is particularly pertinent to Somali refugees. One Somali refugee contends that not only does everybody want resettlement, but that resettlement is the “only solution” to the current situation of the refugees (respondent #23, personal communication, April 21, 2014). A 2006 UNHCR report describes the causes behind this trend, specifically in the Somali context:

One of the reasons why many Somali refugees dream about resettlement or to migrate beyond the refugee camps is related to the poor conditions of their life in the camps as well as the slim chances that they will be able to return to their country of origin in the foreseeable future. (De Vriese, p. 11)

This phenomenon has prevented many refugees from confronting and working to overcome the difficult realities of life in the camps, instead focusing on the hope of a new life in a third-country. In one community meeting, members of the Nyakagondo village expressed that besides ongoing issues of food and water security, feelings that they were being overlooked for resettlement was their most pressing grievance (respondent #32, personal communication, April 30, 2014).

This viewpoint causes a number of problems for the ability and willingness of refugees to become self-reliant. Anthony Lawot Lan described this viewpoint as fundamentally “unsustainable” and that it is counterproductive to refugee self-reliance (A. Lan, personal communication, April 17, 2014). From the data collected, there are numerous examples to support his claims. One refugee, who had built a successful pharmacy, said that he did not want to expand his business because he is currently waiting on resettlement to the U.S. (respondent

#11, personal communication, April 13, 2014). Similarly, a currently unemployed man reported that he had stopped looking for a job in Kampala and returned to the settlement because he was waiting for resettlement and did not want to miss his chance (respondent #6, personal communication, April 12, 2014). Furthermore, refugees often view livelihood opportunities in the camp as a way to hasten or ease resettlement. Among the participants in FRC English courses, the principal motivation cited for taking the course was that the refugees wanted to better equip themselves for when they were inevitably (in their view) granted resettlement to a Western country (respondent #17, personal communication, April 16, 2014; respondent #18, personal communication, April 16, 2014; respondent #19, personal communication, April 17, 2014). Few refugees question this assumption, even when they were unaware of the status of their resettlement application.

One of the root causes of these widespread preoccupations, which are particularly pronounced among Somalis, has been the policies of the United States in regards to resettlement (respondent #14, personal communication, April 9-21, 2014; respondent #15, personal communication, April 14 - 23, 2014). Beginning in 2010, the United States recently launched an ambitious plan to resettle around 6,000 Somali refugees from Nakivale to the United States (Tumushabe, 2010). Currently, around 75 percent of those selected have been resettled but the rest are still amidst the process, which is long, bureaucratic, and vague (respondent #14, personal communication, April 9-21, 2014). During this four year wait, refugees have been given very little information as to their status, leaving many in a contradictory state of certainty of their departure but uncertainty of when or where, further paralyzing their efforts to become self-reliant (respondent #14, personal communication, April 9-21, 2014).

A representative of UNHCR explained that in addition to its detrimental effects on individual initiative, the focus that refugees place on resettlement hurts their ability to participate in group-based livelihood activities. Indeed, many groups lose members or completely fall apart because of resettlement of one or multiple of its members (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). Adding to this trend, a Somali leader explained that the expectation of resettlement causes refugees to be less likely to invest time and money in group business ventures (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014). One refugee asserts that stability is essential to creating self-reliance both individually but also in group settings, and resettlement has, with the frequent arrivals and departures of refugees, made group collaboration

extremely difficult (respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014). Tellingly, this same refugee asserted that the only place to find livelihood stability is in the United States (respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014).

UNHCR and the various IPs in the settlement have made efforts to clarify the requirements and processes of resettlement programs. These efforts, which take the form of various trainings, announcements, and other sensitization programs, have attempted to give refugees clear information and reasonable expectations regarding their likelihood and schedule of resettlement. However, staff members of ARC admitted that these efforts have often proven to be ineffective, citing the tendency of refugees to ignore this information and hold on to their oftentimes unrealistic hopes of resettlement (respondent 15, personal communication, April 14-23, 2014). Although it is natural for refugees to hope for a better life elsewhere, this focus is distracting from the realities of their situation and discourages productive efforts towards self-reliance.

Difficulties in Pursuing Alternative Livelihood Strategies

Efforts to promote entrepreneurship in the settlement

Among the refugees of Nakivale, many have chosen, either out of preference or necessity, to start small businesses as an alternative to or as a supplement to subsistence agriculture. In the case of Somalis especially, who for the most part do not farm, many derive their livelihoods via small businesses and outside connections (respondent #14, personal communication, April 9-21, 2014). These activities are viewed by some Somali refugees as being the only option for their survival (respondent #6, personal communication, April 12, 2014). In order to promote entrepreneurship in the settlement, FRC has a number of courses which seek to promote refugee skills in creating and running small businesses. These classes focus on practical skills which can be utilized within the settlement (P. Rwabwogo, personal communication, April 14, 2014). The students of the class described the main objective of the class as securing self-reliance and that starting businesses is the best way to pursue this goal (respondent #16, personal communication, April 15, 2014). The group surveyed had plans to create a business together, for which they would receive material support from FRC (P. Rwabwogo, personal communication, April 14, 2014; respondent #16, personal communication, April 15, 2014). This course is a great program on the part of FRC, but is only able to serve a tiny fraction of the refugee population.

On a larger scale, a UNHCR representative explained that one of the ongoing initiatives of UNHCR is to help refugees expand and commercialize their agricultural operations (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). The representative also explained that refugees are frequently taken advantage of by outside businessmen who buy refugee crops at cut-rate prices when weather conditions are unfavorable. In response to this, UNHCR has provided refugees with personal food stores to promote food stability and as a result self-reliance. UNHCR has plans to open large-scale food stores for farmers' groups to use to store their crops and provide stability in supply and price (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014). These efforts hold promise to promote more widespread agricultural self-reliance.

Challenges in starting small businesses

Despite official efforts to promote small businesses and entrepreneurship, there are still significant obstacles to both. Almost all of the business owners who took part in the research bemoaned the lack of customers for their businesses, which many described as the biggest obstacle to their self-reliance (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014; respondent #5, personal communication, April 12, 2014; respondent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014; respondent #9, personal communication, April 13, 2014; respondent #10, personal communication, April 13, 2014). A representative of the Refugee Law Project explained how this issue is inherent to the settlement system and that the lack of economic activity in settlements means that the income from small business is not enough to support the refugees who own them (respondent B, personal communication, April 7, 2014). Further compounding these issues, one informant described how markets even on the borders of the settlement are too far and that the journey there is too dangerous to make regularly (respondent #9, personal communication, April 13, 2014). This isolation from outside economic activity is a natural consequence of living in a settlement. Conversely, other refugees who live outside of the central areas of the settlement have difficulty attracting customers and accessing markets (respondent #26, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Additionally, weather and other external shocks can negatively affect the supply and demand for crops, creating opportunities for outside businessmen to come in to the settlement and take advantage of the situation and pay unfair prices to the refugees in buying their crops (respondent D, personal communication, April 24, 2014).

In addition to a lack of customers, refugees cited multiple difficulties in creating investment or business groups. Although refugees largely agree that these are positive and can lead to success in self-reliance, they feel that there is not enough support for these initiatives (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014; respondent #7, personal communication, April 12, 2014; respondent #11, personal communication, April 13, 2014; respondent #12, personal communication, April 13, 2014). One refugee assumed that refugees do not receive loans because they are untrustworthy and their situation is too unstable (respondent #3, personal communication, April 10, 2014). Particularly among the Somali refugee community, the uncertainty in regards to their resettlement has made it difficult for that particular community to create lasting groups and associations.

One other often cited obstacle to having a business in the settlement is a lack of trust of other refugees and of continued stability. One refugee explained that Somalis, although a closely knit group, do not trust each other enough to form lasting business partnerships (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014). Some Somali business owners attributed their personal attitudes of distrust to past incidents of theft or delinquency on loans (respondent #5, personal communication, April 12, 2014; respondent #10, personal communication, April 13, 2014). One Somali was able to create a successful investment group, but he attributes this success to his trust in the other members of the group, who were his relatives and closest friends (respondent #11, personal communication, April 13, 2014). The uncertainty of Somali resettlement compounds this issue (respondent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014). Spreading accurate knowledge about resettlement would help to create more stability in the Somali community and would motivate them to invest in more stable livelihoods.

Many other refugees also cited a lack of opportunities in the settlement to use skills that they had acquired from NGO programs. Members of a tailoring class sponsored by Nsamizi made it clear that they valued and were thankful for the new skills they were learning, but that after completing the class, there would be few opportunities to create a business due to the prohibitively high cost of sewing machines and the lack of microcredit available to them (respondent #26, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Upon completing vocational or business courses offered by the various IPs in the settlement, refugees often are confronted with the fact that there are not customers for their new business or that they cannot access the equipment or funding necessary to put to use their new skills. One Eritrean refugee explained

that he was about to complete a class offered at the computer center which would teach him videography and editing skills. However, he worried that he would not find many opportunities to utilize these skills within the settlement and if he did, the equipment is hard to access and expensive to rent (respondent #4, personal communication, April 10, 2014). These challenges are often unavoidable for those living in a settlement, and highlight the prohibitive circumstances created by trying to become self-reliance within a settlement.

Recommendations

International Donors and UNHCR

Create food ration backup plans for bad weather - Allow for some flexibility with ration cutbacks in the case of bad weather or failed harvests. Many refugees only survive during these times due to assistance from others within and outside of the settlement and if this support structure were to diminish many refugees would be in serious danger of not having enough food.

Government of Uganda

Extend refugee benefits to those living outside of the settlement - Although the settlement system is conducive to aid distribution and subsistence agriculture, there will unavoidably be refugees who choose to opt-out of the system due to greater livelihood opportunities in urban centers. The rights of these refugees must be recognized and they should not have to forsake their benefits in order to find a better life outside of the settlement system.

Reconsider integration as a more permanent solution for long-term refugees - Reassess the assumption that refugees are security threats and analyze the research supporting local integration as a beneficial solution for the host country. The settlement system inherently limits the ability for refugees to maximize their potential for self-reliance in both agriculture and non-agricultural disciplines.

Allocate more land to refugees – It is clear that land allocated to refugees is inadequate in many ways. If the SRS is to remain based on agriculture, then refugees must have access to more land.

Camp Officials

Improve and expand awareness of the requirements and likelihood of resettlement - Expand efforts to sensitize refugees about resettlement and attempt to make the process more transparent. Help refugees to understand that to improve their current situations they should invest in sustainable livelihoods within the settlement.

Provide transportation to and from markets and schools – Provide transportation for refugees between populated areas and distant schools and markets. Without this, refugees are unable to access these services and only those with the means to use private transportation are able utilize these invaluable resources.

Offer agricultural training for refugees - Although not ideal, it is important to give refugees who have not practiced agriculture in the past the opportunities to learn in order to adapt better to the requirements of the SRS.

Carry out a comprehensive assessment of current refugee population and land usage in Nakivale - The uncertainty surrounding the actual populations of refugees within the settlement as well as how much land is currently being used prevents any effective long-term planning for refugee agriculture and land allocation.

Future Researchers

Investigate role of dependency in refugee self-reliance - Dependency is a complicated topic which is outside the scope of this research, however it is essential in understanding the complex relationship between refugees and humanitarian aid agencies. Understanding this topic can help to improve the efficiency and sustainability of refugee support.

Examine more closely the role that inter-ethnicity relations have in livelihoods and self-reliance - Tensions and conflicts between different ethnicities within the settlement are prominent and threaten to disrupt the security and economic stability of many refugees in the settlement. The causes, effects, and possible solutions to this issue need to be investigated further and implications considered in the implementation of the SRS.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that although the implementation of SRS in Nakivale has enjoyed moderate success in promoting refugee self-reliance agriculturally, there still remain serious deficiencies in efforts to provide refugees alternative opportunities to support themselves. The agricultural focus of the SRS in Nakivale works well for some refugees but even this system is vulnerable to the poor weather of the settlement area and also hamstrung by inadequate land. More institutional mechanisms need to be put in place to help struggling farmers ensure their food security. Additionally, the policy must provide more opportunities to pursue alternative livelihoods for refugees who cannot or will not farm. Overall, the SRS needs to be expanded and refined to accommodate the great diversity of refugees and their situations within Uganda.

The policy itself is progressive in its goals for refugee well-being but continues to limit itself to the settlement system, which perpetuates inherent obstacles to self-reliance, primarily the lack of economic activity. This system also harshly neglects the many refugees who live outside of the settlements. This research has demonstrated that the settlement system seriously limits the viability of the SRS. The study has multiple implications for Ugandan refugee policy and sheds light on the many complex struggles of refugees in becoming self-reliant. The SRS is a progressive innovation in refugee affairs but still requires improvement in order to bring about the great innovations that it promises.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Research Photos



Photo 1: Brickmaking workshop at the Nakivale vocational school. Although the vocational school is well funded and equipped, many refugees are unable to access it due to its remoteness in relation to the population centers of the settlement. *(Photo by Erik Svedberg)*



Photo 2: Nsamizi-sponsored goat-rearing enterprise in Kashojwa village. Nsamizi helps to sponsor many refugees with successful group business and agricultural initiatives throughout the settlement. *(Photo by Erik Svedberg)*

Appendix II: Consent Form

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in my study! I am an American undergraduate student currently studying towards my bachelor degree with the School for International Training, based in Gulu. I am currently conducting a 4-week long independent study project in Nakivale Refugee Settlement. My research focuses on the ways that refugees are able to support themselves and how the Government of Uganda's policies and programs affect them.

Please understand that your participation in my research is completely voluntary. If you do not want to participate or don't feel comfortable answering any of my questions, please let me know and I can ask another question or we can stop the interview. Your name will only be used if you allow me to, but other identifying characteristics (age, gender, nationality, profession) may be used.

This research, including what you tell me, will be used in a research report which will be accessible at the SIT office in Gulu (Plot 54, Lower Churchill drive, Gulu, Uganda).

Thank again for your help and participation!

Consent:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

I give permission to use my name in the report: Yes No

I give permission to be recorded by the researcher: Yes No

Erik Svedberg
0794158018
svedberg@gwu.edu

SIT: Post Conflict Transformation
Plot 54, Lower Churchill drive, Gulu, Uganda

Appendix III: List of Respondents

#	Respondents	Location	Date
Key Informants			
	Dr. Paul Omach, Professor, Makerere University	Kampala	April 7, 2014
	Dr. Paul Omach, Professor, Makerere University	Kampala	April 25, 2014
	Dr. Paul Omach, Professor, Makerere University	Kampala	May 7, 2014
	Dr. Paul Omach, Professor, Makerere University	Kampala	May 9, 2014
	Mark Mutaawe, Assistant Camp Commandant for Base Camp Zone	Nakivale	April 9, 2014
	Patrick Rwabwogo, FRC Field Coordinator and Business Trainer	Nakivale	April 14, 2014
	Anthony Lawot Lan, ARC Community Development Officer, Head of Community Services	Nakivale	April 17, 2014
	Obbo Raphael, Nsamizi Livelihoods Field Assistant	Nakivale	April 23, 2014
	Obbo Raphael, Nsamizi Livelihoods Field Assistant	Nakivale	April 30, 2014
Academics and Camp Officials			
A	Interview - Ugandan Lawyer	Kampala	April 4, 2014
B	Interview – Livelihoods Representative of Refugee Law Project	Kampala	April 7, 2014
C	Interview – Representative of International Refugee Rights Initiative	Kampala	April 8, 2014
D	Interviews - Representative of UNHCR	Nakivale	April 24, 2014 May 5, 2014
Nakivale Interviews			
1	Interview – Somali refugee, community cultural leader	Nakivale	April 10, 2014
2	Interview – Eritrean refugee, female	Nakivale	April 10, 2014
3	Interview – Eritrean refugee, male guest house and restaurant owner	Nakivale	April 10, 2014
4	Interview – Ethiopian refugee, male youth	Nakivale	April 10, 2014
5	Interview – Somali refugee, female business owner	Nakivale	April 12, 2014
6	Group Interview – 3 Somali refugees, male community leaders	Nakivale	April 12, 2014
7	Group Interview – 6 Somali refugees, male youth and community leaders	Nakivale	April 12, 2014
8	Group Interview – 4 Somali refugees, female shop owners and 1 farmer	Nakivale	April 12, 2014
9	Interview – Somali refugee, female businesswoman	Nakivale	April 13, 2014
10	Interview – Somali refugee, female shop owner	Nakivale	April 13, 2014
11	Interview – Somali refugee, male pharmacy owner and leader of community investment group	Nakivale	April 13, 2014
12	Interview – Somali refugee, female tea shop and restaurant owner	Nakivale	April 13, 2014
13	Interview – Somali refugee, female community leader	Nakivale	April 13, 2014

14	Informal Interviews – Somali refugee, female community leader	Nakivale	April 9 – 21, 2014
15	Informal Interviews – Ugandan staff of ARC Community Services Office	Nakivale	April 14 - 23, 2014
16	Group Interview – Participants in FRC business course, 9 refugees, Congolese men and women	Nakivale	April 15, 2014
17	Group Interview – Participants in FRC English course, 8 refugees, Burundian, Congolese, and Rwandan men and women	Nakivale	April 16, 2014
18	Group Interview – Participants in FRC English course, 14 refugees, Congolese men and women	Nakivale	April 16, 2014
19	Group Interview – Participants in FRC English course, 37 refugees, Congolese men and women, 1 Somali man	Nakivale	April 17, 2014
20	Interview – Rwandan refugee, male business owner	Nakivale	April 19, 2014
21	Interview – Somali refugee, female community leader	Nakivale	April 21, 2014
22	Interview – Somali refugee, female farmer and business owner	Nakivale	April 21, 2014
23	Interview – Congolese refugee, unemployed youth	Nakivale	April 21, 2014
24	Interview – Representative of ARC water and sanitation program	Nakivale	April 23, 2014
25	Informal interviews – Leading staff of Samaritan’s Purse	Nakivale	April 29, 2014
26	Focus group discussion – Participants in Nsamizi tailoring school, 28 students, male and female, 4 Ugandan nationals	Nakivale	April 30, 2014
30	Focus group discussion – Members of Nsamizi sponsored female farming association, 5 Rwandan women	Nakivale	April 30, 2014
31	Focus group discussion – Members of Nsamizi sponsored butchery group, 5 Congolese and Rwandan men	Nakivale	April 30, 2014
32	Zonal meeting Nyakagondo village – over 100 mixed ethnicity men and women (observation)	Nakivale	April 30, 2014
33	Group interview – Members of Nsamizi-sponsored goat rearing group, 5 mixed ethnicity men	Nakivale	May 2, 2014
34	Group interview – Members of Nsamizi-sponsored carpentry association, 2 Congolese men	Nakivale	May 2, 2014
35	Interview - Congolese refugee, unemployed youth	Nakivale	May 3, 2014