

# INTER-AGENCY REGIONAL ANALYSTS NETWORK

## BRIDGING THE GAP

Long-Term Implications for South Sudanese  
Refugees in West Nile, Uganda

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2016, fighting broke out in Juba, the capital of South Sudan. Over the following weeks, as the vice president, Riek Machar fled through the forests of Greater Equatoria, the country's civil war, until then relatively quiet in the border region, exploded. Within months, hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese refugees had crossed Uganda's border, and by August 2017, nearly one million people had been displaced, the vast majority to the West Nile sub-region in Uganda's northwest. Though the country has upheld its long-standing commitment to displaced people by settling these refugees outside of a camp structure, allocating land, and allowing freedom of movement, the sheer number of the displaced has strained services, degraded natural resources, taxed local coping mechanisms, and threatened the ability of the government and international partners to manage South Sudan's exodus.

The humanitarian emergency that has unfolded in West Nile has only compounded long-standing difficulties within the sub-region's development. Before the influx, Northern Uganda had some of the worst indicators of multidimensional poverty in the country. It has historically suffered from violent conflict from rebel groups including the infamous Lord's Resistance Army. Agricultural development has suffered with the collapse of the cotton sector and diminished productivity due to poor agricultural practices. Before the crisis across the border, the majority of the population, like many of the newly arrived refugees, was engaged in subsistence agriculture amidst crumbling schools, poorly stocked health centers, broken roads, and nearly inaccessible markets.

The huge influx of people into the West Nile sub-region threatens to collapse these health and education services, heavily degrade the natural environment, and raise tensions around the allocation and control of valuable resources. However, unlike the camp systems that dominate international refugee responses, these challenges may be offset by strategic and intelligent investment in long-term, durable solutions for refugees that bridge the traditional humanitarian/development 'gap' in funding, planning, and operations. Specific programs such as the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHoPE) strategic framework were already in place and committed to sharing the wealth of funding among the refugee and host communities for the benefit of both, but more is needed.

Uganda's policy is integral to building strong host communities and establishing a solid foundation for eventual return. The international community, however, must be realistic. The conflict in South Sudan has no end in sight, and as long as violence rages alongside reports of brutal human rights violations, refugees will not return. Even if the conflict ends in the near future, refugees will analyze their own risks and return slowly and in a piecemeal fashion. The outlook for the medium-term, through 2025 according to this report, is extended displacement due to protracted conflict, but with a desire to return nonetheless. Planning, therefore, should acknowledge this basic assumption to better coordinate donors, operational partners, the Ugandan government and a burgeoning private sector with the goal to build a strong and stable response that incorporates the needs of all people in the sub-region.

Though it is greatly strained, Uganda's policy towards refugee integration and support is a model in a time of unparalleled displacement worldwide. It is by no means perfect, nor will it be going forward. The process of refugee hosting will present significant challenges as well as important opportunities for the peoples of West Nile. Markets will expand alongside competition for natural resources and pressure on services. If managed well, the benefits could greatly outweigh the consequences and leave the sub-region with better services, better market access, and a higher standard of living. However, without a serious commitment to funding the refugee response and supporting this unique model, it will collapse. The case comparison with Tanzania proves this well. The commitment to refugees by a host government is a significant political and economic risk, and it must be supported in order to succeed.

The South Sudanese refugees in West Nile will eventually return home. However, for the moment, they have no choice in their displacement, and little hope for a rapid return. Planning for a medium-term displacement, and funding that response, will guarantee that refugees have a strong foundation for return and that host communities will continue to succeed after refugees have gone home. Bridging that traditional 'humanitarian-development gap' is integral to setting a standard for displaced people worldwide and building a consensus that refugees are anything but a burden.

## METHODOLOGY

The information contained in this report is the result of an extensive desk review of relevant issues in Northern Uganda including land conflict in West Nile, historic refugee flows both into and out of South Sudan and West Nile, issues surrounding refugee returns, current analysis of the refugee situation in Uganda since the Juba violence in July 2016, and a case study of a similar refugee response in Tanzania in the mid-1990s that ultimately fell apart under the strain of refugee numbers from the Rwandan genocide, the Burundian civil war, and the First and Second Congo War. This research provided a baseline for key informant interviews with individuals from operational NGOs, donor agencies, the Ugandan government, and independent analysts in Kampala, Adjumani, Yumbe, and Imvepi. Focus group discussions with refugee and host communities were conducted in PAGRINYA and IMVEPI settlements in Adjumani and Arua Districts, respectively.

These qualitative inputs inform a structured analysis that identifies key drivers and their possible evolutions. Drivers deemed highly impactful but relatively certain are heavy trends – climate change, demographics, pre-influx development indicators, and gender inequality. Drivers that are contingent upon a successful bridging of the humanitarian-development gap and therefore more uncertain are key drivers, labeled here as implications for a long-term refugee settlement – markets, services, natural resources, and livelihoods. In any future-oriented analysis, the acknowledgment of disruptors, drivers with the potential to cause disorder or turmoil, must be recognized and incorporated into any strategic planning. In this case, those entail multiple vectors for potential conflict, an increase of refugees beyond expectations, and the possibility that long-term presence of refugees will become a political issue at the local or national level within Uganda.

As this paper is written for advocacy purposes, no scenarios are presented for future strategic planning. Actors who wish to hypothesize outcomes for the various drivers may do so in their own strategic thinking. The overall objective for this paper, however, is to emphasize the need for long-term solutions planning and action as early as possible. Refugees present several challenges and opportunities over the medium to long-term future, and this report is an attempt to build an analytic foundation for long-term strategic thinking.

## KEY ASSUMPTIONS

The following key assumptions provide the underlying foundation to this analysis. They are included as a guide to the paper to frame thinking and planning around the refugee response.

**Extended Displacement** – The previous influx of South Sudanese refugees that fled to the West Nile sub-region of Uganda stayed from approximately 1994 through 2010. This extended displacement is in line with the mean duration of displacement for refugees worldwide, estimated between ten and fifteen years.<sup>1</sup> The South Sudanese government has said it will “silence the sounds of guns” by 2020 through national dialogue.<sup>2</sup> However, few analysts or South Sudanese have faith in this national dialogue, as it has not properly opened channeled to the armed opposition. If the national dialogue does succeed and conflict ends by 2020, the return

<sup>1</sup> Devictor, Xavier and Quy-Toan Do. 15 September 2016. “[How Many Years Do Refugees Stay in Exile?](#)” The World Bank Group.

<sup>2</sup> Radio Tamazuj. 6 February 2017. “[South Sudan Government Says Planning to Silence Guns of War by 2020.](#)”

timeline will be a long one as refugees evaluate security risks and plan their repatriation, leaving behind dependent women and children who take advantage of better services in Uganda while heads of household rebuild a life in South Sudan.<sup>3</sup>

**Protracted Conflict – The Second Sudanese Civil War** lasted from 1983 to 2005 and ended with a peace that presented opportunities for power and advancement for both sides through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.<sup>4</sup> The current conflict is regarded as widely more intractable, as tribal identities have hardened and the view towards winner-take-all elections closes the door to negotiated peace and power sharing. Though the South Sudanese government has made significant military advancements in the first months of 2017, the conflict in the Equatorias has proven brutal and intractable. With South Sudanese rebels establishing bases in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of the Congo,<sup>5</sup> the likelihood for a quick, military solution to the conflict is highly unlikely.

**Desire to Return –** The major reason for displacement from South Sudan at the moment is the conflict in the Greater Equatoria region. It should be clear that were it not for extreme violence in the Equatorias, there would be no refugee exodus on this scale. Every refugee consulted for this project wants to return home. The South Sudanese in Northern Uganda are not economic migrants, and the recognition of a long-term, protracted response including settlement and a focus on development and livelihoods should not be seen as a move towards permanent displacement. Rather, the emphasis on long-term solutions planning should be seen as boosting the development of Northern Uganda while providing a solid, stable platform for eventual return of South Sudanese refugees.

## TANZANIA: A CASE STUDY

Shortly after independence in 1962, Tanzania's founding father Julius Nyerere envisioned an 'open door' policy for refugees entering Tanzania, based on pan-African ideals that saw refugees as victims of political oppression and the fight for post-colonial freedom. His leadership created a Tripartite Partnership Model between the government of Tanzania, Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS), and UNHCR. In 1967, the government signed the Arusha Declaration, encouraging refugees to achieve self-sufficiency through the establishment of settlements similar to those in Uganda. The Tanzanian government provided land for these settlements and a legal environment that allowed refugees to seek opportunities within the country. Uganda's current model is built upon similar principles, principles that ultimately eventually collapsed under the weight of sheer numbers, lack of donor support, and domestic politics.

Tanzania's refugee policy began to change after Nyerere stepped down in 1985. By the early 1980s, the president's African Socialist Ujamaa policies had failed, forcing his successor Ali Hassan Mwinyi to accept a bailout from the International Monetary Fund. The structural adjustment and democratization policies required by the IMF increased competition amongst political actors while reducing the importance of agricultural labor through neoliberal economic policies. Shortly thereafter, some of the worst conflicts the continent had ever seen exploded in Rwanda, Burundi, and Zaire, forcing over one million refugees into Tanzania. The tide quickly turned against refugees. Without strong political leadership or economic utility, refugees became a wedge issue for local politicians.

Anti-refugee rhetoric was a common feature of the 1995 campaign. Benjamin Mkapa won the election in 1995 and began his mandate by expelling refugees. However, regional dynamics were working against him. Shortly

<sup>3</sup> Hovil, Lucy. November 2010. "[Hoping for Peace, Afraid of War: The Dilemmas of Repatriation and Belonging on the Borders of Uganda and South Sudan.](#)" UNHCR Research Paper No. 196.

<sup>4</sup> Young, John. (2012) *The Fate of Sudan: The Origins and Consequences of a Flawed Peace Process*. London: Zed Books.

<sup>5</sup> HSBA for Sudan and South Sudan. May 2017. "[Spreading Fallout: The Collapse of the ARCSS and New Conflict along the Equatorias-DRC Border.](#)"

thereafter, the First Congo War displaced millions in an unfolding humanitarian disaster. The influx only exacerbated anti-refugee feelings. By December 1996, 483,000 refugees were forcibly returned to Rwanda<sup>6</sup> as a result of Tanzanian ambivalence and political pressures from the RPF.<sup>7</sup> In 1998, the country's 'Refugee Act' effectively ended the "open door policy" by suppressing many rights previously granted under the old policies. These included restrictions on political speech and possessing animals, an important livelihood restriction for the peasant farmers who made up the majority of refugees. It furthermore limited refugee mobility by designating specific areas for settlement and restricting refugee vehicle use, effectively recreating a camp system to replace the former settlements.<sup>8</sup>

Tanzania's history should inform how donors react to neighboring Uganda. Nyerere's open door policy was very much tied to his personality and his leadership. Once he was gone, the policy faded under pressure stemming from structural adjustment and the Washington Consensus. The NRM support to refugees is based heavily on a history of conflict and displacement for politicians at the highest level of government. However, the history of Uganda's civil strife is nearly 30 years old and holds less weight in the minds of younger Ugandans, nearly half of whom are under the age of 15 and have no memory of the trials and tribulations that refugees face.

Both Tanzania in the 1990s and Uganda today welcomed an unprecedented number of refugees (from 2% to 5% of their population).<sup>9</sup> In Tanzania, economic and political upheavals changed the government's attitudes towards refugees and reversed a progressive policy that worked and gave tangible benefits to both the country and to host communities. Many of the challenges and opportunities outlined in this report were also present in Tanzania's refugee settlements. The transition to a camp system was not dictated by necessity, but instead arose out of a lack of support for government policies and collapse of domestic political commitments to refugees. While the two countries are separated by nearly two decades of humanitarian thought and action, the failure of Tanzania's progressive refugee policy cannot be ignored in light of Uganda's current challenges and commitments.

## HEAVY TRENDS

Heavy trends are considered key drivers of change that nevertheless are relatively well known in their immediate evolution. Heavy trends are high impact and foundational to a system. In addition to their short-term impact, these trends generally display a strong degree of inertia and continue along relatively known parameters into the medium-term future. These trends were present before the refugee influx and will remain important even after returns are completed.

### Climate Change

Like nearly every country in sub-Saharan Africa, Uganda is vulnerable to climate change and the associated risks to agricultural productivity, public health, food security, and environmental sustainability. Northern Uganda is particularly vulnerable due to the high number of its people who rely on subsistence agriculture and a cyclical history of drought and flooding.<sup>10</sup> Estimates from 2008 believed that Uganda's land temperatures could rise by as much as 1.5°C through 2030. The perception of drought in Northern Uganda, in areas such as Karamoja and in focus group discussions in West Nile, is that drought risk has increased and that climate change is to blame. However, quantitative data supporting or refuting such perceptions in Northern Uganda is

<sup>6</sup> Ogata, S. (2005) *The Turbulent Decade: Confronting the Refugee Crisis of the 1990s*, New York: WW Norton.

<sup>7</sup> Beth Elise Whitaker (2002), "Changing priorities in refugee protection: the Rwandan repatriation from Tanzania", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 21, no. 1 and 2

<sup>8</sup> Refworld, 15 April 1999. Tanzania: Refugees Act, 1998, National Legislative Bodies / National Authorities.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations (2015). *International migrant stock 2015: maps*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

<sup>10</sup> Okumu, David Livingstone. 4 December 2013. "[Northern Uganda to Bear Brunt of Climate Change.](#)" *The Daily Monitor*.

difficult to obtain due to missing historical data.<sup>11</sup> Sub-regional variations in East Africa are poorly understood, in general.

The danger in climate change is an increasing volatility in seasonal rains, including the shifting of the rainy seasons. Northern Uganda is projected to see increased rainfalls between March and May, with potentially 42% more precipitation through 2080. However, the rains through July and September are projected to decrease between 14% and 41% over the same period.<sup>12</sup> Climate-smart adaptations to agriculture are needed to mitigate the impact of a changing climate and its effect on crop yield. Already West Nile has had two years of poor rains, with participants in focus group discussions debating the impact of 2017 rains.

Beyond crop production, the effect of climate change on disease and pests is great. Increased temperatures can allow for malaria to spread into areas where it was previously unknown, though it must be said that malaria is already endemic to nearly all of West Nile. Flooding can lead to cholera, typhus, and bilharzia outbreaks. Previously poor agricultural practices as well as the dramatic overexploitation of forests as part of the refugee movement will exacerbate flooding even without any potential changes in potential rainfall that climate change may bring. This is perhaps the greatest takeaway from thinking about long-term impacts of climate change on Uganda. There have been limited models for Uganda's climate change outcomes. However, the degradation of land and natural resources, especially forest cover, has done significant damage to Uganda's soil fertility, soil erosion, and crop yields. Climate change and the loss of forest cover going forward will significantly affect agricultural output and food security, especially in refugee zones.

## Demography

Uganda has one of the world's quickest growing populations. The crude birth rate of 43/1000 people is the 7<sup>th</sup> highest in the world.<sup>13</sup> Its 3.3% annual population growth means that its overall population will increase from 41.3m in 2017 to 53.5m by 2025 with the associated strains on healthcare, education, and youth unemployment. Uganda's population is overwhelmingly young, with 48.1% of the population under the age of 15. Though a young population is potentially a great asset to a growing economy via a large labor force, Uganda's development challenges mean that it cannot take full advantage of the demographic dividend.

The refugee influx has added to the challenges in the north. Key refugee hosting districts have seen their populations boom. Adjumani district has 227,857 refugees as of 4 August 2017,<sup>14</sup> surpassing its overall population of 225,251 in the 2014 Ugandan census.<sup>15</sup> Yumbe's initial population of 484,822 in 2014 has added 276,710 in the Bidibidi settlements alone. Arua's local population in 2014 was 782,077. In midsummer 2017, it was adding 900 to 1000 people every day in Imvepi before that settlement was closed to new numbers, topping out at 123,019. These numbers are manageable in part due to low population density in West Nile; however, there are real questions around carrying capacity and the ability for marginal land to provide for such increases. The rapid population growth rate is obviously a disruption to planning and development priorities for overworked government officials and development partners, who will need to skill up and scale up their teams in the region.

Refugees themselves add to the population not only now but in the future. Additional research into family planning and births in the refugee community is needed. South Sudan averaged 5.02 births per woman in 2014

<sup>11</sup> Jordaan, Andries. May 5, 2015. [Karamoja, Uganda Drought Risk Assessment: Is Drought to Blame for Chronic Food Insecurity?](#) International Rescue Committee: p 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Mercy Corps. (2016) Karamoja Strategic Resilience Assessment: Final Report.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank. [Birth Rate, crude \(per 1000 people\)](#). Accessed 29 March 2017.

<sup>14</sup> UNHCR. (2017) ["South Sudan Situation: Adjumani."](#)

<sup>15</sup> Ugandan Bureau of Statistics. (2014) ["National Population and Housing Census 2014."](#)

for a crude birth rate of 36/1000.<sup>16</sup> Conflict and displacement will surely affect that number, but to what degree is unknown at the moment. Considering the high proportion of women and children amongst refugee communities, it is possible that birth rates could remain low; however the data needs to be studied now and into the future as communities become settled and move into a development stage, in which population growth rates could grow again at an unsustainable pace.

### Low Development Indicators

Strong economic growth and significant poverty reduction at the national level in Uganda belies high sub-regional disparities. Development indicators in West Nile region remain tremendously weak, as the populations live in one of the most disadvantaged area in the country. In 2017, West Nile's Multidimensional Poverty Index, an international measure of acute poverty, is 0.484, far above the national average (0.367).<sup>17</sup> The MPI reflects multiple deprivations across health, education and living standards. West Nile region is the second lowest developed region in Uganda, after Karamoja, with 84.9% of people multidimensionally poor, according to the MPI (national: 69.9%) and 58.7% living in severe poverty (national: 37.2%).

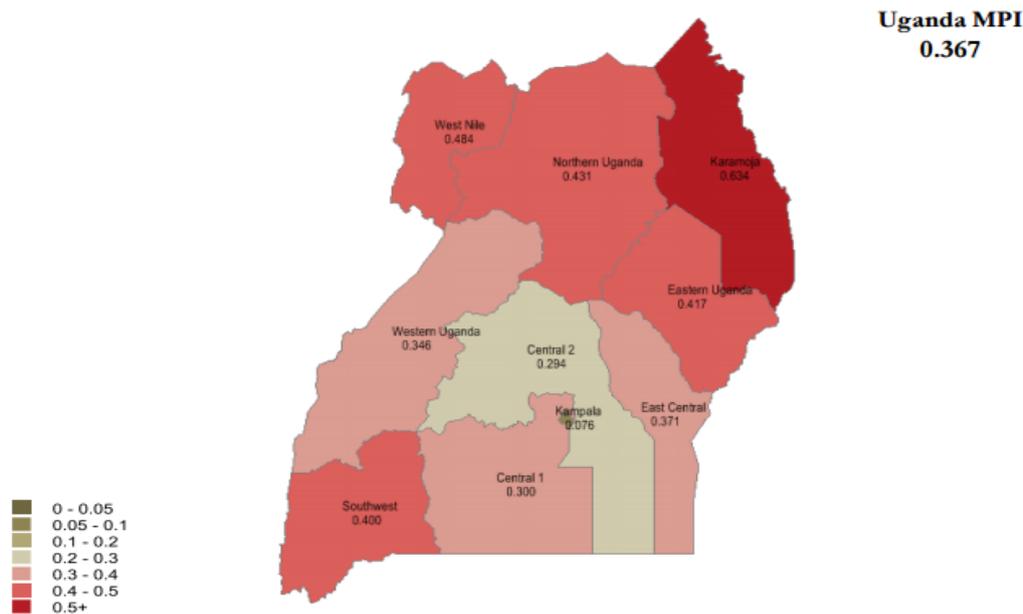
Weak human development in West Nile and other remote areas of Uganda is linked to weak economic growth compared to needs. Decisions regarding governance and development are made in Kampala, far away from the cities and settlements in West Nile, and while decentralization is intended to improve accountability and local solutions for local problems, it is unclear how much the decentralization process can help when the region has a very small tax base and little opportunity to generate revenue internally, rather than relying on Kampala for budget disbursements.<sup>18</sup> Without that tax base and financial independence, it is unlikely that the districts in West Nile, outside major towns like Arua, will be able to set their own development priorities. This has been raised with the Office of the Prime Minister by both donors as well as district governments, which have no control over the refugee settlements, including basic decision making such as where refugees will be settled and how their settlements will impact on local communities. While the Government of Uganda has committed to devolving decision making power in the national sphere, decisions regarding refugees and cross-border issues are still taken in Kampala through OPM, reducing the level of autonomy within local government in West Nile.

<sup>16</sup> World Bank. [Birth Rate, crude \(per 1000 people\)](#). Accessed 29 March 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Oxford Department of International Development. (2017) [OPHI Country Briefing 2017: Uganda](#), Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, pg 6.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Development Programme. (2015) [Uganda Human Development Report 2015: Unlocking the Development Potential of Northern Uganda](#), pg 58.

## K. Mapping Poverty Rates at the Sub-national Level



*The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by OPHI or the University of Oxford. This map is intended for illustrative purposes only.*

## Gender Inequality

Of the four regions in Uganda, the North is the second worst performing region in terms of gender equality. However, this masks the gender dynamics of the three separate sub-regions. West Nile, for example, shows some of the lowest levels of discriminatory social institutions in the country. In terms of discriminatory family code, West Nile charts much along the Ugandan average for early marriage and slightly worse for son preference compared to the rest of the country. The belief that women should not own land is not very prevalent (17%), nor is the belief that they should not access credit or financial services such as bank accounts (14%). However, even if beliefs do not discriminate against women, the lack of financial services in much of West Nile does. How these attitudes towards women change in light of a massive increase in population due to refugee arrivals remains to be seen. The sub-region is also the second best in the country at protecting women's civil liberties, and though 64% of the population believe that men make better political leaders, this bias does not prevent access to justice for women, which is reported at 90%.<sup>19</sup>

Gender inequality is perhaps the only heavy trend that may be vulnerable to change over the outlook of this report. This is due to the extreme influx of refugees in the region. The refugee profile is dominated by women and children, so there is potential for such large discrepancies to have unforetold implications for women's rights and leadership. On the one hand, the number of women could lead to natural boosts for women's leadership opportunities that would have knock-on effects for returns. On the other, gender divisions could begin to overlap with refugee/host country divisions, leading to a regression in women's rights and empowerment. West Nile is particularly liberal when it comes to women's rights and opportunities in Ugandan terms. However, the Mid-Northern sub-region shows some of the worst indicators for women. Ongoing interventions with nuanced, impactful gender components (beyond standard prioritization of pregnant and lactating women) will be important for managing gender imbalances and empowering women. While empowerment plans are important for raising women's cachet in terms of political power, women are often

<sup>19</sup> Social Institutions and Gender Index. (2015) [Uganda: SIGI Country Report](#). p101-106.

targeted by empowerment campaigns that only increase their workload in addition to their domestic responsibilities. The challenges will be to help men in refugee and host communities better accommodate women's participation in the public sphere, perhaps by sharing responsibilities in the domestic arena.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR A LONG-TERM REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

With the key assumption that South Sudanese refugees settled in Northern Uganda will experience extended displacement due to protracted conflict but with a desire for return, one must ask - "What are the long-term implications for community relations with the host communities and for the political economy of the regions where they have settled?" These are not clear cut and will be heavily impacted by government and NGO interventions based on uncertain donor support. A clear, long-term plan to develop the region will help to mitigate conflicts and ensure stability and success for these regions. The presence of large numbers of refugees settled amongst traditionally underserved communities presents a number of challenges and opportunities for building a peaceful, stable future allowing for returns once conflict has subsided in South Sudan.

### Markets

The large influx of refugees after July 2016 severely disrupted local markets in northwestern Uganda. An increase of people anywhere can cause inflation of basic goods including food, fuel, and housing. Initial emergency response to provide for these shortages disrupted markets according to key informant interviews. In-kind assistance was often sold at market so that refugees could afford other supplies that they themselves deemed more important. However, as partners and the government have moved to stabilize markets through cash transfer programming and as refugees have settled into more permanent living situations, markets have adapted, expanded, and evolved to suit the needs of the new residents.

Humanitarian intervention and development assistance can leverage this type of programming to greatly expand opportunities for refugees, as shown in a recent WFP study. According to that report, for every dollar of investment in refugee communities, real income in and around the settlements rose between \$1 and \$1.50.<sup>20</sup> However, cash transfer alone is not a solution, as it does have some market distorting effects. Market strengthening via storage capacity and transport, a development-oriented project, is ongoing and, if sustained, could have an important impact on market expansion. Thus, bridging the divides between humanitarian cash programming and development-oriented market strengthening via capacity building in storage, investment, cash flow, transport, and infrastructure is the best solution for the sub-district's economy moving forward.

Host communities in Imvepi settlement, for example, noted that previous to the refugee influx, their closest markets were small and had limited quantity, quality, and diversity of goods. Larger markets along major roads were difficult to access due to limited transport options. According to several members of the host community, the settlement was extremely remote before the refugee influx. Many would wait for a market car for hours or days without luck. Markets with previously limited access have grown tremendously and are offering both more goods and a greater diversity of goods to both host and refugee communities, and traders have seen their income grow, though there was debate among market women as to degree. Regular market analysis is needed to determine the effects of market growth and income generation within small-scale market activity.

The growth of markets in refugee settlements has been good not only for the host community in the area but for Ugandan traders further afield, as it has led to the growth of feeder markets in major towns including Arua, Koboko, Yumbe, and Gulu and the tentative rehabilitation and improvement of roads linking growing markets.

<sup>20</sup> World Food Program. 28 October 2016. "[New Research Finds Humanitarian Assistance to Refugees Boosts Uganda's Economy.](#)"

There were some complaints in Adjumani that traders had moved away from host community market sites to refugee settlements to be closer to a wider base of customers. The complaint consisted of the claim that host communities were losing market access and that the local government, by not having gazetted new sites for markets, was losing tax revenue. However, in the course of conducting interviews in Imvepi, the team met tax collectors from the sub-district, who assured the team that tax revenue was up as a direct result of expanding markets and an expanded tax base, even with the very low taxes that the sub-district is charging in order not to discourage market activity.

The sudden increase of population in the refugee hosting districts should encourage a number of private sector opportunities. Telecoms, solar, financial services, agricultural products, and construction could all experience major growth as a direct result of the refugee influx and the growing presence of NGOs. Yumbe, for example, has no banking or financial services even with the refugee influx. Before the influx, the town had only one hotel and the rural areas in the district had poor telecoms connectivity. In June 2017, financial services were believed to be moving in to service NGOs, telecoms were seen to be improving, and construction was taking place. However, without concerted support, these endeavors may come to nothing, as proven by the opening and quick closure of the only bank in Koboko in 2017. These gains are fragile, and without political and financial support to sustain them, they may be fleeting. There is an important role for the Government of Uganda to play in terms of reducing risk and increasing access to information for private sector actors as they move into these previously underserved communities.

The potential boom from private sector investment will coincide with increased agricultural production, if properly supported by government and NGO partners. Vast swathes of the north used to produce cotton, an industry that has lapsed in the past decades. Reports of new cotton ginning operations opening up could revitalize the northern agricultural sector at the cost of environmental degradation as seen in other cotton producing areas in Africa. Other cash crops including sesame and chili can boost livelihoods outside of subsistence agriculture, while subsistence crops could boost local markets. The Ugandan government's policy of supporting refugees through land grants will open new production zones to boost trade and agricultural livelihoods. Supporting farmers through increased access to seeds, tools, fertilizer and pesticides will help cement these advances, boost the sector, and have knock on effects for Uganda's overall economic output.

Capitalized or industrialized agriculture is, however, not the solution for a wide-ranging increase in agricultural output without sacrificing labor gains. Agricultural development is one of the best options for increasing income and reducing poverty in the north, but a focus on conservation issues and sustainability is needed to protect any potential increased yields. This will hold true for the refugee communities settled in these agricultural zones going forward.

## Services

The huge population influx has put major strains on services in the north, which were already quite overburdened and/or lacked proper investment. Though West Nile is not the lowest performing sub-region in Uganda, the north and the east in general are worse off than central and west. A huge population influx on already overburdened services could threaten a severe weakening of these systems over the medium to long-term. Conflict over service provision and access could divide host and refugee communities and lead to exclusion, worsening key indicators, especially those related to literacy, child and maternal mortality, and malnutrition.

The emergency response has pushed services to improve via a rush of emergency funding to health and education. These services are undoubtedly still strained by the sheer number of new residents. For example, according to a key informant in Yumbe, there are 34 primary schools for 60,000 students. However, the emergency response has begun to help refurbish and rehabilitate schools and health facilities that were

previously derelict. There are drugs and medical supplies in health centers that host communities reported previously had none. In addition to rehabilitated education and health facilities, the improvement in roads, culverts, bridges, water points, and other infrastructure provides synergy to market access and livelihoods as well. These improvements must be sustained and furthered in order to account for the new influx and make up for the unequal outcomes of previous development efforts. Without continuing support, the threat to service provision or to increased tensions and conflict between refugees and host communities is high.

Health and education provision are a natural fit for bridging the humanitarian-development gap with a focus on needs rather than identity. The 30-70 split for host communities and refugees under the ReHoPE framework is an opportunity to go beyond the host community/refugee distinction in health and education service provision. Host communities in Imvepi, for example, noted in focus group discussions an increase in host community children seeking education due to the influx of refugees. Education is a very high priority for South Sudanese, due to historical reasons surrounding long-term displacement during the Second Sudanese Civil War. Their zeal for education has had a positive spillover effect on host populations. Services will naturally be accessed by both refugees and host communities, and considering the potential long-term displacement, investment in secondary and even tertiary options is important for both refugee and host community children alongside vocational training already prioritized under ReHoPE.

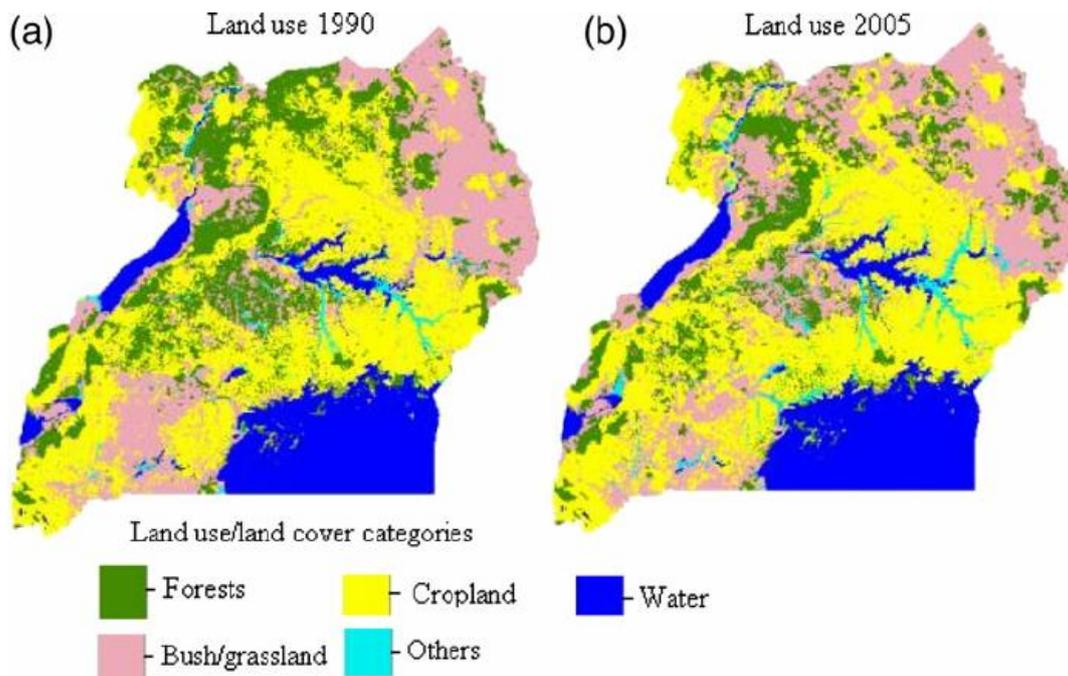
## Natural Resources

The competition for natural resources including land, water, and forests is the greatest source of tension and holds the greatest potential for future conflict in the refugee settlements.<sup>21</sup> Natural resources, specifically timber, were a topic of every focus group discussion with refugees and host community representatives. While most key informants highlighted land conflict as a particularly acute issue, perhaps due to its history in Northern Uganda and a series of violent confrontations around Moyo in 2014,<sup>22</sup> the long-term implications of land titling should not overshadow immediate natural resource issues around timber and water.

Timber is used by refugee and host communities both for building materials and as firewood. As a result of the huge influx of people, the region's trees have been cut at unsustainable rates, adding to an already massive loss of forest cover in Uganda in general over the past several decades. Charcoal production has been banned to help protect forest cover, but the need for building materials and fuel is driving low-level community conflict and tensions between refugees and the host community. Nearly every household in West Nile, especially in rural areas, uses firewood or charcoal for cooking. Loss of tree cover will have knock on effects on soil fertility, flooding, silting of waterways, and water quality. One government environmental officer fears the loss of trees with specific biological, commercial, or cultural significance including certain oil trees and ebony in addition to the destruction of animal habitats and wetland areas - "The environment is a ship, and we cannot afford it to capsize." Planting wood lots and replacing trees consumed for firewood are important interventions that need to be undertaken now rather than later. Additionally, reducing the demand for timber through energy saving stoves, charcoal briquettes, and solar power is important for the long-term sustainable cutting of trees.

<sup>21</sup> Danish Refugee Council, et al. (2017) "Conflict Analysis Assessment: Support Program to the Refugee Settlements and Host Communities in Northern Uganda."

<sup>22</sup> Leonardi, Cherry and Martina Santschi (2016). *Dividing Communities in South Sudan and Northern Uganda: Boundary Disputes and Land Governance*.



There are longer-term implications for land rights in general. When refugees first arrived, they were allocated plots as large as 100m x 100m. Since they began arriving in greater numbers, the area of land allocated to refugee households has reduced to 50m x 50m and even down to 30m x 30m in some settlements. However, land experts note that the official figures may be misleading. Refugees have moved to join families and their own communities from inside South Sudan on land already allocated, avoiding the land distribution from the Office of the Prime Minister and squeezing onto already limited space. Upwards of 20% of refugees in some areas are not staying on land that they were allocated, instead renting it out for homesteading or production. This leads to high mobility and a lack of knowledge of where refugees are moving from and to. There is an unofficial land market that advocates claim is largely uncontrolled and outside the analysis of most actors, and some of the land allocated to recent arrivals, especially in Rhino Camp is very poor, marginal land. Refugees who arrived earlier thus seem to be in better shape than newer arrivals in terms of the quality and quantity of the land they have been allocated; however, the different camps each have their different issues, and refugees settled around Yumbe, for example, have less access to land than those settled around Adjumani.

Though previously fallow agricultural land has been opened up by the refugee arrivals, long-term thinking must be done in terms of the sustainability of this solution. How many additional farmers, for example, can this agricultural zone actually support and give a decent livelihood to? Is there a sustainable alternative to the inevitable division of land into tiny plot sizes? Most of the land that has been given is communal land rented from host communities. These host communities have benefitted from what is essentially free labor to clear fields. Without clear title or rights associated with land, there is little reason to invest in soil fertility or commercialized production. In some areas, refugees are reportedly sharecropping, which is good for landlords but bad for workers. The long-term legal implications present a minefield of potential conflict as refugee communities have very few enumerated rights around a very, very valuable asset in an area where subsistence agriculture is the main source of livelihoods.

Finally, there is an ongoing debate around groundwater sustainability with the refugee influx and the possible piping of water from the Nile to meet humanitarian needs. Trucking water in to refugee and host communities is unsustainable and expensive. However, with a shortage of boreholes, there has been little choice in the matter. Even with the end of water trucking, monitoring the quality of water supplied to refugees will be important to the health and success of the settlements. Further investment in water and sanitation is needed

to avoid potential public health disasters, and in relation to potential conflict flashpoints, water sources are known to be a scene of rising tensions due to limited supplies of water, long wait times, and various languages spoken by women often overburdened by household chores. With ecological issues like groundwater sustainability, there is a need to think holistically in terms of water catchment and pumping, working with district water officials to make sure that groundwater is accessed sustainably for both refugees and hosts.

## Livelihoods

With a long-term settlement one of the most likely outcomes for the majority of refugees, finding sustainable livelihoods outside of subsistence agriculture for even a minority of people will be a challenge. While skilled South Sudanese who were working in the health or education sectors may find an easier route into employment, the large number of unskilled workers will disrupt livelihood markets for casual labor in the sub-region. This could cause anger and resentment among host communities, especially those in larger towns or big cities, who already had little opportunity for regular work.

However, conflict potential around livelihoods is not limited to blue collar jobs. The scale-up of humanitarian and development programming will necessitate hiring new workers, many of whom may come from outside West Nile due to higher educational qualifications. Already there has been conflict between refugees and host communities for jobs as casual laborers in the refugee response. The possibility that Ugandans from outside West Nile or even other skilled East Africans may settle to take skilled jobs with NGOs may lead to local discontent and a feeling among West Nile residents of falling further behind the rest of the country.

In any case, the majority of refugees and host communities will remain in subsistence agriculture. This presents a great opportunity for the Ugandan government and partners to prioritize agricultural livelihoods and attempt to commercialize and capitalize the agricultural sector. There are serious challenges in this. Rain-fed agriculture has suffered bad harvests over the last two years in the sub-region. Army worm is already prevalent in Adjumani region, and there are fears that serious crop loss will result from its presence. There is a need for development partners, agricultural experts, and the government to play a significant role in guaranteeing the viability of agricultural livelihoods with the influx. Poor rains, army worm, or any of a number of other possible disruptors in the sector could destroy these livelihoods and force thousands of refugees, especially refugee youth, into already vulnerable urban labor markets. There, refugee youth would have few better opportunities than within the settlements but with far greater impacts on unemployment, crime, HIV/AIDS, trafficking, prostitution, and a host of other urban problems.

The simple solution is to recognize from the beginning that urban migration will occur over the coming years, and the government and development partners will need to find innovative solutions to employment issues in the city both amongst refugees and host community. Very few partners, at the moment, are working with urban refugees, which could lead to missed opportunities and greater challenges going forward.

## POTENTIAL DISRUPTIONS

There are a number of potential benefits to the long-term hosting of refugees both for Ugandans in West Nile and the country more generally. If international partners can help bridge the gap between humanitarian and development aid, there is great potential to make long-lasting changes to the development potential of Northern Uganda. However, there are potential pitfalls if the refugee influx is not managed well, and the positive potential of refugees could quickly be overwhelmed by the sheer weight of numbers and the negative consequences therein.

## Conflict

A number of potential conflict flash points are already in place among refugee communities and between

refugees and host communities. These start with limited resources in trying times – land, water, and timber as well as pressures on services including health and education. The recent reduction in food rations for refugees could potentially cause problems; however, at the time of writing, this was not yet the case. Partners and the Ugandan government should be thinking about potential long-term issues related to land now rather than in the future, when such problems could be far more intractable.

Host communities in Imvepi worry about passing out of a ‘honeymoon phase’ with the refugees, in which issues of language and culture could cause divisions due to the sheer numbers of refugees living amongst them. It is unclear if this is already happening due to perceived increases in petty and violent crime. There have been two serious incidents of criminal violence in the past few months that are worryingly out of place in a rural community. Perceptions of crime are important in community relations, especially if those perceptions can be mapped onto already existing divisions in identity. Strong justice and conflict mitigation mechanisms are needed to tamp down potential divisions between the communities.

Over the course of a host of interviews, it was unclear as to what peace and conflict resolution mechanisms are in place in each settlement. Traditional conflict mediation mechanisms may be overwhelmed by the increase in numbers and although the refugee welfare councils handle many issues within the settlements, anyone who has worked in the Protection of Civilian sites within South Sudan know that these community groups have the potential to become politicized and to cause more problems than they solve, especially around issues of resource allocation. Small investments in community peace and conflict resolution mechanisms in the early days of this influx could pay large dividends in overall conflict management and mitigation in the future.

Internal peace mediation is one thing, but it is clear from how humanitarians and the government are handling the settlements that they acknowledge that external events have an impact on refugee relations. Various ethnic groups have been segregated from one another due to potential conflicts and violence stemming from the war in South Sudan. There is no unified ‘refugee’ identity. Rather, the Dinka, Nuer, Kaka, Bari, and other Equatorian groups are split according to how their respective communities in South Sudan are affected by the war. This is an understandable conflict mitigation measure may be incompatible with the potential for long-term peace and reconciliation among communities who will return to South Sudan. Perceptions of a Dinka-led government offensive in Equatoria have prompted accusations of war crimes and human rights violations. This bad blood can cross the border. Refugees have access to social media within settlements, where the war is being fought between various propaganda efforts both for and against the government in Juba, and much like the Second Sudanese Civil War, paranoia is rife. Rumors that South Sudanese intelligence officers have infiltrated the camps and essentially kidnapped refugee activists were heard in communities around Adjumani. None of these rumors can be confirmed, but regardless, rumor management is integral as long as the war goes on and tribal identities are mobilized within the conflict.

Finally, there is the realization that the war in South Sudan is not over. It has metastasized and spread over the course of nearly four years, touching nearly every community in the country either through violence or extreme food insecurity. Riek Machar’s flight to the DRC in July 2016 brought the war to the Equatorias and the Equatorians to Uganda.<sup>23</sup> Northeastern DRC currently hosts opposition fighters who have used the border to launch attacks that have captured government-held towns including Kajo-Keji. What the rebels lack is weapons and ammunition, which are typically acquired through a state sponsor in the region. At the moment, they do not have a sponsor that could enable them to seriously threaten the government of South Sudan. However, regional politics are fickle. If a neighbor decides to support South Sudan’s opposition, the war could change again and drive tens of thousands more into exile.

<sup>23</sup> HSBA for Sudan and South Sudan. May 2017. [“Spreading Fallout: The Collapse of the ARCSS and New Conflict along the Equatorias-DRC Border.”](#)

## Increasing Numbers of Refugees

Though humanitarians and development partners may believe that Central and Eastern Equatoria have mostly 'emptied out,' the reality is that there are no known numbers of potential refugees still in the Greater Equatoria Region of South Sudan. The previous census, highly political and contested by the SPLA at the time, was conducted by the Sudanese state in 2008 and has not been updated since. This has led to serious planning issues in emergency response within South Sudan and an inability to even venture a serious guess as to how many people have been killed in the conflict overall. Thousands returned to South Sudan in 2009 and 2010 in order to vote in the referendum that determined independence. According to the 2008 census, there were 1,103,592 people in Central Equatoria, 906,126 in Eastern Equatoria, and 619,029 in Western Equatoria nearly a decade ago. Additionally, numbers in the South Sudan conflict are often inflated for political ends, so gaining an accurate assessment is difficult under the best circumstances. Even with one million South Sudanese displaced to Uganda, there is potential that hundreds of thousands more could still cross the border.

The Regional Protection Force that was intended to deploy to Juba has been long-delayed, and it is not clear that it would be robust enough to protect the city in case of another major round of violence. Moreover, the former Magwi and Pageri Counties are still relatively well-populated. If conflict consumes those areas like it has others, Uganda could face another wave of refugee flight, pushing the country's coping mechanisms to the breaking point.

## Political Backlash against Refugees

Tanzania's open door refugee policy was reversed in part by democratic elections in the mid-1990s. Unfortunately, it is true in many contexts that the presence of refugees can be utilized as a political hammer for dubious politicians. With decentralization and upcoming elections in 2021, there is a real danger that a refugee influx that is not well-managed could become a political issue on either the local or national level. Land pressures, conflicts between communities, and lack of services could push politically ambitious local leaders to call for a return of South Sudanese refugees, or at very least to pressure on the national government to amend its generous policies.

## POSSIBILITIES FOR RETURN

The likelihood that South Sudanese refugees will begin returning to their homes before 2020 is low. It is difficult to project into the future how the South Sudanese conflict will end, but in an optimistic scenario, refugees may start returning by 2025 or even earlier. However, the nature of their return will determine the success of Uganda's refugee response and the possibility for replicating it in other contexts of forced displacement. The following sketches three possibilities for refugees in Northern Uganda in the medium-term.

### Protracted, Voluntary Return

When the South Sudanese conflict began in late 2013, there were already 22,483 South Sudanese refugees living in Uganda. These were the remaining displaced of the Second Sudanese Civil War, some of whom had been settled in Uganda for nearly 20 years already. In light of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the vote for secession, thousands of South Sudanese returned home to rebuild their lives and vote to establish a new country, with thousands more returning over the years before the current conflict began.

These returns were anything but simple. In the years between the CPA and independence, the threat of renewed conflict between the SPLA and the Government of Sudan and the potential collapse of the peace deal kept many from returning fully to the country. Instead, refugees took a step-by-step return to their country of

origin. Sometimes this included the official return process. In other cases, refugees created multiple and overlapping coping strategies in order to manage risk in their returns. Men would typically lead the returns to their areas of origin to gauge security risks and re-establish a homestead. Women and children were typically left behind in Uganda to continue receiving aid and accessing health and education facilities. Only over several years and several fits and starts did refugees fully repatriate.<sup>24</sup>

### Involuntary Returns

The reduction in food rations in May 2017 has forced many to rethink their refugee status and survival strategies in relation to returns. Several refugee groups claimed the reduction had hit them hard, coming in the midst of ongoing displacement and during the traditionally lean growing season. These refugees claimed that they may return to South Sudan, despite the conflict, due to the food insecurity, and while it is difficult to fully accept that a refugee would choose danger over hunger, it would be unwise not to take these threats seriously. If the refugee response is not funded and cannot provide for the whole population, then South Sudanese refugees may return to take their chances within the war, join up with armed groups, or move elsewhere in Uganda, perhaps to slums in larger towns and cities.

### Path to Citizenship

In theory, any refugee who has experienced long-term displacement should be eligible for naturalization and a path towards citizenship in his or her host country. In practice, hundreds of refugees have lived in Uganda for more than twenty years without acquiring Ugandan citizenship. In October 2015, the Ugandan Constitutional Court ruled that refugees were not eligible for citizenship on the basis of registration but were eligible for naturalization. The laws governing the naturalization of refugees, however, are not internally consistent or consistently applied. The Ugandan Citizenship and Immigration Control Act specifically discriminates against refugees born in the country, individuals who would normally be eligible for citizenship by registration, but are ineligible if their parents or any grandparents were refugees themselves. Time spent as a refugee is not considered time spent in residency, making the residency requirements overly onerous for refugees. Overall, the court ruling does not elicit much hope for durable solutions for refugees seeking citizenship in Uganda in the future.<sup>25</sup>

## POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR FAILURE

South Sudanese refugees are in a precarious position. The global refugee system is under strain with more people displaced than at any point since the Second World War. The world has faced four potential famines in 2017 – in Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen, and in South Sudan itself, where famine was declared in early 2017. At the same time, political populism in the UK and the United States threatens humanitarian and development aid from two of the Uganda's biggest donor partners. Uganda's settlement system is straining under the weight of over 1.2m refugees from Burundi, DRC, Somalia, and South Sudan.

Without proper support, the refugee settlements in Northern Uganda may collapse under the strain. A move towards a camp-based system would only exacerbate refugee vulnerability as well as provide a greater strain on emergency relief. The difficulties of a camp system are by now well-known – water, sanitation, and hygiene are difficult, food aid is expensive, livelihoods are nearly non-existent, protection issues affect women and children, youth are idle and can contribute to crime, and many refugees choose to leave camps in search of economic opportunities outside the camp, outside the country, and even outside the continent, fueling human

<sup>24</sup> Hovil, Lucy. November 2010. "[Hoping for Peace, Afraid of War: The Dilemmas of Repatriation and Belonging on the Borders of Uganda and South Sudan.](#)" UNHCR Research Paper No. 196.

<sup>25</sup> Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative. 22 March 2016. "[The Eligibility for Refugees to Acquire Ugandan Citizenship.](#)"

trafficking and the annual dangerous migrations to Europe. The return to a camp structure will only create a burden on donors, humanitarian actors, government services and communities that would host camps.

If settlements do not succeed, expect to see conflicts among refugee communities and between refugees and host communities. Refugees who cannot succeed on a given plot of land could return to South Sudan, migrate to cities to add to growing slums, or take up arms with opposition groups in South Sudan, DRC, or even Northern Uganda. Refugees could become a political issue, mirroring the ongoing debate in Kenya as to the future of Dadaab and its Somali refugees, potentially creating divisions between Uganda and the international community. Considering the country's role as peacekeepers in major conflicts including Somalia, any rift that could open up threatens to destabilize peacekeeping successes across the continent.

## CONCLUSION

The conflict in South Sudan has displaced millions, and in the space of months after the violence 2016 Juba violence, neighboring Uganda became host to one of the biggest refugee populations in the world. The country's generous settlement program is now under strain from receiving over 900,000 refugees in under a year. Hundreds more arrive every day to fill the sparsely populated farmland in West Nile around Adjumani, Moyo, Yumbe, and Arua. While refugees are increasingly problematized in Europe, the United States, Australia, and even neighboring Kenya, Uganda has continued to open its doors and welcome refugees. While this has put increased strain on services, natural resources, and livelihoods, Uganda nevertheless has the potential to recognize great gains from its refugee population and in the process to set a model for future refugee responses. Opportunities to link development and humanitarian aid in generally underserved areas could develop Northern Uganda's agricultural sector, improve services, and boost infrastructure while creating opportunities for the private sector and boosting host communities' tax base.

In June 2017, the Government of Uganda hosted a Refugee Solidarity Summit to raise funds to support their innovative model for refugee assistance. While the summit failed to gather the hoped for \$2bn per annum in assistance, it did leave a common understanding amidst all stakeholders that it is time to begin bridging the gap between humanitarian and development assistance in line with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). It is hoped that donors will become more flexible in their funding and able to better bridge the divide for longer-term solutions to humanitarian crises, and indeed, it appears that there is now a clear and common understanding among donors that will hopefully lead to better coordination of funds. Donors will play a significant role going forward in encouraging and supporting coordination at the national level between the Office of the Prime Minister and the district governments hosting refugees. However, without that assistance from the international community, there is a real possibility that Uganda's unique response could falter, further entrenching poverty in the north and potentially leading to conflict and a destabilization of the border region. Bridging the Humanitarian-Development Gap will be challenging in terms of analysis, coordination, and planning, but the potential benefits both for northern Uganda in general and refugee responses in particular, the opportunities far outweigh the difficulties.