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**FORCED SELF RELIANCE? PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT AND
ECONOMIC INCLUSION: CASES FROM EAST AFRICA**

Måns Fellesson and Mats Härsmar

Forced Self Reliance? Protracted Displacement and Economic Inclusion: Cases from East Africa

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to
The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA)

Måns Fellesson, affiliated researcher at the Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society, REMESO, Linköping University, holds a PhD in sociology from Uppsala University.

Mats Hårsмар, project manager and deputy managing director at EBA, holds a PhD in rural development from the Swedish university of agricultural sciences.

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“Displaced populations will remain siloed in humanitarian responses until development policy and planning are aligned with commitments to inclusion. National development plans will remain incomplete, and possibly ineffective, without acknowledging the reality of protracted displacement.” (OECD 2023)

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Foreword by EBA

Driven by conflict, persecution, and various other factors, the global number of refugees and forcibly displaced persons has reached unprecedented heights. Given that returning to their places of origin is often infeasible, many refugees find themselves in prolonged, decade-long circumstances within camps or settlements.

As humanitarian assistance becomes increasingly restricted, innovative approaches to support refugee livelihoods are essential. International frameworks underscore the importance of refugee self-reliance and facilitating integration into the economies of host communities. Many initiatives aligned with these objectives are currently being implemented across the globe.

In this study, the authors explore the conditional and supporting factors that influence the effectiveness of interventions designed to promote economic self-reliance among refugees. They assess how the effects of these interventions align with the corresponding theories of change at the intervention level. The analysis focus on Uganda and Kenya, two countries recognised as frontrunners in this field. Furthermore, the report considers the broader applicability of the findings, both within these national contexts and beyond.

We aim for this study to be a valuable resource for policymakers and programme managers – at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida, embassies, as well as stakeholders within the UN system and other organizations – dedicated to supporting refugees in prolonged situations and addressing the wider challenges of forced migration.

The study has been guided by a reference group chaired by Malin Oud, Vice Chair of EBA. The authors bear sole responsibility for the content of the report.

Stockholm, September 2025

Torbjörn Becker, EBA Chair

Malin Oud

Sammanfattning

Den här utvärderingen handlar om strävan efter hållbara lösningar i utdragna flyktingsituationer. Det globala antalet tvångsfördrivna individer uppgick 2024 till ofattbara 122,6 miljoner. Medan många av världens nationer oroas över vad som händer kring deras nationella gränser, riskerar ett stort antal tvångsfördrivna mäniskor att falla i glömska. De förblir fast i åratäl, till och med årtionden, i flyktingläger och bosättningar, främst i låg- och medelinkomstländer.

För närvarande lever två tredjedelar av världens flyktingar i utdragna situationer. Det betyder att de har tillbringat fem år eller mer utan att erbjudas någon hållbar lösning – repatriering, vidarebosättning eller lokal integration. De lever ofta i ovisshet, med betydande skyddsbehov, begränsade rättigheter och brist på ekonomiska möjligheter. Det som håller dem vid liv är skydd och stöd från det humanitära systemet. År 2024 finansierades dock enbart hälften av de globala humanitära behoven (UN-OCHA 2024). Eftersom detta system i allt högre grad är underfinansierat blir andra försörjningskällor nödvändiga.

Länder blir alltmer restriktiva i att ta emot flyktingar medan det globala antalet fördrivna mäniskor ökar och de humanitära ekonomiska resurserna minskar. Detta innebär allvarliga utmaningar för internationella ramverk avsedda att skydda tvångsfördrivna mäniskors rättigheter.

New York-deklarationen från 2016 och 2018 års globala flyktingöverenskommelse (GCR) med ”ramverket för flyktingrespons” (CRRF) förespråkar en ansats inriktad mot långsiktig utveckling för tvångsfördrivna mäniskor som befinner sig i utdragna situationer. Centralt är att främja ekonomisk självförsörjning för både flyktingar och lokalbefolkning.

I denna studie utvärderas effektiviteten av sådana interventioner. I vilken utsträckning bidrar stöd till flyktingars och värdssamhällens ekonomiska inkludering till förbättrade försörjningsmöjligheter?

Fallstudierna är valda från två värdländer i Afrika söder om Sahara – Kenya och Uganda. Båda länderna har tagit emot stora grupper av flyktingar som nu befinner sig i utdragna situationer. Med hjälp av en teoribaserad metod bedöms interventionernas interna dynamik och hur de påverkas av flera kringliggande faktorer.

Den övergripande slutsatsen är att klyftan mellan den globala flyktingöverenskommelsens (GCR) ambitiösa målsättningar och den faktiska situationen på marken ökar oroväckande snabbt. Därför krävs åtgärder baserade på välgrundad analys och pragmatiskt handlande. Denna studie kan ses som ett bidrag till detta arbete.

I utvärderingen finner vi att flera av de studerade interventionerna genererar eller har förutsättningar att generera lovande resultat. I och kring de kenyanska bosättningarna ger stöd till privata företag inom bland annat jordbruksnäring, kycklinguppfödning, finansiella tjänster och förnybar energi positiva resultat. Stöd och rådgivning behöver dock vara uthålligt och ges under längre tid än väntat. Det visade sig också vara svårare för flyktingägda företag än andra att konkurrera om finansiering. Vidare har investeringar i jordbruksproduktion varit få och givit begränsade resultat. Omgivande faktorer som flyktingarnas begränsade rörelsefrihet och brist på arbetstillstånd, olämpligt klimat för odling, bristande tillgång på mark och sociokulturella utmaningar inom flyktinggruppen är några av de allvarligaste hindren.

I Uganda är stöd till småjordbruk, där både flyktingar och värdbefolkning inkluderas, den kanske mest lovande vägen. Jämförelsevis goda odlingsförhållanden bidrar till detta. Trots att landets politik tillåter flyktingar att arbeta och röra sig fritt är rörlighet ett stort hinder även här. Detta beror främst på bristande infrastruktur. Svårigheter att få tillgång till odlingsmark, arbetstillstånd eller jobb, samt att anpassa insatser till unga och huvudsakligen kvinnoledda hushåll är viktiga hindrande faktorer.

I båda ländernas flyktingläger, men främst i Kenya, erbjuds yrkesutbildningar. Marknadsanalyserna är dock svaga, och uppföljning efter

avslutade program bristfällig. I flyktinglägren fanns därför överskott av sysslolösa från flera yrkeskategorier.

Insatsernas resultat hålls tillbaka av ett antal faktorer. Relevans och innehåll i projekten framstår annorlunda när nödvändiga förutsättningar och stödjande faktorer synliggörs.

Nedan sammanfattas våra huvudslutsatser, tillsammans med rekommendationer och operativa förslag.

Den nuvarande ansatsen att samla flyktingar i läger och särskilda bosättningar begränsar allvarligt möjligheterna till ekonomisk inkludering och behöver reformeras.

Övergripande rekommendation: *Kenyas och Ugandas regeringar samt internationella givare* behöver omformulera rådande läger- och bosättningsansats mot en gradvis ökning av flyktingars rörelsefrihet och tillgång på arbetsställstånd.

Operativa förslag: *Regeringar i Kenya och Uganda, FN och internationella givare* bör planera för att gradvis öka kvoterna för arbets- och resetillstånd, utbildning och stipendier utanför bosättningarna och lägren. Detta bör kunna öka remitteringar, minska beroendet av bistånd och öka relevansen och resultatet av befintliga självförsörjningsinsatser.

Internationella givare generellt bör fortsätta att driva på för policyförändringar kring rörlighet och arbetsställstånd, samtidigt som de ökar sina egna flyktingmottagningskvoter, i enlighet med principerna om ansvarsfördelning i GCR.

Regeringar i Kenya och Uganda bör hitta fler, bättre lämpade områden för bosättningar i mindre skala som flyktingar kan flytta till. Planeringsverktyg, såsom UN-Habitats "Settlement Profiling", bör användas noggrant i sådan planering.

Värdländers regeringar generellt bör planera långsiktigt och hitta lämpliga bosättningsplatser i fall där jordbruk är centralt för ekonomisk

inkludering. Samarbete med lokala myndigheter och internationella aktörer samt långsiktiga strategier är avgörande för ekonomisk integration och flyktingars självförsörjning. Mindre bosättningar kan bidra till att minska trycket på värdbefolkningar och mark. Även om detta initialet kan kosta mer kan en sådan ansats ge långsiktiga fördelar, exempelvis genom att lokal ekonomisk tillväxt gynnas på fler orter.

Brist på långsiktigt, heltäckande finansiellt stöd är ett stort hinder för att planerat och strukturerat integrera flyktingar på värdsmållens marknader.

Övergripande rekommendation: *Intressenter globalt*, särskilt internationella givare och värländernas regeringar, behöver återuppliva sitt engagemang för effektivt genomförande av de överenskomna strategierna samt hitta nya finansieringskällor.

Operativa förslag: *Den svenska regeringen* bör föregå med gott exempel och i linje med sin senaste humanitära strategi främja ett bättre finansierat, flexibelt och mer effektivt humanitärt system.

Givare, FN och regeringarna i Uganda och Kenya bör tydliggöra roller och arbetsfördelning sinsemellan, i ökande grad främja aktörer som stöder långsiktig utveckling och marknadsbaserade lösningar.

Givare, FN, värländernas regeringar och genomförandeaktörer generellt bör analysera och noggrant överväga rådande incitamentsstrukturer på internationell, nationell och lokal nivå. De bör stärka stödjande och försvaga negativa incitament för att främja ekonomisk inkludering av flyktingar och värdsmållens. Dessa aktörer bör också samarbeta nära för att skapa gradvisa strategier för att ta emot flyktingar.

FN, värdregeringar och givare generellt bör stärka insatserna för att främja riktade repatrierings- och återintegreringsprojekt i ursprungsländerna.

Det finns insatser som leder till ekonomisk integration av flyktingar och värdssamhällen på gemensamma marknader. Men sådana resultat, hur positiva och lovande de än är, är fortfarande marginella i förhållande till flyktingarnas stora och ökande behov.

Övergripande rekommendation: *Alla inblandade aktörer* behöver fortsätta att stärka insatserna för marknadsutveckling och jordbruksproduktion.

Operativa förslag: *Givare, myndigheter och genomförandeorgan i Kenya* bör genomföra kontinuerliga marknadsanalyser för förbättrad ekonomisk integration. Underleverantörer och spin-off-aktiviteter till framgångsrika challenge-fund-finansierade företag bör främjas för att inkludera bredare flyktinggrupper. Marknadsutveckling relaterad till boskapsskötsel och jordbruk bör stå i fokus för ytterligare främjande.

Givare, myndigheter och genomförandeorgan i Uganda bör förbättra samordning och komplementaritet mellan framgångsrika företag, såsom Omia Agribusiness och andra jordbruksfrämjande initiativ. Fokus måste även ligga på finansiell fördjupning, på investeringar i infrastruktur och andra insatser för flyktingars ökade rörlighet.

Genomförandeorgan i Kenya och Uganda bör noggrant överväga om och när programmen är bäst lämpade för att stödja individer eller kollektiv.

Genomförandeorgan, givare, värdnationella och lokala myndigheter generellt bör identifiera och främja framgångsrika insatser som leder till ekonomisk inkludering. Sådana exempel är viktiga för att visa upp flyktingars handlingskraft och bidrar inte minst till att förändra perspektiv och incitament.

Självförsörjning tar tid att bygga upp och kräver stöd i olika former från utvecklings- och privata aktörer.

Övergripande rekommendation: *Givare, värdländer, FN och genomförandeorgan* bör tillämpa heltäckande och gradvisa strategier för att stödja flyktingar i utdragna flyktingsituationer.

Operativa förslag: *Givare och FN-organisationer generellt* bör sträva efter långsiktig finansiering för att förlänga planeringshorisonter och minska investeringsrisker, särskilt för den privata sektorn. Ettåriga humanitära budgetar är inte lämpliga för integrerande syften.

Aktörer inom den privata sektorn generellt bör ta större del i utvecklingen av omfattande finansieringsstrategier och vara mer involverade i implementeringsarbetet.

FN-organisationer och värdländers regeringar generellt bör ta fram mer detaljerad kunskap, data och bättre analyser av behov och kapacitet hos olika flykting- och värdbefolkningsgrupper för ökad selektivitet och behovsanpassning.

Områdesbaserade utvecklingsprocesser främjas inte tillräckligt, retoriken till trots.

Övergripande rekommendation: Bredda perspektivet till en mer områdesbaserad ansats, som betonar lokala samhällen och befolkningar framför ett explicit fokus på utveckling i flyktingbosättningar och läger.

Operativa förslag: *Värdländers regeringar och givare generellt* bör samarbeta närmare med distrikts- och lokala myndigheter.

Genomförandeorgan i Kenya och Uganda bör gå bortom ”30/70”-principer för att inkludera värdbefolkningen i kortsiktigt flyktingstöd. Breddare, långsiktiga perspektiv måste bygga på förbättrade analyser av lokala marknadsmöjligheter.

Lokala och nationella myndigheter i Uganda och Kenya bör gå bortom utvecklingsplaner som huvudsakligen tjänar till att attrahera ekono-

miskt stöd från givare. Bredare och mer inkluderande utvecklingsplaner för områden där flyktingar är bosatta kan leda till ökade lokala intäkter och mer positiva attityder gentemot flyktingar.

Flera likartade insatser genomförs, utan ömsesidigt lärande med brister i samordning och strategiskt samarbete.

Övergripande rekommendation: Kontinuerlig samordning mellan olika givare samt mellan givare och regeringar krävs.

Operativa förslag: *Givare i Kenya och Uganda* behöver ytterligare stärka givarsamordningen för att skapa gemensamma, sammanhängande strategier och program som främjar ekonomisk inkludering.

Givare och genomförandeaktörer i Kenya och Uganda bör samverka kring riktade insatser och fokusera resurser på ett utvalt antal tematiska områden, snarare än att sprida resurser på små, olikartade jordbruksinsatser eller yrkesutbildningar. Inkluderande samarbete med både nationella och lokala myndigheter är avgörande.

Digitala jobb på distans är inte någon mirakelkur för ekonomisk inkludering. Deras roll kommer förbli marginell.

Övergripande rekommendation: Den ökande förväntan på digital sysselsättning som en viktig väg för flyktingars självförsörjning bör modereras.

Operativa förslag: *Genomförandeorgan i Uganda och Kenya* bör lägga begränsad vikt vid utbildning för digitala distansjobb. Även om problem med låga språk- och IT-kunskaper, svag tillgång till internet, datorer och restriktiva regleringar kan övervinnas, kommer andra hinder att kvarstå. De flesta flyktingar saknar förutsättningar för att etablera sig på en mycket konkurrensutsatt, snabibrörlig och oregelrad marknad.

Summary

This evaluation focuses on sustainable solutions that promote economic self-reliance in contexts of protracted displacement.

In 2024, the global number of displaced individuals reached a staggering 122.6 million. While many of the world's nations attentively are concerned with what is happening on their national doorsteps, vast numbers of forcibly displaced people risk falling into oblivion. They remain stuck for years, even decades, in refugee camps and settlements, predominantly in low- and middle-income countries.

Currently, two thirds of the world's refugees live in 'protracted' situations. That is, they have spent five years or more without being presented a durable solution - repatriation, resettlement or local integration. They often find themselves stuck in a state of limbo, facing significant protection challenges, restrictions on their rights and lack of economic opportunities. What keeps them alive is protection and support from the humanitarian system. However, in 2024, only half of the finance needed to cover global humanitarian needs were received (UN-OCHA 2024). As this system is increasingly under-financed, other sources of livelihoods become necessary.

Countries are becoming more restrictive in accepting refugees while the global number of displaced people is rising, and humanitarian financial resources are dwindling. This poses serious challenges to international frameworks designed to protect the rights of displaced individuals.

The 2016 New York Declaration, and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), including the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), advocate a development-oriented approach to the handling of displaced people. A key focus is to promote economic self-reliance for both refugees living in protracted displacement situations and members of host communities.

This study evaluates the effectiveness of such interventions. To what extent are refugees and host communities supported to reach economic inclusion onto joint markets through self-reliance and improved livelihoods? The cases are selected from two countries in sub-Saharan Africa that host large populations of refugees stuck in protractedness – Kenya and Uganda. Using a theory-based approach, the study assesses the internal dynamics of the interventions while also assessing them against several wider conditional and influencing factors.

The overall conclusion is that the gap between the ambitious goals of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and actual practices on the ground is alarmingly widening. The situation calls for urgent action based on informed discussions and pragmatic approaches to effectively address the challenges. This study can be seen as a contribution to this work.

The evaluation concludes that several of the interventions provide or have potential to provide results. In and around the Kenyan settlements, support to private sector businesses in e.g. agribusiness, chicken farming, financial services, renewable energy among others gives positive outcomes. However, it takes longer than expected and require more sustained counselling and support to expand businesses. Few refugee-owned businesses were initially competitive enough to receive financial support. Other investments in agriculture support were relatively few and struggling. Conditional factors such as mobility restrictions, lack of work permits, unsuitable climatic conditions for cultivation, lack of access to land and socio-cultural challenges amongst refugee populations were some of the most severe hindrances.

In Uganda, support to the expansion of small farming including both refugees and host community is perhaps the most promising path. Comparatively good cultivation conditions contribute. However, despite national policies allowing refugees to work and move freely, mobility is a major hindrance even here. This is largely due to lacking infrastructure. Difficulties in accessing enough land, work permits or

jobs, and adapting interventions to young and mainly female led households are among the major hindering factors.

Skills- and vocational trainings are offered in settlements in both countries, primarily in Kenya. However, market analyses are weak, as is the tracing of previous students, which lead to saturation in certain trades.

Hence, multiple interconnected factors influence the results of the studied interventions negatively. The relevance and content of the interventions appear differently when existing conditional and supportive factors are made visible.

The following main conclusions, recommendations and operational suggestions are made:

The current camp/settlement solution restricts prospects for economic inclusion in serious ways and needs to be reformed.

Overall recommendation: *Stakeholders in Kenya and Uganda*, especially host country governments and international donors, need to reformulate the camp/settlement approach and allow for gradual increases in mobility and issuing of work permits.

Operational suggestions: *Governments in Kenya and Uganda, UN and international donors* should plan for gradually increased quotas of work permits, movement passes, education and scholarships outside of settlements. This will increase remittances, reduce dependency on assistance and enhance relevance and outcome of existing self-reliance interventions.

International donors generally should continue to advocate for policy changes in mobility and work permits, while also increase their resettlement quotas, in accordance with principles of burden sharing.

Governments in Kenya and Uganda ought to find more and better suited areas for refugee relocation into less populated settlements. Planning

tools, such as UN-Habitat's 'Settlement Profiling' ought to be thoroughly used in such processes.

Host country governments generally should early on plan long-term and find suitable settlement locations in cases when agriculture is key for achieving economic inclusion. Collaboration with local authorities and international actors as well as sustained long-term implementation of gradual integrative plans is key for economic integration and refugee self-reliance. Smaller settlements may help alleviate pressure on host populations and land. While initially costlier, this approach may yield long-term benefits.

Lack of long-term, comprehensive financial support is a major obstacle to planned and structured integration of refugees onto host community markets

Overall recommendation: *Stakeholders globally*, especially international donors and host country governments, need to revitalize their commitment to the effective implementation of a comprehensive approach and find new funding sources.

Operational suggestions: *The Swedish government* should lead by example and promote a better financed, flexible and more effective humanitarian system.

Donors, UN and governments of Uganda and Kenya should clarify roles and division of labour amongst themselves, continue to promote more development-oriented implementing actors, and more market-based solutions.

Donors, UN, host governments and implementing actors generally ought to analyse and carefully consider prevailing incentive structures at international, national and local levels. They should strengthen supportive and weaken negative incentives for the promotion of economic inclusion of refugees and host communities.

These actors should also collaborate closely in creating gradual approaches for the hosting of refugees.

UN, host governments and donors generally should strengthen efforts to promote targeted repatriation and reintegration projects in countries of origin.

Certain interventions give promising positive results in terms of economic integration of refugees and host communities onto joint markets. But such results, however positive and promising, are still marginal in relation to vast and increasing needs of refugees.

Overall recommendation: *All involved actors* need to strengthen efforts for market development and agricultural production further

Operational suggestions: *Donors, government and implementing agencies in Kenya* should continuously conduct market analyses to expand economic integration. Spin-off activities to the successful KKCF-funded businesses should be promoted for the inclusion of wider refugee groups. Market development related to pastoralism and agriculture should be in focus.

Donors, government and implementing agencies in Uganda Should improve coordination and complementarity between successful businesses, such as Omia Agribusiness and other agricultural promotion initiatives. Focus need also be on financial deepening, on infrastructure investments and on other efforts to overcome the mobility challenges.

Implementing agencies in Kenya and Uganda should carefully consider when whether programs are best suited to support individuals or collectives.

Implementing agencies, donors, host national and local governments generally should identify and promote key successful interventions that lead to economic inclusion. Such examples are important for showcasing refugee agency and not least contribute to shift perspectives and incentives.

Self-reliance takes time to build and requires support in various forms by development and private sector actors

Overall recommendation: *Donors, host countries, UN and implementing agencies* should apply comprehensive and gradual approaches in supporting refugees in protracted situations.

Operational suggestions: *Donors and UN organisations, generally* should strive for long-term budgets to extend planning horizons and mitigate investment risks, especially for the private sector. Single year humanitarian budgets are not fit for integrative purposes.

Private sector agents generally should take greater part in the development of comprehensive financing strategies and be more involved in implementation work.

UN organisations and host governments generally ought to produce detailed knowledge, data and better analysis of needs and capacities of various refugee and host population groups.

Area based development processes are often talked about, but not enough promoted.

Overall recommendation: Widen the perspective to be more area-based, focusing more on local communities and populations, rather than an explicit focus on settlements and camps.

Operational suggestions: *Host country governments and donors generally* should collaborate more closely with county and municipal authorities.

Implementing agencies in Kenya and Uganda should move beyond '30/70' approaches of including host population into short-term refugee support. Wider and long-term supportive engagement needs to build on improved analyses of local market opportunities.

Local and national governments in Uganda and Kenya ought to move beyond development plans that mainly serve to attract donor financial support. Deeper development plans for refugee receiving

areas can lead to increased local revenues and more positive public attitudes towards refugees.

Numerous interventions of similar character are undertaken, without cross-learning, and with sub-optimal coordination and collaboration at strategic level.

Overall recommendation: Continuous donor and donor-government coordination is needed.

Operational suggestions: *Donors in Kenya and Uganda* need to ramp up the efforts of existing donor coordination groups to create joint and cohesive strategies and programmes that promote economic inclusion.

Donors together with implementing actors in Kenya and Uganda should consider undertaking more collaborative and targeted interventions, focusing their resources on a select number of thematic areas, instead of e.g. limited and diverse projects for agricultural development or skills training. Inclusive collaboration with both national and local governments is crucial. *Implementing actors in both countries* should make better market analysis a basis for skills and training programs.

Remote digital jobs are no silver bullet for economic inclusion, but remain a solution on the margin

Overall recommendation: Temper the emerging belief that digital employment may become an important pathway for refugee self-reliance.

Operational suggestions: *Implementing agencies in Uganda and Kenya* should treat training programs for remotely executed digital jobs as a solution for a few individuals. Even if current practical problems of low language and ITC skills, access to internet, to computer equipment and restrictive regulations may be overcome, other hurdles will remain. Most refugees lack the necessary social capital or sufficient diaspora links to enter and remain in a highly competitive, fast-moving, and unregulated market.

1 Introduction

The numbers of forcibly displaced people are increasing at alarming rates globally. According to recent figures 122.6 million people were forcibly displaced or stateless in 2024. The number of *refugees* worldwide reached 37.9 million at mid-2024 (UNHCR 2024c). Most refugees stay in exile for years or decades and such protractedness has steadily increased.

This escalating human displacement situation is becoming increasingly complex, with drastic humanitarian consequences. Recent cuts in humanitarian funding will most likely aggravate the situation further.

While the current study is written, situations for displaced people, including refugees, are undergoing rapid and drastic changes. Actors in this field need to constantly adapt to changing preconditions and realities.

Factors driving displacement are primarily armed conflict, persecution, and climate and environmental changes – as single factors or in combination. Such situations often also imply severe violations of human rights. Conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and Lebanon account for an important share of the increased displacements. Millions of people have also been displaced due to armed conflicts in Sudan, Yemen, Syria, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, and Myanmar.

Out of the 122.6 million forcibly displaced people, *internally displaced persons* (IDPs) account for the larger share: 75.9 million at the end of 2023 (IDMC 2025). For a comprehensive description of the current magnitude and major drivers of forced displacement, see online appendix 3.

The international community formulated a response to protracted forced displacement with the New York Declaration in 2016, and

with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in 2018 (see appendix A 1.3 therein for details). Attached to the latter was the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The Framework contains agreements to support economic inclusion, livelihoods, and self-reliance of refugees in protracted displacement situations. Support should also include refugee hosting communities. The principle of financial burden sharing between recipient and donor country governments is a foundation of the Compact. Since the endorsement, increasing numbers of forced displaced people in protracted situations have put further pressure on the system.

Any search for solutions to economic inclusion, livelihoods, and self-reliance in protracted displacement situations needs to consider that the growing complexity also holds political dimensions. Parallel to growing displacement is the increasingly restrictive and anti-immigrant policies and political movements in many countries, primarily in democratic countries in the Global North. Data covering 195 states over 70 years shows the development of a deterrence paradigm during which states in the Global North have increasingly restricted access to asylum (Rausis 2023).

Consequently, *asylum seekers* are increasingly finding their protection claims assessed in low-and middle-income countries that already host large numbers of displaced people – countries struggling with weak and overstretched institutional capacity for legal protection. The restrictiveness of the Global North is also increasingly replicated by countries in the Global South, leading to higher risks of erosion of refugee protection on a global scale (Blair et al 2022, Ghezelbash 2018). This evolution has contributed to a shortsighted perspective, primarily focusing on deterrence as a response to the most recent crises, while neglecting crises of a more protracted nature as the ones in the scope of this study (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan 2017).

From the perspective of geographic distribution, forced displacement continues to escalate in many regions and particularly in Africa. The total number of persons displaced by conflict in Africa reached

42.5 million in 2024¹ (IDMC 2025, UNHCR 2025). In six sub-Saharan countries more than ten, and up to 30 percent of the population was displaced (ACSS 2023). Notably, African migration and displacement were largely regional and only a small fraction of African migrants and displaced persons embarked on a journey towards Europe. (McAuliffe and Ocho 2024).

Three out of four *refugees* are hosted in low- or middle-income countries. Among high income countries, Germany, France and Chile are the three largest host countries in absolute numbers (UNHCR 2024c).

The statistics on people in need of protection and assistance are coupled with a substantial and growing gap in funding. According to OCHA, the rise in humanitarian needs will become more complex and irreversible due to intersecting drivers of displacement (UN-OCHA 2024). A fragmented, competitive, and polarised geopolitical landscape further weakens the multilateral system. The recent cuts in ODA by the largest bilateral donor, the USA, as well as by other donors, is a dramatic illustration. The current study is an evaluation of interventions already undertaken by external donors. Even so, any recommendations for the future will suffer from uncertainty as to their feasibility, as resource flows may change dramatically on very short notice. Complex displacement patterns will also make it more difficult to reach vulnerable and displaced people.

The humanitarian funding gap is growing wider. Before the cuts by the USA, UN-OCHA (2024) projected that 300 million people needed humanitarian assistance in 2024, necessitating USD 49 billion in funding. At the end of the year 24.6 billion USD (50 percent) had been received, which is slightly lower in absolute terms, albeit covering a higher share of the needs than in 2023.

¹ Refugees, refugee-like, asylum seekers and internally displaced people on the African continent, out of which 2.55 million in North Africa.

1.1 The problem of protracted displacement

Protracted forced displacement is extensive, depriving millions and generations of people of the right to development while at the same time undermining the carrying capacity of the humanitarian system.

Both for individuals and politically, protracted displacement is a state of limbo at many levels. Displaced individuals have moved beyond the emergency phase but are unable to anticipate long-term solutions anytime soon. Prolonged displacement often occurs in fragile states.²

Today, protracted displacement is the rule for most refugees and IDPs. According to current estimations, two out of three refugees find themselves in a protracted situation (UNHCR 2024e). Figures on protracted IDPs are more difficult to come by, but estimates indicate a similar proportion.

According to UNHCR (2004), to qualify as a protracted situation 25,000 refugees from the same country of origin need to have been in exile in a given country for at least five consecutive years. The current definition underestimates protracted displacement, as it does not consider smaller groups of refugees. In addition, long-staying urban refugees are also a category that tends to fall outside the established definitional frame as they often reside in urban areas illegally, avoiding contact with authorities.

² UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as: '...one in which 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.' (UNHCR 2004, p.4).

1.2 Rationale and contribution

This study deals with issues in a highly contentious policy area. From a Swedish perspective, the government's reform agenda for international development cooperation (Government Offices of Sweden 2023) is an important reference. The synergies between aid and migration policies are particularly highlighted, among them to strengthen the capacity of host societies for migration and refugee reception in low- and middle-income countries and support sustainable integration solutions and resettlement in third countries.

This study should also be seen in light of Sweden's contribution to the UNHCR, as the largest provider of multi-year core funding. Sweden contributed USD 140 million to UNHCR in 2024, of which USD 90 million (65 percent) as core support. Sweden is also a major donor of core support to other UN organisations operating in protracted displacement contexts, such as the World Food Program (WFP), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO).

Sweden supports interventions in the studied refugee hosting areas through its bilateral aid programmes. In addition, at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023, Sweden made a specific pledge to support work on economic and social inclusion of refugees.³ The pledge runs over four years and aims to specifically support the economic inclusion and social protection for displaced, stateless, refugee and host communities through Sida's development and humanitarian funding.

In addition, this study responds to key takeaways from a roundtable series on forced migration organised by the Expert Group for Aid Studies, EBA (Burlin 2021). The roundtables highlighted a need for more knowledge in areas such as linkages between displacement and

³ The Global Refugee Forum, held every four years, is the world's largest international gathering on refugees. It is designed to support implementation of the objectives set out in the Global Compact on Refugees.

development, livelihoods, refugee inclusion in national strategies and opportunities.⁴

This study aims to draw lessons of relevance to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

1.3 How to read the report

This study seeks to apply a holistic perspective. Hence, it should be read as an analysis of a wide range of interconnected factors that contribute to the findings and recommendations, that hold both context specific (Kenya and Uganda) and generalisable aspects.

The report unfolds as follows: Section two describes method and design, including how theories of change are used for the analysis. At intervention level, the ToCs enable assessment of respective programme. At aggregated level the ToC enables generalisations beyond the studied country contexts.

Section three describes what protractedness implies and how it is approached by the international community.

Sections four and five evaluate selected interventions from Kenya and Uganda. Interventions are evaluated as self-contained programs, then assessed against a wider framework of conditional and supportive factors, that may circumscribe or enhance their results.

Section six draws the analysis together, including comparisons between the country cases and discussions on wider generalisability. Especially the analysis of what findings imply for the general ToC

⁴ Following the EBA roundtables, EBA and OECD jointly published a mapping of the extent to which forcibly displaced people are included in social protection schemes (Gagnon et al 2022). This publication forms part of an emerging literature on inclusion of forcibly displaced people into various national and international schemes and planning processes (OECD 2023a, OECD 2023b, OECD 2023c, Le Coz and Sohst 2023, Chaves-González and Delgado 2023, Davidoff-Gore and Le Coz 2023).

opens for generalisations as to the viability of the self-reliance model that is fundamental in the Global Compact on Refugees.

Section seven contains conclusions and recommendations.

The appendices aim to deepen the analysis in terms of disregarded historical comparisons (appendix 1), core lessons from wider research (appendix 2) and provide information to back up the analysis (online appendices 3 – 7).

Definitions

Refugees have fled over at least one national border and have been registered with the UNHCR.

Internally displaced persons have been displaced but remain within the borders of the country of origin.

Asylum seekers are not yet legally recognised as refugees but await asylum decisions.

Stateless persons are not considered citizens by any state.

People in *refugee-like situations* fall outside of the legal boundaries of the above.

2 Study design and methods

By evaluating the effectiveness of selected interventions, this study aims to contribute to an operationalizable understanding of whether interventions to support self-reliance⁵, livelihoods⁶ and economic inclusion⁷ in protracted situations can be strengthened. The interventions are studied in two host countries – Kenya and Uganda – both prominent examples of the self-reliance model agreed to in the CRRF. Hence, findings in these cases enable generalisations to other host countries.

The study starts with a formulation of a general Theory-of-Change (ToC) for how the CRRF supports self-reliance, livelihoods, and economic inclusion. This ToC builds on UNHCRs ToC (UNHCR 2019a). It is adapted to conditions where large numbers of forcibly displaced people are received by relatively poor hosting countries, with high dependence on natural resources, primarily agriculture.

The study proceeds along several layers, where evaluation of specific interventions in two different national contexts forms the empirical basis for the assessment of what contextual factors that hinder and/or enable results.

As to the generalisability of findings, a comparison with historical experiences of self-reliance programs is made in appendix 1, and a review of relevant research is done in appendix 2.

5 UN definition: the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs... ...in a sustainable manner and with dignity (UNHCR 2005)

6 UN definition: A means of making a living. It encompasses people's capabilities, assets, income, and activities required to secure the necessities of life (UN-Redd 2024).

7 UN definition: An approach that actively involves displaced populations in the economic life of their host communities. It creates an enabling environment, empowering refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, returnees, and stateless individuals to rebuild their lives through sustainable economic activities (UNHCR 2023a).

The main question guiding the study is:

- How are the selected interventions supportive of both refugees' and host populations' self-reliance, livelihoods, and economic inclusion?

The main sub-questions are:

- What factors have contributed to progress, opportunities, and/or impediments in the operationalization of the studied interventions?
- What changes in the implementation approaches and/or conditions would be needed to improve the result of the studied interventions?

2.1 Theory of Change – how will integration happen?

An overall Theory of Change for the economic inclusion of refugees into local host communities for them – and the local host population – to secure economic self-reliance may be understood and described in the following rather rudimentary way:

- IF programmes of economic inclusion, livelihoods and self-reliance are started early on, with long-term strategic planning;
- IF host countries implement policies that allow right to decent work, including free movement, right to housing, education, justice, and social protection for refugees;
- IF host countries and local populations offer access to sufficient and farmable land to allow for its long-term use by refugees;
- IF stakeholders engage in advocacy to emphasise the positive impact of economic inclusion;
- IF host country authorities, national and international actors contribute to create enabling environments with adapted finan-

cial sectors and infrastructure resources to enable business activities and market development that include both refugees and local host populations;

- IF authorities, local and international organisations provide good quality advice, support and training to refugees and host community members;
- IF development actors take on increasing roles in the transformation, targeting institutional capacity building and stimulating local economic growth;
- IF the international community provides enough resources in terms of humanitarian and development aid long enough for the transformation to mature and be sustainable;
- THEN refugees and local host populations will increase their economic self-reliance, economic inclusion and benefit from central social services.

Assumptions behind this ToC include that the creation of enabling economic environments requires the right to free movement for employment and business purposes, access to finance and regulations that provide for decent employment conditions. Another assumption is that incentive structures for all involved actors – international donors, international organisations, national and local governments, implementing organisations and private sector actors, refugees, and host populations – remain such that they all continue to work and contribute towards the overall objective of integration of refugees into host communities.

The success of interventions supporting self-reliance, livelihoods and economic integration is defined as refugees and host country populations being able to act as economic agents on the same, shared markets in the host communities.

2.2 Methodology and case selection

Interventions have been selected from the Kakuma camp/Kalobeyei settlement in Kenya and the Rhino refugee settlement in Uganda. The purpose is to make comparisons between these sites, as well as between interventions as such.⁸

Kenya and Uganda are both signatory countries to the New York Declaration, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and pilot countries of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). Furthermore, the two countries come out as absolute top, when citizens in an international survey are asked about their willingness to welcome refugees (IPSOS 2024). The camp/settlement areas selected are both dominated by refugees from South Sudan, even if refugees from other countries also are hosted there. Despite these similarities, relative dissimilarities remain in national refugee hosting policies and in contexts of the two countries, supposedly influencing the prospects for economic inclusion, livelihoods, and self-reliance.

Based on their centrality in achieving the above stated objective and questions, private sector development and agriculture production constitute the two core sectors within which interventions have been selected (KIIIs). Besides this, the interventions have been selected on the merits that they, by key informants and in documentation, are described as having potential to overcome restrictions and restraints in self-reliance, livelihoods and economic inclusion among refugees and host populations.⁹

Policy-wise, the two highly protracted situations offer different conditions for economic inclusion. Kenya has a long-standing more re-

⁸ Elements for the discussion on the generalisability of findings is provided in Appendix 1 and 2.

⁹ A list of projects and programs in the settlements from which the studied interventions are selected, along with selection criteria, is provided in online appendix 5.

strictive encampment policy, while Uganda's settlement policy opens for refugees' mobility and provides plots for cultivation upon arrival.

Selected interventions are analysed in relation to three types of *conditional factors* for the development of sustainable and resilient self-reliance, livelihoods, and economic inclusion. The selection of these factors is based on document study and interviews:

Institutional, legal, and strategic frameworks and policies in host countries supporting economic and social inclusion of refugees. This also includes UN operational structures and policies, policies and operational strategies of international development donors, international and national civil society organisations (CSO), and private sector actors.

Geographical and environmental preconditions: Location of the camp or settlement in terms of access and mobility, and of climate and environmental conditions, and Refugees' access to land for productive or wider livelihood purposes.

Size and composition of the populations (refugees and host population) **of concern in** terms of (i) Size and socio-economic composition of refugees and host communities respectively, (ii) Demography of the population of concern.

The three conditional factors are first analysed for each country in sections 4 and 5, and then jointly in the first part of section 6. In addition to this, in a separate section (6.2), the selected interventions are analysed considering several *supportive factors* that are believed to be important for implementation. These are: (i) education - primary, secondary, technical and vocational skills education and training, and higher education, (ii) infrastructure - roads, water, energy/electricity and ICT and (iii) humanitarian assistance - food items, cash assistance, shelter, health.

The study is a case-study based evaluation using a contribution analysis approach (see, e.g. Mayne 2011, 2012) to identify factors contributing to results in interventions, and thus to identify the potential and

hindrances of agency in the studied interventions. The theory-based contribution analysis has been applied at various levels of the investigation, with separate Theories of Change (ToC) for each studied intervention. The theories describe how and why a desired change (result) is expected to occur in a specific setting. The approach helps clarify the connections and possible missing parts between the interventions' inputs and the realisation of long-term objectives.

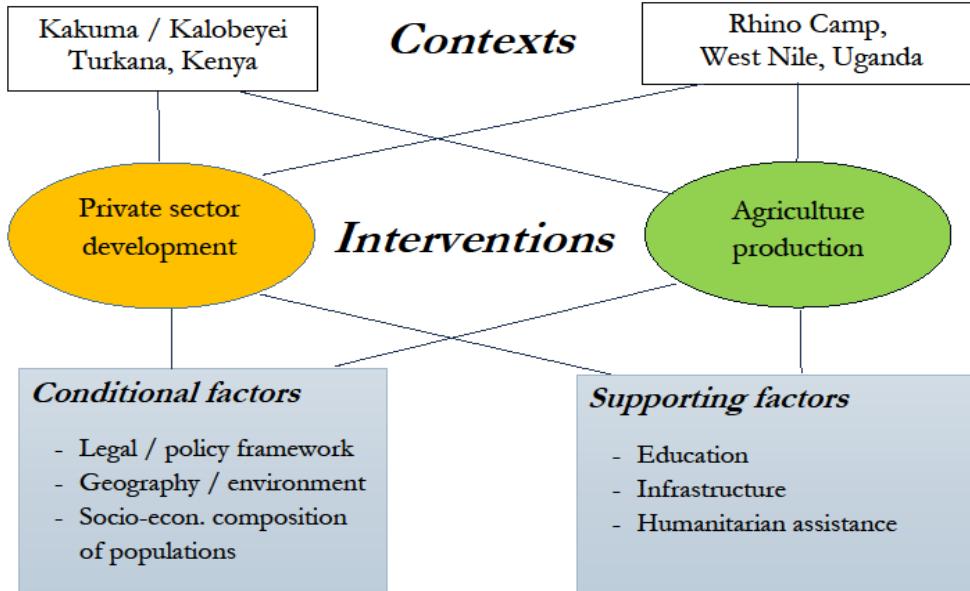
The long-term objective of the studied interventions – economic inclusion – is for both refugees and host country members to be economic agents on joint, not separate, markets.

The analysis of selected interventions is placed within a framework, which serves as a basis for assessing what types of supportive and conditional factors that are needed for the identified outcomes to achieve the long-term goals.

The identification of ToCs has been done on two levels: (i) international agreements and frameworks (our general ToC), (ii) our (re-) formulation of the ToCs of individual interventions by implementing partners. The ToCs have been crafted through a screening process of existing ToC or similar concepts. The ToC for each separate policy/strategy and intervention has then been assessed against existing results reporting, interviews, observations, and conditional and supportive factors included in the analytic framework. When original intervention ToCs have been deemed inadequate, reconstructive interpretations of them have been made, to enable their use as analytical tools. The assessments of interventions have been supplemented with existing academic and grey literature including existing programme evaluations.

Key intervention areas analysed are support for private sector development (with a specific focus on access to finance, characteristics of markets, access to markets, access to business training/education) and agricultural production (with a specific focus on access to farmland/plot size, farming method/tools, type of crops, access to water, quality of soils).

Figure 1: Analytical framework summarised



Interviews with key informants in the areas of economic inclusion, livelihoods and self-reliance have constituted an important basis for the selection of the themes and the interventions as well as the understanding of them.¹⁰ In total 69 persons were interviewed (of which 9 KII) and in addition five group interviews were conducted. Specifically targeted actors for interviews have been the UNHCR (headquarter, regional offices and operations in Kenya and Uganda, 21 interviews), the Governments of Kenya and Uganda (Ministry of Home Affairs, County Government, 10 interviews), implementing partners (19), other UN agencies of relevance (2), private sector actors (9) and researchers (2) as well as refugees (11 interviews,

10 Key informants have been selected from the following categories: UN organisations, donors, government representatives, implementing agencies, researchers.

3 group interviews). See online appendix 4 for the list of interviewees. References to interviewees in the text are done by categories to preserve anonymity.

The interviews have been conducted both remotely and during fieldwork. The information gained has been triangulated through control interviews with refugee and host population households, local authority representatives, and local businesspeople. Other data sources have been development partners' documentation as well as independent evaluations of relevant interventions in the area of forced displacement economic inclusion.

The agency-centred approach to self-reliance, emphasised in international frameworks and translated into various interventions, necessitates a note. The study understands *agency* as the capacity of individuals to have the power and resources to fulfil their potential.¹¹ In doing so, the study emanates from an understanding that refugees in protracted situations face unique institutional conditions affecting development prospects, planning horizons, and quality of life (Betts et al. 2016). Refugees exist in a paradoxical state, being both excluded from legal protection and yet bound by its obligations. This duality results in distorted status and identity, which impose unique behavioural constraints upon them. (Werker 2007; Zylinska 2004).

2.3 Delimitations

Due to a focus on refugees, perspectives of local host populations are consciously addressed to a more limited extent. The perspectives of refugees are mainly gathered in relation to selected interventions, hence, are not representative for the whole refugee community.

¹¹ The agency concept is contested. The evaluation uses a practical-oriented definition that entails the capacity of people to make practical and normative judgements amongst alternative possible actions in response to a context, a demand, or a presently evolving situation (see e.g. Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

Most of the studied interventions run over short project cycles, hence results information has at times been tentative or patchy. A way of compensating for this has been to compare with similar previous interventions by the same agents.

Large groups of refugees in Uganda and Kenya live in urban areas outside of camps or settlements. They have entered self-reliance strategies of their own, and do not receive humanitarian support. While facing much hardship and challenges, it is beyond the scope of this study to include also them.

The iterative process that contribution analysis presupposes has in the eleven different interventions mainly been undertaken remotely, through telephone or video-based interviews, e-mail exchanges and document analysis. The intervention sites have been visited, but repeated physical visits have not been possible.

The effects of interventions vary significantly between different categories of refugees. Women and children are generally among the most vulnerable – and they are overrepresented in all the settlements studied. However, any fair gender analysis would be beyond the scope of this study, and gender differences have thus only been referenced briefly, even though we are aware of the magnitude and importance of the issues. The study has furthermore not addressed the situation for people with disabilities, other particularly exposed groups or the effects on various age groups or on individuals who have been in exile for differing lengths of time.

3 Implications of protractedness

Before presenting the assessments of interventions in the following sections, a closer description of the problem of protractedness, and of the internationally agreed solutions to this problem is needed.

3.1 Human development and a rights-based approach

During refugee emergency phases the focus of refugee assistance is on protection and life-sustaining. With extended time in exile access to a set of wider rights is growing in importance. Potential problems are many, including i) insecurity in camps, ii) uncertainty about current and future legal status and iii) unclear governance systems. As host governments may not fully fulfil their responsibilities, situations emerge where non-state actors exercise state-like administrative and governance functions (Veroff 2010, Slaughter and Crisp 2009).

In situations of protracted forced displacement, individual human rights are closely linked to policy processes related to state sovereignty. Individual rights may be at odds with the rights of sovereign states to decide who has what rights within its territory. Dealing with such tensions, various international and regional legal instruments have been agreed, defining specific requirements of state parties. The UN Declaration on Human Rights from 1948 and the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol are the most central treaties – applying equally to all individuals (UN 1948,

UN 1951, UN 1967). Parts of the human rights declaration and the 1951 Refugee Declaration have a direct bearing on this study.¹²

Also, international non-binding state-negotiated frameworks, such as the GCM and GCR (UN 2018a, 2018b), articulate human rights aspects.

Despite international conventions and frameworks, the adoption of rights-based approaches at the policy level and implementation on the ground remains weak (Ferris et al 2008, Slaughter and Crisp 2009). Long-term investments in the rights and capabilities of refugees seems more cumbersome than mobilising funding for immediate needs-based activities (Ferris et al. 2008). Host governments may also favour support to needs-based activities to avoid politically sensitive integrative aspects of rights-based programmes (Loescher and Milner 2007).

To settle refugees in camps is primarily a means to temporarily meet life-supporting needs during an emergency phase. The basic premises of the camp are planning and control – keeping refugees in one place is seen as logically and security-wise more efficient. For similar reasons, camps are often located close to borders, in sparsely populated areas of the host country. In most cases, the control function also contains firm restrictions in the right to mobility. As exile extends and turns into protractedness, multifaceted and contradictory layers of needs, interests, possibilities, and restrictions are gradually created (Hovil and Maple 2022, Martin et al. 2020, Mallki 1996).

12 E.g., Article 14: 'Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution', Article 23: 'Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment' and Article 28: 'Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms outlined in this Declaration can be fully realised'. Further, the 1951 Refugee Declaration, grounded in Article 14 of the HR Declaration, contains relevant elements such as the right to decent work (Art. 17-19 and 24), the right to housing, land and property, including intellectual property (Art. 13, 14 and 21), the right to education (Art. 22) and the right to freedom of movement within the territory (Art. 26 and Art. 31(2)).

Legal constraints influence refugees' ability to pursue self-reliance and livelihood both short- and long-term. Such constraints include encampment, absence of residency rights, restrictions on movement, employment, education and property rights, as well as limited access to monetary and non-monetary resources (Turner 2016, Minca 2015; Darling 2009, Jacobsen 2002). Further distortions also emerge from factors such as the policies of humanitarian organisations, socio-economic and cultural practices of surrounding communities, and the sociocultural norms established by groups of refugees. (Oka 2014, Holzer 2013, Salvatici 2012, Kibreab 2004).

Nevertheless, life in protracted situations is not static and immobile. Despite policy hesitance to local integration (Fielden 2008), de facto integration evolves over time. Many refugees in protracted situations constantly develop their agency, mobility, resilience, and transformative capacities to form practices supporting their own individual development and collectively through different forms of grouping (Landau 2014, Gray 2009, Fellesson 2003).

Refugees in protracted situations demonstrate remarkable problem-solving abilities. They apply innovation processes by identifying problems, defining solutions, testing, and adjusting for wider use (Betts et al., 2016). The lack of institutional support in refugee communities may be the driving force behind grassroots innovation initiatives (La Chaux and Haugh, 2014).

While agency-driven initiatives highlight the potential of refugees as economic contributors, they also illustrate the economic loss incurred by keeping knowledgeable, skilled, and ambitious individuals in confined and temporary states of existence. We have not found any studies or estimates of the magnitude of this loss. However, considering the large number of refugees in protracted situations and the investments made in preparatory activities – such as the interventions focused on in this study – the total loss seems substantial.

3.2 Economic inclusion as a solution

As the number of protracted situations rapidly increases and financial resources dwindle, the urgency of finding solutions to self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods grows. Policies of the host government play a significant role in facilitating necessary transformation, although not always sufficient. In such instances, the focus may shift towards preparing for repatriation and reintegration. Nevertheless, the promotion of self-reliance is a priority for many international refugee assisting organisations.¹³

The 2023 Global Refugee Forum "mega-pledge," (UNHCR 2023c) aimed to reach one million people with economic inclusion and broader social protection programming within four years. Additionally, the pledge aimed to assist 15 nations in strengthening or adopting laws and policies on economic inclusion and social protection. A total of over USD 2,2 billion was committed by governments, the private sector, philanthropies, foundations, and faith-based organizations.¹⁴

In the current international policy environment, the idea of economic inclusion, livelihood and self-reliance can be seen both as a reformulation of the recognised concept of durable local integration, and as an idea of international burden-sharing. The notions appeal directly to the agency of people, placing responsibility primarily on the refugees, but also on the local population. However, from a critical perspective, they can also be viewed as a response to the lack of effective solutions to address increasing protracted displacement situations. This lack of solutions threatens the legitimacy and authority of the international refugee regime (Betts and Collier 2017).

¹³ These include among others the UNHCR, the WFP, the ILO, the World Bank, as well as international donors and NGOs. In 2024 six percent of UNHCR's Global Appeal was set aside for support to self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods (UNHCR 2024b, p 18).

¹⁴ The GRF mobilized over 1,600 pledges across 43 multi-stakeholder commitments, aimed at enhancing economies in refugee-hosting areas through investments, support for refugee entrepreneurs, and job creation. The private sector pledged over USD 250 million.

The redefinition of refugee presence as a longer-term development opportunity has been interpreted as an ideological project influenced by dominating political and economic interests in the international refugee regime, aiming to redefine the responsibilities of both displaced populations and host communities (Omata 2022).

But this is not the first time focus is on economic inclusion, livelihoods, and self-reliance. The problem of mass-displacement and protracted refugee situations has been a reality throughout the history of the post-WWII refugee regime. In the African context, several attempts have been made to find solutions. From the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, most refugee-receiving governments and international agencies embraced the idea of local integration as the primary approach for addressing protracted situations, culminating in two international conferences, ICARA I and II, in the early 1980s. (Gorman 1986). Including both refugees and host populations, an integrated zonal development approach with organised rural settlements was at the heart of the strategy. Refugees ought to be turned into economic actors while awaiting repatriation, provision of necessary means for agricultural production was the primary means (Kibreab 1989).

Finding areas suitable for farming was key – areas with enough water, good soil, and favourable weather conditions. The heavily involved UNHCR set up a process with three stages: emergency, establishment, and consolidation. First, refugees would receive traditional humanitarian aid. Once feasible, refugees would then move to the establishment stage and start integrating by accessing farmland and necessary tools to become self-sufficient. In the final consolidation stage, the settlement would aim to produce a surplus of agricultural goods and be integrated into the regional development framework. Additionally, refugees would gain the same civil rights as the local population (UNHCR 1981).

Many settlements were able to reach the consolidation phase within two to ten years. However, despite strong support from both host governments and the international community, the organised settle-

ment solution was only actively implemented for a limited time, mainly between 1963 and 1979.

Further description of these historical experiences is found in appendix 1.

In recent years, UNHCR has developed a global strategy concept note (2019-2023) for its current initiatives related to livelihoods and economic inclusion programmes (UNHCR 2019a). The note emphasises the importance of starting economic inclusion early on during a refugee influx. Long-term strategic planning is viewed as essential. The right to decent work is seen as a fundamental entitlement that also requires a range of other rights, such as freedom of movement, housing, land ownership, education, access to justice and property rights. These challenges are to be mitigated through measures promoting inclusive market systems, for instance access to financial services, training, certification, social protection, employment, business registration and partnerships with the private sector. Refugees in rural areas are specifically targeted through inclusion in agriculture value chains.

UNHCR sees context-specific, evidence-based advocacy efforts as important. The positive impact of economic inclusion of refugees and host communities should be lifted. Data and analysis are essential to highlight this potential.

According to the note, development actors are to take the lead on livelihood interventions in most cases. Collaboration between humanitarian and development actors can allow for increased access to development expertise, funding, and resources. Furthermore, such collaboration is believed to strengthen connections with governments, the private sector, and other key stakeholders. Collaboration with line ministries and local governments is believed to be key for facilitating the integration of refugees into national systems and have positive impacts on hosting economies.

With this focus on economic inclusion, UNHCR's view is that refugees first and foremost must be given opportunities to feed

themselves either through cultivation of food and/or by earning money. What is required is access to land and agricultural inputs, possibilities for employment and possibilities to start their own businesses to integrate with the host community economy. Uganda's policy framework has provided such opportunities for decades and is well-known for its progressiveness. Kenya has through recent policy development entered a similar path. Its policies for integration make economic inclusion between refugee settlement and surrounding host communities the key approach.

4 Evaluation of interventions, Kenya

In the following two sections, focus will be on the evaluation question “*how are the selected interventions supportive of both refugees’ and host populations’ self-reliance, livelihoods, and economic inclusion?*” The interventions will be assessed separately, and then in relation to conditional factors, starting with Kenya.

Kenya has hosted large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers for decades and is currently the fifth-largest refugee-hosting country in Africa. As of March 2025, Kenya hosts close to 837 000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers from over 20 countries. Refugees originating from Somalia and South Sudan constitute the majority. More than 86 percent of the registered refugees are residing in camps. Almost 290 000 of them reside in Kakuma camp and Kalobeyei settlement, which are the sites selected for this evaluation.

The refugee situation in Kenya is deeply protracted. Many refugees have spent decades in the camps. As a result, several generations have been born within the camp's boundaries without experiencing other places or other legal status. The Kenyan refugee operation has during later years been significantly underfunded. As of end-April only 27 percent of the required finances of USD 158 million for 2025 had been received (UNHCR 2025).

Kenya is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 2016 New York Declaration for refugees and migrants and its annex, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The country has pledged support for the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and has implemented various initiatives and policies aimed at improving socio-economic conditions and integration of refugees, as well as enhancing the resilience of host communities.

The sites studied are situated in Turkana County, in the far northwest corner of Kenya between Lake Turkana, South Sudan, and Uganda.

In these settlements, most refugees originate from South Sudan, while Ethiopians, Somalis and Congolese (DRC) are other large groups. An even larger settlement in the eastern part of Kenya, Dadaab, hosts mainly Somalis.

The average age among refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei is 28 years, whereas host community members in the surrounding area have an average age of 33. Only 14 percent of the refugees are employed, most refugees are engaged in informal agriculture (Poole, 2019). A substantial portion of the local population is also engaged in informal sector jobs or self-employment (UNHCR 2018b). Turkana County generally consists of dryland landscape, and about 65 percent of the host population are pastoralists. Most refugees were settled farmers in their places of origin. It follows that access to land is a fundamental issue. A communal tenure system strongly dominates in the County. However, climate change and economic transformation are driving changes to both land use and the traditional role of livestock herding.

Water scarcity is another contentious issue in this arid region with irregular rainfall. Poor road conditions, weak transportation systems, and security concerns challenge the movement of resources and people to and from the sites (World bank 2018a).

These are some characteristics of the refugee hosting sites where livelihood supporting interventions are undertaken. In the following, we analyse how economic self-reliance is promoted and to what extent interventions succeed in integrating refugees and host communities on the same markets. A first section analyses interventions promoting business sector activities, followed by a section analysing how agriculture is promoted.

4.1 Key intervention area I: support to private sector development

Several studies have found refugee settlements to have great market potential due to the inflow of resources (e.g. World Bank, 2018b). Efforts to attract investments in and around settlements have followed. Some of the humanitarian activities may possibly also be taken over by private agents, including by refugees themselves. But to what extent can promotion of private sector initiatives enable refugee and host community agency and contribute to economic inclusion and self-reliance?

4.1.1 Kakuma/Kalobeyei challenge fund

The first intervention studied is somewhat of a flagship programme for business development. The ultimate objective of the Kakuma/Kalobeyei Challenge Fund (KKCF) is to improve “economic integration and self-reliance of refugees and host communities”. The programme took its starting point from a market study, “Kakuma as a Marketplace” (World Bank, 2018b) that in a detailed way showed major market opportunities in the settlement area. Against this backdrop, the KKCF promotes the private sector through various activities. Priority is given to investments in agribusiness, financial services, health, education, aquaculture, water and sanitation, renewable energy, logistics, cold storage and child-care. These sectors are chosen because of their potential to contribute to enhanced livelihoods. By providing performance-based grants to medium sized companies, social enterprises and local refugee or host community companies, KKCF seeks to enable new and stronger companies in these sectors. The grants are combined with technical assistance, training and knowledge transfer to the grantees.

Advisory services are also provided to larger, external, firms to entice them to invest in the settlement area. Furthermore, advice and support are provided to the Turkana County Government with the

purpose of helping to improve the local business environment. Easier administrative regulation and procedures for starting and running businesses and to invest are meant to contribute. The set-up of ‘one-stop-shops’ for needed licences, fees and permissions is one part (MDF, 2023).

Through these interventions, the number and quality of private companies are to increase, and with it employment of refugees and host country population. The profits and salaries generated will increase local income, and this way contribute to enhanced livelihoods. Increased local production of goods and services will also enhance refugee and host community livelihoods.

The idea is also for early established companies to inspire further expansion of business activities and increased investments. Expansion of the financial sector will give greater access to finance and hence support further business expansion. The KKCP theory-of-chance can be summarised as follows (MDF 2023:12):

- IF performance-based grants are provided to medium sized companies, social enterprises and local refugee or host community companies,
- IF the grants are combined with technical assistance, training and knowledge transfer to the grantees,
- IF advisory services are also provided to larger, external, firms in order to entice them to invest in the settlement area,
- IF advice and support are provided to the Turkana County Government with the purpose of helping to improve the local business environment,
- IF administrative regulations and procedures for starting and running businesses are made easier by the set-up of ‘one-stop-shops’,
- IF investments are undertaken in the following priority sectors: financial services, renewable energy, health, education, water and sanitation, aquaculture, agribusiness, childcare, logistics and cold storage.

- THEN the number and quality of private companies will increase, as will the employment numbers of refugees and host country population. This will generate increased profits and salaries;
- LEADING TO increased local incomes which together with increased and improved local production of products and services will contribute to enhanced livelihoods.

An assumption is that donors provide financial support. Another assumption is that all relevant stakeholders will contribute constructively to these effects and results.

The five-year programme was launched in October 2019. It is supported by the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC) and financed with 25,4 MUSD by the EU, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the UK. A mid-term review published late 2023 (MDF 2023) found the pilot programme to advance well, despite being a novel and complex undertaking in a challenging context. Challenges have been legion, and delays occurred not least due to the covid-19 pandemic. Still, the KKCF has managed to deliver on most of its output in accordance with the targets that were set up from the start. Private sector activities have increased in the KK area, the business environment and investment climate have improved in Turkana West, and the awareness of market opportunities as well as of the potential of market driven solutions in and around refugee settlements have increased. Progress is noted by outside observers:

“We now have six filling stations in Kakuma/Kalobeyei, where we used to have two. The companies that have benefitted from KKCF support need more transportation.”
(KII).

In total, 176 enterprises across many sectors had been supported at the end of 2023, and 313 jobs had been created. At least 2 million US dollar worth of investments had been attracted to the KK area. Hence, overall, the programme has been assessed as very successful,

and the mid-term review recommended it to be continued beyond the pilot phase of the five years (MDF 2023).

Progress has not been even. As in all market activities, there are differences in the success and profitability rates between various sectors and activities. The production and sale of liquid honey, vegetables and fruit, cookstoves, power generation and mini grid distribution are examples of successes. In other areas, enterprises are struggling. However, in addition to the profits and incomes generated, the provision of a set of new and demanded products and services does also contribute to enhanced livelihoods for refugees and local host country populations (KII, MDF 2023).

Another effect of the programme is the influence it has had on perceptions in the wider community of humanitarian actors. By achieving positive results, the programme has shown the potential of opening for private sector partners to conduct various services that earlier were seen – mainly or purely – as tasks for public or non-profit voluntary actors. With the entrance of private sector actors, the scope for refugees as well as host country actors in humanitarian affairs have increased (Interviews with UN and donors, MDF 2023).

Difficult lessons have been learned along the way. As things took longer than expected the Midterm Review especially points to the need to allocate enough time to build relations and partnerships with stakeholders and to help the local community better understand the interventions. This is especially important in an area that for long has been dependent on aid, where perceptions might be less geared towards taking their own initiatives, and where capacities may be low in various ways (Interviews with UN and implementing agencies).

Noteworthy is also how the distribution of funds has evolved. Funding was absorbed very differently by the various business types and by different population categories. Mid-sized private companies funded through the private sector window (PSW), consumed all allocated funding for that category. Social enterprises, funded through the Social Enterprise Window (SEW), consumed 70 percent

of the budgeted allocated. However, of the funds allocated to local enterprises (Local Enterprise Development, LED, window), only 29 percent of funding had been used after more than three and a half years (June 2023). Investors supported were mainly Kenyans (38), of which eight were from Turkana County ('host population'). Six were foreigners, and 11 were refugees. Among refugees, 3 businesses were owned by South Sudanese, 3 by Burundians, 2 each by Congolese (DRC) and Somalians and 1 by an Ethiopian. Reaching these eleven investors was a result of a deliberate effort to reach refugees from different country origins.

A special 'accelerator programme' was put in place to rectify the very low absorption capacity in the LED category. Companies with good potential were given special training to live up to required standards. As a result, 66 new firms could be contracted, and the share of committed funds rose to 58 percent half a year later. Still, this was significantly less than in the other two funding windows. The amounts allocated within the LED were also significantly lower than in the other windows – and were lowered further for the 66 new contracts. The lowest amounts of all were allocated to enterprises run by refugees (MDF 2023).

An insight gained is that much more technical assistance and capacity training than first assumed is needed for local entrepreneurs to be eligible for support (KII, interviews with UN). This goes against the basic assumption underlying the KKCF programme that the private sector would grow with rather light support from external actors.

Companies owned by refugees received the smallest amounts of financial support, since they ran the smallest businesses. Only eight businesses owned by host community members received finance. Competence and absorption capacity were for various reasons lower among the local host population and refugees (MDF 2023:35). Key informants assess this as a weakness of the programme in the sense that external business owners rarely had Kakuma or Kalobeyei in their original investment plans (KII). They benefited from the

opportunity that the challenge fund offered, without making deep enough market analyses:

“Are the businesses that receive funding from KKCF financially viable in the longer run?” (KII).

If such assessments are correct, this leaves question marks for the sustainability of many of the investments undertaken (Interviews with UN).

Noteworthy is also that the acceptance rate among applicants was higher for the SEW (16,7 percent) and the PSW (7,2 percent) windows compared to 4,7 percent among the 770 applicants for the LED window funding. This underlines the difficulty of finding competence and absorption capacity within the LED category (MDF 2023).

Another difficulty in the programme has been to get the Turkana County Government to invest fully. The one-stop-shop for an improved business environment, called the Biashara-Huduma centre, was launched in early May 2023. However, the County Government has been reluctant and slow in providing financial resources, so the centre has been understaffed. It took long before the 15 planned services became available (MDF 2023:51f). The centre is located in an area that is distant and hard to reach particularly from the Kalobeyei settlement. Even more, the inclusion of national services, the Huduma part of the centre, has been slow in the making. In the autumn of 2024, it was only temporarily available. Increased engagement and involvement also of the national government is needed for the ‘one-stop-shop’ to become a meaningful concept. To get necessary documentation, several visits to the centre, over periods of weeks, are currently needed (KII, interviews with government and implementing agencies).

The tension between the KKCF and the Turkana County Government has several components. KKCF-supported businesses are often owned by external actors who furthermore may face difficulties in finding competence and skills in Kakuma (Vemuru et

al. 2016). When they recruit from outside, locals feel sidelined. It also happens that politicians ask for compensation in return for e.g., access to community owned land.

“Since land belongs to the people, politicians may ask companies to pay school fees for the kids or other personal services. Politicians look at where they have leverage, and they go for that” (KII).

The third pillar of the project is to inform about market opportunities and attract larger external companies to invest in the KK area. The KKCF has engaged with ten larger firms in key areas such as energy, nutrition, banking, pharmaceuticals. However, only one company has so far set up a local branch: Goodlife Pharmacy. Unfortunately, they have failed to attract more than ten customers daily on average, mainly belonging to the ‘expat’ community of staff working in the settlement.

These weaknesses ought to be balanced with the overall success of the programme. What the weaknesses indicate, however, are problems in the programme’s interaction with societal levels both ‘below’ and ‘above’ the programme itself. The political and regulatory environment has not evolved as expected in the ToC. Processes for setting up businesses have not been made easy enough by the county administration.

Another miscalculation has been to treat the different business categories in similar ways, and not responding enough to differences in competence levels.

The Midterm Review, as well as key informants, underline that the KKCF should not be seen as a total solution, but only as part of the efforts required to promote economic inclusion of refugees and the development of refugee-hosting areas (MDF 2023).

“The government has promised liberalisation of the refugee regime, but despite lots of declarations changes have not been implemented. The effects in terms of more jobs could have been much larger” (KII).

Still, the KKCFs tense relations with the Turkana County Government, the many complaints from local economic actors of being excluded, and the lower shares of support to local enterprise development (as compared to other categories) indicate two things. The first is that interventions are not fully ideal neither for refugees nor for the host population. The second is that incentives at the county government level is not fully in line with KKCFs vision of free market competition.

Hence, the IF-point in the ToC that advice and support to the Turkana County Government would improve the local business environment turned out not to be a sufficient condition. Failing was the assumption that all relevant stakeholders would contribute. Incentive structures turned out not to be the expected ones.

There are also tensions in relation to the national government. The underlying intentions and fundamentals of national policies are hard to interpret. The radically shifting policy statements indicate that the government at irregular times tries to signal its need for external support in terms of humanitarian funding to the international community. This is despite the generally progressive policies in terms of refugee integration. The puzzle is that several administrative hurdles remain, even though it would be relatively easy to lower or abandon them.

This illustrates another weakness of the ToC, in not taking national level policies and politics enough into consideration in the design of the intervention.

The assessment is in sum that KKCF has managed to assist a significant number of businesses to establish themselves on the local market. This provides improved livelihoods, both directly and indirectly, for refugees and host community members alike.

However, the total effects are tempered both by limitations in refugee capabilities, in the policy environment and the way the programme interacts with these actors.

4.1.2 Plastic waste recycling as a business

Alongside broader programmes, The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) engages in self-reliance at individual and household level. A few years ago, DRC realised that its earlier focus on skills training did not result in improved livelihoods, mainly since training programmes were not sufficiently linked to existing market opportunities or jobs (Interviews with implementing agencies). A market system approach was developed.

A recent job-creating intervention is the Fair Recycling Project, which aims at plastic recycling. The initiative is developed in partnership with the private sector (Unilever and MrGreen Africa). It is based on the rationale that waste picking, which generally is seen as a very low paid and undesirable job by most Kenyans, can constitute a source of income for refugees facing barriers to access employment opportunities. According to DRC, the low income of waste pickers and the plastic waste challenge in areas hosting refugees are closely connected, due to low-value chain efficiency, limited value addition and a lack of formal organisation. A pilot project has been running for three years with waste pickers in Nairobi. During 2024 a one year pilot project is undertaken in Kakuma (DRC 2024b, Interviews with implementing agency).

The aim is to integrate 5,000 informal and marginalised waste pickers and refugees in Kenya, into a formalised plastics recycling value chain over the coming ten years. Together with Mr. Green Africa, refugees are enrolled in employment programmes as waste-pickers. The collected plastic waste is first transformed into high-quality pellets using state-of-the-art equipment. This business is estimated to employ 500 people. The pellets are then bought by Unilever and will replace currently imported plastic. Unilever will through this

convert to 'locally and fairly sourced recycled plastic' when they produce new consumer products, contributing to a fair and formal recycling ecosystem in Kenya. Unilever has publicly announced that its plastic packaging will be fully reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025. As to MrGreen Africa, they are discussing with Coca-Cola and PepsiCo regarding food grade recycled polyethene (rPET) plastic for the East Africa region. Hence, the plastic recycling market may be growing (DRC 2024b, Interview with implementing agency, KII).

The idea is that, by implementing innovative and financially sustainable investments in the value chain, the project will contribute to safer working conditions, increased income, decent jobs, and drive the transition to a localised circular plastic economy. The three-year project is structured along four project outputs: (i) identification, registration and integration of 1,500 waste pickers, (ii) transforming 500 waste pickers into collector agents, (iii) testing and developing four sustainable 'impact boosters' (innovative financial solutions) and (iv) strengthen Kenya's plastic waste collection and recycling ecosystem. In the feasibility phase of the project, it has been estimated that current waste pickers will be able to increase their wages by approximately 65 percent.

The ToC for the project has been described by DRC as follows (DRC 2024b):

- IF formal and marginalised waste pickers are enrolled in tailor-made upskilling and formally integrated in sourcing networks where they receive fair prices,
- IF systematic barriers, including the right to work for refugees, access to government ID and financial inclusion, are addressed to allow waste pickers to transform into formal collector agents,
- IF impact boosters are integrated in the business models in a financially sustainable way and made accessible to all registered waste pickers,

- IF waste pickers are organised and included in a strengthened and responsible plastic waste collection and recycling ecosystem in Kenya,
- THEN a professional, fair, and inclusive plastic recycling ecosystem in Kenya will flourish, benefiting people, planet and markets. Decent jobs based on the respect of waste pickers' rights will be created,
- This will LEAD TO the creation of a formalised, scalable waste-to-value business model ensuring that waste pickers, including refugees, can access long-term predictable livelihoods, safer work conditions and improved resilience.
- ASSUMPTIONS include:
 - Inclusive, market-driven solutions is an effective and sustainable approach to handle Kenya's challenges with plastic pollution,
 - Socio-economic support, access to government ID and financial inclusion allow waste pickers to join the formal economy,
 - An increase in the supply of plastic made from post-consumer resins (PCR) from the project is to be met by a growing demand and ability to use PCR in manufacturing processes,
 - A financially sustainable model can be developed for collection of plastic waste in refugee camps,
 - The political, legal, and economic environment in Kenya will continue to be supportive to facilitate the formal involvement of refugees and other marginalised groups.

As the project is in a pilot phase in Kakuma, no results have been reported yet. The positive results that exist have emerged in Nairobi, where conditions are different with buyers of bulk plastic waste nearby. It is, however, already possible to see that some of the assumptions behind the ToC are not realistic in the current situation. This especially concerns working opportunities for refugees. DRC has been in the forefront in pushing for more inclusive refugee policies in Kenya and has seen a clear movement in that direction.

At the time of writing, both formal and practical hindrances severely limit the possibility for refugees to be formally employed. If they are to be included as waste pickers or employees in plastic transformation, this must be done through informal or transitory arrangements. Some ambitions in terms of decent work conditions and financial inclusion may therefore have to be tempered, awaiting governance changes.

A more direct problem, already observed, is long-distance transport problems between refugee settlements and markets. A bailing machine was installed in Kakuma to ease the transportation of the waste. An alternative idea is to place pellet production in, or close to, the refugee camps, to reduce the volume of transported goods.

“It is an ongoing discussion whether it is better to connect with markets in Nairobi or markets in Uganda, depending on transportation costs” (KII).

A question of sustainability also enters. The inflow of plastic (waste) is currently linked to the refugee settlement and the practices of the humanitarian interventions. If this will change in any way in the future - will the market remain? Will there be enough plastic waste to transform? This will have bearing on the logistical and transportation solutions. The project has good potential, however, there are still practical hurdles to overcome, linked to questions around infrastructure, labour regulations and refugee registration.

As to the wider strategy of DRC, success of a project such as the Fair Recycling Project would have wider implications. It would serve as a showcase and an incentivise county and municipal governments to ease administrative procedures for refugee integration. More successful businesses would mean more local tax revenues. With reduced administrative hurdles, more refugee led businesses may be started, and more jobs created. The current situation is somewhat of a stalemate. Progress is being done as to the implementation of the more progressive Refugee Act of 2021, however, concrete impact for refugees remains to be seen.

It is primarily the IF-point in the ToC on overcoming systematic barriers – such as insufficient right to work, lacking access to IDs or financial exclusion – that is not fulfilled. This also violates the assumption about a continuously supportive political, legal, and economic environment in Kenya. Formal involvement of refugees is not yet happening.

In sum, the assessment is that DRC with this intervention shows potential of integrating refugees and host community members onto an emerging market. Results in terms of refugees and host community members working jointly in the plastic waste value chain are not yet achieved in the Kakuma setting, only in Nairobi. It is still a promising endeavour since it is building new market opportunities. Risks and hindrances related to the policy and regulatory environment, mainly related to refugees mobility, remain.

4.1.3 Don Bosco – support to vocational training

Refugee's and host communities' access to jobs require them to have relevant skills. Technical and Vocational Skills Education and Training has long been a major activity in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. Dominant in this field is the Don Bosco Training Centres. The organisation has operated in Kakuma since 1993 and currently has five centres in the camp and two in the neighbouring local community, with a total enrolment of 3518 students in 2023. Three out of four students were boys, and a majority were refugees (Don Bosco 2024).

The largest of the centres is located outside of the settlement. It was planned and built after the 2017 government decision to close the Kakuma Camp (BBC 2017, never implemented). With this centre, the focus of Don Bosco's activities shifted towards the needs of the host community (KII, interview implementing agency).

The program aims to create job opportunities and increase income for young people in the camp and the local community. This is

achieved through market-led vocational and technical skills programmes – short and long-term. A programme on ICT knowledge, offer training in computer operation, covering basic computer skills, mathematics, computer applications, basic electronics, programming, computer maintenance, and the development of business plans and trade projects. The programme is developed by the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA), which also examines the students. It consists of three levels and runs for 28 months. Other Don Bosco training programmes offer certificates in public accounts, accounting and management skills, an accounting technician diploma, and a diploma in credit management. Yet another strand focuses on vocational training, with short-term programmes in dress making, tailoring, welding, masonry, plumbing, electrician, carpentry and joinery and motor vehicle mechanics.

In ToC terms the intervention is thought to provide results:

- IF refugees and host community members are provided with relevant skills and vocational training;
- IF trainings are provided based on good analysis of labour market needs;
- IF trainings are given by competent trainers;
- IF diplomas and certificates are provided after fulfilled trainings and certification of trainees;
- THEN refugees and host community members may get employment or start their own businesses in the fields where they have been trained.

Implicit assumptions are that jobs will be available in the sectors and niches where skills have been trained, that employers are willing to employ refugees, and that the trainees are not hindered by other factors to seek employment.

Don Bosco's skills training programme has reportedly remained largely unchanged over the years, with gradual additions in the areas of ICT and accounting (interview, implementing agency). Despite

the sustained protracted situation, the intervention has held on to an ideal of repatriation – designing the modalities in accordance with potential job markets in refugees' countries of origin. These labour markets are not significantly different from Kenya's labour market. There is, however, no specific analysis undertaken as to what might be local opportunities in and around the refugee settlements. The methods and models for labour demand analysis are set up and conducted by Don Bosco's headquarter in Nairobi and very little systematic tracing of former students is undertaken (Interview, implementing agency).

Hence, the skills training programme could have been more precisely adapted to the local host community economy. For instance, why aren't there any skills programmes in cattle breeding, and manufacturing based on hides and skins, despite Turkana being a county dominated by pastoralists? These areas were identified as key sectors in ILOs labour market analysis for Turkana (Interview, UN, implementing agency).

According to informants, the return on the investments in the various training components are modest, seen from the perspective of supplying the Kenyan job market. A limited job market within Kakuma and Kalobeyei, together with restrictions in mobilities and intricate procedures to secure employment permits, have severely limited the prospects of finding employment. Even without these obstacles, refugees would face difficulty competing with Kenyan nationals due to high unemployment rates among young people with similar skills.

ICT skills training holds potential to open new job opportunities for refugees stuck in settlements. Jobs in the digital economy may be done online and remotely. With the evolution of artificial intelligence, cloud computing, internet of things, e-commerce, call centres and other, new employment opportunities emerge, which demand various kinds and levels of competence. Simpler tasks include entering data into computers, transcription of speech, language translation, online customer services etc. Digital marketing,

content creation or videography demand intermediary skills, whereas graphic design, software programming or data science are much more demanding in terms of skills.

The Don Bosco centre is, together with the organisation ‘Learning Lions’ in Lodwar (at 120 km distance), the only suppliers of intermediary to higher ICT skills training in the Kakuma/Kalobeyei area (ILO 2021). In 2023 a total of 442 students studied in Don Bosco’s ICT courses, and 366 of these followed the third and final phase. 110 students took their exams at the end of the year. Two of the students also conducted three-months internships in ICT companies (Don Bosco 2024).

Ideally, refugees could achieve ICT skills training and access online jobs of various sorts, starting to compete at an international arena. There are, however, several complicating factors. The low level of basic education among refugees is an obvious first hurdle. This could be remedied through the schooling provided in the settlements. English language knowledge is especially important to strengthen, not least as most ICT soft- and hardware instructions are given in English. English is also the most common working language online.

Another hurdle is legal documentation. To open a bank account or to register for mobile money transfers, refugees need to have refugee ID cards, as well as other documents, such as a personal identification number from the tax authorities. The process to acquire a refugee ID may take up to five years. Without it, no work permit may be issued, and working without permits implies the risk of being heavily fined. To obtain a work permit requires a prior job offer. However, securing that job offer often depends on face-to-face interactions with potential employers – which is difficult for refugees with restricted mobility. A refugee ID is also necessary for acquiring a mobile phone SIM card, which in turn is needed to get access to the digital payment system M-Pesa. In sum, even if a refugee lands an online job, it may be very cumbersome to get wages or economic compensation transferred (EastAfrican 2024, ILO 2022, Interviews with UN, donors and implementing agency.)

Primarily, the IF-point in the ToC that is least from being fulfilled is the need to base trainings on relevant and good labour market analysis. This becomes evident when listing all hurdles above. The implicit assumptions of job availability are often not fulfilled either.

Despite its commendable purpose, the Don Bosco intervention contributes to building an educational and knowledge reserve within Kakuma, without real possibilities of employment and practice, whether from an integrative or repatriation perspective. Reportedly, former students are getting employed on local and distant markets, however to what extent is not known. The organisation does not keep records of how many refugees find jobs after completing the training programmes, neither in Kakuma, Kalobeyei, Kenya, nor after returning to their country of origin.

4.2 Key intervention area II: support for agricultural production

A vast majority of refugees that reside in the studied settlements and camp in Kenya and Uganda were subsistence farmers and/or cattle breeders before they fled. Furthermore, agriculture is a special economic activity in the sense that what is produced – food – is directly needed for human survival. Hence, the combination of producing for subsistence and for cash, is absolutely essential when this majority of refugees seek to enhance their livelihoods and their economic self-reliance.

Various efforts are tried to improve agriculture in ways that not only increase food production on refugee plots, but that also enable the integration of refugees with host community populations. Such interventions are analysed below. An issue that immediately emerges as a precondition is access to enough fertile land. To understand how local land tenure systems function becomes a key element in the subsequent analysis of different intervention approaches.

4.2.1 Mwana cooperative farm

As the plots that refugees receive upon arrival are sufficient only for cultivating complementary food, there is vast demand for larger areas of arable land. Access becomes possible through the formation of cooperatives. In the 'Kakuma 4' area, the Mwana farm cooperative assembles 120 members. The cooperative is shaped and run by refugees and host community members themselves. Refugee led organisations are often small, started by engaged individuals to solve practical problems in the community. Very few of these organisations have staff employed or localities to use, mainly because they have difficulties to register and become eligible for receiving external funding (Ramazani 2022).

Community organisations are regulated by the Kenyan Societies Act of 1968. This Act does not mention refugees' right to create associations, which makes it difficult for refugee led organisations to register. To do so, they need Kenyan nationals on their board of directors, allow for open membership, and run activities that include the local community (Getachew et al. 2022). This is limiting and unfortunate since refugee-led organisations are held to have several advantages, such as better responsiveness to refugee needs, better treatment of refugees, and higher accountability towards their own community (*Ibid*).

The Mwana farm cooperative has leased a large land area from a local host community landlord. This area has been opened for cultivation also by non-members. Around 500 people are cultivating on the allocated land. Cultivators are both refugees and members of the host community. Credits for land lease and agricultural inputs are provided by outside organisations that have helped set up village saving and loan associations (VSLA).

The cultivation is done in delimited plots of approximately one square meter each. Approximate production costs and gains from selling the crops are estimated per plot. This enables cultivators to apply, get registered and pay a fixed price for accessing the plots.

Hence, the farming practice is largely determined for administrative, rather than agronomic reasons (onsite observations, interviews with government and implementing agency).

The intervention's implicit ToC stipulates that refugees and host community members join forces to access finance through savings and loans, and to access to land and farming inputs through the cooperative. In bullet form:

- IF refugees and host community members form and save in village saving and loan associations (VSLA),
- IF VSLA savings are used as collateral to access credits from outside financial institutes,
- IF access to land is granted to a cooperative by local landlords, who are members of the cooperative,
- IF clearing of land, digging of wells, and piping of water are done,
- IF external organisations contribute grants to finance farm inputs such as seeds, pesticides, fertilisers, and water pumps,
- IF demand for vegetables and other fast maturing crops exists in local markets,
- THEN cooperative members and other cultivators may earn enough from their cultivation to repay loans, complement food rations, and cover additional basic needs in their households.

Cultivation on the Mwana cooperative's fields mainly focuses on green vegetables, such as lady fingers, and various leaves. Cabbage or sweet potato demand more water and is cultivated on other lands and then by the landlord, not by the cooperative. Carrots, onions and garlic are difficult to cultivate due to limited local access to good seeds. Hence, the choice of crops becomes somewhat limited. Seeds are generally bought on credit by groups within the cooperative. When cultivating vegetables, it is possible to harvest after rather short periods, and income from selling at nearby markets is stable. The loans taken by groups may usually be repaid in advance.

However, all is dependent on water from dug wells, pumped up by motor pumps into pipes that reach the fields. Wells are often shallow and dry out from time to time. Pumps are of poor quality, and when they break down it is almost impossible to find spare parts. Due to the long distances and poor infrastructure the cooperative is referred to dealing with middlemen through whom they may buy the pumps. Because of this dependence, they often end up with poor quality pumps without any guarantees given for their maintenance.

The fact that the cooperative could access water pumps at all depend on external financial support. As to farming advice, the cooperative is dependent on the extension workers from the ministry of agriculture. However, in the area visited, there was only one extension worker, and when he left his position, no replacement had been found (interviews with refugees and implementing agency).

Even though the IF-points in the ToC are fulfilled, many implicit assumptions behind the design of the intervention prove not to be realistic. The input goods and services have not been sufficient. The environmental factors constitute major obstacles.

Among all the challenges, access to water is the most fundamental factor. During a period of two years, 2022 and 2023, there has been no rains, hence no farming was undertaken in the area that the cooperative has access to. Closer to the river area, some cultivation has been possible also during the dry years. The land that was used during the 2024 season had not been under cultivation since 2019.

As the land is rarely cultivated, it also lacks fencing. In times of food shortages, even though guards are assigned and are spending nights in the field, crops are being stolen.

Given the hurdles faced, cultivation more than one season at a time is difficult. Refugees and host populations are eager to take any opportunity they may to cultivate more to gain increased food security and possibly some additional income. Reported results from cultivation during the 2024 season are generally positive as the cultivation was ongoing on the site. This contributes to improved

livelihoods for both refugees and host community members. However, it all depended on both the availability of water and a good rainy season and external support from a donor agency. Furthermore, the scale of the cultivation is minimal compared to the size of the settlement. Hence, this is a livelihood solution that would need to be made available to much larger shares of the refugee population.

4.2.2 Poultry production and marketing

In the context of gradual food ration reductions, poultry production is seen as an opportunity to improve food security, income, and nutrition. The FAO, in partnership with the Turkana County Department of Livestock Production and funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF), has identified over 1,200 refugee households in Kalobeyei to benefit from poultry production activities. To support this initiative, 14 community based facilitators have been trained to promote livestock production and trade. A total of 533 households received six chickens each, and reportedly most of these chickens multiplied, providing the households with increased access to meat, eggs, income, and manure for their kitchen gardens.

The project has established two poultry production units, each stocked with 600 chickens. Additionally, the units were equipped with poultry production equipment and feeds. A training component, a Farmer Field School, is also associated with the project. Through this programme, poultry farmers receive comprehensive training on poultry production systems, chicken feed composition, disease control and management, marketing, as well as the nutritional benefits of poultry. The poultry units are not just for raising chickens, they are also meant to serve as educational resources for new poultry producers, households, and school children. The project has so far supplied 10,000 improved indigenous chickens to refugee households in Kalobeyei settlement, especially targeting crop farming households supported by the FAO.

Other actors also support chicken farming. In nearby Kakuma settlement, Danish Church Aid, with funding from IKEA Foundation, are supporting chicken farmers. The purpose of the project is to engage more households to start chicken breeding (UNHCR 2019b, DCA 2023). The model they pursue is to support experienced chicken farmers, for inspiration and training of neighbours. The project initially provides support in the form of a number of chicken, feeding and training sessions. The farmer decides whether to focus on producing eggs or broilers. Some chicken farmers have already established channels for selling meat or eggs. Farmers who have reached some scale in their farming may also have established contacts with chicken breeders, who provide newly born chicken from as far away as Eldoret (480 km distance). Others get support to establish contacts with actors both on input and output markets.

The intervention's ToC may be described as follows:

- IF experienced chicken farmers are identified among the refugees;
- IF chicken, feeding, and training is provided to these experienced chicken farmers in camps,
- IF contacts with market actors on both input and output sides are established,
- IF input and output markets are functional,
- IF neighbouring households are invited to join, become engaged and learn from chicken farmer examples,
- THEN refugee households may improve their food security and earn additional income from production of eggs and chicken meat.

There is demand both for eggs and chicken meat in the camp and settlement. However, with lower amounts of humanitarian support the market is shrinking. Local restaurants in the camp don't buy as much as they used to. When the manure is traded to neighbours

growing vegetables, the compensation is now usually in kind, rather than monetary (interviews with refugees and implementing agencies).

Implementation of these projects have not been straightforward. Interviews revealed uneven leverage among targeted households. While there are several successful cases where households have managed to sustain and develop their production, many households are struggling to maintain their stock due to limited and expensive feed and medicine, insufficient water for chickens especially during dry periods, inadequate production equipment, and irregular immunisation and treatment services. One challenge, which reportedly has worsened due to climate change, is balancing an optimal temperature for the chickens – heat in the night and cold during daytime – which require access to shelter and heating/electricity. Access to additional land to expand the production was mentioned as another significant barrier. Even when chicken farming is undertaken on the small homestead plots, there is a sense of uncertainty regarding investments: can the land be reclaimed by landlords or the state in the future? How secure would investments in chicken farming be? Such uncertainty, together with difficulties of accessing land and physical buildings hinder the scaling up of chicken farming.

In sum, chicken farming is highly relevant and contributes to improved livelihoods for refugee families. Most of the IF-points in the ToC are fulfilled. There is demand for both egg and chicken meat both inside and outside the camps. The improved road infrastructure has made it possible to expand the scale of breeding, due to deliveries of newborn chicken. However, several conditions are still hindering the scaling of businesses. The implicit assumption about favourable environmental conditions, and access to more land when needed are not realistic.

4.3 Summing up findings from interventions

Common findings from the studied interventions are:

- Improved finance and financial products, such as challenge funds for businesses, start-up capital for agricultural or other production, support to setting up village savings schemes and other, have proven essential for facilitating refugee and host community agency.
- Lacking, or non-functional, infrastructure, mainly roads and transportation means, constitute major hindrances to improved livelihoods. Improved infrastructure, on the other hand, provide opportunities which sometimes are unexpected. This is also valid for other kinds of infrastructure, such as internet or financial services.
- For the establishment of businesses and private sector initiatives, long-term support is needed, often longer and more comprehensive than outside actors have planned for.
- Support given to collective groups is fruitful in some settings, but not in others. Interventions are not always adopted to such differences in needs, but rather follow standard approaches.
- Tensions exist between different levels of governance, as incentive structures seem to differ. Interventions on the ground often suffer from this.
- Skills training of refugees and host community members is essential as preparation for entering labour markets and setting up businesses. However, existing skills programmes suffer from weak market analyses and are not well tailored to existing or emerging local market needs.

It follows from these findings that results in terms of improved livelihoods and economic integration are tempered by major external and conditional factors. The influencing factors we assess to be of most importance are analysed in the following.

4.4 Conditional influencing factors, Kenya

4.4.1 Legal and policy conditions

Five significant government actions and policy measures undertaken since 2016 can be viewed as a national-level framework in which the economic inclusion, livelihoods, and self-reliance interventions are conducted in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. These include: (i) the 2018 Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-economic Development Plan (KISEDP) – phase I (2018–2022) and phase II (2023–2027), (ii) the Third County Integrated Development Plan 2023–2027 for Turkana County, (iii) the Refugees Act of 2021, (iv) the Socio-economic Hubs for Integrated Refugee Inclusion in Kenya – the Shirika plan and (v) the UNHCR Kenya Multi-year Strategy 2023–2026: Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion. Most of these are strongly supportive of the economic integration of refugees, but not all. A key question is to what extent policies and regulations are supportive of such integration in practice.

A detailed analysis of the content of, and coherence between, these policy documents is presented in online appendix 6. The first of these initiatives, the KISEDP (Government of Kenya and UNHCR 2023), is a plan to promote financial inclusion and increased self-reliance among refugees and host community in and around the settlements. It aims at including private sector agents while also enhancing aid delivery. Its second phase, however, appears less ambitious concerning the economic integration.

Clear tensions exist between these and other national policy initiatives on the one hand, and the County development plan. In the latter, the relationship between host community and refugees is described as complex, and integrative approaches are lacking.

The more recent national law from 2021, the Shirika Plan and UNHCR-Kenya strategy all have integrative elements. However, they also uphold the principles of control and concentration of

refugees, making them ambiguous. The strategy extensively discusses obstacles and challenges related to economic inclusion and livelihoods, pointing to problems of a non-conducive policy and regulatory environment. Specifically, it highlights problems such as lack of freedom of movement, encampment, lack of access to work permits, land, banking services, training, identity cards, and job opportunities. There are additional important political barriers to economic inclusion, such as refugees and asylum seekers being viewed as security threats, host perceptions of preferential treatment for refugees, and concerns about environmental degradation by refugees and asylum seekers.

In sum, Kenyan refugee policies at the national level have moved in the direction of becoming more inclusive, at least in policy documents. The integration of refugees into local economies has increasingly been promoted. However, the slow and partly lacking implementation of policies creates substantial hindrances for the studied interventions. We also observe that the focus on keeping refugees in designated areas (camps/settlements) remains. A combination of threats and even decisions by the government to close refugee camps, and a very slow implementation of the more integrative refugee policies, makes it even more difficult to draw firm conclusions about the policy direction. Are competing interests at play, pushing policies in contradictory directions? Is the government sending different messages to international versus domestic audiences? Or is the implementation of policies simply slow, because of lacking resources and administrative inertia?

An observation is that there exist tensions between policies at the international, national and the county level, including apparent contradictions between national and county level strategies. This finding is further reinforced by interviews. The recent introduction of a third administrative level, the municipality Kakuma, in Turkana County, may further affect such interplay.

4.4.2 Geographic and environmental conditions

The remote location of Kakuma and Kalobeyei is far from optimal for many reasons. This is obvious from the challenges both for agricultural production and for the business sector. Transporting materials, technology, and skilled personnel to locations far from primary urban centres is both challenging and expensive. The distance to Nairobi is nearly 800 km, and the bus ride takes approximately 15 hours. The nearest urban centre, Lodwar, is 120 km away. Thanks to a new World Bank funded road, the journey now takes only one and a half hours. However, Lodwar offers minimal resources and business opportunities compared to Nairobi. Further, being far from the primary business hubs can spell economic and political marginalisation – being out of sight. In this way the sites' geographic challenge goes beyond distance, potentially affecting infrastructure development and the well-being of the refugees and host population.

Access to abundant water resources, whether from underground sources or rainfall, is vital for the success of any agricultural endeavour. With over 80 percent of Turkana County classified as arid or very arid, coupled with unpredictable rainfall patterns, it is evident that agricultural production faces substantial obstacles.

Despite assertions by county-level policymakers about the existence of an untapped underground water basin, scientific studies reveal a more complex reality. Already in 1969, geologists reported that:

'...the water supplies in the area, though small (apart from Lake Rudolf), are generally ample for the needs of the small nomadic population and their stock; the latter being necessarily limited by the poor grazing available' (Walsh and Dodson 1969).

In 1969, the Turkana population was estimated at 165,000 people, compared to roughly 930,000 people according to the 2019 population census – excluding the refugee population. With the

current population size, the traditional pastoralist livelihood can no longer meet the increasing food demands, leading to a reliance on repeated food relief interventions (Avery 2014). While irrigation schemes have been proposed as a potential solution to bolster agricultural production, uncertainties surrounding factors such as varied annual rainfall (ranging from 200 to 400 mm), slow ground-water recharge estimates (yielding only a fraction of recharge at 0.1 to 5 percent), and the vulnerability of arid land soils to salinization pose considerable obstacles. These challenges underscore the complexities of establishing large-scale agricultural production in Turkana.

Notably, a series of water studies carried out in relation to the establishment of the Kalobeyei settlement has highlighted the area's uncertain water capacity, as evidenced by this quote:

Kalobeyei has been considered by some to be an optional site to which to relocate additional refugees from Kakuma, which is currently overwhelmed by the influx of refugees from South Sudan and other neighbouring countries. Unfortunately, this study observed very poor conditions to support a new population of refugees. The area's 48 million cubic metres of freshwater per year is too fragmented and not viable enough. (RTI 2013).

Criticism has also been voiced about the rushed and haphazard way in which the construction of Kalobeyei was conducted (Bauman et al. 2017). A geohydrological study conducted in 2016 found complex results. The extensive test drilling did not result in a confident assessment of the water supply in the area. Instead, the report highlighted considerable uncertainty in providing drilling sites due to low resistivity values and a high concentration of fluoride (salinity) and clay. The absence of information on existing boreholes was a further aggravating factor in determining the yield at sites (UNHCR 2016).

Land tenure Turkana County Kenya

Remoteness and marginality have a long history in Turkana. A century ago, the region was known as the Northern Frontier District – an area where special visiting permits were required during colonial times cattle raiding and violence between warring ethnic groups were common, also across borders (Oba 1992). Since independence, the region has remained one of the Kenyan counties with the highest incidences of poverty. Even though pastoralism today is combined with sedentary agriculture, mobility in search of grazing remains a main pattern.

During the last five decades, droughts have become more frequent, (Erickson et al. 2013). Finding grazing areas have also become increasingly difficult. Pastoralists' livelihoods often have been misunderstood and undervalued (Pas et al. 2023).

Interventions that promote refugee agricultural self-reliance are struggling with the issues of access to land. The need to expand refugee settlements depends on increased access to land as well. Still, knowledge about the prevailing land tenure system is weak both among implementing agencies and refugees (Interviews with refugees, implementing agencies and UN). Part of the reason is that the system is continuously changing.

Under the dominant communal land tenure system, the council of elders traditionally took decisions on land use and management. Women, youth or disabled are seldom involved in land matters. Land rights are normally inherited, but women have very few, if any, land rights (FAO 2017). Recent changes have had the purpose of making communal land more secure. Through a set of recent laws – the 2010 Constitution, the Community Land Act of 2016, and the Community Land Regulation of 2017 – the Government has recognized the communities' right to own land. The purpose has been to enable livelihoods and rights of communities and community members. Pastoralists have in this context also been characterised as a 'marginalised group' (Akall 2021).

Since the availability of grazing land and water these resources change from season to season, land tenure rules must be flexible to fit pastoralism. A social system is built on autonomous family units, that together form the neighbourhood, ‘adakar’, who in turn are members of a territorial group. These ‘ngadakarin’ (plural of adakar) are traditionally the ones that continuously negotiate rights to, and manage conflicts over, pastures and water resources when herds are moving in search of grazing lands (Oba 1992).

Changes in governance structures and the entry of new administrative layers have come in conflict with indigenous resource use strategies (Ibid.) The Community Land legislations aimed at formalising communal land holding, and to compensate for compulsory acquisition of communal lands. However, with the devolution of power from national to local levels, the County Government now holds all unregistered community land in trust for the pastoralists. Hence, the County Government has taken over the role that the council of elders previously had. Decision over land use now must be negotiated with the government, albeit with the elders still in consultation (Akall 2021, UN-Habitat 2016). There are obvious risks that the space for pastoralism decreases with these changes while no improvements in women’s land rights have been noted.

Pressure on land in Turkana County has increased with infrastructure development, oil and gas findings, discovery of water aquifers and not least refugee settlements. In addition, resource rich persons push for land privatisation for speculative reasons. This leads to reductions in grazing areas, and increased land speculation. It is in this context that refugees must apply for access to additional land for expansion of their cultivation of additional food and agricultural expansion. The vagueness and volatility of land rights are important hindrances for several livelihood interventions.

4.4.3 Socio-economic composition of refugee and host communities

Given the imperative of economic inclusion, livelihoods, and self-reliance, the socio-economic situation and characteristics of the refugees and host population present several challenges. As has been shown, the prevalence of poverty is evident. Local communities frequently grapple with limited access to food, resulting in high levels of chronic and acute food insecurity and malnutrition. Only 6.5 percent of the population have access to electricity and Turkana exhibits the lowest access to financial services in the country (KIPPRA 2020).

Within Turkana West, a major part of the local population is engaged in informal sector jobs or are self-employed (UNHCR 2018b, World bank 2018a, Vemuru et al. 2016). About 65 percent of Turkana County's population are pastoralists. However, climate change and economic transformation are driving changes to the traditional role of livestock herding.

71 percent of the refugees in the Kalobeyei settlement and 49 percent in Kakuma are South Sudanese. The next largest group in Kakuma is Ethiopian, followed by Somalians and Congo DR refugees. In Kalobeyei, the pattern is similar, except for Ethiopians. Refugees have arrived in different waves, following conflicts and political upheavals. More than 80 percent in both settlements have lived there for over six years – which is the lower limit for protractedness (World Bank 2024).

The refugee population is young, with an average age of 28 years, whereas host community average age is 33. More than half of the families in Kakuma and Kalobeyei have five or more members. The most common household composition is two or three adults and several children (35 percent). Many households are female led, as men at times have stayed behind to fight in conflicts or to guard property in the country of origin (Poole 2019, interviews with refugees, implementing agencies and UN).

Female headed households face particular challenges. One is to negotiate land rights with host communities as this usually is seen as a domain of men. Women also face challenges in combining child-care and being away to cultivate distant fields, or to take on paid jobs, as high school fees or need for helping hands may hinder children from going to school.

Another common pattern in refugee settlements is increased sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Protracted displacement clearly increases the risk for SGBV. A broad study in the Kakuma camp found displacement to deplete such resources at individual, family, socio-economic and cultural levels that mitigate against violence (Horn 2010). Experiences of war tend to increase the prevalence of SGBV (Gnaegi 2024). Even more tragically, victims for SGBV are often met with stigma themselves, and expelled from families as ‘unclean’, left on their own.

The prevalence of SGBV is difficult to assess. A limited sample study of women, age 12 - 60 in Kakuma and Kalobeyei found extremely high prevalence of SGBV – over half had been victims of physical violence (Ngala 2021). However, uncertainty remains as to the width of the problem.

The combination of a young population and a situation of protracted forced displacement has consequences. About half of the adults were below 18 years when they first arrived in the camps. Many of them had either no schooling, or had their education disrupted by the displacement. In Kakuma around 40 percent of people in the ages 25 – 64 have no schooling at all. In Kalobeyei, the same figure is 49 percent, (World Bank 2024).

However, in Kenyan settlements, with its 27 primary schools, the current enrolment rates are very high. Over 80 percent of children 6-11 are enrolled, which is higher than most other refugee or host groups in other areas of Kenya. When total enrolment in primary school is counted, the shares even reach much higher: 174 percent in both Kakuma and Kalobeyei in 2022/23. The reason for this over-

enrolment is that large numbers of over-aged children also enrol in primary school. What is less positive, is the net enrolment in secondary school (enrolment by children in the right ages) of only 23 and 18 percent in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. The overaged pupils remain in primary school, and the degree of learning is not good enough for progressing to secondary school (World Bank 2024:30).

Psycho-social wellbeing is difficult to measure, however, a key factor for how well people function in their lives and in society. In Kakuma and Kalobeyei 14–17 percent of the refugees self-report severe or moderately severe symptoms of depression. This is higher than in other refugee settlements and more so than among host communities. Self-reporting of severe or moderately severe symptoms of anxiety are also high (11 percent of the camp populations) (Ibid. 70). Relatively low levels of trust between refugees and host population, perceptions of increased weather and climate related events also contribute to limiting the space of action for refugees and host populations.

Refugees are to a very large extent struck in camps, with few activities to undertake. In the Kalobeyei settlement, 40 percent are of working age, amongst these, two out of five are employed, and two additional percent seeking work (UN/ILO labour force framework). In the Kakuma Camp, despite half of the refugees being of working age, eight out of ten are unemployed, only 14 percent are employed in some form. Most common is to be an ‘incentive worker’ for an international organisation, with payment clearly below normal wages. Even though refugees have the right to work, they need permits to do so. To receive such permits, they must have a recommendation from a Kenyan employer, who in turn must show why there was no Kenyan to employ (World Bank 2024).

Due to feelings of discouragement and discrimination, many refugees reported not actively seeking work. The influx of remittances was also quite marginal, affecting the refugees’ financial capacity (World Bank 2018a). Some refugees run their own business, mainly inside the settlements due to the difficulties to move outside. Small

shops are common, mainly standing beside each other in designated areas. Household incomes for refugees in camps come to 79 percent from aid, while 11 percent stem from wage income (World Bank 2024:45).

Only 11 percent of refugee households have regular bank accounts, and Refugee ID Cards are not recognized by most banks due to "Know Your Customer" regulations. Mobile banking services like M-PESA and Airtel Money are crucial, but only 43 percent of refugee households have access, far below Kenya's average of 73 percent.

Movements out of the settlements are rare. Only about three percent of those currently living in the settlements say that they have tried to return to their countries of origin. Over 80 percent of refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei never leave the camp. Those who leave often do it for medical reasons, some for visiting family or friends, while rather few leave the settlements for working outside. Nearly 40 percent express a willingness to leave and live elsewhere, almost exclusively to another country (World Bank 2024).

Food insecurity has been persistent since the establishment of both Kakuma and Kalobeyei. In 2018, up to 80 percent of the refugees were highly food insecure. Since then, the gradual decrease in WFP food rations may have worsened the situation, as food insecurity in the camps is closely tied to the provision of humanitarian assistance rather than variations in refugees' self-reliance.

With such demographic preconditions – a young population, adults with little or no education, many female-headed households, difficulties in finding employment – the opportunities for livelihoods become limited. These conditional factors need to be taken into consideration when designing interventions to support livelihoods.

5 Evaluation of interventions, Uganda

Uganda has a long history of hosting large numbers of displaced people from various countries in the region. As of April 2025, Uganda hosted 1,89 million refugees and asylum seekers, making it the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa and 6th largest in the world (UNHCR 2024c). A large majority of refugees and asylum seekers come from South Sudan (1 million) and the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC (616 000). Most refugees live in settlements located in 12 districts along the western part of the country, spanning from south to north, with a concentration in the north-western part. About 150,000 refugees are estimated to live in Kampala. The settlement studied in this evaluation is Rhino Camp in West Nile District, north-western Uganda.

Displacement situations in Uganda are severely protracted. New arrivals, mainly from South Sudan and DRC, continue at a rate of 2,500 each week, while the operational response is significantly underfunded. According to the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP), the funding requirement for 2025 stands at 859 MUSD of which 46 percent had been received as of May 2025. Since 2018, there has been a significant widening of the funding gap (Republic of Uganda 2023).

Uganda is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 2016 New York Declaration and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The country has pledged its support for the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and has continued to implement an open and progressive refugee policy based on a settlement approach that ascribes freedom of movement, access to education and health care, opportunity to work and become self-reliant through access to land for agriculture. The current settlement-based model ensures that newly arrived refugees are provided with 30 x 30 m plots of land to build homes and cultivate crops. The gradual re-

duction in plot size from its original 100 x 100 m since 2018, has reportedly been a necessity to accommodate the continuous influx of new arrivals. As agriculture forms the core of the settlement approach, the reduction of the plots has jeopardised the goal of self-reliance, ultimately resulting in heightened food insecurity and increased dependency on humanitarian assistance.

The West Nile region is bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. It is amongst the least developed regions in Uganda. The incidence of multidimensional poverty is over 84 per cent as compared to a national average of 70 percent. Nearly 60 percent of the population in the region living in situations of severe poverty (national average: 37 per cent) (Destrijker et al. 2023).

Around nine out of ten refugees in the Rhino Camp originate from South Sudan. Two thirds of the households are led by women and the average age of refugees is low with 35 years. In the camp, six out of ten are not engaged in any economic, market oriented, activity.

Most of the West Nile population, host community and refugees alike, are subsistence farmers, with crop cultivation as main economic activity. Northern Uganda has an abundance of land, which often is seen as a critical resource for sustaining livelihoods for both refugees and host communities. Access to land has become an increasingly contested issue. The customary land tenure system is put under increasing stress.

Soils are rated moderate to good, but irrigation remains poorly developed. Hence, vulnerability to droughts and flooding is high. The main cultivation season runs from late March to November, with a major peak in August to October.

5.1 Key intervention area I: support to private sector development

5.1.1 Danish support to Omia agribusiness

The Danish Refugee Council works with what they call a ‘market systems perspective’, where target populations should be provided with information, equipment, finance and market channels that incentivise them to be market-oriented producers or seeking employment. Target groups are refugees and host community members who take active part in local market systems, but whose resources are underutilised, and who do not benefit much from markets. Hence, while they are targeting people living in poverty, subsistence livelihoods are not included in the programmes.

DRC define themselves as facilitators, working with complex and rapidly adaptive market forces. But as a principle, they see a need to provide rather substantial initial support to market actors in contexts where poverty is widespread. On the financial demand side, refugees and host populations are to be given training on the use of finance and be supported to access necessary documentation and registration. On the supply side, lenders are to be motivated to develop and offer adapted financial products and services. Together, this will lead to improved financial access and use for the target groups.

In promoting market systems that works for refugees and host communities, DRC identify three areas of work (DRC undated, DRC 2024c):

- Financial literacy and inclusion of entrepreneurs.
- Adapted skills and competence training and support to entrepreneurs so they can develop and grow their businesses.
- Suitable financial support to build and expand the business ecosystem in refugee hosting areas. This may imply working with

banks or financial institutions to support businesses that benefit refugee communities through services, products or jobs, but that do not need to be owned by refugees.

In the following we will describe an intervention of the third kind (financial support) that also resembles the KKCF approach in Kenya. It is coordinated by the Refugee Investment Facility, RIF, which started as an initiative of Danish Refugee Council and the impact investment firm iGravity. The overall objective is to support refugees and host communities to access employment, skills, and key goods and services.

With financial support from a handful donors and philanthropic foundations the RIF provides long-term financing and technical assistance to local businesses active in refugee hosting areas. In the case of the West Nile region in Uganda, support is given to Omia Agribusiness. Omia started in 2018 as a farming input business but has since expanded its activities to include a set of other goods and services along whole agricultural value chains. The credits provided to Omia are linked to predetermined results, expressed in terms of key performance indicators (RIF 2023):

Omia's first key performance indicator (KPI) concerns the number of active model farms set up in the refugee settlement. These farms will serve both as models and incentives for neighbouring farmers, as showcases for Omia's products, and as sites for training and support in farming and animal husbandry techniques.

The second KPI concerns the number of customers that cultivate or hold cattle on plots of 0,25 acres or less. The objective is to provide affordable inputs to the large community of refugees that do not have access to more land than was given to them upon arrival in the settlement.

The theory-of-change behind the Omia business model can be described this way:

- IF peasants and small farmers are offered high quality and relevant agricultural inputs at affordable cost;
- IF competent and relevant farming training and advice is offered in way accessible to small farmers;
- IF a distribution net for agricultural inputs and training is built through engaging voluntary farmers in distant locations;
- IF refugee farmers are offered relevant inputs for cultivating on minimal plots;
- IF extension workers seek out, and assist farmers in their own environments and help to respond to emerging challenges;
- IF incomes from farming is high enough to expand cultivation onto larger fields and larger scale and further profits;
- IF markets for farming outputs and financial services develop accordingly, while stockage and transportation challenges may be dealt with;
- IF and increasing numbers of farmers chose to utilise services offered;
- THEN an expanding number of farmer households, both refugees and host community, may achieve improved livelihoods and economic self-reliance.

Assumptions underlying this include that donors and local financial provides will offer seed finance in terms of loans. It is also assumed that profit rates will be high enough for production to be sustainable. This may, however, imply that the provider – Omia agriculture business – will have to operate at lower than standard rate of return. An implicit assumption is that the owners of the business are committed to the development of these markets, and not only profit motives.

Omia agribusiness started out in 2018 selling inputs to farms (seeds, fertiliser, pesticides, farm tools) but has since expanded its business activities to include extension services and on-site training in farming systems. It has also set up Omia Foods, which provides outlets for the crops that refugees and host communities produce. By mapping out and sourcing to market outlets such as vendors, hotels, schools, and export businesses, Omia brings the buyers to farmers. In addition, Omia controls, cleans, sorts and packages crops and provides joint transports to where demand is (Omia 2024).

The underlying analysis and problem description concerns the limited mobility and difficulties to access farming inputs that most refugees face. Despite their right to move freely within Uganda, most refugees – of which 90 percent live in settlements (Mustard Seed Advisory 2024) – are constrained due to long distances, bad road infrastructure and lack of financial resources to move themselves and their production. Omia's approach is to provide cheaper inputs, inputs in smaller and more affordable packages, extension services to improve farming practices, and also outlets for farm products, through its own purchasing channels.

To work closely with refugee and host community farmers, Omia collaborates with 'village agents' and local para-veterinaries. These contact persons are paid commissions on what they sell in the villages. With time, their homesteads become informal shops for agricultural inputs, and sites for agricultural or cattle breeding training sessions (Omia 2024). For refugees and host communities with difficulties reaching the village agents, Omia has engaged 165 'last mile agents' that search out farmers at their plots or gardens. 43 of these are refugees (KII, Interview with implementing agency).

In total, Omia claims to have reached and worked with 43,357 farmers since the start in 2018. 13 percent – 5,763 farmers – are refugees, mainly cultivating in groups, but also individually. Over the last year, the increase in outreach has been rapid, which is reflected in the number of employees that has almost doubled from 16 to 29 (Interview with implementing agency, Omia LinkedIn site).

The Omia approach for working with refugee farmers builds on ‘model farmers’. These have shown capacity to increase production and develop their farms, hence they are paired with groups of refugee farmers. This way, the model farmer may serve as role models for refugee farmers, ideally let the group farm on parts of his or her land, and help refugees develop farming based on the experiences and knowledge gained.

By working with, and supporting refugee farmers along the full value chain, Omia goes a long way towards overcoming hurdles met by refugee farmers. Still hindering factors remain. Several agroecological experts argue that the 30 x 30 plots given to refugees simply are too small for enabling a family to survive, not least as they need to have their homestead on the same plot. It may at most provide a complement to other, more important sources of livelihood. Given periodically limited access to water, cultivation may also be confined to parts of the year (interviews with implementing agencies and UN).

Omia’s model is to help refugees get a starting capital primarily through vegetable cultivation on the small plots. Refugees may then get access to gradually larger lands, and livelihoods are improved step-by-step. The sustainability of Omia Agribusiness depends on farmers making such progress, in order to afford buying new inputs. Another requirement is that Omia Agribusiness, at least during a build-up phase, must depend on grants and subsidised loans, and accept lower profit rates than what is common in the market (Interviews with implementing agencies). Similar to the Kenyan situation, a question is how refugees being dependent on grants and hand-outs can manage the transition to becoming self-reliant actors on agricultural markets.

The overall assessment is however that Omia agribusiness group is making good progress in developing adapted markets and helping both refugee and host community farmers to access them. Two IF-points are less fulfilled compared to the others. One is whether incomes are high enough for expansion onto larger fields. The other is whether stockage and transportation problems may be dealt with. These two remain challenging, despite some slow progress.

In sum, the Omia agribusiness model helps increasing numbers of both refugee and host community farmers improve their livelihoods. This is achieved through adapted and gradual approaches to market development. Not least the setting up of food retailing activities show a capacity to act along whole value chains, based on good market analyses. A continuous challenge is to find the balance where support to farmers don't distort the emerging markets in their functions and sustainability.

5.1.2 The GROW programme for women's enterprise

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in Uganda implements the Generating Growth Opportunities and Productivity for Women Enterprises (GROW) project, in collaboration with the Uganda Private Sector Foundation. Support is given to female entrepreneurs, with funding from the World Bank. The program aims at reaching 60,000 enterprises, among them 3000 that are owned by entrepreneurs residing in refugee hosting areas, such as the Rhino Settlement. Support is provided in four different ways:

- Enterprise development services including training (technical, life-skills, digital), business advisory services, and women's networks that facilitate market linkages, value chain and transforming negative social norms that prevent women from engaging in business activities.
- Increased access to finance for women entrepreneurs to transition from micro enterprises to small and medium enterprises.
- Support to inclusive infrastructure through common users' facilities and childcare.
- Support to project management, policy innovation, and evidence generation.

The activities include host communities, but there are special activities that address the specific needs of refugee women entrepreneurs.

While women own about 40 percent of all enterprises in Uganda, the average profit rates are about 30 percent lower compared to companies owned by men (Mastercard 2020). The overall purpose of the GROW programme is to move female business from micro to small, and from small to medium size, hence increasing earnings and profits.

The financial support to female enterprises takes several forms, however all funnelled through selected financial institutions. Business owners will get reductions in payments on current loans, there will be new financial products specifically targeted to female owned businesses and the financial institutions will have access to line of credits on beneficial conditions. The aim is to transform the financial market in ways that may benefit female business owners more permanently.

The theory of change of the programme can be described the following way:

- IF female entrepreneurs are trained in business and life skills;
- IF financial sector actors are encouraged through risk sharing to develop credit products targeted at micro and small-scale female owned businesses;
- IF supporting functions in terms of joint business venues and childcare facilities are developed; and
- IF general support be given to enhance business models and market analysis,
- THEN many female owned enterprises will be able to scale up from micro to small, to medium size businesses. This will then increase business profits, and create increased employment, that in turn will improve livelihoods for many women and families.

Key assumptions include that the World Bank or other donors will provide funding for the programme, that qualified trainers and support staff be available to the extent and where they are needed, and that finance sector actors will provide suitable finance products.

A more general assumption is that skills training and other advice be adapted to existing market conditions.

In the West Nile district, and in the Rhino Camp Settlement, initiatives for business development have been relatively rare. An exception is the Omia agribusiness (Omia 2024, interviews with implementing agency).

Even though refugees have the right to move freely in Uganda, there are several practical hindrances for them both to find employment and to run businesses. On the administrative side, there is a need for refugees to have work permits to take up formal employment. To get hold of such permits, they need to have a refugee ID card. Both are time consuming and cumbersome to get. Furthermore, administrative systems are not coordinated, and at times block each other. For financial inclusion, SIM cards for phones are essential, as most transfers are done via phones. However, at times not even refugee IDs have sufficed to register SIM cards (Mustard Seed Advisory 2024). Ugandan business owners are reportedly also reluctant to employ refugees when Ugandan alternatives are available. Refugees that have left the Rhino Camp for Kampala are often squatting in an area called the 'Arua Park' in the Capital. What they at best can hope for there is casual work, not formal employment (Interviews with refugees, implementing agencies and UN).

But the largest hindrance to external economic activities for refugees residing in the Rhino Camp Settlement is the difficulty of moving due to lack of resources. Distances are long and transportation expensive as well as rare. Roads are in bad condition and seldom maintained. There is no public transport, and motorcycles are the most common means of transportation. This implies that very few refugees can afford travelling outside the settlement area. Hence, the business undertaken is confined mainly to markets within the settlement (Interviews with implementing agencies and UN). Since most of the camp inhabitants have a background in agriculture, often of subsistence character, the most common market activities are selling of vegetables and other agricultural products. As crops are

perishable, the sale over longer distances, and outside of cultivation seasons become very limited.

Several of the assumptions behind the ToC are thus not fulfilled – the intervention is not adapted to existing labour and other market conditions for refugees.

In the West Nile region, where the Rhino Camp is situated, there is a dearth of manufacturing. Unemployment is high, particularly among young people. The employment opportunities that exist are found in the informal sector. Hence, in sum, given these hurdles and limitations it is highly unlikely that the GROW programme can succeed in moving refugee women's businesses from micro to small or medium scale in this region. The ToC has not taken a number of conditional factors enough into consideration, and hence has no strategy to deal with them. What it possibly can achieve is rather to help existing businesses to sustain, given continuous harsh conditions.

5.1.3 Financial inclusion through village groups

Most implementing agencies that support refugee economic self-reliance work on establishing Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA). In addition to organising savings, these offer possibilities for small loans from the common fund that builds up. It is primarily peer pressure from, and obligations to, other members in the associations that lead to very high repayment rates. Most implementers initiate the associations by giving training in how to organise a VSLA, in meeting procedures, bookkeeping and more widely in what is phrased 'financial literacy'. At times, initial capital is provided to get a revolving fund going.

The purpose of most of these VSLA is not simply to provide micro loans and saving opportunities, but also to serve as a channel for refugees to access finance from more formal institutions. Some of the implementing agencies, such as DRC, also work at the financial

supply side, trying to motivate banks to develop financial products that suit refugee and host community needs. De-risking instruments, such as guarantees, are used for that purpose. These guarantees have largely been targeted at the setup and expansion of micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs), which includes MSMEs owned by refugees.

Instead of studying any specific implementing agent in its support to VSLA organisation and training, this section looks at how the Ugandan informal financial sector functions in relation to refugees, and how attempts at formalising it has evolved.

Some 66 percent of Ugandans, 15 years and above, have an account with some of the formal financial institutions. Shares are lower among rural populations and especially refugees are mainly financially excluded. Most refugee businesses in West Nile are of micro size and informal (Mustard Seed Advisory 2024). As to the financial services used, refugees use more loans than local populations do. Especially South Sudanese refugees take on loans (Ibid.). The background is a widespread establishment of VSLAs. Almost eight out of ten refugees reported having access to savings through VSLAs, while only 19 percent save in formal banks. Seven out of ten refugees who borrow money do that through VSLAs (Ibid.). More women than men participate in VSLAs.

The use of mobile money, and digital financial services is widespread among refugees in West Nile, especially among South Sudanese refugees. However, many refugees also indicate that they cannot access such services, mainly because of eligibility criteria, i.e., not having the right documents for access to phones and/or SIM cards. SIM cards are required for accessing digital money transferring services. Refugees have mobile phone accounts to receive their cash transfers from the World Food Program (WFP), however these accounts cannot be used for other financial transfers. Legal barriers are strong hindrances for refugees to access formal financial services. It is cumbersome and takes long to receive refugee IDs, which are mandatory in the application for SIM cards. There are also other

limitations that refugees face linked to lack of access to mobile phones and to the Internet. Hence, refugees are mainly accessing finance and financial services through participation in VSLAs.

Uganda's government has tried to promote financial inclusion by regulating VSLAs. In 2016, they established the Uganda Micro-finance Regulatory Agency (UMRA) and signed the Microfinance Institutions and Money Lenders Act. This Act regulates activities of Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCO), micro-finance institutions, VSLAs and money lenders. This category is labelled 'tier IV' in Uganda's financial market categorisation. In 2022, UMRA had licensed over 1500 of such microfinance institutions (Mustard Seed Advisory 2024). Among other, the Act allows for movable assets to be used as collateral, which increases the possibilities for refugees to take on loans.

There are four different types of institutions that provide financial services accessible to refugees in the West Nile region – when VSLAs are counted as one. Within the other more formal institutional types, there are five actors that are providing services to refugees. The financial sector has somewhat deepened. For instance, a guarantee to the telecom company MTN allowed them to issue a corporate bond, which in turn financed the expansion of the mobile phone system to rural areas. This was a commercial success as more customers started to use mobile phones. However, the longer-term goal of deepening the financial market with an expanded bond market was not achieved. This market is still very limited.

Mustard Seed Advisory's analysis (2024) concludes that there are several opportunities for further expansion of financial services targeted at refugees and host communities. An enabling legislation and UMRA work with registration build trust in the system. This has led to an increased number of digital lenders. A young population supposedly more open to new financial products, and a growing private sector increase demand for finance. The presence of many actors, not least NGOs, imply that capacity and financial literacy is built broadly.

However, there are also hindering factors. As discussed above, the very weak road network, and more general communication difficulties due to scarce electricity and internet connections imply that refugees, and host communities have great difficulties running and expanding businesses. Most refugee owned businesses remain micro scale, with very low profit rates. The land issue is relevant, since refugees do not own land, and hence cannot use that as collateral. On top of this, refugees have continuous difficulties in getting ID documents, so acquiring them takes extremely long.

Given these hindrances, financial service providers still do not offer relevant products or services for refugees. To the extent services are provided interest rates are high. Banks and financial institutions do not have business models adapted to refugees. Balancing social and commercial objectives is challenging. In conclusion, despite the progress, much remains to be done for refugees to have good access to financial services. Most economic activities currently function at the limited levels that VSLAs allow for.

5.2 Key intervention area II: support for agricultural production

5.2.1 Danish support to Omia agribusiness

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) intervention in Rhino Camp has been described above as it may primarily be described as a market development intervention (DRC undated). It is clearly also an intervention that promotes agriculture. Hence, it belongs to both categories even though it is placed above. Seen as an intervention for increasing agricultural production it is clearly the most successful of the three interventions analysed. It has so far proven sustainable, reaching increasing numbers of both refugee and host population farmers, with well adapted farming tools and techniques. Furthermore, the Omia companies help by developing input and product

markets that refugee and host community farmers can access. The flip side is a partial dependence on external funding during a build-up phase.

5.2.2 The Norwegian block farming model

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) promotes a model that may be called block farming (NRC 2024b). NRC engages with refugees and host community members in groups initiated by NRC. Groups are often set up as VSLAs, with the intention of also entering joint farming. By initiating mixed groups of refugees and host community members, the objective is to achieve collective learning in farming methods, having access to land through links with landowners and to build up trust between the two groups. Ideally, host community members lend out land to refugees for free, perhaps with a request to get some compensation in kind, for instance to receive some of the harvest. However, it is increasingly common that the host community leases out land against a fee.

An implicit Theory-of-Change for this approach can be constructed as follows based on interviews and document studies (NRC 2024c):

- IF refugee farmers can be organised in groups, where saving and loan activities are complemented by collective farming;
- IF land for farming, outside of the refugee camp, can be leased or accessed in other way by engaging host community landlords;
- IF support for agricultural inputs and land clearance is provided;
- IF agricultural products are transported to local markets;
- THEN refugee and host community small farmers will improve their livelihoods and take steps towards self-reliance.

The village saving scheme serves to hold the group together, force them to deal with internal conflicts and ideally build trust between group members. If at least one member of the host community takes part in the group while the rest are refugees, this opens opportunities

for land sharing, given that that member has access to land. To cultivate in groups also creates opportunities for the introduction of new and adapted agricultural techniques, and hence for learning. The NRC may intervene by bringing the group together and make it functional. Other parts of the intervention are typically to provide a set of support services for the cultivation, and to provide opportunities for bringing the produce to markets.

For the block farming activities, land may also be provided by the Ugandan government, after negotiations with local landlords.

“Since land mainly is owned by communities and landlords in this part of Uganda, there is need for the government to provide some standardisation of leasing agreements.” (Interview with UN)

Regardless of how leasing agreements are reached, the subsequent role of NRC is to work with farmers to subdivide the land and decide on how to use it. The groups often collectively decide what crops to grow. Clearing of land is done collectively, irrigation canals dug, and fire lines established. The latter is needed due to the risk of fire in dry periods with high temperature. Cultivation may be done either on collective fields or on smaller individual plots. The set-up for marketing is organised accordingly (Interviews with implementing agency).

Problems with the block farming approach are often related to unclear leasing agreements, or unforeseen demands coming up when harvest time is approaching. In other words, it is unclear or contested land tenure that opens for potential conflicts. NRC has set up a specific working unit, Information Counselling and Legal Assistance, ICLA, that helps refugees and host community members concerning disputes over housing, land, and property. Over the last three years 37 000 people have been assisted within three refugee settlements, including Rhino Camp (NRC 2024a, 2024c).

“Even if agreements have been reached, when it’s time for harvesting claims for reclaiming land or parts of the harvest can come from the landlords. This of course creates tensions.” (Interview with implementing agency)

Refugees cannot buy or sell land in Uganda. They are entitled to the 30x30 metre plots they receive upon arrival. When they need more land for cultivation, they have to rent it. The ICLA team provides information on what due diligence is necessary, how to demarcate land and what tenancy agreements should include to avoid future conflicts. They also help in drafting legal documents and in finding ways to resolve conflicts without having to go through court processes (NRC 2024a Interview with implementing agency).

Experience has shown that over time there may be a growing tendency for refugees to prefer individual, rather than cooperative cultivation. This is why the next interventions we will discuss, by the German organisation Welthungerhilfe, has stopped working with the block farming model (interviews with implementing agency).

NRC is currently working also with another model in combination with block farming. The approach in this is to give individual support to relatively successful, ‘model’ farmers. The idea is for these model farmers to serve as role models, from which other farmers may learn what crop varieties to cultivate and what farming techniques to apply. This model is also used in support of successful chicken breeders, who by way of example will raise the motivation of others and show what methods to use.

Within this latter model, support is given to a select number of farmers, who also are receiving training, are provided contacts with suppliers, and at times also helped with market outlets. In the case of chicken, contacts with breeders outside of camps are provided. This way the chicken farmers may buy newly born chicken and have them delivered. These are nurtured until they are either sold as broilers, or as egg producing hens. There are outlet markets for both broilers and eggs in refugee settlements/camps.

In general, outlet markets for vegetables, crops and poultry exist locally within the camps or settlements. The NRC programme is successful primarily in supporting refugee farmers to produce for the settlement market and for their own consumption. This way they can complement the food rations they receive.

However, this is not enough to achieve the THEN-point of self-reliance. To reach that, refugees need to be integrated into the same market as host communities. But to expand beyond the settlement based on this intervention is not a realistic option. For refugees to trade in markets outside the settlement a number of challenges exist; overcoming remoteness and transportation hurdles, lack of trust in unknown distant traders, problems to get access to finance, as well as finding channels for financial transactions, and difficulties to travel, which in turn minimises opportunities to check on quality before buying or finding reasonable prices for the inputs. These aspects are clearly not taken into consideration in the implicit ToC.

5.2.3 Welthungerhilfe and Farmer Field Schools

Welthungerhilfe (WHH) also used to support block farming but has stopped doing this. In addition to the increased tendency of farmers cultivating individually, other hindrances emerged as well. Their experience of block farming was at first positive, with cultivation of cassava flourishing on vast fields. However, as farmers started to cultivate their own rather than collective fields, Welthungerhilfe stopped block farming in 2018. A main reason was that collective lands were located far from farmers' homesteads. It became difficult to constantly move back and forth in catering to fields kilometres away. There is a need to either arrange for the cultivation to be closer to where refugees live, or to establish a water source like a well or similar. Furthermore, the land issue complicates matters since several landlords need to come together for enough land to be available (interviews with implementing agency and refugees).

Hence, WHH chose another approach to support farming livelihoods. The focus is rather on what refugees can cultivate on the 30x30 metres plots where they live. WHH mainly works with Farmer Field Schools (FFS). This implies providing training sessions where agricultural specialists train refugees in groups, in the settlement on farmers' own lands. WHH is also providing contacts with downstream market actors, who come to the settlement to buy vegetables and other crops. Especially sesame reaches a good market in West Nile. In these transactions, WHH serves as a non-profit middleman, providing contacts and transports between cultivating groups and market actors in the city of Arua (interviews with implementing agency and UN).

On the 30x30 metres plots refugees primarily cultivate vegetables that mature quickly and that are possible to grow vertically. Socket beds for cultivation of maize are also used. Cultivating around ten plants of maize, together with tomato, cabbage, and eggplants make it possible to both complement the food rations, and to get some income. With the little earnings, it may be possible to lease some land in the area and start cultivating at a slightly larger scale.

There are agriculturalists who argue that it would be theoretically possible for a family to cultivate enough food on a 30x30 metre plot. However, that would require very different cultivation methods, which regenerates soil fertility in combination with water harvesting methods. Such farming methods are both labour and input intensive, hence expensive and out of reach for most refugees (KII, interview government).

The staff of WHH don't see this as a possibility, rather they see growing of vegetables and other crops on the small plot as complementary to other means of livelihood. They also see opportunities for refugees to strike deals with landlords in the host community. By joining groups, refugees may get support for cultivation, for instance in the form of inputs. Such inputs may be shared with host community members, who then also may benefit from leasing out land. The results of Welthungerhilfe's programmes are very similar to the re-

sults from NRC programmes. The programme helps primarily refugee farmers to add complementary food crops and some income. It also allows them to save and expand their production.

An implicit ToC emerge along the following lines:

- IF competent extension workers may reach out to groups of refugee farmers;
- IF trainings take place on plots or farms belonging to refugee farmers themselves;
- IF returns from cultivation on the small plots that farmers are given upon arrival are used for gradually expanding cultivation;
- IF assistance is provided to refugee farmers in transporting their production to markets;
- THEN refugee farmer will gradually improve their livelihoods and take small steps towards economic self-reliance.

It is obvious that despite the right to free movement, refugees – as well as host community members – in practice are hindered from accessing relevant wider markets. It is only through the interventions by aid organisations such as WHH that they can get their harvests to market in time.

The limitations for this model are very similar to that of the NRC model described above. Hence, assumptions about reaching self-reliance and economic integration are unrealistic also with this model. A difference is that this THEN-point, and the overall ambitions with the intervention, is humbler in the WHH model.

The geographical location in the arid north-western part of Uganda, with its often unclear and difficult to understand tenure system, create further problems for refugees. Negotiations with landlords are often complex, time consuming, and not providing them with any tenure security. Furthermore, five years of failed or erratic rains speak its clear language. Farming is often dependent on having access to water sources for irrigation, and these sources are rare.

The majority of the South Sudanese used to be cultivating in their home country. This young population is – despite its relative lack of formal education – able to work hard in agriculture. However, the hurdles are many and massive.

In sum, the intervention run by Welthungerhilfe brings refugee farmers small steps closer to improved livelihoods. Results are positive but limited. The ToC has not considered a set of conditional factors, which the organisation has minimal capacities to influence. Due to this there is little reason to see this approach as scalable, or a solution for wider parts of the refugee population.

5.3 Summing up findings from interventions

Common findings from the studied interventions comprise the following:

- Despite the formal right for refugees to move freely in Uganda, the vast majority of refugees stay in the camp. They face major practical hindrances to free movement, such as lack of means for transportation, impassable roads, and administrative hurdles in getting necessary permits and licenses.
- Improved finance and financial products prove essential for expanding agriculture or setting up businesses. However, in comparison with Kenya, village savings and loan associations have a more dominant role, implying a more rudimentary financial sector.
- Lacking, or non-functional, infrastructure, mainly roads and transportation means, constitute major hindrances to improved livelihoods. This is also valid for other kinds of infrastructure, such as internet or financial services.
- For the establishment of businesses and private sector initiatives, long-term and systematic support need to be combined with the

development of markets. Such an approach has gained traction in agriculture. Few other business initiatives have been able to move beyond the internal markets of Rhino Camp.

- Agricultural cultivation in collective groups is relevant due to difficulties in negotiating access to land. However, incentives may be more geared towards individual cultivation. This creates somewhat of a dilemma for refugee agriculture expansion.
- Tensions exist between different levels of governance, as incentive structures seem to differ. Interventions on the ground often suffer from this.

From the above follows that results in terms of improved livelihoods and economic integration in Uganda are influenced by major external and conditional factors.

5.4 Conditional influencing factors, Uganda

5.4.1 Legal and policy conditions

The historical background to Uganda's 'progressive' refugee policies is described and analysed by Betts (2021). He finds the roots of the policy for refugee self-reliance and economic inclusion in the attempts of successive Ugandan regimes to either control domestic enemies or to build alliances with populations in remote areas ('hinterlands'). Starting with Uganda's first president, Milton Obote, the locations of refugee settlements have served to keep authoritarian leaders in power onwards. A continuous flow of international humanitarian financial resources has boosted local economies. With Betts own conclusion:

“The Ugandan case reveals the interplay between patronage politics and refugee policy. Without side payments at every level of governance, there would have been no Ugandan model. Recognizing the progressive refugee policies have depended upon patronage, illiberalism, and authoritarianism presents a significant normative challenge to refugee policy-makers and practitioners.” (Ibid. p 275-6).

A more detailed description of this interplay is given in appendix 2.

Regardless of its progressiveness, the highly praised Ugandan model appears to be at a critical crossroads. The vast majority – 91 percent of the refugees (Mustard Seed Advisory 2024) – still reside in settlements. Integration with surrounding communities remains limited, despite policies for free movement and work. As food rations gradually have decreased since 2020, and prices of most basic food items risen, policies for humanitarian support have changed. The funding situation has forced a new model where WFP-rations are distributed according to three categories of assessed vulnerability. Simultaneously, the protracted nature of the refugees' displacement persists, with no solutions in sight for repatriation.

Three significant government policy acts and plans are key for economic inclusion, livelihoods, and self-reliance for both refugees and host populations. These include: (i) the Refugees Act of 2006 and the 2010 Refugee Regulations, (ii) the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2022-2025, (iii), Uganda Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan (JLIRP). In addition (iv) the UNHCR/Uganda: Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Strategic Directions 2023 – 2028 will also be discussed.

The 2006 Refugee Act – an act of generosity, protection, and inclusion?

The country's progressive refugee legislation has its base in the 2006 Refugee Act, which in turn is firmly anchored in the country's long record of openness and generosity towards people in need of protection. In addition, most refugees in Uganda are recognized as

refugees *prima facie* (Republic of Uganda 2006). That is, they are acknowledged as refugees based solely on their nationalities and the assumption that their countries of origin are not safe, without undergoing individual status determination procedures for the initial period of two years.

The Act is undeniably progressive and human rights-oriented in an international comparison. However, there are implementation inadequacies that potentially could hinder compliance with international protection standards and long-term inclusion objectives (Ahimbisibwe 2020). The first issue concerns refugees' freedom of movement, which is granted by section 30 of the Act. This freedom is simultaneously restricted by other national laws and directives, on the grounds of national security, public order, public health, public morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. While such restrictions are legitimate, the directives may be arbitrary, as there are no detailed criteria for issuing them.

Additionally, section 44 of the Refugee Act empowers the minister to establish settlement for refugees in designated areas on public land. Hence, refugees are obliged to live in these settlements or to obtain permission from the commissioner to live elsewhere. This curtails refugees' right to choose their place of residence and their freedom of movement.

Given the prolonged stay of most refugees in Uganda, the language on naturalisation in the Act is another area affecting the prospect for economic inclusion. The Act imposes significant restrictions on the acquisition of citizenship. Section 45 of the Refugees Act states that

'...the constitution and any other law in force in Uganda regulating naturalization shall apply to the naturalization of a recognized refugee.'

According to the Uganda Citizenship and Immigration Control Act, an alien qualifies for naturalisation as a citizen if he or she: (i) has resided in Uganda for an aggregate period of 20 years, (ii) has resided in Uganda throughout the period of two years immediately preceding

the date of the application, (iii) has adequate language skills in a prescribed vernacular language or in the English language, (iv) is of good character, (v) and intends, if naturalised, to continue to reside permanently in Uganda. Some of these requirements present almost insurmountable obstacles for refugees. The amalgamation of aliens and refugees is unfortunate as the categories have completely different circumstances. While aliens continue to enjoy the protection of their home countries, refugees do not. While aliens can participate in politics back in their countries of origin, refugees cannot – their status deprives them of essential political rights for as long as they remain refugees.

Uganda refugee response plan 2022–2025

The legal act aside, even more important are current plans and policies. Today, the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) is the central policy document. This is a joint plan between the Government of Uganda, the UNHCR, national and international partners. It aligns with national policies and seeks to build on existing development projects. Strategic objectives are: (i) maintaining asylum space, (ii) providing life-saving assistance, (iii) improving refugee access to public services, (iv) strengthening co-existence and self-reliance, and (v) pursuing durable solutions. The vision is:

‘a coordinated, accountable, and sustainable refugee response for socio-economic transformation of refugee and host communities.’ (Republic of Uganda 2022).

Unlike Kenya, Uganda also includes refugees in official national statistics, and according to the National Development Plan III (2020/21–2024/25) initiatives are taken to include refugees in development planning.

Looking specifically at economic inclusion, livelihoods and self-reliance, the plan prioritises surplus agricultural production, support to employment and to small enterprises. This is in line with Uganda’s Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan (JLIRP). Focus is on

developing market relevant skills and increased access to finance. Implementation depends on collaboration with District Local Governments to integrate refugees into development plans and provide technical services. Households should have access to agricultural land, improved farming techniques, climate-smart agriculture, and agricultural extension services. Additionally, the plan includes advocacy and information sharing towards potential employers on refugee labour rights (Republic of Uganda 2021).

With cash grants, agricultural seeds, farming kits, households may establish kitchen gardens to produce vegetables and food crops, as supplement to humanitarian assistance provided. Once a certain level of stability is achieved, refugees can be integrated into mainstream livelihood programmes. Gender-responsive targeting is seen as central as over 60 percent of the intended beneficiaries are women. To promote peaceful co-existence and social cohesion, all livelihood interventions must ensure a 70/30 percentages division of assistance targeting refugees and host communities.

Particularly agri-business is seen as important to support private sector-based solutions and improve market access for beneficiaries. Collaboration with financial services providers is also seen as essential for credit, insurance, and other financial services to be more accessible to refugees and host communities.

Within the total budget for the UCCRP (858 MUSD for 2024), livelihoods and resilience accounts for a significant share (162 MUSD). So far, all seems to be lined up for refugee economic inclusion. However, there are dark clouds. In the ‘strategic risk-register’ the funding situation is marked as ‘disastrous’, which according to the plan means that:

‘...the combination of likelihood and impact of a risk materialising is such that main response objectives may well not be achieved, effectiveness could be substantially disrupted, and/or the standing and position of the response could be seriously undermined.’ (Republic of Uganda 2022).

Despite alignment with other policy documents, the country's generous approach as suggested by the UCRRP has not been consistently integrated across policy areas and national development strategies. There are few references made to refugees and their potential contribution to national development in other central planning documents. In the Third National Development Plan (NDPIII) 2020/21–2024/25, minimal attention is given to refugees, and they are often portrayed as more of a burden than potential actors of development. The plan reads:

Whereas Uganda's policy towards refugees has been applauded globally, the country's resources could be overwhelmed by the high and increasing number of refugees... ... their impact on the environment as well as demand for social services is substantial. Refugee populations in some districts are higher than the host population.' (Republic of Uganda 2020, p.19)

While there is a strong argument for protection, repatriation is seen as the prime solution, suggesting a view on refugees as temporary visitors.

Other strategies are more aligned with the UCCRP. The Northern Uganda Regional Development Strategy 2020/21–2024/25 highlights the potential of refugees as economic agents for the development of markets, citing research.

'The significant and growing refugee communities in Northern Uganda have potential to be a great asset to the region as they provide a market for local goods and bring foreign investment and infrastructure development.' (Republic of Uganda 2020).

At the same time, it also warns of potential aid-driven disturbances in local prices, which could reduce local farmers' incomes. Additionally, it argues that the massive influx of people from South Sudan may lead to instability and cultural conflicts within the region.

Jobs and livelihoods plan 2020/21–2024/25

The prospects for refugee economic inclusion also need to be considered in relation to the country's overall Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (JLIRP) (Republic of Uganda 2021). The plan, which adopts a similar language as the UCRRP, envisions an inclusive refugee and host community that are socially, economically, and financially sustainable by 2025. The JLIRP has set clear targets to be achieved by 2025 in relation to strategic objectives such as peaceful coexistence and strengthened economic interaction, creation of sustainable economic opportunities and skills training.¹⁵

The plan focuses on the economic aspects of self-reliance and should, as the UCRRP, be seen foremost as a fundraising mechanism. In the current situation, the plan therefore shares the same dilemma with shortage of funds as the UCRRP.

The UNHCR strategy for livelihoods and economic inclusion

The recently developed 'Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Strategic Directions 2023–2028' defines UNHCR's role in support of the JLIRP plan. The strategy acknowledges that despite the progressive refugee hosting model, almost half of the refugee population in Uganda continue to live in poverty.

The UNHCR has taken a catalytic role in delivering economic inclusion and livelihoods programmes. It is advocating for an enabling legal and policy environment for private sector investments,

¹⁵ The plan aims to improve competitiveness and promote inclusive growth of refugees and host communities in 13 refugee hosting districts by; (iii) Improvement of food, nutrition, and income security for 486,861 refugee households and 1,152,087 host community households; (iv) Development of skilled refugees and host communities capable of taking advantage of employment opportunities in the country by 2025 and (v) Inclusion and active participation of a minimum of 361,000 vulnerable populations from refugee and host communities in local development initiatives of the country. The JLIRP budget comprises a total of 169 MUSD over five years.

partnerships with national and district government authorities and coordination at national and settlement/district levels.

Interestingly, the strategy emphasises that the UNHCR only gets directly involved in providing services as a last resort. Involvement is only justified when the UNHCR has a clear advantage, a plan to exit and phase out its intervention, and when there is a strong business case for its investment in promoting economic inclusion for refugees. Considering the current operational funding shortage, which has led to significant scaling down and phasing out by many implementing partners, the study did not observe any replacement activities conducted by the UNHCR in the Rhino settlement.

Taken together, key policy documents are contradictory, and the legislative circumstances compromise in part the practical implementation of key areas of the UCRRP linked to economic inclusion, livelihood, and self-reliance. This constitutes, in various ways, important hindrances for interventions in Rhino Camp.

5.4.2 Geographic and environmental conditions

Since most of the activities in Rhino Camp focus on agriculture, geographic and environmental preconditions become key, especially the dependence on access to land and water.

Rainfall trends across Uganda seem relatively stable over the past 60 years, with an average rainfall of around 1300 mm/year (Kansiime and Mastenbroek 2016). While this provides for good cultivation conditions, heavy rainfall events have become significantly more frequent, as have droughts in the western, northern, and north-eastern regions, including the West Nile region (Zinyengere et al. 2016). These events are expected to become even more frequent with climate change. Climate models predict rising temperatures and increasing numbers of days with high temperatures, especially in the northern part of Uganda (Destrijcker et al. 2023). The vulnerability

to effects from climate change is larger in the lower lying areas around the Nile River that runs through the West Nile region.

The main cultivation season runs from late March to November, with a major peak in August to October. There may also be a briefer rain period in April to May. Among the crops cultivated in the region cassava, sweet potato and sorghum are more resistant, whereas cash crops such as coffee and tobacco, together with rice and maize are more vulnerable (Destrijcker et al. 2023). As the West Nile is the leading producer of tobacco and cotton within Uganda, new crops or more resistance varieties are likely to be needed (UN-Habitat 2021).

The West Nile region is also suitable for cattle rearing, usually goats, sheep, and pigs. Fisheries and poultry are additional important economic activities (Destrijker et al. 2023). The main sources of energy in West Nile are biomass such as firewood and charcoal. There is already a serious deficit of energy, and this is expected to worsen in the future if forests continue to decline (Zinyengere et al. 2016).

Land rights in Uganda

Access to land is a main precondition for the agricultural projects. While awareness is high about the importance of land tenure, deeper knowledge of its functions is not widely spread. E.g., NRC has invested in a specific structure, ICLA, to deepen this understanding and deal with land conflicts (NRC 2024b). However, shallow knowledge about land rights remains a limiting factor.

Uganda has a wide set of laws that regulate land ownership, registration, and administration. In the southern part of the country, dominated by the Buganda region, the government is the owner of the land. Many land policies and laws have been shaped based on practice and experiences from this part of the country. However, in the northern part customary land tenure dominates, which in practice creates a multi-layered mix of different land governance and

use (Adoko and Levine 2005, Walker et al. 2023). Since colonial time several systems and initiatives have overlapped, resulting in conflicting tenure rights and interests. (Samba-Mugerwa et al. 1989).

With refugee inflows, population growth, intensified agricultural practices and discoveries of oil and mineral resources land has increasingly become seen as a finite resource and commodified. It has become challenging to prove rights since registration processes have become more cumbersome, with accountability and transparency often in short supply (Burke and Kobusingye 2014).

Northern Uganda still has an abundance of land, and customary land tenure is recognised in Uganda's constitution (Republic of Uganda, 1995). However, the term '*customary*' is misleading since its content is undergoing constant reinterpretations. Interpretations are often opportunistic, where individuals or groups may try to take advantage of distressed situations. Another characteristic is that women are regularly discriminated against in land matters. They do seldom enjoy complete and equal ownership of land and even though they have access to land (Burke and Kobusingye 2014).

It is the elder members of the clan that decide on access, use, transfer, and ownership of the land. Individuals are simply custodians of land that belongs to the clan for future generations (KII, interviews with implementing agency). The tenure system is thus embedded in social relations rather than defined in legal codes. (Lavigne-Delville 2000).

Many argue that customary land tenure systems have been eroded (Quinn 2009), not least due to the earlier civil wars in the region. However, the clan structures remain strong and continue to play important roles (Burke and Kobusingye 2014). Land held under customary tenure can be regarded as communal private property for the group that controls it (Okoth-Ogendo 2002, Interviews with implementing agency). Since awareness of the norms and rules related to land access are very limited land conflicts, mainly within clans or families, are common (Burke and Kobusingye 2014). All this

complicate the implementation of interventions aimed at increased agricultural production.

The tenure situation is, however, undergoing change. Earlier, the sale of land was only possible to fellow clan members, and this had to be agreed both with the family and with clan elders. As customary tenure becomes more individualised, incidents of land sales have increased. It is also becoming more common that host community members ask for financial compensation for leasing out land to refugees (interviews with UN and implementing agency). As many inhabitants in northern Uganda fled to Sudan when civil war raged in their country during the 1990s, they tended to welcome refugees from South Sudan that fled to Uganda from 2005 onwards. However, when a second wave arrived from 2015, and when the refugee situation became protracted, they gradually started to lease, rather than lend out their land (KII, interviews with UN). A land market seems to be gradually emerging.

5.4.3 Socio-economic composition of refugee and host communities

West Nile is amongst the least developed regions in Uganda, with over 84 per cent (national: 70 percent) of people multidimensionally poor and nearly 60 percent living in severe poverty (national: 37 per cent) (Destrijker et al. 2023). It has about three million inhabitants, and hosts around 1 million refugees. Largely because of the latter, the West Nile are among the most food insecure regions of Uganda and have long been heavily reliant on donor food assistance.

Among the West Nile population, host community and refugees alike, subsistence farming dominates. For refugees, the main challenge is secure access to fertile land. For host secure access to water is key (FAO 2018). Both formal and informal cross-border trade remain critical for the region's economy. A road, railway, and water transport network links the region with the rest of Uganda and with neighbouring countries, with the regional capital Arua as a hub.

However, the infrastructure is worn down, and often non-functional during rainy seasons.

An absolute majority of refugees in the Rhino Camp Settlement in Uganda come from South Sudan. To judge from languages spoken, the share may be over 90 percent (Poole 2019).¹⁶

In the Rhino Camp, Uganda, the average age among refugees is 35 years (Poole 2019, REACH 2019). More than half of the families have five or more members. The most common family constellation is to have two or three adults and children. Five years ago, 26 percent of the refugees in Rhino Camp had no schooling at all. Four out of ten had some primary schooling. Only six percent had completed secondary school (Poole 2019). In 2020, 73 percent of children in school going ages were enrolled in primary school in the settlement. Classes were large, and each teacher had on average 121 pupils to cater for (UNHCR 2020b).

Two thirds of the households are female led, as men at times have stayed behind to fight in conflicts or to guard property in their country of origin (REACH 2019, Poole 2019, interviews with UN). The gender imbalance is as serious and has similar consequences as those described above for Kakuma and Kalobeyei. Many women have encountered SGBV during war, during flight and continue to be exposed when living in the camp. Rape, and psychological abuse are the most common abuses (Dawa 2020). Other difficulties particular for women include access to land, and a set of other challenges. To mitigate land access difficulties, studied interventions organise village groups for collective negotiations. The female dominance in such groups is striking (observations).

Most refugees were farmers and herders in their countries of origin. More than 60 percent reported to have farming skills, and 30 percent having skills in livestock breeding. Half of the female refugee population also reported to have skills in domestic work (REACH 2019).

¹⁶ Demographic and socio-economic data is five years old. Since most refugees have stayed longer, the current situation is likely to be similar.

The dominant character of family constellations, with a majority of female headed households and many dependants, is a major challenge for livelihood and self-reliance promoting interventions.

Refugees have access to some agricultural land, however the majority have to do with the 30 x 30 metre plot they receive upon arrival. Only one out of five refugee households have access to plots 50 x 50m up to one acre.¹⁷ This may be compared to land access among host community members, where only 17 percent of the households have under one acre to cultivate. Half of the host community households have plots of 1 to 5 acres and the rest areas from 6 acres upwards (World Vision, 2017).

While free to move and to work, practical hurdles, such as too expensive or non-existing transport, difficulties to socially integrate, lacking education and skills hinder most refugees from both employment and moving outside of the camp (interviews with refugees and implementing agencies). In 2019 only 11 percent of the households in Rhino settlement had members who had moved outside the camp in the last year. Only five percent had been in urban areas. The main reasons for moving were to get access to education or health services (REACH 2019).

In the settlement, almost six out of ten refugees did not engage in any economic activity, at least prior to the reduction in food rations. 24 percent were engaged in some form of commercial agriculture, and 9 percent in petty trading. Casual labour and motorcycle transport services were other activities undertaken, albeit by small shares of the population (World Vision 2017). Many refugees and host community members reportedly save money through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). As in Kenya, refugees have less access to credit than host counterparts. However, of those who can borrow, the majority relied on informal sources such as VSLAs, friends, and family members. Regarding household debt, 41 percent

17 An acre is 40,4x100 meters.

of refugee households across settlements reported taking on at least one debt within a 12-month period.

In sum, we find that the conditioning factors discussed above constitute severe structural hindrances for the success of livelihood interventions and programmes. They don't make success impossible, as for instance the Omia case shows. Market development is taking place, based on agriculture and on the need for cultivating more food. But the conditional factors still starkly limit the possibilities to reach results in terms of livelihoods and economic integration at any relevant scale.

Furthermore, supportive factors hardly balance out the hindering factors in the Rhino Camp case. Road infrastructure is extremely bad, even missing during periods of the year. Skills and vocational training programmes are limited, and humanitarian assistance going in a very negative direction, with rapidly decreasing funds. The only exception seems to be the juvenile financial market, where new initiatives and mechanisms seem to emerge.

6 Joint analysis at overarching level

In this section, we apply our analytical framework to understand how conditional and supporting factors influence functions and results of the analysed interventions. The analysis compares the Ugandan and Kenyan settlements. We also indicate where findings may be generalised beyond these two contexts.

First a few general observations. In selecting cases for analysis, it turned out to be easier to find agricultural interventions in Rhino Camp than in Kakuma / Kalobeyei. On the contrary, it was easier to identify general private sector promoting interventions in Kenyan compared to Ugandan settlements. These observations are in themselves findings: there is a more dynamic business climate in Turkana County, Kenya compared to West Nile County, Uganda, while there is a more enabling situation for agriculture in West Nile. The latter is arguably linked to better access to land, water, and better soil quality.

Skills and vocational trainings are more prevalent in the Kenyan settlements, than in the Ugandan. There are also better road connections to and from the settlements in Kenya, even though road infrastructure inside the camps is comparably bad in both contexts.

Several of the studied interventions show relatively good results in terms of improved livelihoods for involved beneficiaries, as described in sections 4 and 5. Many of the interventions studied also demonstrate strong potential for achieving further results. This section aims to put these results in the context of the conditions that hinder or help such potential.

6.1 Conditional factors' effects on selected interventions

The legal and policy dimension

Our analysis has found two key determining factors that affect prospects for economic inclusion: 1) restrictions in mobility and 2) restrictions and limitations in the access to work permits. These factors significantly impact all selected interventions, undermining their Theories of Change related to both prerequisites (IF) and anticipated outcomes (THEN).

The legal challenges posed by these hindering factors lie beyond the control of implementing agencies. Nonetheless, it is crucial to address them in the design of interventions and to advocate for necessary changes. Only a handful of interventions seriously addressed these factors in design and planning. Instead, these issues often surfaced in the result reporting as barriers hindering the full effectiveness of the intervention.

In Kenya, restricted mobility and limitations for obtaining work permits are matters of legal and political regulation. Despite policy statements and even legal acts that allow for refugee mobility, practice lags. This is often seen as a policy implementation problem, due to administrative processes that are slow and contradictory.

In Uganda, the legislation on mobility is different, as refugees are free to move all over the country, to take up employment and to engage in businesses. Still, mobility has shown to be as problematic as in Kenya. The difference is that in Uganda refugee movements are primarily hindered by practical things, such as remoteness of settlements, lack of financial resources to pay for travel, a road system that is run-down and during rainy seasons even unusable. Adding to that are difficulties with finding employment with Ugandan employers, who often are reluctant to hire foreigners and especially refugees, due to uncertainty about their legal status and to

administrative hurdles. As a result, markets for products and skills developed through the selected interventions are largely confined to the settlements and its immediate surroundings. Urban centres like Arua, located just 60 kilometres away, become out of reach. Economic integration remains very limited.

Although both Uganda and Kenya have made commendable strides in their refugee hosting and inclusion policies, closer examination reveals inconsistencies and challenges. For instance, current development plans in both counties largely neglect the economic contributions and potential of refugees, instead framing their presence in problematic ways.

In Uganda, the purported open and inclusive approach is riddled with conditions: while mobility is permitted, refugees cannot settle elsewhere without obtaining permission. Moreover, the pathway to citizenship, though legally available, is laden with nearly impassable requirements. As a result, the inclusive policies prominently feature elements of repatriation directed objectives.

In Kenya the Turkana County Government alternately portrays refugees as both burdens and assets, depending on the prevailing policy context. Positions may also differ within the county government. Interviewees argue that especially county revenue authorities are eager to move ahead with refugee integration - since expanded economic activities would lead to increased tax revenues. However, changes in policy implementation hinge on results on the ground. The more business development succeeds, the stronger the incentive to ease the processes of establishing businesses and applying for work permits. This circle may be virtuous or vicious depending on the success of market and business development interventions.

Tensions are obvious also at national level where the government seems to be resolutely attached to an established security agenda, containing recurring threats of closing the camps. There is thus a fundamental uncertainty about the Shirika plan, which is widely seen

as a ‘funding document’ rather than as a steering policy document. While the plan views refugees primarily as economic assets for development, it lacks a clear roadmap, making implementation vague and uncertain. Major challenges lie in the transition from camps to integrated settlements, and in the transfer of service management from humanitarian actors to the national government. The approach is fraught with risks, as the government relies heavily on donor funding, while also grappling with austerity measures and stringent donor conditions.

The critical question of mobility remains. Will the plan mean an end to encampment, or will free movement be confined to the new settlements and hosting counties? Until now, very little, if any, change has been noted in the lives of refugees. Hence, vagueness remains even though Kenya in recent years has taken substantial policy steps forward to facilitate inclusion of refugees.

Right to mobility and work are necessary, but far from sufficient conditions for economic inclusion of refugees into host communities. Both the Ugandan and Kenyan examples underscore the need for more coherent approaches. It also shows the malleability of policy frameworks leading to the slowness of their implementation. Incentives in host countries are shaped by economic and security realities on the ground, as well as by the level of burden sharing that donor countries and the international system offer. The character of these incentives influences the degree of policy progressiveness.

This insight has wider generalisability. Incentive structures as those found here create dilemmas for any country hosting large populations of refugees in protracted situations. To what extent are mobility restrictions needed for security reasons? To what extent can they be relaxed to give refugee economic self-reliance more space?

The environmental and geographical dimension

The studied refugee camp and settlements are located on unsuitable lands, in sparsely populated areas near national borders. The most

critical location factor is often the urgency of the influx of refugees, both in terms of speed and volume. Where is space available and what are the logistical preconditions? However, the result is at odds with promotion of self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods – especially when relying on agricultural production. Difficulties in terms of farming conditions (soil quality, access to water, season variation, floods and droughts) and complex land tenure systems constitute important hindrances.

With continuous refugee inflows, the flexibility of customary land tenure adapted to pastoralism has turned into ambiguity. This has in turn led to conflicts when land is lent or leased to refugees for farming over longer periods of time. A case in point is Kakuma and Kalobeyei, where pastoralism dominates, and host communities thus often move their homesteads depending on their access to water and grazing. Conflicts over land are legion, and actors intervening in support of refugees' access to land also invest in legal counselling, and conflict resolution. Even though pastoralism is less prevalent in West Nile, Uganda, a similar pattern prevails. It is here that the Norwegian Refugee Council has developed its Information Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) mechanism in support of refugees' – mainly female headed households' – attempts to get access to additional land for cultivation.

The availability of unused land areas without formal titles limiting access may seem advantageous for establishing refugee settlements. However, such situations seldom exist. Even in areas that appear to have ample land, there are as shown often complex legal and customary user rights associated with existing farming and nomadic livelihoods. At an initial stage, negotiations about land access typically occur at the government level, involving organisations like the UNHCR, regional governments, and local communities. When refugees require additional land, more detailed discussions and negotiations with landlords become necessary. While governments may play a role in facilitating access to more land, negotiations often shift to an individual level between the refugees and the landlords.

Customary tenure systems are usually not fit for massive reception of new farmers, subject as they are to constant reinterpretation. This leads to situations of ambiguity in the interplay between customary rights and an emerging land market. Refugees – with minimal financial resources and very little social or cultural ‘capital’ to draw on – are often the weakest part in such (re-)negotiations.

Indications are lacking that deep enough analysis of land tenure, options for acquiring additional farmable lands or access to water were undertaken in Kenya or Uganda. The extensive preparatory work carried out during the era of organised rural settlements (see appendix 1) has been largely missing. The UN-Habitat ‘Settlement Profiling Tool’ was not yet developed at the time of decision. Especially in Kenya, the self-reliance concept is imposed in an environment not conducive to agricultural activities. The mismatch between policies and environmental realities has become increasingly apparent as population grows and climate change effects aggravate.

A common approach for securing additional land access is to organise refugees in associations or cooperatives that may negotiate with individual host community members (‘landlords’). A preferred option is to include such landlords, or ‘master farmers’, into the associations. An alternative is for refugees to lease land on an informally emerging land market. In these unstructured and unregulated markets, various forms of legal and conflict management advice are provided by implementing partners. In the absence of any overarching regulation - formal or informal - of refugee access to additional land, such limited support is what implementing partners currently can offer.

Access to water is also central to agricultural livelihoods. Our two country contexts display both water shortage and abundance. Although the water situation in Uganda is better than in Kenya, challenges still exist due to variable rainfall and a lack of underground water. According to informants, the increasing frequency of extended dry spells creates uncertainties in planning and expected harvests. The decreasing capacities of drilled wells pose another

challenge. Although new wells were drilled to replace depleted ones, results varied significantly due to insufficient capacity, too high salinity or the need for more investment in pipelines. The introduction of more efficient methods, such as drip irrigation, showed promising results but remained marginal. Furthermore, the interventions faced the challenge of heavy rainfall, which led to flooding, which may wash away the upper, fertile soil layers or destroy harvests. Cycles of prolonged droughts followed by flooding have become more frequent in both cases.

A general pattern for most refugee hosting countries is that settlement location decisions are taken under time pressure, without prior analysis of land tenure or carrying capacities of land. As long as refugees remain in such settlements, without relocation, potentials for self-reliance remain seriously circumscribed.

The socio-economic dimension

The socio-economic character of refugee populations is also decisive for economic self-reliance approaches. South Sudanese refugees are used to livelihoods based on crop farming and cattle breeding, mainly of subsistence character. Their skills are primarily agricultural. The Ugandan site, with better natural conditions for agriculture, is better suited for this group of refugees than the Kenyan site. Ugandan interventions more often focus on agriculture and give comparatively better results. However, the number and scale of interventions aimed at agricultural production is not in parity with population sizes. This may be due to the unfavourable conditions for agricultural production, which may deter potential partners from initiating interventions. In addition, international donors have shown no interest in investing in large-scale agricultural production, despite their commitment to the plans in both Kenya and Uganda.

As to business and entrepreneurship, divisions between refugees of different origins were discernible. Business owners encountered in the settlements were of Burundian or Congolese origin, with rather good education backgrounds. Very few examples of South Sudanese

business ownership were found in Kakuma/Kalobeyei, despite the overwhelming South Sudanese majority. Even if KKCF intentionally supports business owned by refugees with different country origins, only three out of eleven businesses in its 'Local Enterprise Development' category were owned by South Sudanese as of June 2023 (MDF, 2023).

In both business and agricultural promotion, the plights of women, children, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups must be given much more attention. To answer how is however beyond the scope of this study.

Business promotion is still clearly an area where progress is made. In Kakuma/Kalobeyei, several investors have established themselves or expanded their businesses due to the support received from the KKCF challenge fund and other support. This has led to spin-off effects among micro level businesses, such as transportation services (KII, Interviews, refugees, implementing agencies). The work of Omia in Uganda is also a well targeted. Despite this, large difficulties in reaching wider groups of refugees with business promotion activities prevail. Business promotion risks becoming good for the host community economy without integrating refugees more than marginally.

Surveys reveal a significant population of young people of working age. The potential for labour-intensive economic activities is considerable. However, in Kakuma, three out of four people aged 18 to 35 are unemployed. The lack of job opportunities is exacerbated by the camp's isolation, limited educational resources, and restrictive movement policies. This situation nourishes frustration and hopelessness, which may result in destructive behaviour. Desperate situations may generate desperate solutions. The disparity between the size of young populations and the availability of jobs has implications for the interventions studied, particularly concerning the relevance of their activities and the expectations they create.

More generally, any refugee hosting country need to find and promote the markets and market niches that match refugee skills. This is especially challenging if market structures between host country and countries of origin differ substantially, as well as when host country unemployment is high.

6.2 Supporting factors' effect on selected interventions

In this section, we are assessing the influence of factors supposed to strengthen and support the selected interventions in reaching the objective of economic integration. These factors are education and training, supportive infrastructure and humanitarian assistance (see section 2.2 above).

The educational and training dimension

Several of the interventions investigated include education and training, partly or fully. Regardless of specific approach, the concept of preparatory learning is widely applied in both Kenya and Uganda. This has remained so over time, guided by the traditional framework of durable solutions: repatriation, resettlement, and local integration. The long-term presence of certain implementing partners, such as Don Bosco, that operate largely unchanged programmes, is a testament to the consistency of the policy paradigm in place.

Our examination of interventions that provide education or incorporate education and training as part of their programmes, highlights notable challenges. While theoretically designed to offer multiple options for refugees, trainings remain highly restrictive to the limited opportunities within the camp/settlement. How can effective learning be created in support of private sector development and enhanced agricultural production for self-reliance if local integration in practice is hindered by national policies among other factors?

It is important to maintain a preparatory focus in livelihoods-related education and training programmes. However, this strategy has seemingly resulted in an oversupply of skilled individuals across various sectors. This is largely due to the restrictions refugees face, which in practice prevents refugees from entering job markets. Return on training investments is limited due to logistical reasons, difficulties in settling elsewhere, and high unemployment in host communities. The skills offered are often not in high demand and job offers subject to competition with nationals.

The extent to which education and training programmes have resulted in employment within camps or settlements has been challenging to assess. The interventions register participants in their programmes, but rarely trace them afterwards. This supply-driven approach may lead to market imbalances and can create unrealistic expectations for those attending the programmes. Reports indicate that many refugees have started their own businesses after completing training; however, many of these enterprises struggle to survive due to market saturation. This raises important questions: How many tailors, hairdressers, carpenters, plumbers, and retailers can realistically be trained and concentrated in one area when there is limited financial capacity to support them? To what extent will these occupational categories generate sustainable economic value if the current financial foundation of refugees' existence – humanitarian assistance – is withdrawn? Our analysis highlights significant challenges in maintaining the existing training approach.

There is a growing belief that training in digital entrepreneurship may become as a pathway to employment beyond refugee camps. However, the digital employment market is highly competitive, making it increasingly challenging to earn a living. While digital freelancing may offer a legal grey area alternative, refugees face significant barriers to entry, including access to computers, reliable internet, and digital literacy. The belief that refugee entrepreneurs can attain wealth through the creation of innovative apps can serve as a motivational

factor. In our cases this perspective may be misleading due to the societal barriers that refugees in Kenya and Uganda experience.

During protracted displacement, there is a clear connection between education and the hope for a better life. This is especially true for tertiary education, which involves significant investments of both time and money. However, for most refugees, such opportunities are narrow and uncertain. An illustrative example is the earlier establishment of the Turkana West University Campus, located next to the highway between Kakuma camp and Kalobeyei settlement. This campus was intended to provide refugees and the host community access to accredited and affordable higher education. Although hailed as a flagship project under the KISEDP I, by 2024 the campus remains empty due to a lack of financial support and accreditation issues. Currently, the campus stands as a testament to the necessity of thorough preparatory work that ends in realistic policy and financial scenarios.

The general insight for host countries is that preparatory education and training programmes need to be based on thorough and updated analyses of local and national labour market needs.

The infrastructural dimension

Infrastructure is essential for enabling both economic integration and economic self-reliance of refugees and host communities. The remote locations of the camp and the settlements heighten the risk of supply chain disruptions, impact the availability of food, medicine, and other essentials, and lead to increased infrastructure development costs. Consequently, these factors indirectly hinder efforts to establish any sales-oriented activities aimed at reaching beyond the boundaries of the camp or settlement.

The Ugandan case shows, with its non-functional, and seasonally non-existent road network, how livelihood activities become impossible in the absence of infrastructure. A similar road situation unfortunately prevails also in the Kakuma/Kalobeyei settlements.

When the rain falls, agricultural cultivation is enabled, while transportation of goods may turn impossible. Inadequate drainage infrastructure often leads to flooding in agricultural areas during heavy rainfall as well, causing crop loss.

Lacking access to internet and digital equipment is also a problem. This is a hurdle both for digital skills training programmes, finding digital jobs and for the provision of financial services. The latter are increasingly provided through digital money transfers, which remain largely unattainable due to both weak internet coverage and refugees' lack of legal documentation and permissions.

In all interventions studied the lack of infrastructure is an important hindering factor. Some implementing agencies, e.g. Welthungerhilfe or Omia Agribusiness, try to compensate for this. Welthungerhilfe provides transportation services of inputs to refugee farmers and crops to markets. Omia locates goods and service outlets in the settlements, where they also engage local sales representatives.

The importance of well-functioning infrastructure has also been shown by the road project financed by a World Bank loan connecting the Turkana County main city Lodwar with the border to South Sudan. As the road runs straight through Kakuma city and passes both settlements, it has already contributed to increased investments and economic activities in the area. For example, chicken farming in the settlements has expanded, since deliveries of day-old chicken from Eldoret now have become possible.

As discussed above, and with general relevance beyond the studied contexts, business investments do not emerge just because a road is built. But when the road is in place, it contributes to a more enabling environment for private sector investments. If, with the Kenyan case as example, the road eventually could be refurbished also on the South Sudan side of the border, continuing to Juba, increased cross-border trade is likely to expand. In such trade South Sudanese refugee presence and connections could become an asset.

The humanitarian assistance dimension

In supporting livelihoods and self-reliance, humanitarian assistance plays multiple roles. It provides essential goods and services for survival on the one hand. Refugees are dependent on this support – a dependency that may linger on in situations of protractedness. On the other hand, humanitarian assistance also supports interventions to develop refugees' self-reliance, agency, and self-determination, to *reduce* dependency on external assistance. Hence, the presence of humanitarian assistance is both a conditional and a supportive factor.

The interventions examined are largely dependent on external international funding, both public and private, and have maintained this reliance since their inception. Over time, few alternative funding sources, or mechanisms have been introduced, except for private sector business promotion.

The GCR and the CRRF emphasise the importance of operationalising the humanitarian-development nexus to relieve pressure on the humanitarian system and to build long-term sustainable capacity. Based on our observations, there is limited visible transformation from humanitarian to development actors. The introduction of market oriented interventions in Kakuma/ Kalobeyei since 2018 seems to have led to changes in attitudes among humanitarian actors. New actors, such as ILO, are also entering, undertaking market analyses, and supporting market driven programmes.

But the major shift among actors seems to be occurring in two directions. On one hand, long-time implementing partners with a traditional humanitarian profile, appear to have gradually adjusted their programmes to be more development-oriented in content. This transformation has generally been limited to existing programmes and has not evolved into a broader approach for institutional capacity building including government entities or private sector actors. On the other hand, the number of implementing partners is decreasing due to financial constraints resulting from significant cuts in ODA. Informants report a clear and rapid trend of scaling down

and phasing out among implementing partners in both Kenya and Uganda across all sectors, including those supporting livelihoods and economic inclusion.

Generally, how to deal with the dual role of humanitarian assistance and reduce refugees' dependency on external assistance is at the core of the self-reliance model promoted by the GCR and the CRRF. Experiences gained in the model countries Kenya and Uganda are especially important in this regard.

6.3 Assessing the overarching ToC

Since findings from the studied country contexts – Uganda and Kenya – are highly relevant for the self-reliance and economic integration model promoted by the GCR, the general ToC (as described in section 2.1) can now be linked to the analysed interventions. The analyses of the interventions add up to an analysis of the overarching ToC. This synthesis also builds on our analysis of conditional and supporting factors.

The overall conclusion of the study is that multiple interconnected factors influence the outcomes of economic agency among refugees in our studied settlements. Results by interventions are achieved at local scale, and efforts are undertaken to circumvent hindering factors. Although this conclusion may initially seem vague and impractical, our analysis shows that the study's central question cannot be effectively answered without acknowledging the strength and significance of the interplay between these identified conditional factors.

While this conclusion adds complexity to the issue, it does not imply that the interventions are futile. On the contrary, we argue that the relevance and content of programmes designed to support livelihoods and self-reliance for economic inclusion appear differently when existing conditional and supportive factors are made visible. This awareness can lead to more realistic and adequately designed interventions. The challenge lies in stakeholders' willingness to dis-

cuss these factors openly and to agree on a clear path to support refugees' agency without compromising their right to protection, human rights, and the right to development.

Policies and plans are carriers of visions, change and anticipation. The GCR along with the overall guiding policies in our two countries, signalise a possible way out of a protracted existence characterised by confinement and dependency. For implementing actors, these policies guide the design of support needed for its fulfilment. For refugees they instil hope for a better life. But plans remain visions if not accurately implemented and sustained. A prominent conclusion concerns a discrepancy in the relationship between policy ambitions and action on the ground. This discrepancy affects the prime target in focus – the individual agency-driven refugee and host community member.

Based on findings previously described, we may now provide a more coherent answer to the evaluation question - *how are the selected interventions supportive of both refugees' and host populations' self-reliance, livelihoods, and economic inclusion?* Emerging conclusions are formulated and grouped in relation to the elements of the general Theory-of-Change described in section 2.1. A set of recommendations will follow as an answer to the second evaluation sub question - *What changes in the implementation approaches and/or conditions would be needed to improve the result of the selected interventions?*

IF programmes of economic inclusion, livelihoods and self-reliance are started early on, with long-term strategic planning;

There is a dearth of learning from history in the design and implementation of interventions aimed at economic integration and refugee self-reliance. The implementation in both Uganda and Kenya offered unique opportunities to learn from the experiences of past integrative refugee-hosting solutions. However, previous lessons and results have largely been ignored. Especially, considerations about geographical and land access preconditions have not been given enough weight in decisions on where to locate refugee settlements.

Early decisions and plans motivated by emergency concerns and repatriation focus can complicate work for self-reliance. In the Kenyan case, the current plan to make refugees self-reliant is to be forced forward in a non-favourable policy and geographic environment, both regarding agriculture production and private sector development. Even when self-reliance is a part of the hosting strategy from the beginning, as in the Ugandan case, a sustainable approach must be based on realistic preconditions. This includes ensuring that basic requirements are met, so that the planned livelihood activities can be developed through adequate and well-calibrated support.

IF host countries implement policies that allow right to decent work, including free movement, right to housing, education, justice, and social protection for refugees;

Common for the interventions is that they navigate in increasingly complex policy contexts and natural landscapes. Programme planning builds on grand and partly unrealistic visions. Interventions are to be carried out in restricted and economically harsh environments, with irregular and volatile access to natural resources. This is highly problematic even if they are understood as interim solutions to facilitate an eventual return to countries of origin, rather than long-term integrative solutions.

Further, there is a policy and strategy overload. The production of new strategies around disfavouring factors is continuous, but strategies alone will not lead to success in livelihoods projects. Strategies are visible proof of activity, but not of results. In practice the stream of strategies has rather served the role of attracting donors than enabling refugee and host population self-reliance. Such interplay between different policy and governance levels – county, national government, international organisations and donors – reveals areas of inconsistency and tension. This interplay is driven by unfavourable incentive structures and leads to suboptimal actions.

Examples of hidden incentive structures are many. As the history behind the evolution of Uganda's 'progressive' refugee policies indicates, there might be more than one type of motivation behind cho-

set national policy paths. Incentives may also vary and be time-bound, due to pressure from various stakeholders. An example is when Kenya's government for security reasons ordered the closing of refugee camps in March 2021, while simultaneously launching the new Refugees Act, which progressively opened for a greater inclusion of refugees.

Contradictory incentive structures may be at play also in relation to the key policy decision about refugee settlement location. As discussed in section 5.4.1 above, governments' incentives may be to build alliances with, or counterbalance, groups in specific geographic areas. It may also be a matter of keeping refugees relatively close to national borders, and of finding areas where land is relatively abundant.

Political will for inclusion of refugees is far from certain at national level. Following terrorist attacks in Kenya 2013 and 2015, perceptions of refugee settlements as breeding grounds for criminality and security threats, became widespread. Hostility towards strangers can easily be provoked, not least in situations with high rates of insecurity and unemployment. On the other hand, refugees can alternatively be perceived as economic agents contributing to a country's growth and wealth and attracting international financial resources. Positive local economic development effects from refugee settlements are well documented. Both private and public sectors may in the longer run benefit.

These trade-offs make it hard to interpret the policies of refugee hosting governments. Delays in implementation may be intentional, or results of lacking coordination. Decisions may aim at sending signals to international organisations and donor governments or to domestic voters. Policies of refugee inclusion need to be balanced against policies for reducing high domestic unemployment.

Regardless of the motives, the above examples show that the host country's national policies and policy implementation has important consequences for refugees and local host populations. The incentive

structures that shape polices differ from one country to another. But their importance is general to host country policies.

The potential for economic growth and improved livelihoods that the refugee presence brings, needs clear and inclusive policies to flourish. These policies need to take highlighted surrounding factors into account. Policies that shift back and forth, become contradictory and/or pending, constitute hurdles for refugee and host community agency.

Regarding the key mobility and working permission issues, the conclusion is that progressive policies towards the economic inclusion of refugees is a necessary, however not sufficient, condition for improved self-reliance for refugees and host communities. Other kinds of hindrances are prevalent as well.

IF host countries and local populations offer access to sufficient and farmable land to allow for its long-term use by refugees;

There is a mismatch between the operational requirements of the CRRF in terms of agriculture based livelihoods and geographical/environmental realities. Without pioneering innovations, the agricultural potential of the areas is not enough to support a population of current sizes. Reasons differ slightly between the Uganda and Kenya. For any large-scale farming project aiming to significantly reduce the dependency on food assistance, the selection of Kalobeyei and Kakuma sites appears unrealistic. In West Nile County agriculture production is still advancing due to well adapted commercial interventions. This will help a subset of farmers – both refugees and host population – to gradually advance their production. Other interventions assist groups of refugees to cultivate well selected crops, which complement their livelihoods in terms of both food and income. Still, a vast majority of refugees have so far not been included in these efforts. It is far from obvious how they will be included in the future.

IF stakeholders engage in advocacy to emphasise the positive impact of economic inclusion;

There are indications that actors in the humanitarian system have become more open to the importance of private sector development in situations of forced displacement. However, internal organisational incentives counteract the handing over to organisations with development mandates and competences. Humanitarian organisations are rather trying to transform their own programmes and activities to become more development oriented. Problems with such mission creep may include competence limitations within the organisations, and limitations related to the continued short-term financing cycles that characterise humanitarian work.

The failure of advocacy work is not due to the absence of stakeholder strategies or the failure to emphasize the importance of economic inclusion. Instead, given the confined and immobile status of refugees, it is hard to produce evidence of positive and sustainable impact of economic inclusion. Without this, there will only be marginal effects to build an advocacy on. This situation will become even more pronounced if humanitarian support is further reduced.

IF host country authorities, national and international actors contribute to create enabling environments with adapted financial sectors and infrastructure resources to enable business activities and market development that include both refugees and local host populations;

In both country contexts, some progress has been made in promoting private businesses and improving the business climate. Especially promising are initiatives that seek to build on or create local markets with potential to expand beyond the settlements. The limited progress achieved is still potentially important not only for involved businesses and their beneficiaries. It may also have wider systemic effects. Expansion of the local economy brings potential tax revenues, as well as direct economic growth. This is an incentive for county governments to further promote an enabling business climate. Also, national governments are likely to increasingly perceive refugees as economic assets, as such examples multiply. This may in turn spur implementation of more progressive policies.

It is argued that larger investments in infrastructure, primarily roads and ICT, is necessary for putting remote and marginalised areas on a development path. Comparison between the two country context supports this argument. However, such large-scale investments don't replace the need for active local business promotion and market development. Results of infrastructure investments will furthermore not be achieved if the overall policy framework remains restrictive to mobility and work permits.

In sum, a conclusion regarding private sector development is that high hopes are prevailing while it remains both challenging and risky for refugees to invest and for outside companies to enter. Private sector may not become a massive job creator. Ideas of industrial parks or establishment of large labour intensive enterprises, etc have not materialised. Beyond markets in hides, skins, and meat not much of local comparative advantages are to be found in the areas where the refugee settlements are located.

IF authorities, local and international organisations provide good quality advice, support and training to refugees and host community members;

Without much more localised and deeper market analyses, technical and vocational skills education, and training will remain an activity at the margins. The way it is currently practised is driven by a repatriation logic. Seen from an integrative angle, training programmes are mainly supply driven, hence running the risk of becoming more of a therapeutic exercise. Despite some emerging efforts, programmes are still lacking enough links to what demand could look like when refugee and host community economic self-reliance is put centre-piece.

Access to higher education can be a powerful tool that empowers refugees and enhances their employability in the host country. Given the large proportion of young people, the demand for higher education is high. However, the prospects for entering these programmes are basically limited to the few available scholarships for studies abroad or at institutions within Kenya or Uganda. Currently, and

similar to technical and vocational skills education and training, higher education becomes largely a preparatory investment with great uncertainty about prospects for employment.

IF development actors take on increasing roles in the transformation, targeting institutional capacity building and stimulating local economic growth;

The analysis of the interventions displays a fairly dark picture of the prospects for developing the GCR and CRRF according to plan in both Kenya and Uganda. There is an imminent risk that the camps/settlement will remain heavily dependent on humanitarian assistance. A more integrated and long-term development is held back by all the factors discussed. Overall, the premises of concentration, control and movement restriction continue to block the road to inclusion and increased economic freedom for refugees. The overall strategy and programme ToCs have serious limitations in this respect.

In line with the first element of the ToC - the need for long-term planning - there must be a careful withdrawal of humanitarian assistance, while development actors step in. If basic needs aren't met (food rations, service) refugees cannot engage in livelihood strengthening activities. It is essential to keep detailed track of refugees' and host communities' living conditions, during such gradual transformations. Controlling for the absence of humanitarian assistance is key to understanding the economic capacity of the population in relation to the restricted surrounding environment.

A gradual shift from humanitarian to long-term development actors is occurring in both country contexts. However, eight years down the line from the start of the GCR/CRRF there are much fewer development partners coming in, while humanitarian actors are leaving in increasing numbers. This is a worrying trend.

IF the international community provides enough resources in terms of humanitarian and development aid long enough for the transformation to mature and be sustainable;

Financial backing is increasingly inadequate, uncoordinated and misallocated. International donors have generally supported the CRRF as a conceptual approach to refugee hosting, however, thus far this has not been accompanied neither by sufficient, nor the right kind of financial backing. Cuts in humanitarian and long-term development funding are far from replaced by other sources of finance or support for market development. Donor mindsets are still set on ‘refugee funding’ rather than on inclusive area based funding and development. Tensions between national and local governance levels deepen and become increasingly visible. Continued weak policy incentives for integration at national and local levels, will most likely leave donors hesitant about supporting the CRRF as a development project. This creates a vicious circle of incentives.

Besides weak compliance in allocating sufficient funding, donors also seem to act in uncoordinated manners. Although the CRRF emphasises the need for a coherent support, donors have largely operated independently, directing resources towards projects that align with their own aid priorities. This has caused problems with coordination, oversight, and monitoring. Despite the existence of donor coordination groups in both countries, there is little collaboration on joint investments among bilateral donors.

Assumptions:

Creation of enabling economic environments requires the right to free movement for employment and business purposes, access to finance and also regulations that provide for decent employment conditions.

In line with this assumption, and to answer the first evaluation sub question “What factors have contributed to progress, opportunities and/or impediments in the operationalisation of the selected interventions?”, we have found that no conditional or supportive factor in isolation leads to enhanced self-reliance for refugees or host communities. Well implemented progressive policies and legal regulations are necessary. But furthermore, implementing actors

need to design interventions so that remoteness, lacking access to natural resources and finance is managed in some way or another.

Incentive structures for all involved actors – international donors, international organisations, national and local governments, implementing organisations and private sector actors, refugees, and host populations – remain such that they all continue to work and contribute towards the overall objective of integration of refugees into host communities.

It is furthermore necessary for all actors within the interrelated system of refugee reception to cooperate and work in the same direction. The insight that refugees and host communities primarily are economic agents who contribute to local economic growth must override the risks and fears of spurring criminality and security threats through the settlement approach. There are obviously great challenges with existing incentive structures at many levels in this interrelated system.

THEN refugees and local host populations will increase their economic self-reliance, economic inclusion, and benefit from central social services.

We now continue to answer the second evaluation sub question “What changes in the implementation approaches and/ or conditions would be needed to improve the result of the selected interventions?” In the end refugee and to some extent also host community agency is circumscribed by an inability by involved actors to shift perspectives. The challenge is to move from a logic of three objectives - repatriation, resettlement, and integration - into one of integration as the primary objective. While most agree with the need for inclusive policies, there are practical hurdles to overcome in terms of coordination between various governance levels, compromises between various interests, and organisational-internal incentive structures. There is also necessary to shift perspectives on settlements. While reforms of refugee camps and refugee policies are necessary, a comprehensive re-examination of the idea of camps as spaces of care and control is also required. This involves critical examination of the notion of encampment, including the underlying structural

conditions that limit freedoms, restrict rights, and condemn human beings to 'bare life'.

7 Conclusions and policy recommendations

The gap between the ambitious approach of the Global Compact on Refugees (GRF)/CRRF and practice on the ground is rapidly widening. For anyone to break free from the restricted existence in protracted situations, it is important to gain hope from the opportunities of more sustainable solutions, some of which are evaluated in sections 4 and 5 above. But ongoing interventions, however promising, need to be realistically grounded for results not to fall short of expectations. More realistic approaches to the handling of protracted situations are decisive.

A major conclusion is that efforts to promote economic inclusion in the selected cases encounter significant challenges. However, there are constructive paths forward that can be implemented through collaboration among concerned stakeholders: governments, donors, the UN, implementing partners, and the private sector.

For the Swedish Government, the conclusions and recommendations can be operationalized through the recently adopted strategy for humanitarian assistance 2025 – 2029 (Government of Sweden 2025), which primarily aims to reduce the increasing gap between global humanitarian needs and funding.¹⁸

In the following we outline main conclusions followed by recommendations and operational suggestions:

¹⁸ The strategy focuses on three overarching areas: 1) reducing humanitarian needs, 2) expanding the donor base for humanitarian aid and 3) strengthening the effectiveness of the implementation of humanitarian aid.

Conclusion 1: The current camp/settlement solution restricts prospects for economic inclusion in serious ways and needs to be reformed.

Recommendation 1: Stakeholders in Kenya and Uganda, especially host country governments and international donors, need to further reformulate the camp/settlement approach and allow for gradual increases in mobility and issuing of work permits.

Operational suggestions:

- *Governments in Kenya, Uganda, UN and international donors:* Agree on plans and budgets to gradually increase quotas for work permits and movement passes. Allowing more individuals to work outside of the camps or settlements will increase remittances, reduce dependency on assistance and enhance relevance and outcome of existing self-reliance interventions.
- *Donors, UN, implementing agencies, host countries:* In addition to work permits, the plans should include expanded options for education, encompassing both vocational and tertiary education, outside of the settlements or camps. Scholarship programs should be enhanced to facilitate studies in the host country, the region, and internationally.
- *International donors, general applicability:* Continue to advocate for policy changes in mobility and work permits, while also increase resettlement quotas, in accordance with the GCR's principles of burden and responsibility sharing. This can empower negotiating stances with host governments, while boosting remittances that support both refugees and the host country society. Proportional burden-sharing helps pave the way for more progressive economic inclusion policies.
- *Governments in Kenya and Uganda:* Find more and better suited areas for refugee relocation into less populated settlements. Planning tools, such as UN-Habitat's 'Settlement Profiling' ought to be thoroughly used in such processes.

- *Host countries, general applicability:* When agriculture is key for achieving economic inclusion there must be early, long-term, planning for well-motivated location of settlements. Collaborate with local governments/authorities and international actors in the implementation of gradual integrative plans. Sustain long-term efforts for economic integration and refugee self-reliance. Smaller settlements may help alleviate pressure on host populations and land. While initially costlier, this approach may yield long-term benefits.

Conclusion 2: Lack of long-term, comprehensive financial support is a major obstacle to planned and structured economic inclusion of refugees into host community markets.

Recommendation 2: Stakeholders globally, especially international donors and host country governments, need to revitalize their commitment to the effective implementation of a comprehensive approach and find new funding sources.

Operational suggestions:

- *Swedish government:* Lead by example based on the principles in the new humanitarian strategy and promote this actively towards other donors.
- *Donors, UN, host governments, Uganda and Kenya:* Clarify roles and division of labour among implementing actors. Continue to promote more development-oriented implementing actors, and more market based solutions. Humanitarian protection activities ought to be complemented by and coordinated with, gradually stronger development interventions.
- *Donors, UN, host governments, implementing actors, general applicability:* Analyse and consider carefully incentive structures at international, national and local levels. Act in order to strengthen supportive and weaken negative incentives for the promotion of economic inclusion of refugees and host communities.

- *National and local host governments, donors:* Collaborate closely in creating gradual approaches for the hosting of refugees. This requires long-term planning, clear criteria for when and how long-term development programmes start, and clear exit strategies.
- *UN organisations:* While the UNHCR and WFP play crucial roles, it is critical for other UN agencies to integrate the issue of refugee economic inclusion into their programmes. The Resident Coordinating Offices (RCO) has a coordinating role to play in fostering a more inclusive environment for refugees.
- *UN, host governments, donors, generally applicable:* Strengthen efforts to promote targeted repatriation and reintegration projects in countries of origin.

Conclusion 3: Certain interventions are found to give promising positive results in terms of economic integration of refugees and host communities onto joint markets. But such results, however positive and promising, are still marginal in relation to vast and increasing needs of refugees.

Recommendation 3: All involved actors need to strengthen efforts for market development and agricultural production further.

Operational suggestions:

- *Donors, government and implementing agencies in Kenya:* Provide improved market analyses continuously to expand economic integration. Promote spin-off activities to successful KKCF-funded businesses to include wider groups of refugees. Focus on pastoralism and agriculture for further market development.
- *Donors, government and implementing agencies in Uganda:* Improve co-ordination and complementarity between successful businesses, such as Omia Agribusiness and other agricultural promotion initiatives. Focus on financial deepening for increased integration. Increase infrastructure investments and other efforts to overcome mobility challenges.

- *Implementing agencies in Kenya and Uganda:* Consider carefully when whether programs are best suited to support individuals or collectives.
- *Implementing agencies, donors, host national and local governments, general applicability:* Identify and promote key successful interventions that lead to economic inclusion. Such examples are important for showcasing refugee agency and not least contribute to shift perspectives and incentives.

Conclusion 4: Self-reliance take time to build and require sustained support in various forms by all involved agents including development and private sector actors.

Recommendation 4: Donors, host countries, UN and implementing agencies should apply comprehensive and gradual approaches in supporting refugees in protracted situations.

Operational suggestions:

- *Donors, UN organisations, general applicability:* Single year humanitarian budgets are not fit for integrative purposes. Deviations from agreed long-term plans creates uncertainties and risk interrupting the implementation of interventions. Large responsibility for this hinge on donors. Longer-term budgets are needed to extend planning horizons and mitigate investment risks, especially for the private sector.
- *Private sector agents, general applicability:* Take greater part in the development of comprehensive financing and counselling strategies. This would help assessment of investment potentials and risks. Greater private sector engagement can also strengthen the case for expanding access to work, improving mobility, and exploring alternative settlement options.
- *UN organisations, host governments, general applicability:* To develop graduation approaches, more detailed knowledge, data and analysis of needs and capacities of various refugee and host popula-

tion groups are key. There is currently a knowledge gap regarding the targeting of livelihood interventions.

Conclusion 5: Area based development processes are often talked about, but not enough promoted.

Recommendation 5: Widen the perspective to be more area-based, focusing more on local communities and populations, rather than an explicit focus on settlements and camps.

Operational suggestions:

- *Host country governments, donors, general applicability:* Collaborate more closely with county and municipal levels.
- *Implementing agencies, Kenya and Uganda:* Area based approaches have often been interpreted as including host population in short-term refugee support, following a 30/70 percent shares principle. Wider and long-term supportive engagement needs to build on thorough analysis of local market opportunities.
- *Local and national governments, Uganda and Kenya:* National and local development plans promote integration of refugees largely to attract donor financial support. By supporting wider development plans in refugee receiving areas, donors and host governments can contribute to increased local revenues and more positive public attitudes towards refugees. Hence, the entry point ought to be support to both host communities and to refugees.

Conclusion 6: Numerous interventions of similar character are undertaken, without cross-learning, and with sub-optimal coordination and collaboration at strategic level.

Recommendation 6: Continuous donor and donor-government coordination is needed.

Operational suggestions:

- *Donors Kenya and Uganda:* Existing donor coordination groups need to ramp up efforts to create joint and cohesive strategies and programmes that promote economic inclusion.
- *Donors and implementing actors Kenya and Uganda:* To maximize impact, donors should consider undertaking more collaborative and targeted interventions, focusing their resources on a select number of thematic areas, instead of e.g. limited and diverse projects for agricultural development or skills training. Inclusive collaboration with both national and local governments is crucial.
- *Implementing actors in Kenya and Uganda:* Make continuous and deeper labour market analysis around settlements and adapt technical and vocational skills educations and trainings (TVET) according to these. Improve the follow-up of former students in TVET programs.

Conclusion 7: Remote digital jobs is no silver bullet for economic inclusion but remain a marginal solution.

Recommendation 7: Temper the emerging belief that digital employment may become an important pathway for refugee self-reliance.

Operational suggestions:

- *Implementing agencies in Uganda and Kenya:* Treat training programs for digital jobs executed remotely as a solution for a few individuals. Even if current practical problems of low language and ITC skills, access to internet, to computer equipment and restrictive regulations may be overcome, other hurdles will remain. Most refugees lack the necessary social capital or sufficient diaspora links to enter and remain in a highly competitive, fast-moving, and unregulated market.

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Appendix 1: Origin of current approaches

A 1.1 Organised rural settlements in Africa

Throughout the history of the post-WWII refugee regime, the problem of mass-displacement and protracted refugee situations has been a reality for host countries and the international community.

In an African context, several attempts have historically been made to find a way out of this situation, most notably the ICARA I and II conferences (International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa) in the early 1980s. (Gorman 1986). Including both refugees and the host population, the aim was to mobilise resources in support of a strategy referred to as ‘refugee aid and development’. An integrated development approach with organised rural settlements was at the heart of this strategy. Refugees ought to be turned into economic actors while awaiting repatriation, by obtaining the necessary means for agricultural production (Kibreab 1989).

Since the early 1960s, a significant academic literature on organised rural settlements, with particular focus on Africa has emerged (Chambers 1986, Bulcha 1988, Kuhlman 1990, Jacobsen 1997, Fellesson 2003). From the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, most host governments and international agencies embraced the idea of local integration as the primary approach in protracted situations. Local integration was seen as a process, leading to a gradual reduction in humanitarian assistance. The concept of economic integration was also tied to national development plans.

'If the process of refugee settlement is planned as an integral part of a general plan of zonal regional development of the host country, the undertaking will not only enable refugees to become self-sufficient and facilitate their integration but will also create conditions for the betterment of the quality of rural life benefiting both the local population and the refugees themselves.' (Kibreab 1984).

Between 1962 and 1988, more than 170 settlements were established in Africa where refugee movements mainly were rural-to-rural (Kibreab 1984). The two UN conferences in 1981 and 1984 (ICARA I and II) gave substantial policy support to the settlement solution. The organised rural settlement was designed to evolve through planning and control. As put by one scholar, the settlement was a:

'...deliberate and coherent process of administrative and technical measures which enables a group of refugees to settle on land usually in unutilized or sparsely populated areas with a view to creating new self-supporting rural communities which will ultimately form part of the area's economic and social system.' (Armstrong 1987).

A key factor in planning the settlement was to locate an area suitable for farming – one with enough water, good soil, and favourable weather to support a specific number of refugees. The UNHCR was heavily involved and set up a process with three stages: emergency, establishment, and consolidation. During the first stage, refugees would receive traditional humanitarian aid. Once feasible, refugees would move to the establishment stage and start integrating by accessing farmland and necessary tools to become self-sufficient. In the final consolidation stage, the settlement would aim to produce a surplus of agricultural goods and be integrated into the regional development framework. Additionally, refugees would gain the same civil rights as the local population (UNHCR 1981).

The process required the initial allocation of resources to infrastructure (such as roads, schools, health centres, water supply, adminis-

trative facilities, etc.) and a thorough examination of the socio-economic composition and structure of the refugee population in question (including education, skills, etc). Additionally, refugees were screened based on attitudes, motivation, and leadership potential (Ibid.).

The organised rural settlement solution was actively implemented mainly between 1963 and 1979. According to the UNHCR, many settlements were able to reach the consolidation phase within two to ten years. However, despite strong support from both host governments and the international community, the solution became a relatively time bound event.

Success was, in most cases, restricted to economic integration in terms of self-reliance and did not expand to social and legal integration (Bulcha 1988, Fellesson 2003). No overall follow-up studies have been conducted since the early 1990s, when a census of 117 organised rural settlements was conducted, concluding that the model:

‘...has not been very successful. Most refugee settlements are unable to achieve and sustain economic self-sufficiency and many refugees are not integrated into the host country. These failures, particularly the inability to achieve durable solutions for refugees, have contributed to a financial crisis enveloping UNHCR and to a political crisis in Central Africa.’ (Stein and Clark 1990).

The survey identified governments as the primary culprits responsible for the failures, accusing them of being unable to select sites with suitable soil conditions, rainfall, and access to drinking water. Additional problems – which relates to conditions in Kalobeyei, Kakuma and Rhino – included allocated plot sizes being too small for subsistence cultivation and the use of advanced and assistance-dependent farming methods.

Additionally, a one-sided focus on the economic dimension of integration had led to a view of refugees as temporary guests awaiting

repatriation, excluding them from participation in the running of settlements. This problem was sustained by hosting governments' unwillingness to modify their refugee legalisation, which significantly hampered the process of the newcomers' social and legal integration attributed to the 'consolidation phase' (Fellesson 2003).

A 1.2 Shifting priorities

Much of the development-oriented and burden-sharing vision of the ICARA conferences was not realised, mainly due to inconsistencies in the way host and donor countries perceived the objective of 'Solution'. At the time, donors felt that the concept of refugee relief and development was being used as a means of mobilising additional development funds for some beleaguered states, rather than as a genuine effort to find lasting solutions to the refugee problems (Crisp 2001). Since repatriation was increasingly seen as the ultimate solution by many recipient states, the donor community was not interested in pouring money into large development projects if refugees were to return to their country of origin. This viewpoint is still evident in the current refugee hosting debate on inclusive solutions.

Since the mid-1980s, the political attention and support to longer-term, sustainable solutions through self-reliance has fluctuated with the scale and characteristics of current emergencies, budgetary constraints and not least political appetite to support durable solutions beyond repatriation. Large-scale repatriation programmes (Mozambique, Namibia, Cambodia, Central America) and emerging mass-flight emergencies (the Great Lakes region, the Balkans, Liberia, Northern Iraq, Somalia) following the end of the Cold War continued to delude attention away from the fact that a growing number of refugees were struck in protracted situations (Crisp 2003). The political atmosphere surrounding refugees in the 1990s did not support comprehensive and inclusive solutions (Rutinwa 2002). On the contrary, previously generous and inclusive recipient countries began to apply increasingly restrictive and repatriation-directed policies.

One of the most important signs of growing restrictiveness was the creation of ‘safe zones’ – to protect refugees in their countries of origin rather than grant them asylum.¹⁹ As repatriation was seen as the only viable solution for large refugee situations, the UNHCR began to emphasise concepts such as ‘sustainable reintegration’, ‘returnee assistance and development’ and the ‘relief to development gap’ (Crisp 2003).

The reality during the early 2000s and up to today proved different. Voluntary repatriation became an exception, while protracted situations worldwide and especially in Africa grew in numbers. International donors and the United Nations recognized that the repatriation-focused approach risked becoming an endless and costly aid dependency – meeting minimum humanitarian standards through long-term aid was not considered a sustainable combination.

Adding to the problem, the growing number of protracted situations also brought with it several negative consequences (e.g. environmental and security) affecting both refugees and host countries. Based on principles of dignity and independence, livelihoods in the form of access to grants and loans, training, and work-related activities such as cash or food-for-work activities became operational priorities for UNHCR and its partners (UNHCR 2012, Women's Refugee Commission 2009). It became important to recognize the diverse economic and social capacities and livelihoods of refugee populations, and to understand refugee hosting contexts in terms of policy environment and market opportunities. The private sector and development actors ought to be engaged and advocacy for the right and access to work be undertaken (UNHCR 2012). Ambitious toolboxes were developed, however largely geared towards controllable factors, such as the trainings and technical support inside of a camps or settlements.

¹⁹ The idea of creating safe zones was included in the Action Plan for the Voluntary Repatriation of Refugees in the Great Lakes Region, which was adopted at the Intergovernmental Regional Conference held in Bujumbura from February 12-17, 1995.

A 1.3 The New York Declaration

Operational mismatch and tensions prevailed until the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016. This was by many seen as a turning point and the beginning of a new era of global solidarity and burden-sharing (UN 2016). The declaration reaffirmed the importance of the international refugee regime and contained a wide range of commitments by member states. It paved the way for the adoption of two new global compacts in 2018: a Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) including the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) (UN 2018a, 2018b).

Since the adoption of the New York Declaration and GCR, UNHCR has worked with states and relevant actors to develop the practical application of the CRRF in several countries in Africa and Central America. However, the political intentions were not implemented from the outset, and situations have become more intricate with increasingly intolerant and restrictive national refugee policies. The central promises of burden-sharing and financial support for protracted situations have largely been compromised, leading to further operational mismatch and growing discontent among CRRF pilot countries.

Tanzania is a case in point that shows the unpredictability of political processes related to CRRF (Fellesson 2019). The country had long been praised for its pioneering approach to hosting refugees and was an obvious choice as a pilot country. However, it decided to withdraw from the CRRF in a note verbale in early 2018 (Government of Tanzania 2018). The government announced that it would no longer grant citizenship to Burundian refugees per an earlier decision on naturalisation. It would instead limit itself to the option of voluntary repatriation and work harder to "discourage" new asylum seekers. In addition, the government was not to borrow from the World Bank's IDA 18 window to "finance refugees".

Taken together, these messages conveyed a radical departure from greater refugee inclusion under the CRRF approach. An escalating security situation and lack of financial support from international donors appear to have been key factors behind the withdrawal (Fellesson 2019). The Tanzanian case may be extreme but demonstrates the importance of financing and burden sharing in supporting and sustaining an inclusive approach. At present, the issue of insufficient financing is central in all CRRF countries while the gap widens.

Appendix 2: Literature Review

Are the findings above specific to the two studied contexts, or are they relevant also more widely? What happens when a refugee camp or settlement is established in a host country? What effects does it have on the local economy and the surrounding local society? What have been the effects of previous efforts to promote economic inclusion? Several studies have investigated these questions.

A 2.1 Local level research findings

The inflow of refugees influences the host community economy and livelihoods in several ways. It may cause environmental degradation, pollution, lost access to natural resources, but also bring increased access to education and health through investments primarily made for refugees. Any assessment of effects for the host community needs to take these different factors into consideration.

Sanghi et al. (2016) found the presence of refugees to benefit Turkana's economy permanently, by way of increased employment and per capita income. However, this positive effect had not spread to other parts of Kenya. In Turkana, the 'non-tradable' sectors had benefitted: goods and services that are produced and consumed locally. Consumption and incomes increased among the host population. The positive effects are largest within a radius of five kilometres around the refugee camp, including Turkana Town which has seen a growing population.

Benefits are not equal. Turkana households with small businesses or money incomes from farms have become better off. In spite of becoming more vulnerable to price shocks, wage labourers and farmers have seen their assets increase over time, whereas those dependent on selling animals have seen losses over time. Livestock holding, which still is the main livelihood in the Turkana region, has decreased in the area surrounding the camp.

Similar results were found in and around three refugee camps in Rwanda – Nyabiheke, Gihembe and Kigeme (Alloush et al. 2017). Rwandan refugee laws are liberal, in the sense that refugees are allowed to work and to move outside of camps. The study found rather vibrant economies within the refugee camps. Such economic activities, together with the resources brought in by humanitarian support, have positive economic effects also for the host communities. However, benefits did accrue differently to various economic activities and actors.

A simulation of what an additional refugee family, or an additional dollar of humanitarian aid, means for the local economy was also done in a study in Uganda (Taylor et al. 2016). The authors found significant economic contributions by refugees in and around two studied camps. Contributions were larger in an area with better agricultural conditions as well as when refugees received cash transfers rather than food aid. And the incomes clearly exceeded the costs of humanitarian aid.

Hence, the pattern is similar for all three countries: the inflow of refugees is beneficial to local economies, cash transfer gives more of a positive effect compared to food aid. The effects differ depending on local socio-economic and productive preconditions, and some groups are still negatively affected, while majorities of host community members benefit to various degrees. This is also corroborated by other studies (Alix-Garcia et al. 2017, Tayler et al. 2016, Whitaker 2002) including a meta-study of 59 research articles on the impact of refugees on hosts (Verme and Schuettler 2021). The latter find that more than four out of five households living next to refugees experience improved wellbeing, such as through better access to social services (health, education), better roads and increased access to cheap labour.

The question is whether such benefits may be upheld over time? May results change with increased protractedness of refugee situations?

Even though there seems to be positive effects from economic integration between refugees and host populations, studies also found that resilience and food security indexes are lower among host populations closer to refugee camps (Oliver et al. 2024). Their conclusion is that '*(t)he net welfare effect is ambiguous*' (Ibid. p 377). More qualitatively based studies also raise similar questions (Omata 2022, Omata 2021, Kaiser 2006).

Through detailed ethnographic descriptions Omata (2022, 2021) captures a wider set of challenges to livelihoods for distinctive groups of refugees and host populations. Among these are social stigma and the tendency to perceive of refugees as terrorist, not least following the Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi, 2013 and the massacre of students at the Garissa University in 2015.

Being stuck with informal economic activities is another. Within the Kakuma camp, refugees who work for humanitarian organisations receive 'incentive', rather than formal, salaries. Small businesses such as bars, restaurants, groceries etc. are also informal, as refugees are hindered from moving, and are forbidden to keep livestock, or cut trees for charcoal production. However, these activities have still become semi-formal, since the County Government has started to charge a business licence fee and to register the business inside the camp (Omata 2021).

Business owners in the camp are regularly exposed to controls by the police. If they lack required licences, they may either pay bribes or ultimately face business closure. Motorbike drivers within the camp claim to be regularly stopped and asked to pay fees, unless their motorbikes are taken to the police station – only to be recovered by paying a 'fine' (Ibid.).

This 'grey' zone between formal and informal activities is also what refugees in Nairobi experience. Outside of the camps, without access to humanitarian support, refugees have no right to formal employment, but nevertheless must find livelihoods. What is peculiar is that many of them can receive business licences from the City Council of

Nairobi. These licences constitute a source of revenue for the City, which then apply a more liberal approach (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, interactions between refugees and the police are often include bribes, which both makes it more expensive but also enables the pursuit of businesses. Restrictive regulations are thus mitigated by two movements: refugees working informally, while local authorities – in contradiction to national laws – partly formalise the informal economy of refugees.

This shows the insufficiency of relying on separate studies of economic benefits from refugees – host community interaction. The various forms of socio-economic integration that are taking place must also be taken into consideration, for the sustainability of livelihoods to be assessed.

In Uganda, refugees gradually face increasing problems with their farming despite ‘progressive’ refugee regulations. Cultivation plots decrease in size with increasing numbers of refugees, soil quality deteriorates, access to water is often irregular and limited, and conflicts with host communities prevail. Self-reliance based on cultivating plots allocated to refugees has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible (Omata 2022).

These deteriorations concern refugees living both inside and outside of camps. Many refugees living outside of camps claim to be bound to informal sector work, despite increased street vendor competition which make it more difficult for refugees to survive on such activities (*Ibid.*). Individuals provide similar reasons for opting to stay in camps, as others provide for leaving them and living outside. Besides reasons related to livelihood opportunities, the search for security is a common cause for both options (Kaiser 2006).

Hence, wider research findings are broadly in line with findings of the current evaluation. Another new study further reinforces this. Based on two years of study covering nine East African and Great Lakes countries Smith-Höhn et al. (forthcoming 2025) point to the centrality of very similar hindrances to economic inclusion as found

above. Moreover, they highlight the potential for market development and economic self-reliance that exist in various value chains. To unlock these potentials, it is necessary to first remove the many barriers that hinder refugee and host community agency. They underline that a gender perspective is necessary, since a majority of refugees are women, and many hurdles are especially obstructive for them.

A 2.2 National effects of refugee reception

Host countries' refugee policies need also to be put in a wider context. The historical background to Uganda's 'progressive' refugee policies is described and analysed by Betts (2021). He finds the roots of the self-reliance and economic inclusion approach in the attempts of successive Ugandan regimes to either control enemies or to build alliances with populations in remote areas ('hinterlands'). The question of nation building is central as Uganda since colonial times (1894 – 1962) consists of several separate kingdoms, with the central Buganda kingdom enjoying a privileged position. The country received refugees already after the second world war. Larger inflows started to come as Rwandan Tutsis fled conflict in 1958.

These refugees were given plots to cultivate in sparsely populated areas. The first president of free Uganda, Milton Obote, realised that this was a model that could receive international support. An agreement with the UNHCR was reached, and substantial financial support emerged. This flow of resources served to uphold peace with potential competitors through patron-client relations. The subsequent dictator, Idi Amin, became infamous for throwing the Asian population out of Uganda and threatening to expel all refugees. Less known is his progressive refugee policy towards refugees from neighbouring countries (Betts 2021). To retain power, he expelled Obote's allies from the army, replacing them with soldiers from his own people – and with refugees from neighbouring

countries. The progressive self-reliance refugee policy served to keep also Amin in power.

The return of President Obote (Obote II) reversed the game. Refugee policies focused instead on containing refugees in camps, still with the objective of balancing out threatening groups in the provinces. With the subsequent entry of President Youveri Museveni, it was again back to building alliances like those of Amins. Betts (2021) describes this intriguing story in much more detail and precision. The thrust is that the progressive refugee policy over the years has served the purpose of keeping authoritarian leaders in power. The basis has been the interplay between the international refugee system and donors at the international level, national government, and local actors. Through this system, resources have been flowing to otherwise marginal provinces, where people in return have provided support for authoritarian presidents. An additional precondition is that the presence of refugees in most cases boosts the local host economy. In essence, there are 'side payments' at many different levels from such a system.

With Betts own conclusion:

"The Ugandan case reveals the interplay between patronage politics and refugee policy. Without side payments at every level of governance, there would have been no Ugandan model. Recognizing the progressive refugee policies have depended upon patronage, illiberalism, and authoritarianism presents a significant normative challenge to refugee policy-makers and practitioners." (p 275-6).

Furthermore, this pattern of patronage seems applicable also to other refugee policy situations, among them Turkana County, Kenya. In 2015, the KISEDP provided (on paper) refugees with the right to work, and to move freely for work or setting up businesses. The Governor, Josapat Nanok, managed with this programme to bring substantial financial resources to Turkana County, strengthen his local standing as well as getting a more prominent place in

national politics. All of this, together with substantiated allegations of corruption (Turkana County, 2018), fits the pattern of patron-client relationships (Betts 2021:272f).

Progressive refugee policies, focusing on livelihoods and subsistence, may obviously be beneficial to national, as well as local host communities. It has potential to benefit the international humanitarian system, in the sense that it may somewhat eases the pressure on restricted financial assets. It may be beneficial to donor countries since it allegedly eases the irregular migration pressure on countries. Despite this, such a system has only provided very limited benefits to refugees and to the local hosts that live next to them.

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With dwindling humanitarian support, refugees stuck in camps since decades are increasingly referred to self-reliance. This study evaluates the effectiveness of programs for the integration of refugees into local host economies.

Minskat humanitärt stöd pressar de många flyktingar som sedan decennier lever i läger att bli självförsörjande. Denna studie utvärderar effektiviteten i program som syftar till att integrera flyktingar i värdländers lokala ekonomier.



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