What Lies Ahead?
Navigating New Insecurities in Displacement

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Introduction

Uganda's 1.4 million refugees have trekked into the country, fleeing violence and conflict in South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Somalia, and other regional neighbors. They came to Uganda sometimes intentionally, sometimes merely following the crowd, but all looking for peace. Through in-depth interviews with 30 refugees in Kampala in August 2019, we found that many urban refugees have found only partial peace, continuing to confront insecurity in displacement. Their experiences and fears of violence are limiting their livelihoods opportunities, their interest in integration, and even their willingness to send their children to school.

A range of threats at home

While not the focus of our research, a number of participants shared with us the insecurity they experienced at home. Often, specific family members were killed or targeted, forcing the family to leave. Other times, entire communities were targeted, so large numbers of people sought refuge elsewhere. Although common, the violence was not always directly tied to political conflict. For example, we interviewed a few refugees who left due to threats to their safety over land inheritance disputes. One young man was enrolled at a Congolese university but was forced to leave after his father was killed by a family member. Given that this young man was next to inherit the land, he was then at risk, and forced to leave.

Looking for safety

This young man, like others, came to Uganda looking for safety. Some had family already in Uganda; many had nowhere else to go. One respondent told us, "we heard that in Uganda, refugees are treated well, and they will be safe."

However, this was not always the case. A number of refugees recounted experiencing violence while living among host communities around Kampala, particularly in the densely populated low-income areas where they could afford to pay for housing. In-

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stead of finding security, many were confronted with continued threats of political violence, as well as sexual violence and kidnapping in their new homes.

Political violence

Several refugees we interviewed shared with us a common fear: the threat of being tracked to their new location, particularly fearing retribution by political leaders in their home countries.

Paul, for example, supported the opposition leader in his home country, Burundi. After the leader was killed, Paul's own life was threatened, and he escaped an attempt to have him killed. He had hoped things would be better in Uganda, but for some time, he was still very uncomfortable. Paul said, "I could not hawk anything in town for fear of being recognized by my fellow countrymen. Some of them could be spies."

Paul knew he was not safe because he had been communicating with his wife, who was still in Burundi with his family. He worried that combatants could torture his family members into revealing his whereabouts. Once he made some money in Uganda, he sent it to his wife so she could also come to Kampala. He felt safer when all his family members joined him in Uganda.

A second refugee we spoke with, Gideon, came to Uganda from Rwanda and was working as an Uber driver in Kampala. When we asked him if he could connect us to some people he knows from his country, he said he is not close to anyone from Rwanda: "Most of my friends are Ugandans. I fear people from home because they may be spies who send information about other Rwandese living in Uganda." When he came to Uganda, he was hosted by friends he knew from home who had encouraged him to come and try his luck in Kampala. Those friends have since returned to Rwanda, and Gideon has not interacted with anyone from Rwanda since. Gideon had managed to get a Ugandan ID, but worried that if he could get an ID, so could the "spies" he feared, which would enable their work.

Women whose husbands were killed working in the government also felt insecure. When we asked Maggie why she was straining to pay unaffordable rent, she told us it was for security reasons. The plot she lives on has a gate, which is the only entrance to the compound and is always locked. She lives with Ugandans and is always cautious when talking to other South Sudanese, except those she met in church. , Compared to women who experience the same fear of being recognized or targeted, those who do not tended to be more social and engaged in income-generating activities, while those with such fears were more isolated and relied heavily on remittances from relatives. Many of these women did not understand why their spouses were killed and worried they would become targets as well.

This common fear of "spies," while a serious issue for some refugees, has been manipulated to justify creating more barriers to claiming refugee status. Recently, the Uganda Office of the Prime Minister suspended mass registration of asylum seekers. All refugees are now subjected to the full application and status determination process a month after arrival. Previously, most were given an initial two years of automatic protection. The government claims this is an effort to curb insecurity and criminal activities, particularly protecting refugees from their home country "spies."[1]

Sexual violence

Female refugees shared with us their experiences—or fears—of being raped by combatants at home. Most of them were troubled that this threat did not recede in Kampala. Women who were separated from their husbands were particularly concerned about their risk of being raped.[2] Some had already experienced rape, while others heard of such cases in their neighborhoods.

We met Eunice in her two-room house, which she shared with another family. Eunice is a widow who is caring for seven children, three of her own and four orphaned nephews and nieces. Eunice's husband was

1   The Independent, "Plan to Eliminate Spies in Settlements Sends Refugees into Panic," The Independent Uganda:, September 11, 2019, accessed January 17, 2020, https://www.independent.co.ug/plan-to-eliminate-spies-in-settlements-sends-refugees-into-panic/; Rajab Mukombozi, "Government Warns Foreign Spies Disguising as Refugees," Daily Monitor (Kampala, June 21, 2018), accessed January 17, 2020, https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Government-warns-foreign-spies-disguising-refugees/688334-4623006-fufaqr/index.html.

2   Pearl Karuhanga Atuhaire and Grace Ndirangu, Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence in Refugee Settings in Kenya and Uganda (Washington, D.C.: Women in International Security, March 2018), https://www.wiisglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/9th-WIIS-Policy-Brief-3-5-18-v2-.pdf.

killed four years earlier at home in Burundi. The other family sharing the house has six members: a mother with her five children. Unlike other families who first passed through the camps to register and receive food rations, Eunice had come straight to Kampala. This made her vulnerable in several ways. Before she moved into her current shared housing, she had been sheltered in a church for three years. She struggled daily to get enough food for the children under her care. One day, a fellow Burundian acquaintance invited her to come to his home and collect maize flour to cook for her family. When Eunice arrived, this acquaintance forced himself on her and, she told us, he failed to give her any food to take home. Eunice was angry that he preyed on her vulnerability. She reported the incident to the police, but the guy took off and wasn't seen again. A month later, Eunice found out that she was pregnant. She was devastated, already struggling to make ends meet and relying on church donations. When we met her, she was still breastfeeding this newborn baby.

The church had been a valuable refuge for many displaced people. Most people were able to leave within six months to a year, finding alternative housing with friends or on their own once they were able to earn some money. It was more difficult for Eunice. With so many children in her care, no friends had the space to take her in. The pregnancy made it even more difficult for her to find any kind of work. When she gave birth, she tried selling *sombe* (cassava leaves), which was difficult for her because it meant walking around with her young child. Eunice recalls when she was young, while living in a camp in Tanzania, she would go around the camp looking for work and hawking cereals to earn a living. But now she was afraid of letting her children go outside on their own. She feared they may be raped, even though they were still very young. In an urban setting, it is difficult to know who to trust and who not to trust, she told us. Now Eunice's fears may be holding her family back from integration.

Another refugee we spoke with, Halima, also expressed fear of what might happen to her girls when they leave the house. She has three children, all girls, whom she has not enrolled in school. While many refugees do not enroll their children in school because they cannot afford fees, that is not the case with Halima. She receives a monthly remittance of USD 100 per month from her sister, who lives in Europe. Halima uses this money for rent and food. In this case, her children are not going to school because she wants to keep them safe. "They may be raped on the way to or from school," she says.

Halima worried not only about the risk of rape, but also about her daughters being lured into early relationships. In 2015, UNICEF Uganda pointed the finger at young male motorcycle riders, claiming they are responsible for many teenage pregnancies and early marriages in towns such as Kampala. They allegedly attract girls with small amounts of money and gifts.[3] Motorcycle riders, commonly known as *boda boda,* are very common in Kampala. Given that *boda bodas* are less common in Somalia, and interactions between men and women are generally discouraged, Halima avoids them in Kampala. Today, her fears keep her isolated and keep her daughters from attending school.

Still nursing wounds from sexual violence at home, these kinds of fears are keeping a number of women in our study from building a new and full life in Kampala.

Missing children

Another security fear our participants expressed was the possibility of their children being abducted. They recounted a number of cases in 2019 in which children were abducted and later found dead. This made them nervous for their children to travel alone or even go out to play.

Zain was living with the pain of a lost child. She was with her nephew in Congo when they got the news that the boy's parents had been killed. Fearing they were also at risk, the two fled. After three months living in a church, Zain and her nephew were reunited with another relative, an aunt, who had also made it to Kampala, and moved in with her. This is where her nephew disappeared from in 2016. He was out playing with his friends but never came home. Zain reported this to the police but there has been

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3 UNICEF, Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda: A Formative Research to Guide the Implementation of the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda (UNICEF, December 2015), accessed January 17, 2020, https://www.unicef.org/uganda/media/3901/file.

no progress on the case. Zain seems to have lost all hope of finding her nephew. "If he was still alive, the kidnappers would have called to asked for a ransom," she said. She is aware that children have disappeared in Kampala and most are found dead.

Zain still has no answer to what happened to her nephew. Our interpreter, who is also a refugee in the same area, was quick to tell us that it is a common problem in the area, not just for the refugees, but also for the host community. The 2018 annual police report cited 184 cases of kidnapping reported that year, though some question the reliability of these statistics and suggest rates of kidnapping have been increasing.[4]

Conclusion

The focus of our study was to understand the process of economic integration of refugees, but we found that security fears are also an important factor inhibiting refugees from building self-reliant livelihoods. Because of these fears, refugees limit themselves to income opportunities very close to their homes and reduce potential earnings by accompanying their children to and from school every day. Some feel the risks are compounded when their documentation is incomplete. They are more reluctant to report crimes, which may make them more attractive targets. Young men we talked to were afraid of going far from their neighborhoods and into areas where they are not known and could be at risk. "Anything can happen to you. You could be framed for something you have not done," said Ismael, who sells shoes just from his doorstep. In order for refugees to become more self-reliant, they need better assurances that they are truly safe to pursue new livelihoods.

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4 Paul Ampurire, "2018: Police Reports 5.2% Reduction in Crime, Kidnappings and Mob Action Rise," Online News from Uganda and the East African Region - SoftPower News, May 27, 2019, accessed January 17, 2020, https://www.softpower.ug/2018-police-reports-5-2-reduction-in-crime-kidnappings-and-mob-action-rise/; Elias Biryabarema, "Rise in Kidnappings Shakes Faith in Uganda's Police," Reuters, April 16, 2018, accessed January 17, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uganda-security-idUSKBN1HN15Z.