

UGANDA

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Aug 2017

A home away from home?

Exploring the situation of South Sudan refugees in Uganda



South Sudanese children play at Bidi-Bidi refugee settlement. @Credit: MSF

Foreword

Getting around in South Sudan could not have been more difficult. Politically and ethnically motivated conflicts underline sustained violence in the world's newest country. The state in South Sudan is barely existent and can hardly provide basic public goods and services, including security. Climate change

has hindered food production resulting in famine on a large scale.

As new rebel factions continue to emerge and ethnic tensions deepen, neither the African leaders under the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)¹ nor the international community has managed to successfully press for an end to

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the violence in South Sudan. Consequently, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that more than 4.7 million South Sudanese have fled their homes. That makes 38 percent of the country's population estimated at around 12.2 million.

The level of human suffering resulting from the South Sudan conflict demands immediate action towards achieving an end to the war. Most urgently however is the need to support those fleeing from the violence to find a safe place to settle and live in dignity as they wait to return home when peace is finally achieved.

Uganda has been forthright in welcoming and accommodating those fleeing violence and other forms of suffering, such as famine. It is home to more than 1.2 million refugees, about 900,000 of whom are from South Sudan. Uganda has also won international praise for guaranteeing the rights of refugees by providing land for settlement and agriculture, ensuring freedom of movement, and providing an environment where the refugees can run businesses and take up job placements just like Ugandan citizens would.

In line with our commitment to solidarity and social justice, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), joins the world in recognising

Uganda's exemplary commitment to refugee protection and management, and in calling upon the rest of the world to emulate and support the country in fulfilling this obligation.

This special country report explores the situation of South Sudan refugees and asylum seekers in Uganda as well the impact of a burgeoning refugee crisis towards Uganda's ability to cope. The report furthermore highlights critical issues that need to be addressed regarding refugee protection and management including the support Uganda urgently needs. It suggests the need to address pervasive violence by focussing on state building within the great lakes region as the long-term solution to a refugee situation that is potentially exploding beyond existing capacities for response.

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Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. Introduction

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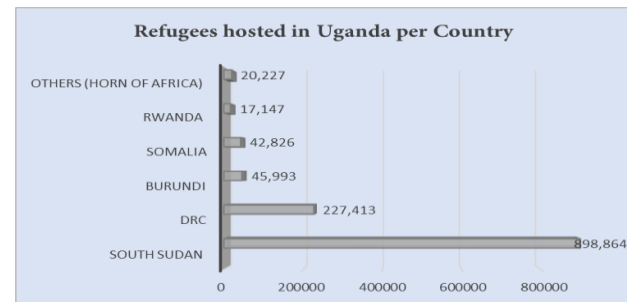
Welcome to Uganda, the largest refugee hosting country in Africa and number three in the world. For its compassionate refugee policy, Uganda has recently experienced unprecedented surge in the number of South Sudanese entering the country as refugees. They are escaping a tirade of catastrophes: violence, a shattered economy, climate change-induced famine alongside a weak or non-existent state that can barely provide basic services including security.

Uganda's refugee figures are staggering: Adjumani district alone hosts 224,318 as of May 2017, almost matching its native population of 226,600.ⁱⁱ Yet Adjumani cannot claim to be accommodating the most number of refugees in Uganda. Yumbe district does. It has 272,707 refugees,ⁱⁱⁱ all of them in Bidi-Bidi, the world's largest refugee settlement.

Between January and June 2017, more than 300,000 South Sudanese refugees are reported to have entered Uganda,^{iv} a figure that could double by end of year according to estimates. In such a scenario, the South Sudanese refugee influx to Uganda will have doubled the number of African immigrants crossing to Europe via the Mediterranean, which was estimated to be 300,000 for the first nine

months of 2016.^v Already, before the dawn of 2017, more than half a million South Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers were living in Uganda.^{vi}

Uganda is currently home to more than 1.2 million refugees in total^{vii}, more than half (69.3 percent) of whom are South Sudanese.



Source: Authors' conceptualisation using data from UNDP Report on Uganda's contribution to refugee management and protection, 2017.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. South Sudanese escaping the violence

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South Sudan is the third most fled country in the world after Syria and Afghanistan. According to the UNHCR, more than 4.7 million South Sudanese have fled their homes.^{viii} Furthermore, statistics from United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicate that over 86 percent of those fleeing are women and children^{ix} - a population prone to infectious diseases - heightening the country's child and maternal mortality rates, which are already among the highest in the world.

Just like most nation states, South Sudan is a country born out of violence and its seven years of existence have only experienced a continuity of violence. While the birth of South Sudan in 2011 was itself delivered through a peaceful secession referendum, this democratic process was only held as an end to almost half a century of protracted civil war, which underlined the struggle for independence from the Sudan. Available estimates show that more than half of South Sudanese population fled their homes during the pre-independence violence and had to attain refugee or asylum status across the world, mostly in Uganda.

The 2011 independence referendum brought hope for peace

and unveiled a society ostensibly ready to prosper as a nation state. This optimism, however, burst before dawn. No sooner had South Sudan made a year of independence than the country slipped back into a recurrent web of political turmoil, ethnic conflicts and civil unrest, creating one of the world's largest humanitarian nightmares and Africa's biggest refugee crisis.

It is important to note that independence in South Sudan was not matched with development of a state apparatus that could monopolise violence to guarantee peace or tranquillity. To date, the South Sudan state remains a weak, fledgling and disorganized political establishment. Proliferation of violence among different rebel groups, army factions and ethnic militias remains the number one challenge to peace and stability.

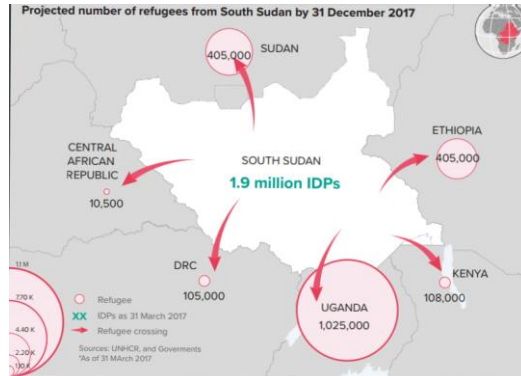
Pervasive violence underlines the matching outpouring of South Sudanese young and old from their homeland in the post-independence state. Arrivals in Uganda for example peaked in March 2017 when an estimated 2,800 South Sudan refugees were registered each day^x. With no peace in sight, the migration of South Sudanese will continue to rise, moving to several desti-

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. nations beyond Uganda. UN-HCR's projections give a clear outlook.

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The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung reflects on the South Sudanese refugee situation.

Ahead of a large refugee solidarity summit hosted by the UN and the Uganda government in Kampala in June 2017, KAS held a small roundtable conversation mostly attended by South Sudanese refugees living in Kampala. The discussion focused on opportunities, rights, integration for refugees as well as the prospects for peace in South Sudan.



Key roundtable discussants (from L-R): Innocent Ndihirirwe-Office of the Prime Minister; Daniel Pou, South Sudan Human Rights Society; Choul Magok, SPLM-IO and Malual Bol Kiir - AYAN, South Sudan.

The over 20 participants at the KAS organised roundtable lauded Uganda for keeping the country's borders open to people fleeing from conflict. The South Sudanese were particularly unreserved in their gratitude: "We thank Uganda and Ugan-

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dans deeply for providing us and our people a place to stay when it is not possible to go home, when home is full of war,” remarked one participant.

Uganda was also applauded for providing opportunities for refugees including land, freedom of movement and the possibility to access social services such as education. Yet the difficulty in accessing basic needs like food for a number of child refugees, especially those living in the city, attracted an emotional reflection.

The question of refugee rights was also explored. It was noted that while refugees generally enjoy equal rights akin to the Ugandan citizens, civic organisations run by and working with refugees particularly find challenges in registering and accessing support to pursue their goals. Registration with the refugee department in Uganda’s Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) is a requirement but several representatives said they could not easily get the necessary clearance.

A key challenge observed relates to the difficulty of integration within the South Sudan refugee population itself. Back home, South Sudan’s population lives amidst deep ethnic divisions, which in part accounts for the violence there. Refugee participants in the KAS roundtable

wished that the period spent in Uganda as refugees could be an opportunity for South Sudanese to blend and live together across ethnic divides. However, they observed that the allocation of refuge settlements by Ugandan authorities was also typically aligned to the same ethnic divides as they exist back home. By this, the opportunity for interethnic integration is lost. At a later engagement, however, a representative of the OPM insisted ethnicity is not taken into account in the allocation of refugee settlements.^{xi}

Finding a solution to the violence in South Sudan was the resounding appeal by participants, particularly those from South Sudan. Participants decried the lack of accountability which, they noted, implies the perpetrators of violence find no pressure to reach a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In his concluding remarks, KAS Country Representative, Mathias Kamp, shared the frustration that the real perpetrators of the violence are largely unaffected by its effects. He furthermore observed that they do not show concern about the suffering they breed and yet there seems to be no headway in the internationally-brokered peace process, or in holding the antagonists to account.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. Reflecting on the role of South Sudan elite

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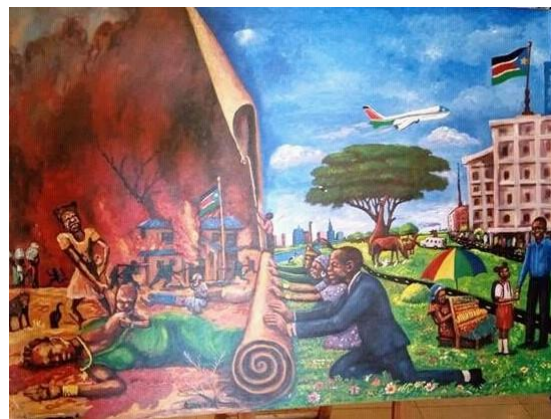
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Despite the opaque smoke that looms in the horizon of peace and prosperity in South Sudan, the role of the South Sudanese elites cannot be underestimated. At the KAS roundtable, a young South Sudanese peace advocate based in Uganda, Gatwal Gat-kouth, provided a detailed account of how young South Sudanese elites in various fields are championing initiatives to stabilise their homeland. From the spiritual work of the clergy preaching peace, unity and reconciliation, the inspiring works of art by artists and organizations like AnaTaban, to grassroots activism like the Youth Maale (Youth for Peace) campaign, there are many efforts that won't just end in vain. Perhaps now is the time that the South Sudanese elite in their capacities and wherever they are around the world, started doing something to connect the rods of peace.



A painting by an artist from Ana-Taban, a Nairobi based South Sudanese organization that uses art as to champion peace and unity in South Sudan.

At the roundtable discussion, the heart-breaking but inspiring stories of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda gained significant prominence. A recap of Malual Bol Kiir's story of inspiration mirrored the hope that lies ahead of South Sudan's future. Malual, a South Sudanese human rights activist, uses his voice to champion peace building in South Sudan. For his relentless pursuit of peace and social justice, he was awarded the Voice of Courage Award in New York in April 2017.

Re-echoing his commitment, Malual stressed that through his organisation - the African Youth Action Network (AYAN) - he will continue working with the South Sudanese youth to light the torch of peace regardless of the cost it comes with. "At the end of the day, what matters is peace and stability in South Sudan. It is so painful to be a ref-

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ugee because you can never enjoy all your inherent rights and dignity. It is for this reason that I will never relent in my efforts to make South Sudan peaceful,” he remarked.

To the host governments, Malual advised that they ought to view any refugee population as an opportunity and not a threat because ‘their [refugees] contribution to development efforts is immense”.

Is Uganda a home away from home?

“Your home is always your home, but we are trying our best to provide a situation for refugees that isn’t very different from home.” These reassuring words were echoed during the KAS roundtable, by Mr Innocent Ndihirirwe, refugee integration expert in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

In March 2017, while addressing a high level Global Workshop on Forced Migration and Refugees Management in Copenhagen, Denmark, Musa Ecweru, the Uganda government minister responsible for refugees, re-echoed Uganda’s commitment to making the lives of refugees in Uganda comfortable. He pointed out thus (sic):

Uganda offers refugees stability as well [as] the opportunity to thrive. Our refugee policy amounts to extending a generous helping hand to them in their greatest time of need. Uganda admits refugees on its territory irrespective of nationality, ethnicity or religion. They enjoy security as well as legal, physical and social protection. We issue refugees with identity cards, so that they enjoy freedom of movement. In Uganda, refugees use public health facilities and receive universal primary and lower secondary education. In Uganda, we do not have refugee camps. Instead, our Government has set aside approximately 1,000 square miles of land for refugee use and the community has donated more. Refugees are allocated land for cultivation to promote self-reliance. Refugee settlements look just like any Ugandan rural village. Refugees pursue economic opportunities without discrimination. They have the right to work and to establish their own businesses. The government has waived the work permit fee for all refugees. In Uganda, refugees co-exist

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with nationals to the extent that an outsider would find it difficult to tell the difference.

Mr Ewero's views are shared by many across the world. Uganda's progressive refugee approach has won international admiration and is fast being regarded as a blueprint. In 2016, it informed the design of the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migration which reaffirms the political will of world leaders to save lives, protect rights and share responsibility on a global scale.^{xii}

UN Secretary General António Guterres sees Uganda's refugee policy as "a symbol of integrity of the refugee protection regime", which he observes, is unfortunately not replicated in many places around the world. Uganda's borders have remained open to refugees from all backgrounds. At a recent international refugee solidarity summit in Kampala, António Guterres had this summary of Uganda's refugee protection and management approach: "I have seen Uganda's borders open, I have seen the doors of Uganda's people open, I have seen the hearts of the Ugandan people open."^{xiii} When an international team attending the Kampala refugee solidarity summit visited the camps hosting South Sudan refugees in June 2017, the UN

Secretary General, who was part of the delegation, had this to say afterwards:

"... it is important to underline that Uganda, in the past, received these South Sudanese refugees and I had the opportunity when visiting the same area that I visited yesterday, to see that they were not in camps but in so-called settlements that are in reality villages, like villages of the Ugandan people. This allows them to farm the land, allows them to go to the same schools, the same health centers, to have jobs, to allow them to have normal lives, to live in dignity."^{xiv}



*South Sudanese refugees at Bidi-Bidi Settlement plough a garden.
@Credit: Caritas International.*

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. In Uganda's refugee policy

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- Refugees do not stay in camps but are assigned settlements where land for residential and agricultural^{xv} use is provided. Refugees can start up a business, formal or informal, following the same requirements as applicable to Ugandans. The possibility to pursue independent livelihood reduces dependence on humanitarian aid.
- Uganda focuses on integrating refugees with local host communities.
- Refugees have rights to participate in the labour market without requirement for additional permits to take up a job.
- There is freedom of movement for refugees to all parts of the country.
- The Ugandan government with support of partners provide social services to refugees such as education, water and health.

Settling in Uganda's peace and tranquillity? it has not always been *Uhuru*

Uganda is relatively peaceful today, at least in comparison with most of her neighbours or to the country's own recent past. A South Sudanese refugee entering Uganda today is more certain of settling in an environment free from war. But this has not always been the case.

Until 2006, Uganda was struggling with its own internal insurgency, mounted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels. The LRA conflict, that lasted more than 20 years, affected the northern part of the country (including West Nile, Lango and Teso sub-regions). The north is where South Sudan refugees mostly settled since they started fleeing pre-independence fighting back home.

The plight of South Sudan refugees has thus always been compounded by running conflicts in host countries. At Achol Pii refugee settlement in Northern Uganda, for example, South Sudanese refugees were under constant attacks by the LRA rebels. Human Rights Watch estimates that between 1996 and 2000, approximately 120 Sudanese refugees were killed in rebel attacks and that in 2001 alone, more than 1,000 refugees temporarily fled their settlement site because of rebel attacks.^{xvi} Again, the camps in northern Uganda were particularly seen as vulnerable to raids by LRA forces.^{xvii} Elsewhere in Ethiopia, war made life unbearable for South Sudanese refugees who had been settled at Itang and several other refugee camps.

Relative peace has returned and the LRA is no longer a potent threat to Uganda. Nevertheless, the risk to refugees—and this

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was expressed during the KAS organised roundtable—is that among those fleeing South Sudan and seeking settlement in Uganda at times include South Sudan rebels, who may use the refugee settlements as recruitment grounds. In addition, ethnic tensions that underline social relations in South Sudan tend to be reflected in the settlements. The risk for ethnic differences being exploited for radicalisation and brewing further conflict cannot be underestimated.

Meeting the cost: why Uganda needs support

Uganda's friendly refugee policy comes with attendant costs to the government and local communities. A recent study by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) finds that the Ugandan government and local communities together spend 323 million dollars annually on refugee protection and management.^{xviii} The estimations take into account land, provision of social services (education, health, energy, and water), ecosystem loss and tax exemptions to United Nations agencies.

Most of the land provided for refugee settlements—particularly in northern Uganda—does not belong to the government but to local communities who donate it for the purpose. This explains

why refugee settlements are concentrated in areas with communal land ownership systems.^{xix}

Our interview with Mr Thomas Tayebwa, a legislator active on the parliamentary team following up on the refugee issues in the country, confirms that local communities grant their land willingly but with expectation of some benefits in return. They are promised improvements in social services such as roads, medical centres and schools by government or humanitarian agencies. These promises, Mr Tayebwa stresses, “are an important part of the equation” because the local communities themselves have been struggling with lack of basic social amenities.

However, being a relatively poor country, Uganda's government is seldom able to meet these promises on its own, at least not in time. The international humanitarian agencies on their side concentrate on the refugees. This has created a situation where, according to Mr Tayebwa, the social services accessed by refugees in the settlements turn out to be better than those accessible to local communities that host them. “It breeds a degree of conflict,” he says. Reportedly, there are incidents of Ugandans (members of host communities) attempting to

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seek registration as refugees so that they can benefit from the humanitarian services provided to refugees.

Local communities have on their part expressed concern about the futility of promises made to them by government officials. “They told us that if we gave our land and are good hosts to the refugees, we would get good roads, hospitals and schools but this isn’t coming so soon,”^{xx} lamented a resident from a refugee hosting community.

In June 2017, Uganda’s Parliament approved a 50 million dollar World Bank loan to enable the implementation of a Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHOPE) Programme. ReHOPE is a self-reliance and resilience strategic framework targeting refugees and host communities. Through this initiative, host communities and refugees will be able to build strong social ties and create a better environment for economic engagement. Gradually, neighbouring districts where refugee settlements are located have started to witness improvements in public service delivery in sectors such as health and education for both the host communities and the refugees. Mr Tayebwa believes that if the plight of host communities is taken into account, Uganda’s welcoming poli-

cy towards refugees can only get better.

The refugee solidarity summit held in Kampala in June 2017 came when it was most needed. It occurred at a time when Uganda has the highest number of refugees ever, and the main contributing factor to the crisis—the conflict in South Sudan—presenting no end in sight.

Uganda is already facing difficulties in coping with the big refugee numbers. As the settlements get crowded so does the pressure to provide much needed social services. Moreover, Uganda has her own domestic battles to deal with; considerable parts of the country are reeling from a climatic change induced food scarcity, increasing land conflicts including in areas near refugee settlements, and essential social services which are either unavailable or in a sorry state. Therefore, the target to seek international support was a timely endeavour.

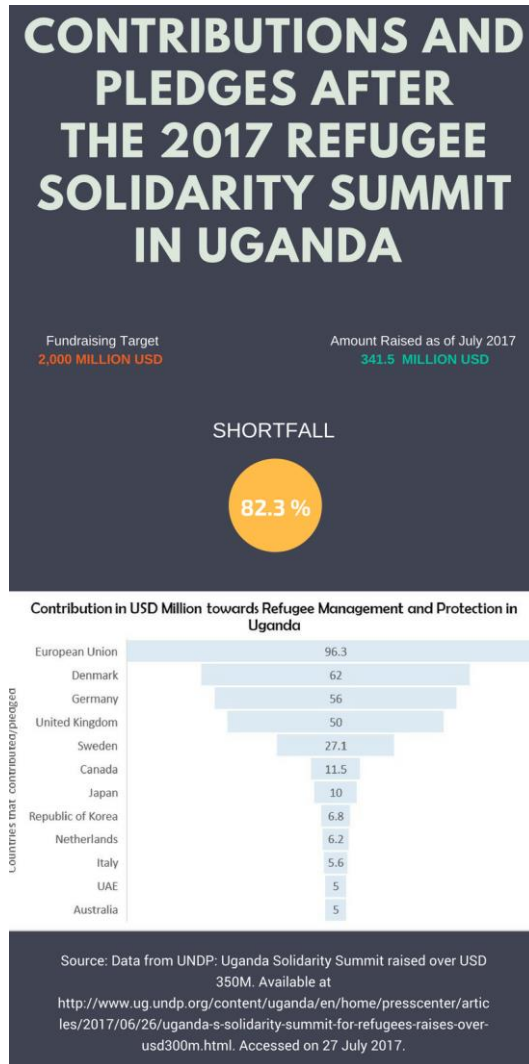
But slightly above 350 million dollars was raised at the solidarity summit in Kampala leaving 82.3 percent of the target of two billion dollars unrealised. Uganda still needs support.

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Looking forward, improving refugee management and protection

While Uganda maintains the gold standard for refugee management and protection, its compassion is underlined by a number of challenges that need immediate redress.

As refugee numbers surge, Uganda may increasingly fail to shoulder the burden. There appears to be no peace in sight in South Sudan from where the largest number of refugees entering the country originate. Furthermore, there are fears that

the conflict in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) may escalate due to growing political tensions there. Additionally, any violent outbreak in DRC can only exacerbate the refugee situation in the region. Burundi, another of Ugandan neighbours, remains dogged with a violent political conflict making it another 'reliable' contributor to Uganda's refugee numbers.

It can therefore be projected that refugee numbers will continue to rise in the short and medium term, thus calling for two urgent responses: first, regional neighbours like Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Rwanda that have attained relative peace need to emulate Uganda's example and take up their obligation in welcoming more refugees. Secondly, Uganda needs more support. Additional financial contributions will be needed towards meeting the solidarity summit target of 2 billion dollars.

As Uganda continues to respond compassionately to the refugee situation, focusing on host communities is going to be crucial for a sustained positive response. Successful integration of refugees and local communities will require substantial investments in social services that enable the refugees and host communities enjoy better lives and expand opportunities for economic engagement.

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However, as significant amounts of funds stand to be mobilised in support of the refugee situation, accountability concerns need not take a back seat. With crisis also comes the urgency to intervene. This however carries the risk that crucial requirements for probity may be less emphasised. This could create gaps that can undermine well-intentioned contributions to misappropriation.

The other challenge that needs to be addressed concerns the incoherence of refugee management projects by the various local and international organizations working in settlement areas. The Department of Refugees in the OPM is working closely with humanitarian agencies through a sectoral working group approach. In this way, organisations addressing specific challenges on health, education, and infrastructure come together and draft project strategies to avoid overlapping and duplication. This mechanism still needs to be strengthened.

The ultimate solution lies in restoring peace

UN chief Guterres stresses that “everything must be done to end the war in South Sudan”.^{xxi} This report entirely agrees. The only way to end the refugee situation is to address its causes, in this case, ending the violence in South Sudan and the region.

Participants in the KAS roundtable too repeatedly called for concerted efforts to find and restore peace so that the South Sudanese people can return home.

Unfortunately, there seems to be no end in sight with regard to South Sudan’s violent conflict. While the running conflict between SPLM in Government and that in the Opposition keeps gaining fresh momentum, new and different militia groups keep sprouting. Several calls by IGAD and the UN for a ceasefire have fallen on deaf ears as both the government and opposing forces disregard pleas for peaceful resolution of conflict. This shows the complacency and disinterest of South Sudanese leaders from both sides of the political spectrum, to end the atrocious conflict.

Many countries in the great lakes contributing to the refugee crisis exhibit characteristics of weak states with autocratic tendencies. Achieving credible states that can suppress violence as basis for guaranteeing peace or tranquillity should be seen as the panacea to the refugee crisis. Partners seeking to support stability in South Sudan might have to reflect on sequenced focus that follows building state capacity, the rule of law and then democratic accountability.

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- ⁱ The Intergovernmental Authority on Development
- ⁱⁱ Data from UNDP study, 2017. Uganda's contribution to refugee management and protection
- ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*
- ^{iv} UNHCR & GoU (2017). 'Breaking Point' imminent: Government of Uganda, UNHCR say help for South Sudan refugee inflow urgently needed. Joint statement on behalf of the Government of Uganda and UNHCR.
- ^v Data from UNHCR. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/9/57e12c564/300000-refugees-migrants-cross-med-far-2016.html>. Accessed 26.07.2017
- ^{vi} Authors' calculations using data from UHRC/GOU estimates of South Sudan refugees to have entered January to June 2017 and UNDP data on current number of South Sudan refugees in Uganda
- ^{vii} UNDP 2017. Uganda's contribution to refugee protection and management
- ^{viii} UNHCR (2017)
- ^{ix} UNICEF (2017). South Sudan refugee crisis: Over 1,000 children fleeing violence and instability every day. Press Release 18th June 2017
- ^x Data from UHCR/Government of Uganda joint statement. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/press/2017/3/58d3abab4/breaking-point-imminent-government-uganda-unhcr-say-help-south-sudan-refugee.html>. Accessed July 25th 2017
- ^{xi} Discussion at launch of Uganda's refugee management approach within the EAC policy framework report at Gold Tulip Hotel in Kampala, August 16, 2017.
- ^{xii} New York Declaration
- ^{xiii} Excerpt from speech at the refugee solidarity summit in Kampala. Available at <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2017-06-23/secretary-generals-uganda-solidarity-summit-remarks>. Accessed on July 27, 2017
- ^{xiv} *ibid*
- ^{xv} Agriculture is the mainstay of livelihoods in Uganda employing more than 70 percent of the population.
- ^{xvi} Human Rights Watch (2002). Why refugees leave Uganda
- ^{xvii} *Ibid*
- ^{xviii} UNDP, 2017. Uganda's contribution to refugee protection and management
- ^{xix} Uganda duality of land ownership system include privately ownership and communal land ownerships. Systems vary across regions.

^{xx} Michael Boyce and Francisca Vigaud-Walsh (2017). Getting It Right: Protection of South Sudanese Refugees in Uganda. Refugee International Field Report.

^{xxi} Excerpt from speech at the refugee solidarity summit in Kampala. Available at <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2017-06-23/secretary-generals-uganda-solidarity-summit-remarks>. Accessed on July 27, 2017.

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