

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN UGANDA

Understanding public attitudes towards refugees and migrants within their host communities is becoming an increasingly important task for those working on refugee and migration issues. This includes governments, international and national NGOs, academics, think tanks and civil society. Although there is evidence that refugees and migrants can contribute significantly to society if given the opportunity to do so (Pantuliano, 2016), public attitudes have a significant bearing on their prospects. Whether organisations and/or governments are trying to raise funds, disseminate work, or advocate on behalf of refugees and migrants, their success hinges on how refugees and migrants feature within public attitudes. Hence, our street talk for this issue of the Arise primers the drivers influencing public attitudes towards refugees and migrants in Uganda, and what they mean for the government and other key stakeholders working on refugee and migration issues.



Pauline Salamula
Publishing manager

I am very glad that as a country, we are able to welcome and host refugees who would have, otherwise, not had anywhere else to go. It is a good initiative. However, on the part of the citizens, there is a fear that the resources that might have been used to develop the country are channelled to cater for the needs of refugees. If the resources that are supposed to come to us as nationals are split, how can we get the services we need? Remember that some of these resources are coming from our taxes. As a developing country, I do not believe that we can afford to spend so much money on hosting a large number of refugees. At the end of the day, some of these refugees do not have the desire to return to their countries of origin even when war ends.



Hendrichah Nabukwasi
Researcher

As a country, I do not think we have the capacity to host all the refugees that we host today. Having refugees is not just about keeping them within our borders. You need to empower them economically, mentally and socially. Currently, this is not possible because the country is not even empowering its own citizens. So, we just have people who are stuck in refugee settlements always waiting for UNHCR to provide them with food. If a country is going to host refugees, it should have policies and programmes in place to empower these people. It is not just a matter of opening up your borders to anyone to walk through. The refugee settlements should also have conditions that are habitable so that the refugees can live a sustainable life until such a time as they are ready to return to their country of origin.

Shakira Ndagire
Sex worker

I stay in Kimombasa zone of Bwaise. When I first came here six years ago, it was only Ugandan women working here. Today, however, there are several non-Ugandans encroaching on our market. They do not live here; they just come to work and then return to their homes. I have been told that some of them are Somali girls and since they are brown (light-skinned complexion) I have reason to believe what I have heard. I am not against Uganda hosting refugees because as women, we are the most affected by war. Women suffer abuse and rape by soldiers in war situations. However, the employment situation in Uganda is bad and some of us are sex workers because we failed to find formal jobs. It is very unfair for someone who is getting relief food or money to invade our territory.



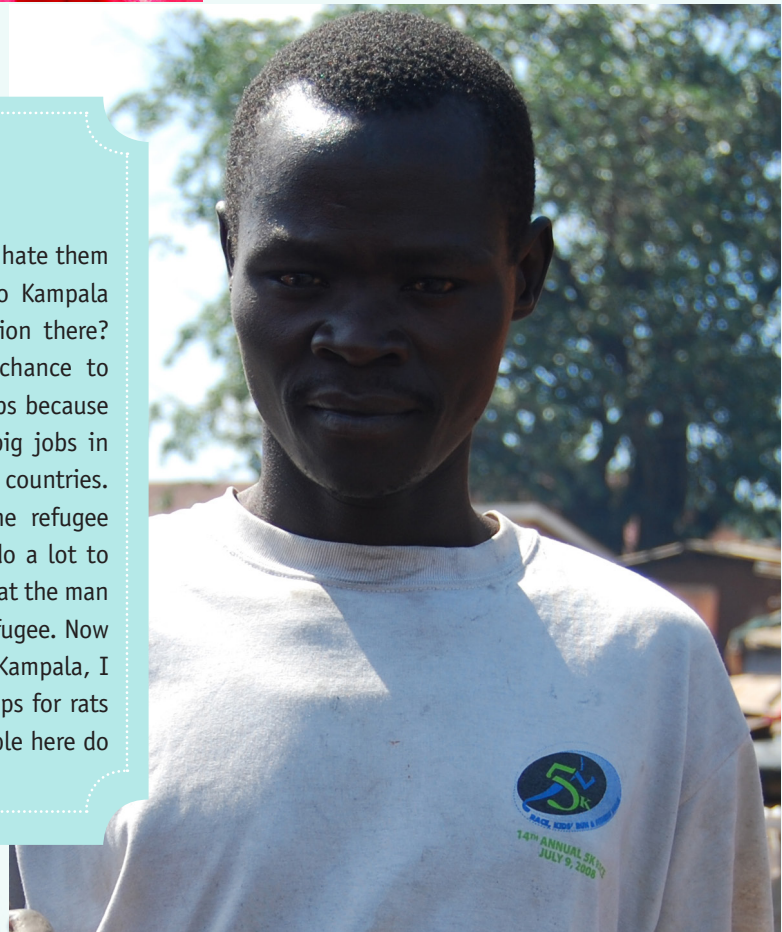


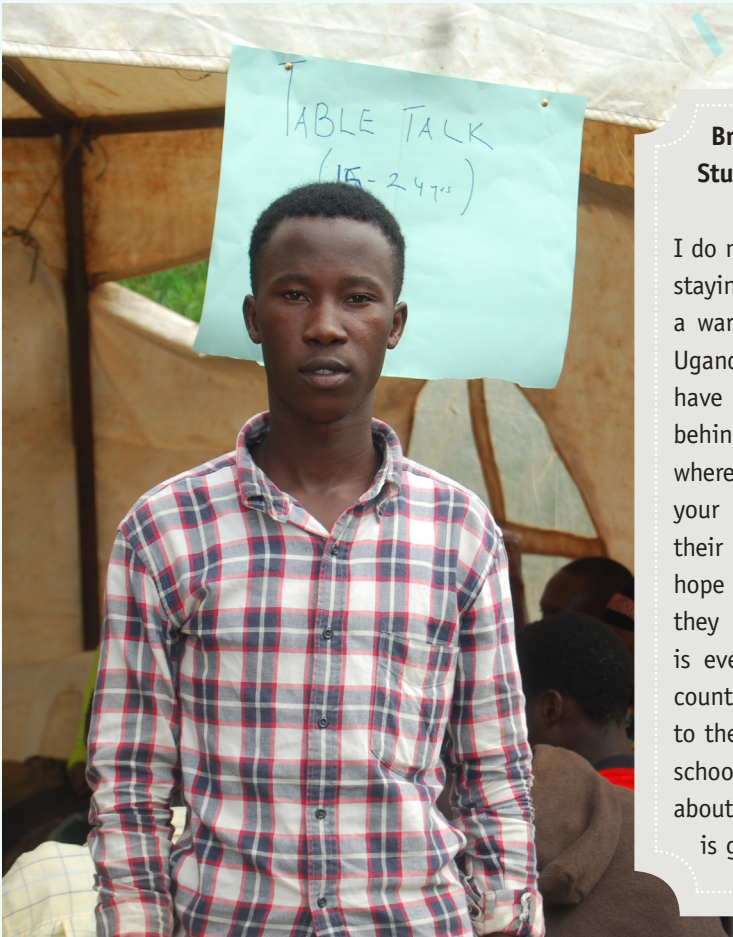
Salima Nakiyemba
Farmer

There are things this government is doing that are wrong. It does not care about us. I am a subsistence farmer in Iganga district but encroachment on my land by sugar cane companies is increasing. In fact, recently, my husband leased our six acres of land to a factory at 100,000 shillings per acre. I never saw that money because he hid it. I decided to form a women's group with my fellow women in this village (Busowobi) so that we can target the women empowerment funds. But to-date, after many applications, we have never been given any funds. Our children are not going to school. I get angry when I hear about the amount of money that has been earmarked to help refugees from South Sudan yet we, the citizens, are struggling to get basic needs. Why do so many refugees come to this country? Why can't they go to other countries?

Marvin Odong
Itinerant trader

I do not mind refugees or migrants. How can I hate them when I also migrated from Moroto district to Kampala because of the economic and security situation there? Refugees and migrants should be given a chance to compete with the citizens for the available jobs because some of these refugees had businesses and big jobs in their countries before wars erupted in their countries. Why do people want them to remain in the refugee settlements yet if given a chance, they can do a lot to improve our economy? I have heard rumours that the man who owns Gapco petrol stations was once a refugee. Now he employs many Ugandans. When I came to Kampala, I failed to get a formal job. I started selling traps for rats to feed my children. The problem is some people here do not trust people from other regions.



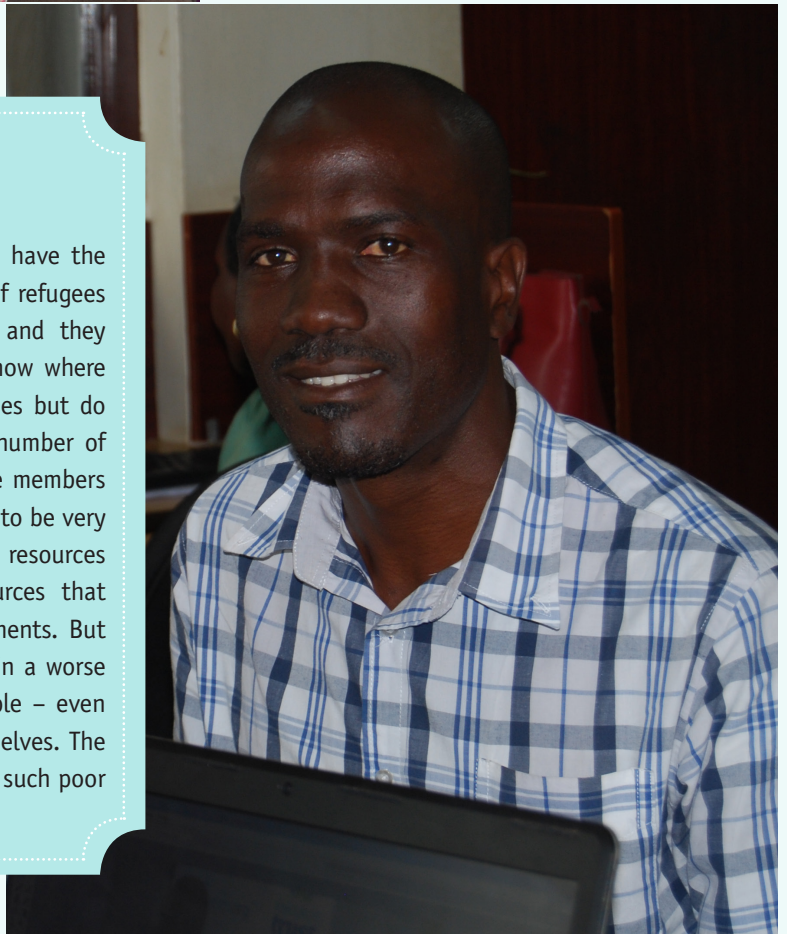


Brian Tenywa
Student

I do not mind refugees coming to this country and even staying here permanently. I can imagine if there was a war in Uganda, other countries would be welcoming Ugandans who are running for their safety. We need to have compassion for refugees. It is not easy to leave behind everything you own and run to another country where the people have very different cultures from your own. Some of these refugees were students and their education was disrupted because of war. I really hope they get a chance to pursue their education while they are still here because in this world, education is everything. By the time they return to their home countries, they should have the expertise to contribute to their development. If Uganda government is building schools for refugee children, why should I be angry about that? I believe that what our government is doing is good

George Katongole
Journalist

I think the question should be: Do we really have the potential to host refugees? There is a group of refugees wasting away at Old Kampala playgrounds, and they have been there for a long time. I do not know where they came from. It is not bad to host refugees but do we have the potential to keep such a large number of people? Some of these refugees are good, like members of the Somali community who are now proving to be very astute in business. In fact, if we had enough resources as a country, I would not mind the resources that Uganda spends on refugees in refugee settlements. But we also have people in this country who are in a worse situation than those refugees. There are people – even in Kampala – who cannot afford to feed themselves. The projects targeting refugees should also benefit such poor Ugandans.





Aloysious Tabu
Businessman

I do not mind Uganda hosting refugees or migrants. Personally, I think the authorities in this country have discovered an important secret in playing host to a number of refugees. It is basically a way for the country to earn extra income. The way I see it, is the more refugees you host, the more you attract dollars and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These NGOs bring in the much-needed jobs for social workers and other professionals and this relieves some of the unemployment burden this country is facing. I believe Uganda is a friendly country for refugees, but that is secondary. This whole thing of saying we are hosting so many refugees just because we are friendly is a hoax. The more refugees you host, the more dollars you attract because the advantages of hosting refugees are enormous.



Refugees are not terrorists. They are often the first victims of terrorism.