Negative Brief: Uganda Refugee Camps

By “Coach Vance” Trefethen

***Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reform its foreign aid.***

Summary: AFF plan gives an additional $534 million in foreign aid to Uganda to support camps caring for refugees from South Sudan. South Sudan has been in civil war since 2013, displacing around 4 million people.

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Negative: Uganda Refugee Camps

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

1. Crisis exaggerated by Ugandan government

Uganda uses phony inflated numbers with “ghost refugees” to get more aid. UNHCR and WFP are unreliable, they don’t catch the fraud

Cissy Kagaba 2018 (works with the Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda) THE OBSERVER (Uganda news source) 14 Feb 2018 “Handle refugee money scandal decisively” https://www.observer.ug/viewpoint/56916-handle-refugee-money-scandal-decisively.html

Spot-checks conducted by the United Nations have alluded to ghost refugees, theft of logistics meant for refugees, and trafficking of refugee women and girls into forced marriages and/ or illegal repatriation or relocation. Uganda is reported to be hosting between 1.2 and 1.7 million refugees mostly from war-ravaged South Sudan, Somalia and Democratic Republic of Congo. This number is now contested because of allegations of inflated numbers to attract more donor funding. This is not the first time the country is hit by accusations of ghosts. Previously, cases of ghost soldiers, teachers, civil servants, and pensioners have been reported. There have also been scenarios of ghost projects, schools and roads, inter alia. In all these scandals, the country has lost colossal amounts of money and the suspects have seldom been held to account. What is peculiar and worrying about this scandal is how the inflated numbers went unnoticed by both the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and World Food Programme (WFP), assuming monitoring and verification was being done.

2. Crisis exaggerated by Ugandans posing as refugees

Ugandans are poor too, so they pose as refugees to get help

Tonny Onyulo & Doreen Ajiambo 2017 (journalists) “Amid Crippling Drought, Ugandans Pose as Refugees to Eat” 7 Sept 2017 https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/articles/2017/09/07/amid-crippling-drought-ugandans-pose-as-refugees-to-eat

The sprawling Ngomoromo camp in northern Uganda hosts more than 50,000 South Sudanese refugees. But Ugandans in the surrounding communities are also starving. “We are feeling hungry. Our children have no food,” said 30-year-old Belinda Nakato, a Ugandan mother of five, adding that she hadn’t eaten anything for the last three days. “We’ve now opted to become refugees in our own country in order to gain access to food being distributed in the camp.” Nakato is one among 10 Ugandan families who told Refugees Deeply they had posed as refugees in order to feed their families. It is hard to tell exactly how widespread the practice is. Joseph Okello, a local official in Ngomoromo, said he believed their number might run into the thousands, but there are no official figures and national government officials were reluctant to discuss whether they were tracking the problem. “We suspect that some locals might be benefiting from free food meant for refugees,” Okello said. “We’ll arrest anyone found pretending to be a refugee from South Sudan.” But no arrests have been made so far, he said.

No one can tell and Ugandans can easily misrepresent themselves as South Sudanese refugees

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It can be complicated for officials to distinguish between South Sudanese refugees and Ugandans in these borderlands. Members of the Acholi tribe, who make up much of the population of northern Uganda, also live in lesser numbers in South Sudan near the border. Many speak Arabic or have South Sudanese identity cards. The South Sudanese government has used this point to claim that the number of refugees from their country has been exaggerated and downplay the brutal war raging in the country. “I don’t think all these refugees are from South Sudan,” said Ateny Wek, a spokesman for the South Sudanese government. “You cannot differentiate between Acholi of Uganda and South Sudan. They are all the same and one people.”

3. Good reason for funding shortfalls: Ugandan government fraud

AFF forgot to tell you, the reason there’s a “shortage of funds” is because donors got wise to the Ugandan government stealing the aid money

Georgi Gotev 2018 (journalist with Agence France Presse) 6 Feb 2018 “EU flags fraud and corruption in refugee settlements in Uganda” https://www.euractiv.com/section/european-external-action-service/news/eu-flags-fraud-and-corruption-in-refugee-settlements-in-uganda/

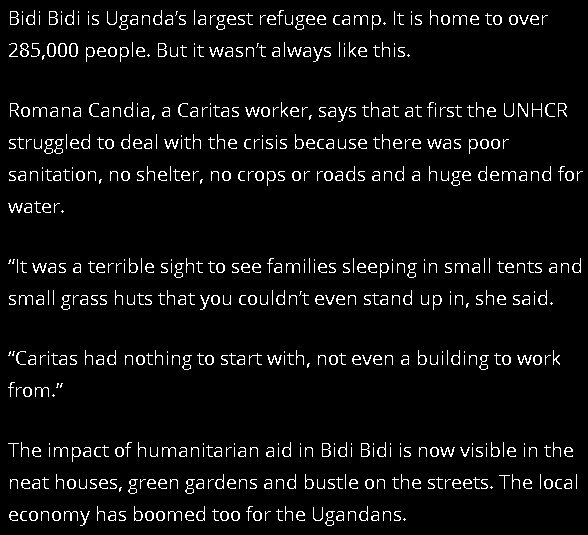
Uganda has welcomed refugees, giving them land and the opportunity to work, in stark contrast to many richer nations. Only last week, UN refugees chief Filippo Grandi hailed Uganda for having, “one of the most progressive policies for refugees, not only in Africa but also in the world”. But diplomatic sources told AFP that one large Western donor has already suspended aid because of the graft allegations, and others are threatening to follow suit.

INHERENCY

1. Problems at Bidi Bidi have been solved

Biggest refugee camp, Bidi Bidi, is doing great!

CARITAS 2018. (international charity of the Catholic Church, working in the South Sudan / Uganda region) 24 Sept 2018 <https://www.caritas.org/2018/09/south-sudan-refugees/> (UNHCR = United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)



DISADVANTAGES

1. Huge ripoffs

Link: Uganda inflates the number of refugees to get more aid, then steals it

Cissy Kagaba 2018 (works with the Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda) THE OBSERVER (Uganda news source) 14 Feb 2018 “Handle refugee money scandal decisively” https://www.observer.ug/viewpoint/56916-handle-refugee-money-scandal-decisively.html

Before getting into the depth of the disappearance of loan monies meant for medicines, reports have emerged in recent days relating to a new corruption scandal at the office of the prime minister (OPM). The scandal, as reported in the press this week, relates to inflation of refugee numbers resulting in misuse of funds meant for provision of services to refugees. Spot-checks conducted by the United Nations have alluded to ghost refugees, theft of logistics meant for refugees, and trafficking of refugee women and girls into forced marriages and/ or illegal repatriation or relocation.

Impact: Colossal waste. Referring in context to refugee camps, Ugandan journalist Cissy Kagaba says in 2018:

Cissy Kagaba 2018 (journalist) THE OBSERVER (Uganda news source) 14 Feb 2018 “Handle refugee money scandal decisively” https://www.observer.ug/viewpoint/56916-handle-refugee-money-scandal-decisively.html

This is not the first time the country is hit by accusations of ghosts. Previously, cases of ghost soldiers, teachers, civil servants, and pensioners have been reported. There have also been scenarios of ghost projects, schools and roads, inter alia. In all these scandals, the country has lost colossal amounts of money and the suspects have seldom been held to account.

2. Corruption

Link: Ugandan government use of refugee camp funding is corrupt and won’t get fixed without major reforms

Cissy Kagaba 2018 (works with the Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda) THE OBSERVER (Uganda news source) 14 Feb 2018 “Handle refugee money scandal decisively” https://www.observer.ug/viewpoint/56916-handle-refugee-money-scandal-decisively.html

Investigations currently mooted by the government and the United Nations will most likely yield nothing, if the recommendations are not implemented. Without a strong will to fight corruption, the ‘zero-tolerance to corruption approach’ will remain a slogan. We suggest that an independent agency be contracted to conduct a special audit in the misuse of refugee funds. All officers implicated in this scandal should step aside, to allow investigations go on unhampered. The business of transferring officers who have been implicated in malfeasance must stop. If stern action is not taken against the perpetrators, major donors, including those who pledged funds during the solidarity summit, may refuse to honor their pledges. With the Ugandan economy already in dire straits, this could mean disaster for the refugee community.

Impact: Citizens harmed. “Free” money is the perfect way to keep a bad government in power

Dambisa Moyo 2009 (former economist at Goldman Sachs. She’s the author of "Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa") 21 Mar 2009, “Why Foreign Aid Is Hurting Africa,” <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB123758895999200083>

A constant stream of "free" money is a perfect way to keep an inefficient or simply bad government in power. As aid flows in, there is nothing more for the government to do -- it doesn't need to raise taxes, and as long as it pays the army, it doesn't have to take account of its disgruntled citizens. No matter that its citizens are disenfranchised (as with no taxation there can be no representation). All the government really needs to do is to court and cater to its foreign donors to stay in power.

3. Refugee camps are the wrong answer

Link: Host country integration – not refugee camps – is the right solution for Uganda

Impact: Confinement in refugee camps is devastating to refugee well-being and mental health. Both of these come from the same evidence:

Melanie Gouby 2017. (award-winning investigative journalist, writer and documentary filmmaker, working primarily in East and Central Africa) 22 Nov 2017 “What Uganda’s Struggling Policy Means for Future of Refugee Response“ https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/articles/2017/11/22/what-ugandas-struggling-policy-means-for-future-of-refugee-response

Uganda’s progressive policies were in many ways the inspiration for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), a blueprint for a new way of responding to refugee crises that was agreed at last year’s U.N. refugee summit, which resulted in the New York Declaration. The CRRF will be the basis of a global compact on refugees due to be adopted in 2018. Uganda is one of several countries piloting the CRRF during the two-year consultation process. One of the ways the CRRF aims to shift the paradigms of refugee response is by moving away from camps and aid distributions to helping refugees become self-reliant. “We know that the confinement of the refugee camp has a devastating effect on refugee well-being and mental health,” says Isabelle d’Haudt, the European Commission humanitarian adviser for Uganda. Several studies have also demonstrated important economic benefits for countries that integrate refugees into their labor market.

Impact: Human trafficking and abuse of women and girls

Georgi Gotev 2018 (journalist with Agence France Presse) 6 Feb 2018 “EU flags fraud and corruption in refugee settlements in Uganda” https://www.euractiv.com/section/european-external-action-service/news/eu-flags-fraud-and-corruption-in-refugee-settlements-in-uganda/

So far, Uganda has not publicly addressed the sex trafficking allegations, although they do feature in the government’s internal memo of 29 January. “Trafficking of minor girls and women is high on the radar,” it said. The specific allegations, said a diplomat familiar with the charges, are that South Sudanese girls and women are being trafficked from the refugee camps of northern Uganda back across the border. There, they are sold as “wives” to combatants with the possible knowledge or complicity of Ugandan officials, the diplomat said.

4. Promotes abortion

Refugee camps in Uganda are bringing women (both native Ugandans and refugees) in contact with abortion providers for the first time

Ashley Wolfington and Rita Nehme 2017 (Wolfington is a reproductive health senior technical adviser in International Rescue Committee Health Unit. Nehme is Reproductive Health Officer at the International Rescue Committee. ) 4 May 2017 “From Crisis Comes Opportunity to Improve Refugees’ Reproductive Health” https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/community/2017/05/04/from-crisis-comes-opportunity-to-improve-refugees-reproductive-health-2

“Services like family planning are economically better and less stressful for women,” Peter, a volunteer in the camp, said, adding. “The community is starting to realize this.” Reproductive health services such as contraception, safe abortion care, emergency obstetric and newborn care are critical for all women, whether they find themselves at the heart of crisis, displacement or in a stable but poor setting. These services change lives. The people of Uganda – both refugees and locals – are recognizing the advantages of reproductive health services and their right to access it. If attitudes on the ground can change so quickly, so can the attitudes of humanitarian organizations in other settings, toward the importance of reproductive health for women and girls.

5. White Savior Complex.

It’s degrading to say that Africans can’t solve their own problems and they need Westerners to fix everything. In addition to racism, it undermines Africans making progress toward their own solutions

Prof. Kathryn Mathers 2014 (visiting assistant professor in the Department of International Comparative Studies at Duke University) Op-Ed: Why Won’t White Savior Complex Go Away?23 July 2014 http://www.takepart.com/article/2014/07/22/why-wont-white-savior-complex-go-away

One of the most intrinsic characteristics of the white savior complex is its ability to ingrain and spread the notion that Westerners are the solution to African problems. This requires portraying the latter as helpless and endlessly recirculating images only of abandonment and violence, or innocence and primitivism. Another trait of the white savior complex is that unlike the imperial, top-down "white man's burden," it takes place in a virtual space shared by the savior and the people being saved and in a world in which the goals, personalities, and projects of white saviors can be immediately beamed out, commented on, "liked," or retweeted into the worlds of Africans themselves. This can undermine the work of Africans in their own communities. Africans are, after all, actively mobilizing new technologies and social media to shape their own worlds and engage directly with the ways that others represent them. So why, even in these shared spaces, do narratives in which Africans are just the backdrop to American saviors' stories still persist?

6. Enables bad governance

Link: “Free” aid money enables bad governments in poor countries

Dambisa Moyo 2009 (former economist at Goldman Sachs. She’s the author of "Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa") 21 Mar 2009, “Why Foreign Aid Is Hurting Africa,” <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB123758895999200083>

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Impact: Death and destruction. Uganda’s bad government kills people and denies human rights

**Analysis: If anything, we should be sanctioning Uganda, not aiding it**

Human Rights Watch 2017. (international human rights non-profit advocacy group) “Uganda – Events of 2017” https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/uganda

The government of President Yoweri Museveni, in power since 1986, continues to violate free association, expression, and assembly rights. Protests over constitutional amendments that would entrench the power of the ruling elites—one to remove the presidential age limit, allowing Museveni to run for office in 2021, and another to dramatically ease government’s ability to acquire land without meaningful advance consultation and adequate compensation—met with heavy-handed partisan response from police. Security officials’ continue to use excessive use of force with impunity, for example there was no investigation into the November 2016 military and police assault in Kasese that left over 100 people, including children, dead.

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