

Towards a global compact of Refugees: Thematic discussion five
Reflection from the host community perspective: Challenges and Opportunities



By: Ms. OKELLO Christine Laura
Humanitarian Emergency Coordinator
Caritas Uganda

1. Self-Introduction

Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am Okello Christine Laura from Caritas Uganda

2. Preamble

- ❖ Today, we are focusing on one of the complex challenges and opportunities of our time; maximizing refugee integration in host communities
- ❖ The total number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Uganda is approx. 1.4 million (as of 31 October, 2017).

Uganda Government has:

- ❖ Hosted the Refugee Solidarity Summit 2017 that translates the New York Declaration Commitments into Action
- ❖ Refugees are in the second National Development Plan (NDPII) through the Settlement Transformative Agenda (STA) which outlines Government priorities consistent with a comprehensive refugee response approach.
- ❖ Identified critical projects for refugee hosting districts to meet STA objectives and resilience of the target population.
- ❖ Embraced the multi-stakeholder Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHoPE) strategy which was designed with support from the UN and World Bank to the STA.

3. Localised Preamble of refugee areas

- ❖ The preliminary geographic areas of intervention under ReHoPE (i.e. the refugee-hosting districts as of 1 February 2017) are:
 - **Northwest Uganda** (Adjumani, Arua, Koboko, Moyo and Yumbe)
 - **Southwest and Mid-West Uganda** (Hoima, Isingiro, Kamwenge, Kiryandongo, and Kyegegwa).
- ❖ These districts in Northwest Uganda suffered the impact of past crisis and are still recovering yet these districts are hosting the largest numbers of refugees, particularly from South Sudan (the total South Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers in country are 1,037,359 (as of 31 October 2017)).

What are the implications of this situation?

Currently, host communities are facing growing Challenges such as:

- Competition for limited resources such as water, firewood, etc
- Competition for social services such as health, education, to mention but just a few
- The support given to host communities (to ease the pressure) is not geared towards sustainability

- Efforts to strengthen the government ability to deliver services are limited.
- Increased cost of living for the host communities (inflation)
- Food security of refugee hosting communities is being threatened since the host communities are selling high portion of their own food crops to refugees.
- Infrastructure degradation is on the rise. Roads in refugee hosting districts have become very bad because heavy tracks carry materials and food to the settlement.

Much as there are challenges, the host communities also benefit from opportunities particularly through the ReHope strategy (70% support to refugees and 30% to the host communities)

The ReHope strategy was initiated by the Government of Uganda, the United Nations (UN), and other partners with the help of the World Bank and other donors to respond to specific challenges and to develop durable solutions for refugees and host communities.

- ❖ The ReHope is a practical application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) as stipulated in the New York Declaration
- ❖ Refugee-hosting districts are now recognized under the vulnerability criteria of NDP II making them a priority for development interventions and providing an opportunity to engage various actors to comprehensively respond to the humanitarian and development needs of refugee-hosting districts and the entirety of their population-both refugees and the host communities.
- ❖ Business opportunities are created for both Government and host communities (e.g. locals are opening shops; income for the district is increasing though local service taxes etc)
- ❖ **To create more opportunities for the host communities, Caritas Uganda and other partners are already implementing the ReHope strategy by giving 70% support to refugees and 30% to host communities.** Currently, Caritas is:
 - ✓ Providing fast-growing seeds and tools to the vulnerable host community households
 - ✓ Training host communities and refugees in Business development and management, good agronomic practices and vocational skills training such as mechanics, welding, tailoring, ICT etc
 - ✓ Caritas is training local peace committees in peaceful conflict resolution and mediation skills
 - ✓ Employing host communities as community extension workers to act as everyday link between the beneficiaries and Caritas Uganda (creating job opportunity)
- ❖ Urbanization – improvement in social amenities and townships. Urbanisation can be an opportunity (job opportunities, earn money, etc) but also presents challenges and dangers (increased violence, refugees may be exposed to labour/sexual exploitation, detention and can be forced to compete with the poorest local workers for jobs.

How can we sustain these opportunities in the long term? (Gaps/What is still needed?)

- The ReHoPE strategy is good and relevant but how can we sustain it in the longer term? More financial resources are needed to support efforts in easing pressure on the host community and in the refugee response.

- ❖ **Localisation** – Involvement of local/national NGOs and local government in refugee response needs to be strengthened (gap). Building capacity of the local governments and local actors and increased financial support
- ❖ As stated in the 1325 UN Security Council resolution, promote involvement of women in peace-building and security. **82%** of south Sudanese refugees are women. Therefore it is crucial to involve them in peace building activities, including prevention of sexual gender based violence, mediation and reconciliation with host communities. Women of the host community should also be involved.
- ❖ Despite the above challenges, Uganda continues to keep the door open and accepts the daily refugee influx; the international community should give more support to ease the pressure on host communities and make it more sustainable in the long term.

Let me conclude with Pope Francis' message on the occasion of the launch of the Caritas Internationalis "Share the Journey Campaign" *"Not just to see but to look. Not just to hear but to listen. Not just to meet and pass by, but to stop. And don't just say what a shame, poor people, but allow ourselves to be moved by pity"*.