

HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES**A virtuous circle of collaboration for an efficient urban humanitarian response: Kampala**

Louise Thaller • Senior Programme Officer at IMPACT Initiatives
Innocent Silver • Project Coordinator at the Kampala Capital City Authority

As the country in Africa that receives the greatest number of refugees, Uganda has an open and inclusive migratory policy. The authorities of the capital, Kampala, have put in place an innovative and comprehensive project for the management of the needs of migrants and of the host population. The project, which brings together local and national authorities, international NGOs and local associations, benefited from the support of the think-tank IMPACT Initiatives.

Over the past years, distress over refugees making their way to the Global North has dominated headlines and public debate. The images of arrivals on the coasts and borders of Europe have vastly overshadowed the efforts of African States and their cities faced with far more staggering migration flows. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 85% of the displaced populations find refuge in developing countries¹, and of these the majority make their way to cities rather than stay in dedicated camps. This means that the impacts of urban displacement and migration are mainly borne by the municipalities of developing nations. This is especially true in Africa, which is demonstrating the fastest rates of urbanisation – and soaring numbers of refugees and migrants². However, these mutually-influential processes remain under-studied.

Displacement is urbanising, as are humanitarian approaches

This phenomenon could not be better exemplified than by what is being seen in Uganda. The biggest refugee host of the continent³ is praised for its open-door policy, which allows freedom of movement for refugees, thus able to settle in urban centres. The movements witnessed in Uganda are also a reflection of the fact that, for forcibly displaced populations, finding security and refuge in a foreign country does not put an end to mobility within borders⁴.

As migration is increasingly entrenched in urban areas and is growing more and more protracted in nature, forcibly displaced people are faced with the need to integrate within host communities. These dynamics have also called for humanitarian organisations to adjust to the changing nature of displacement. In recent years, humanitarian organisations have strengthened their efforts to adapt to community dynamics and collaborate with local organisations. Yet, they still tend to disregard

¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017”, 2018, p.2, <http://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf>

² United Nations Population Division, “United Nations World Urbanization Prospects 2018: Key Facts”, 2018, <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-KeyFacts.pdf>

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Uganda 2019-2020 Country Refugee Response Plan”, 2018, p.6, http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Uganda_Country_RRP_2019-20_28January_2019%29.pdf

⁴ AGORA, “Understanding the Needs of Urban Refugees and Host Communities Residing in Vulnerable Neighborhoods of Kampala”, July 2018, p.2, www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/agora_kampala_all_in_one_report_26072018_vf.pdf

HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES

municipal governments as viable partners in the response. This lack of engagement quickly puts sand in the wheels of sustainable, feasible and scalable response programmes.

When people flee their homes and find refuge in cities, they do so in search of security, access to services and livelihood opportunities, all overseen by local authorities. In spite of the local needs of displaced people, responsibility for managing and responding to displacement is largely considered a national policy issue. Paradoxically, municipalities in the global south stand at the frontline, but lack direct access to financial resources, technical expertise, and sometimes a political mandate to address the specific needs of the displaced individuals among their residents. Urban vulnerability also affects nationals.

Kampala is a prime example of this phenomenon. Vulnerable urban migrants can only afford to settle in already impoverished, informal slum areas in the capital city, where accurate information, public funding and resources to support basic amenities have been scarce for decades. However, these mounting challenges have not been left unaddressed, and the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) – the government entity running the capital – increasingly recognises how new arrivals can yield positive benefits to the city's long-term development. In parallel, the local humanitarian community is demonstrating its willingness to reinvent its ways of working in the city⁵. This presents increasing opportunities for the KCCA to tap into the potential of the humanitarian response to advance its social agenda, in view of accommodating urban migrations and scaling up basic services. Kampala's recent experience in bringing together humanitarian partners and the public sector demonstrates how adequate information management and cross-sectoral dialogue can inform urban migration management.

Uganda, an island of stability and Kampala, a city of migration

Before delving deeper into the location at hand, it is worth taking a look at the regional picture. The greater East African Region – including the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan and the Horn of Africa – has been the site of protracted civil strife and armed conflict for the last thirty years. The history of conflict has made the region one of the most unstable areas in the world seeing high numbers of displaced populations moving both within and across borders⁶.

The regional exception has been Uganda, which has enjoyed a period of relative calm, having overcome the violent armed conflict and civil strife that plagued most of its post-colonial history. In recent years, the country has developed progressive refugee-hosting policies, based on an open-door approach irrespective of nationality or ethnicity, granting freedom of movement and the right to seek employment, and giving a piece of land to each refugee family for its own agricultural use⁷. These rights and freedoms have created clear incentives for people to settle in the country for various lengths of time: approximately 1,1 million refugees currently reside in Uganda⁸.

⁵ European civil protection and humanitarian aid operations, *Humanitarian action in urban crisis*, February 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/humanitarian-aid/humanitarian-action-urban-crises_en ; Global Alliance for Urban Crisis, *Guidance Note: Protocol of Engagement between Local Governments and Humanitarian Actors*, Working Paper, January 2019, <http://urbancrises.org/downloads-0>

⁶ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Reducing Displacement Risk in the Greater Horn of Africa*, Thematic report, October 2017, https://www.unisdr.org/files/55093_20170910afgreaterhornofafricadrr.pdf

⁷ Government of Uganda, The Refugees Act 2006, 24 August 2006; The World Bank Group, *An Assessment of Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management*, 31 August 2016,

www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/brief/ugandas-progressive-approach-refugee-management

⁸ REACH, Uganda Joint Multi Sector Needs Assessment, Identifying Humanitarian needs among refugee and host community populations in Uganda, August 2018.

HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES

While the majority of the refugees are initially accommodated in dedicated settlements, lengthy periods of displacement and limited opportunities in the rural areas where the settlements are located inevitably push refugees to move to urban centres, essentially the capital, Kampala. In November 2018, UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister have registered over 50,000 refugees in the city⁹. Despite the official figures, it is critical to note that these urban refugees are not the only contributors to urban migration. The figures need to be reflective of self-settled foreigners, refugees registered in settlements but residing in Kampala, internal economic migrants moving from other locations to the city, and all migrants settling on the fringes of the capital city. KCCA estimates the number of all incoming residents at 1 million. Kampala is indeed a city of migrants, 70% of its residents being less than 3rd generation citizens¹⁰.

The urgency for a response does not translate into resources

The pull-factors experienced in Kampala have not come without serious challenges. The city has been faced with the inability to manage the rapid growth of its population and a gap in resources. National strategies for the management of refugees and migrants have not been cascaded down to the lower levels of government, which has resulted in national strategy plans¹¹ receiving massive international support, leaving little to support their implementation at lower levels of government. Although the KCCA is not legally entitled to manage the urban refugee caseload and does not enjoy sufficient resources to alleviate urban poverty, it has not overlooked the impacts of migration on its strained services nor the growing needs of the one-third of its population residing in slum areas. The first steps taken by the KCCA in untangling the situation were to recognise the need for data and the creation of evidence-based response and action.

The needs of urban refugees and migrants living in Kampala have indeed long been overlooked. Living dispersedly in already culturally-mixed neighbourhoods, the displaced are harder to identify and reach. The focus is on settlement-based assistance with the assumption of self-reliance in urban settings. This situation has been amplified by the dearth of reliable data on urban poverty and migration. This lack of data has also hampered humanitarian organisations and urban authorities in prioritising their interventions. With this in mind, the KCCA took the initiative to gather information that would put all stakeholders on the same page and encourage reciprocal collaboration between public and humanitarian actors.

Linking humanitarian and policy responses

In early 2018, IMPACT Initiatives offered to support KCCA to conduct an area-based assessment on urban vulnerabilities, exploring shortcomings in the policy and humanitarian response for both refugee and host communities, as well as structural issues related to access to basic services in the capital's slums. Building on IMPACT's expertise in analysing the needs of vulnerable populations and KCCA's knowledge of the local ecosystem, the assessment¹² provided an analysis at granular levels and succeeded in identifying patterns of social and territorial vulnerability.

⁹ Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Portal, <http://www.ugandarefugees.org/en/country/uga>

¹⁰ Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017.

¹¹ Government of Uganda, United Nations, The World Bank, *ReHoPE – Refugee and Host Population Empowerment: Strategic Framework*, June 2017; UNHCR, *Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, Applying Comprehensive Responses (CRRF) in Africa*, August 2018.

¹² AGORA, *Understanding the Needs...*, *op. cit.*

HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES

The assessment revealed that displacement itineraries are especially diverse in Kampala, as urban refugees are far from being a homogenous group. Comprising of no less than twenty-five different nationalities widely dispersed across the city, refugees and migrants present very different levels of socio-economic resilience, social ties within the host community and understanding of their duties and rights as urban residents. The assessment also revealed that unlike the global narrative on refugees suggests, host communities are almost as vulnerable as refugees. Based on a widespread assumption, refugees are even regarded as wealthier than nationals.

On the one hand, these attitudes and assumptions encourage property owners to charge refugees an average of 1,5 times more than nationals for accommodation, disrupting an already under-regulated rental market. On the other hand, refugees can easily be denied access to protection and amenities, as host communities and service providers are often unaware of applicable laws regarding refugee rights. This also highlights the attention that should be given to individual choices and strategies to make a living. The vast majority of slum dwellers, and among them refugees, resort to informal ways of making ends meet. While most humanitarian interventions are well aware of the crucial role of livelihood support for the urban poor, such initiatives have significant leaps to make in supporting beneficiaries to formalise their businesses. Indeed, local regulations regarding the urban economy exist and the KCCA is deploying efforts to enact them. Such findings highlight the need for humanitarian actors to provide a targeted response that is consistent with the municipal regulations in place.

Making the case for cross-cutting expertise and dialogue

The findings provided a clear indication of how urban displacement and socio-economic vulnerabilities are closely interlinked in the city. This in turn acted as an important step in making the case for a more profound and engaging collaboration between public and non-governmental stakeholders, who demonstrate complementary expertise. From a service delivery standpoint, the reality seen in the city calls for an inclusive and cross-cutting approach in both the policy and humanitarian response. The diversity of the types of vulnerabilities advocates for actions that primarily target beneficiaries through the criteria of access to socio-economic safety nets, rather than focusing on displacement status. This assertion is particularly well reflected in how KCCA approaches its mandate for overseeing public service delivery, which is only based on the fact of being a resident of Kampala. The city's flagship hashtag, #KampalaForAll, clearly illustrates that inclusivity is a growing objective.

In 2018, the KCCA still lacked human resources and capacities that were directly committed to refugee and migrant responses. This reinforced the need to leverage external funding and expertise to achieve the objective of addressing the needs of vulnerable residents. As the assessment conducted by IMPACT provided clarity on the response gaps¹³, prioritisation and targeting became an option for KCCA. Under the initial incentive of a core group of humanitarian organisations¹⁴, the institution continued its efforts by establishing a city-level coordination platform, the Kampala Coordination Forum for Displacement, Migration and Urban Refugees, which was expressed by KCCA releasing a Strategic Response to Displacement, Migration and Resettlement for the first time¹⁵.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Including the International Rescue Committee (IRC), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and IMPACT Initiatives.

¹⁵ Kampala Capital City Authority, *Press statement: KCCA moving to improve the plight of migrants*, 10 April 2018, http://www.kcca.go.ug/news/280-.XGGi_1VKhEY

HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES

The Coordination Forum quickly proved to be a unique coalition, where urban practitioners from humanitarian, development and policy spheres and all sectors could raise practical concerns affecting slum areas, ranging from protection to access to public services. The uniqueness of this initiative rests as much on the fact that it has been led by the city hall as on the scale of the stakeholders it has been able to bring together. Public institutions, multi-lateral development agencies, international and national NGOs, businesses and research firms, as well as refugee-led associations, have praised KCCA for its efforts. Through the platform provided by the Forum, humanitarian agencies have had access to major State representatives, who in turn, have echoed the richness of the associative fabric. By formalising a network of already active urban practitioners, the Forum defined a privileged space within which implementing partners were expected to make contributions to the policy agenda. This situation favoured the emergence of innovative and realistic ideas to address common concerns that remain difficult to solve on a case by case basis.

KCCA's strategic plan for urban migration is thus the product of a collective effort. For instance, based on data and field experiences, participants acknowledged that there are still worrying protection issues for refugees in Kampala. It is not uncommon to hear of cases of unregistered refugees asked to pay for being taken through the refugee registration process, a service that is free of charge, or asked to pay above normal charges for health care. As a response, solutions suggest focusing on improving access to civic information for all, so that neither refugees, service providers nor community elders can ignore the conditions for accessing basic social services.

Untapped opportunities and areas for improvement

The lack of joint information management and coordination between humanitarian organisations and local authorities is one of the key issues hampering the long-term efficiency of the humanitarian action worldwide. In Kampala, this is being addressed exceptionally, thanks to reciprocal commitment from both groups. However, critical barriers to bridging the gap between words and action remain. Addressing short and long-term needs simultaneously remains a challenge, partly because of the humanitarian funding architecture, which to a large degree remains sector-focused and rigid in its schemes.

The city of Kampala has experimented an innovative and collaborative framework, whereby a city authority and its aid partners began identifying intersections and avenues for complementary action. At the domestic level too, progress is being made. The 2019-2020 Refugee Response Plan, co-led by the Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR¹⁶, has inscribed the urban refugee response as one of its priority outcomes. In this sense, Kampala is in phase with the international community which made commitments to recognise and support the hosting role of municipalities¹⁷.

¹⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Uganda 2019-2020 Country Refugee Response Plan*, 2018, p.6, http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Uganda_Country_RRP_2019-20%20January_2019%29.pdf

¹⁷ United Nations Habitat III, *The New Urban Agenda*, 2017.

HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES

Biographies

Louise Thaller • Louise has worked with international NGOs and donor agencies in various capital cities on the African continent and in the Caribbean, retaining a strong focus in supporting local government partners to develop inclusive social policies and projects. With a Master's Degree in International Urban Development from SciencesPo Paris, she is currently working with the IMPACT Initiative on research and programmes focusing on urban migration. She led a multi-sector needs assessment with KCCA in Kampala in 2018.

Innocent Silver • The Project Coordinator at the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), responsible for overseeing the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the Authority's projects. He is a Public Administrator, with specialised post-graduate training in Health Demography and Corporate Strategy Management. Innocent is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) with extensive experience in managing transnational projects. Alongside his Project Management Role, he is currently leading the City of Kampala's initiative to develop a comprehensive strategy on Displacement, Migration, Resettlement and Urban Refugees.

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