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The ‘refugee aid and development’ approach in Uganda: empowerment and self-reliance of refugees in practice

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I. Introduction

Since we are people who came from suffering, we will endure suffering...(Male refugee, Imvepi, 11/9/05)

Since it is imposed, we have nothing to say. If the refugees were asked, no refugees would accept self-reliance, but since it is told – it will take place and it's like this, we are accepting it (Male refugee, Imvepi, 15/9/05)

The Self-Reliance Strategy [SRS], a program designed and implemented by the Government of Uganda [GoU] and United Nations High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR], Kampala Branch Office, has had varied and complex outcomes. It entailed a wide spectrum of implications for the range of actors involved in or affected by the program. The “suffering” the refugees refer to above was one such outcome of the SRS for some refugees, as the program entailed reductions in food rations and decline in provision of health care and community services for refugees. However, the outcomes emphasised by subsequent ‘official’ characterisations of the policy continually point to the ‘achievements of the Self-Reliance Strategy’, referring to refugee self-reliance, achieved through ‘refugee empowerment’, as the key accomplishment of the SRS (UNHCR/GoU, 2004b). The following examination explores this disconnect between refugees’ experiences and perceptions of this program and the ‘official’ discourse surrounding the SRS. It brings to light the significant barriers to self-reliance for refugees in the settlement system in Uganda, the inconsistent conceptualisation of self-reliance embedded in the program and the flawed approach to refugee empowerment. It argues that the refugee aid and development [RAD] approach¹ from which the SRS emerged can serve a range of agendas. In appealing to these agendas, however, refugee self-reliance, an underpinning principle of the approach, can in fact be in tension with refugee empowerment, rather than inextricably linked to it, as was proposed in the SRS.

The international refugee regime² currently faces significant challenges to its capacity to deal with the global refugee situation. A recent report has found, “the number of long-term exiles in ‘protracted refugee situations’ has grown, and some of these situations seem more intractable than ever” (Castles et al., 2005:28). A protracted refugee situation is defined by UNHCR as a case “in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo” (2004a:1), often in refugee camps or settlements in developing host countries. Of central concern in protracted refugee situations is that often refugees’ “basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile” (UNHCR, 2004a:1). As

¹ The phrase ‘RAD’ can be taken to refer specifically to a set of approaches developed by UNHCR in conjunction with host governments in the 1980s; however, throughout this article it will be taken to refer more broadly to a range of approaches, including current policies, that have drawn on common themes, as described in Chapter Two.

² Crisp defines the international refugee regime as constituted by three steps taken between the 1920s and 1970s: the establishment of international institutions, culminating in the establishment of the UNHCR; international legal instruments, such as the 1951 Convention; and the development of international norms relating to treatment of refugees, for example, the principle of voluntary repatriation (2003:3).

well as posing challenges to refugee protection, such situations have decreased refugee-hosting governments' willingness to provide asylum to refugees, leading to a situation of encampment of refugees in many protracted refugee situations. Moreover, these situations have impacted donor willingness to fund the long-term care and maintenance operations – for example, provision of food rations – which such situations often entail. The efficacy of the international refugee regime in providing protection for refugees is challenged by the ubiquity of protracted refugee situations, such that alternative measures to address the challenges to refugee protection in protracted refugee situations must be found.

The RAD approach has been proposed as one such solution. The RAD approach can be defined as a form of assistance for refugees who have found asylum in developing countries, that recognises the often long-term nature of this asylum due to limitations in finding durable solutions in such contexts, therefore taking a developmental approach to refugee aid and policy. This approach is based on achieving self-reliance for refugees, while simultaneously addressing the burden of refugees on developing host countries. For example, UNHCR has suggested that the challenges of protracted refugee situations could be tackled “if refugees were given the chance to...make a positive contribution to their host country during their enforced exile”, an objective that could be achieved through “a new strategy to shift the focus from provision of care and maintenance assistance to empowerment of refugees to attain self-reliance” (UNHCR, 2001a:1-2). This renewed emphasis, the focus of this paper, centres on a discourse of refugee empowerment, aiming to recognise refugees as ‘agents of development’ (cf. UNHCR 2002c; UNHCR 2002d), yet also appeals to a range of interests for host governments, donors and UNHCR as an institution.

Argument and approach

The following research is grounded in a recognition that the RAD approach to refugee aid and policy could be to the benefit of a variety of actors – the international refugee regime, donors, host governments, refugees and local host communities. This examination nevertheless adopts a critical perspective on the potential of the SRS in Uganda to achieve its stated objectives, given the lack of recognition of the obstacles to empowerment for refugees, the absence of avenues for refugees' effective input into the process and the flawed conceptualisation of self-reliance embedded in the SRS program and the RAD approach more broadly. The SRS clearly appealed to a range of interests for UNHCR Kampala, UNHCR Geneva and GoU, at both a national and district level. Seeking to address these interests is an understandable, and perhaps, realistic, approach to negotiate the political tensions and conflicting agendas present in protracted refugee situations, between donors' interests to cut care and maintenance costs, host governments' fears to permanent integration of refugees, and UNHCR's mandate to protect refugee rights while mediating these interests. Yet, in seeking to address these interests, the focus on refugee empowerment in the SRS has been more rhetorical than practical. One of the underpinnings of the RAD approach, self-reliance, can in fact undermine refugee protection and create obstacles to refugee empowerment. It has largely been assumed that the outcomes of a RAD approach will necessarily be to the benefit of refugees. The findings in this research challenge this assumption.

The RAD approach to refugees in Uganda has been operationalised through a model that envisages increased development funding to the region and policy structures that

purport to allow refugees to act as ‘agents of development’. At the same time, however, the SRS does not address the more fundamental obstacles to achieving what would be a radical change in the relationship between refugees, the international refugee regime and host governments. The outcomes of the SRS must be examined, revealing the significant limitations of shifting to a developmental approach and achieving self-reliance for refugees when self-reliance is decontextualised, externally defined and disconnected from constraints on refugees’ lives. This research hence seeks to refocus analysis and evaluation of the SRS, and indeed, the broader RAD approach, on the key concerns of unequal power relations between various social actors and the limitations on empowerment of refugees that result from these power relations. In doing so, this paper suggests a need for the current refugee regime to reassess both its ideational and material approach to protracted refugee situations, taking into account the constraints evident in local contexts and the obstacles to ‘empowering refugees’ through the current process of refugee policy formulation in local, national and global settings.

As a policy and process, the SRS has been identified by many policy actors as an example of a successful RAD approach. A report written for UNHCR states that the SRS “clearly represents one of the best attempts by UNHCR to put in place a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach to refugee economic self-reliance” (CASA Consulting, 2003:72). The policy is understood as a success, such that the subsequent policy in Uganda – Development Assistance for Refugee-Hosting Areas [DAR] – is seen by most policy actors as building on the successes of the SRS and shifting the program into a new phase,³ and a recent UNHCR report highlights the program’s potential for replication in other refugee situations (UNHCR, 2006b). However, the research in this paper reveals the broader shortcomings of a RAD agenda which focuses on donor and host government agreement at the expense of the actual impact on refugees and host communities. Furthermore, the question of the links between RAD approaches and improved refugee protection needs to be critically examined.

While this paper presents findings that are critical of the SRS, and the conceptualisations embedded in the RAD approach overall, this should not be interpreted either as an evaluation of the SRS as an unmitigated failure, or an unmediated critique of the actors involved in developing and implementing the program. The institutions, individuals and agendas implicated in this critique all also act and interact within significant structural constraints. For example, food ration reduction is, at root, an outcome of cuts to World Food Program’s [WFP] budget and declining donor interest in protracted care and maintenance situations. Yet, these actions can also be further understood if the discourse surrounding these reductions, the ways in which refugees are involved in such policies, and the conflicting or converging political agendas that create such actions, are all examined. Hence, this paper, although a critical analysis, is based in an understanding that the issues involved are deeply political and that the RAD approach is suggested by many actors as a way to address some of the worst aspects of violations of refugee rights in protracted refugee situations. This research seeks to develop greater understanding of

³ The DAR program in Uganda was only in its beginning stages at the time of fieldwork. Evaluation and in-depth analysis of the DAR program as such is not yet possible. Therefore, this program will not be analysed or addressed in depth in this paper, given it existed primarily in policy documents and statements at the time of fieldwork.

the limitations of the SRS, such that future programs can implement self-reliance in a method that is actually developmental and addresses the core challenges of protracted refugee situations. The conclusion of this paper addresses policy recommendations in greater depth.

The structure of this paper

In order to examine the RAD approach, and the SRS specifically, the second chapter presents a critical review of RAD literature. The central concepts identified in the literature – shifting refugee presence from a ‘burden’ to a ‘benefit’, bridging the relief-development ‘gap’, and the underlying theme of self-reliance – are inextricably linked to the concept of empowerment. However, each of these themes also appeals to a range of agendas. A brief description and analysis of the different actors and agendas intersecting in the RAD approach brings to light the complexities and contradictions evident when this approach is translated into policy. The UNHCR Geneva-level Convention Plus process is explained as an example of renewed focus on RAD approaches. Finally, the SRS policy itself is described, revealing the continuities with the broader RAD themes.

The third chapter examines the concept of self-reliance embedded in the SRS in contrast to differing notions of refugee empowerment. This theoretical discussion brings out the tensions between the concepts of self-reliance and empowerment, and suggests a notion of refugee empowerment that entails shifts in power relations, recognition of structural constraints and focus on access to spaces of decision-making for refugees.

Fieldwork findings presented in chapters four and five reveal that the ‘empowerment’ approach in the SRS was embedded in an outlook that ignored structural constraints to refugee empowerment, and the specific contextual obstacles to self-reliance. Chapter four analyses the existence of decision-making spaces for refugees in Uganda, specifically examining the process of implementation of the SRS, whereby there were practical constraints to refugee involvement in local processes. Chapter five will further argue that the concept of self-reliance underpinning the program is flawed. Attempting to ‘empower’ without addressing the dominant power relations that shape self-reliance in this context – the relationship between refugees and the aid agency umbrella of UNHCR and the national policy framework – is an approach that should be challenged.

This research is based on findings collected during fieldwork in Geneva at UNHCR Headquarters in May 2005 and in Uganda, between July and September 2005. The methods used to investigate the impact of the SRS process and its meanings for a range of actors fall within the category of qualitative research. Fieldwork was primarily executed through semi-structured interviews, alongside observation of district meetings and events in refugee settlements, and reviews of policy documents and Ugandan newspapers. A range of actors, including refugees, Ugandan local hosts, refugee-hosting district officials, GoU officials in Kampala, staff of Implementing Partner [IP] agencies and UNHCR officials and policy makers in Kampala and Geneva, were interviewed, and their perspectives on the SRS taken into account in shaping this case study.

Before continuing this analysis, the rest of this chapter examines the refugee-hosting context in Uganda, and also provides the definition of refugees used throughout this paper.

Refugees in Uganda

Crisp argues that one of the two “principal sub-regions of displacement” in Africa is “the vast area of central Africa which...encompass[es] the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC], Congo Brazzaville, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia” (2002:2). Uganda is at the centre of this sub-region of displacement, both in terms of being a place of asylum for refugees from neighbouring conflict zones (primarily South Sudan, DRC and Rwanda⁴) and in terms of being a producer of refugees and zone of displacement itself.⁵ The First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Refugees, Moses Ali, stated that Uganda’s position in the region has substantially shaped the refugee-hosting context, arguing “our geographical position has had some effect on us. You see, we are more or less in the centre of the continent, and I don’t think there will be a time when we will be without refugees” (Interview, 18/7/05).

Refugee statistics are notoriously unreliable (Crisp, 1999), but according to UNHCR’s figures of official, registered refugees in Uganda, there were 228,700 Sudanese refugees, 25,000 Congolese refugees and 16,000 Rwandese refugees as of January 2006 (UNHCR, 2006a:161). Most of the Sudanese refugees have been in Uganda since 1992 or 1993.⁶ There are also up to 30,000 unregistered refugees who are self-settled, in towns or with local communities (cf. Okello et al., 2005) as well as approximately 10,000-15,000 refugees in Kampala (Bernstein, 2005).⁷

Despite the protracted nature of the major refugee populations, UNHCR recognises that the “refugee programme in Uganda is in a state of flux” (2006a:161), with refugees arriving in and leaving Uganda on a daily basis. The protracted situation of Sudanese refugees in Uganda has been in flux for three reasons. Firstly, refugee settlements in the Northern districts have experienced significant security threats since the mid 1990s due to the internal conflict in Uganda. This has caused movement of refugees within Uganda, most notably the attacks on Achol-Pii refugee settlement in 2002, when 24,000 refugees fled after 100 refugees were killed by Lord’s Resistance Army [LRA] attacks.⁸ Secondly, there is still an inflow of newly arriving Sudanese refugees. From 2004 to 2006, 18,000 Sudanese arrived in Uganda (UNHCR,

⁴ There are also a few refugees – mainly based in Kampala – from Burundi, Ethiopia and Somalia (cf. Bernstein, 2005).

⁵ In the early 1980s refugees fled primarily from the West Nile region to South Sudan and then-Zaire (Pirouet, 1989:239). Current displacement in Uganda is due to conflict in the North; approximately 1.7 million internally displaced persons [IDPs] have been in ‘protected villages’ for over a decade (see International Displacement Monitoring Centre, www.internal-displacement.org, accessed 6/4/06).

⁶ Sudanese refugees that arrived in Uganda at this point were fleeing intensifying fighting between the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, and Sudanese government forces, as well as increasing conflicts within the Sudan People’s Liberation Army itself.

⁷ Some urban refugees are counted in these official statistics as some refugees have been given permission to reside in Kampala if they can prove ‘self-sufficiency’, but many of the refugees in Kampala are not counted in official refugee statistics as refugees are expected to live in rural settlements (cf. Bernstein, 2005).

⁸ The LRA is a rebel army in Northern Uganda. See Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999, for more on the conflict.

2006a:163). Interviews with many ‘new arrivals’ revealed that motivations to flee to Uganda is a result of better educational opportunities in Uganda than in Sudan for Sudanese refugees, while also a reflection of insecurity and conflict. Finally, in light of the peace agreement signed between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army in 2005, repatriation for the majority of the refugees is in sight. UNHCR had planned for 35,000 refugees to have been repatriated from Uganda in 2005, yet obstacles to this included absence of the required tri-partite agreement between UNHCR, GoU and the Government of Sudan (UNHCR, 2006a:163). The agreement has since been signed (in March 2006) and repatriation started from Moyo district in May 2006. (www.unhcr.org, accessed 10/8//06). Despite refugees being overwhelmingly positive about the idea of repatriation in the coming years, provided rebuilding of South Sudan occurs, the impending repatriation has created a context of uncertainty and increased feelings of impermanence of refugees.

Overview of refugee policy in Uganda

GoU policy regarding Sudanese refugees is that they should obtain *prima facie* refugee status.⁹ They are registered by UNHCR upon arrival in Uganda and then located in refugee settlements, usually rural, isolated areas where plots of land are allocated to the refugees in an effort to make them ‘self reliant’, that is, to be able to produce food and not require full food rations. Sudanese refugees are mainly concentrated in settlements in West Nile region [see Appendix 1]. UNHCR (working via IP agencies who deliver the actual goods and services) provides, for example, community services, health care and water and sanitation to refugees as long as they are resident in these settlements. Food rations are provided through WFP.

Kibreab has argued that a primary reason for host governments’ use of rural refugee settlements to manage refugees is to preclude social, economic and political integration with host communities (1989). This fits with the overall prioritisation of repatriation as a durable solution, both in Uganda and at a global level. Repatriation is clearly the preferred option at a national level, creating a sense of the impermanence of refugee presence, despite Uganda being a refugee-hosting country from the 1950s (Pirouet, 1989). GoU officials are quick to clarify that despite utilisation of the term ‘integration’ in policy documents, the preferred durable solution is repatriation and GoU policies aim to facilitate this. For the GoU Permanent Secretary for Refugees, the “protractedness” of refugee situations in Uganda will dissipate only when refugees “develop confidence in the situation with their governments at home and can return” (Interview). For the GoU Commissioner for Refugees, “we still think that the best solution to the problem of refugees, is return, we still emphasise that in our policies” (Interview). There is explicit concern that the SRS be interpreted not as accepting ongoing refugee presence, but as initiating a developmental process to mitigate the impacts refugee-hosting has had on Uganda (Interviews, GoU officials, Kampala). This perspective is reinforced by and reflected in the global prioritisation of repatriation, as discussed by Chimni (1999) and Crisp (2004). A UNHCR update on the context of Uganda states, “[r]epatriation will continue to be encouraged for the Sudanese, Congolese and Rwandan refugee populations despite the challenges being

⁹ *Prima facie* recognition entails that refugees are recognised as refugees collectively, due to their nationality, and do not have to undergo individual refugee status determination. This approach is utilised by some host countries in cases of mass influx and also applies to Congolese refugees in Uganda.

faced in their countries of origin” (2006a:164). Promotion of self-reliance is clearly an interim measure in the context of an over-arching commitment to repatriation as a durable solution.

‘We are all brothers’: refugee-hosting discourse in Uganda

Despite the prioritisation of repatriation and the perspective expressed by many GoU officials that refugees are a burden on hosting communities, GoU hosting policies are presented in a discourse of ‘African brotherhood’, described by Kaier as a “language of solidarity and brotherhood” (2000:8). The GoU Commissioner for Refugees stated, “the refugee policy has been informed by...our own population going into exile in Amin’s time...so we have that culture, we have been refugees ourselves and we are hospitable...we reciprocate the gesture shown by our hosts” (Interview, 18/7/05). Deputy Prime Minister Moses Ali also maintained that the overall policy was “because of historical background, because of our relationship...and also because it appears that tomorrow you can also become a refugee, so why not be kind to your fellow brothers, who are your relatives” (Interview, 18/7/05). At the national and district levels in Uganda, refugee policy is thus framed in a discourse of solidarity and kinship.

This discourse has also been taken up at a global level, and Uganda is lauded by UNHCR Geneva through the narrative of the ‘good host’. In the context of increasingly restrictionist asylum policies in neighbouring Kenya and Tanzania, and what has been termed the end of the ‘golden age’ of African asylum (Rutinwa, 1999), UNHCR wants to promote a refugee-hosting success story in Africa. Many of the descriptions of GoU refugee policy in UNHCR documents and publications can be read in light of this objective. While Uganda’s hosting policy is comparatively better than other countries in the region, this discourse substantially marginalises any account of the limitations of GoU policy. A review of recent UNHCR documents referencing or focusing on Uganda brings to light this narrative, for example, a DAR program document points out that “[t]he generous policy of hosting refugees for decades and allocating agricultural land in making refugees self reliant has eased many of the hardships of vulnerable populations” (UNHCR, 2003a:2). On visiting Ugandan refugee settlements on World Refugee Day, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres stated “I believe Uganda is an extraordinary example of generosity towards refugees” (Daily Monitor, 21/6/05). Notably, the SRS is actually taken to represent these aspects of the policy approach, and the discourse also flows into policy documents and evaluations of the program.

The national GoU and global UNHCR ‘good host’ discourse combines to create a view of GoU refugee policy that emphasises its empowering elements. For example, a UNHCR/ GoU joint publication states that policy and programming for refugees in Uganda is

based on the principle whereby refugees, when empowered with resources and the capacity to be actively involved in the prioritisation and implementation of their own development agenda, can play a key role in their own socio-economic development and contribute to the development of their host communities (2004b:5).

This publication concludes, “[t]his principle of refugee empowerment has guided much of Uganda’s refugee hosting experience” (2004b:5). SRS policy documents continually emphasise this policy environment. The discourse of brotherhood that surrounds GoU refugee policy, and the way in which UNHCR has further emphasised the positive elements of Uganda’s hosting policies, surrounds all accounts of the SRS. The following research questions whether the SRS should be understood as an approach that can achieve ‘refugee empowerment’.

Definition: ‘Refugee’ as a contested category

The term ‘refugee’ often connotes a range of normative assumptions (Malkki, 1997). Despite the fact that the term refers to a clear-cut legal definition, research on and descriptions of refugees using the term uncritically must be problematised. In fact, through fieldwork, it became clear that the definition of a ‘refugee’, as acted upon within Uganda, was contested and blurry.

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as “a person who is outside his/ her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/ her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/ herself of protection of that country, or return there, for fear of persecution” (www.unhcr.org, accessed 29/11/05). Yet the national refugee policy framework in Uganda, and UNHCR’s acceptance of this policy framework, has created a confusing and misleading definition of ‘refugee’ in Uganda. Refugees in Uganda are essentially only recognised as such if they live in refugee settlements in isolated rural areas. Unless given express permission to reside in Kampala,¹⁰ if refugees choose to leave the settlements to reside in towns or other non-gazetted rural areas, they are no longer considered refugees under the GoU policy framework, nor are they eligible for assistance or protection from UNHCR.¹¹

The confusion that exists in Uganda over the definition of refugees became clear during fieldwork. GoU refugee officials insisted that self-settled refugees were allowed food rations, when this is clearly not the case. UNHCR staff asserted that self-settled refugees were of no concern to them, regardless of UNHCR’s protection mandate for all persons found to be refugees. Local district officials maintained that self-settled refugees would be allowed to remain in the district after the formal repatriation process and naturalise as Ugandans, despite lack of provision for this in the Ugandan constitution. Notwithstanding the contradiction this definition creates with international refugee law, the term refugee used in this paper will refer to refugees in settlements,¹² following the practice of GoU. This is because the SRS policy was designed and implemented for refugees who fit under this definition.

¹⁰ Some refugees are given permission to reside in Kampala if they can prove self-sufficiency, for example, proof of employment. See Bernstein, 2005, for further information on urban refugees in Kampala.

¹¹ According to Kaiser et al., refugees who leave settlements are legally ‘aliens’ (2005:10).

¹² Self-settled refugees in Uganda have been the focus of recent research (cf. Okello et al., 2005). This thesis, however, does not address self-settled refugees.

Conclusion

The necessity of developing and implementing new ways of addressing protracted refugee situations is indisputable. The RAD approach proposes to be a solution to protracted refugee situations that can address a range of interests, however, this claim requires critical analysis. The SRS process in Uganda used a RAD approach that focused on macro-level engagement and interaction between policy makers, and marginalised key concerns, including the definitions of self-reliance, context of 'empowerment' and institutions allowing refugee involvement and representation. The following paper argues that the SRS achieved 'successful' outcomes for a range of policy actors, but that a critical tension between refugee self-reliance and refugee empowerment remains.

II. Refugee aid and development: literature, agendas and policies

This section contextualises the SRS in Uganda within the body of RAD literature, bringing to light three central themes of the literature: the positioning of refugees as a ‘burden’, the concern to bridge the relief-development gap and the concept of self-reliance. It explores these key themes in the RAD literature, the underpinning assumptions of these themes and the continuities with current RAD approaches. Analysis of these themes brings to light a range of flaws in the literature, including the dichotomy presented between self-reliance and refugee dependency, and the overall assumption that self-reliance (conceived in the terms the approach proposes) and refugee empowerment are reconcilable objectives. These flaws can be connected to the agendas that the RAD approach serves. Therefore, the range of actors with interests in this approach is examined here. This section also presents an explanation and analysis of the recent UNHCR Convention Plus initiative as an example of a RAD approach. Finally, it ends with a description of the SRS policy itself, revealing considerable overlap and consistency of ideas with the RAD approach.

Refugee aid and development: literature and critiques

RAD policy approaches draw upon a number of themes evident in the RAD literature, from the 1980s to 1990s (cf. Gorman, 1987; Kibreab, 1991; Sorenson, 1994). The RAD literature has engaged with a macro-level, institutional focus on how to achieve a RAD approach, including issues of co-ordination between donors and institutions, and host states’ agreement to facilitate such an approach. However, it has neglected a more contextual and micro-level focus on the obstacles to implementing a RAD approach and the implications for refugees in varying contexts. References to ‘refugee empowerment’ have increased in the current incarnation of RAD approaches, yet ‘empowerment’ is never defined or adequately explained.

Underpinnings of refugee aid and development literature

The key aspects of the RAD literature identified here are threefold. Firstly, the literature portrays refugees as ‘burdens,’ and proposes RAD approaches as a way to shift refugees from being a ‘burden’ to ‘benefit’ to host states and communities. Secondly, there is the suggestion that the RAD approach can bridge the gap between relief and development paradigms in protracted refugee situations. Finally, the concept of self-reliance is central, positioned as the polar opposite to refugee dependency. These aspects of the literature can be seen in the UNHCR’s definition of RAD as assistance that is:

development oriented from the start; enables refugees to move towards self-reliance and self-sufficiency from the outset; [and] helps least developed countries to cope with the burden that refugees place on their social and economic structures (cited in Stein, 1994).

Historical and current RAD approaches draw upon these themes, and there is a remarkable consistency between the themes in the literature and the concepts in the actual policy processes.

The burden paradigm

A central reason for the emergence of the RAD approach is the perception by developing host states of refugees as a 'burden'. The International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa [ICARA] conferences in the early 1980s, which were an impetus to much of the RAD literature, explicitly sought to address the burden of refugees on host-states, in the interests of 'burden-sharing'. The literature describes the RAD approach as a way to counter this perception of refugees as 'burdens' and ensure recognition of refugees as potential 'benefits'. However, the RAD literature in fact reinforces the view of refugees as a 'burden'. The narrative that emerges from the literature can be seen in one of the key texts in the RAD literature, Gorman's *Coping with Africa's Refugee Burden* (1987):

Given the rudimentary and limited resources these governments [of developing host countries] have to provide their own people with health, education and agricultural development programs, it is reasonable to assume that sudden and large influxes of refugees can overwhelm their capacities to respond. Many of Africa's refugees...impose a direct burden on host country infrastructure (Gorman, 1987:33).

The literature simply assumes refugees to be burdens in resource-constrained areas and proposes that implementing RAD approaches can ensure that refugees transform from being a 'burden' to a 'benefit'.

However, a significant body of literature argues that the polarisation of the debate, regarding refugees in developing host countries and the need for burden-sharing, into 'burden' *or* 'benefit' fails to see the complexities of social change that refugees bring to an area. Kibreab notes that the assumption that refugees are a burden on host communities is not based on empirical data but abstract preconceptions (1991:59). He argues regarding the contention that refugees are a burden, "buried under such seemingly straightforward assertions are a myriad of theoretical assumptions, all of which must be tested for the case to stand" (1991:60). Indeed, a number of studies (Whitaker, 2002; Rutinwa, 2003; Landau, 2001) have shown that the impact on differing sectors of the host population and spheres of government, as well as differing elements of this impact – for example, on security, the environment or infrastructure – precludes any generalisation regarding the 'burden' or 'benefit' of refugee-hosting on local communities and host states. In fact, in some spheres, refugee influx can create opportunities and broader social, political and economic development in the area. Contrary to popular readings of refugee situations, the potential for refugees to present a 'burden' is often due to host government restrictions on livelihood opportunities.

The binary polarisation between 'burden' and 'benefit' can and should be broken down to better understand the obstacles and opportunities of refugee-presence for developing host countries, yet this sharp distinction is actually perpetuated through the RAD literature. It is assumed that the RAD approach itself will transform this, 'empowering' refugees to act as a 'benefit' rather than a 'burden', despite a lack of engagement or analysis of the conditions that determine refugees' presence as a burden. As will be seen, the SRS is built on vague notions of transforming the

presence of refugees from a 'burden' to a 'benefit', without examination of conditions under which such a shift could be achieved.

Relief-development gap

The RAD approach is also presented in the literature as an effort to link the relief and development paradigms. This is due to the fact that in protracted refugee situations, refugees' needs are no longer strictly relief-related, and yet are often not addressed through a developmental outlook, funding or institutional support. The RAD approach proposes bridging the 'gap' by addressing refugee issues through a development paradigm (Macrae, 1999; Crisp, 2001). Theorists contrast the two paradigms, emphasising the participatory element of developmental approaches. For example, Demusz argues that the 'development' paradigm "refers to a type of self-reliance, which can be measured by the ability of the relief agencies to allow the refugees to manage programmes and resources on their own" (1998:232-233). This element of the RAD literature suggests that in achieving a shift from a relief to a developmental outlook, refugee policies and programs will be inherently more empowering and participatory (Castles et al., 2005:53). In being connected to the broader effort to bridge relief and development approaches, the RAD approach has also become linked to ideas such as participation and empowerment.

Frerks, however, points to the inherent 'structural discontinuities' of interventions seeking to bridge the relief-development gap, and argues that in light of these, "[i]t seems that it is easy to underrate the difficulties that are involved in this linking exercise. Whereas the agencies limit their discussions mainly to the policy level, the problem merits a more critical theoretical, analytical and empirical approach" (2004:177). Frerks draws attention to the fact that 'the problem' referred to in bridging the relief-development gap is *not* simply institutional, necessitating better funding agreements or planning processes. Rather, the 'gap' experienced by the "programme beneficiaries" is often due to lack of attention to their own identified needs (Kaiser, 2002). That is, a problem lies *within* this institutional focus, which often comes at the expense of actually accounting for the 'gap' as experienced by refugees. Therefore, Frerks continues, there is a need to "incorporate the views and interests of other actors such as the programme beneficiaries: the refugees, the stayees, the internally displaced or the hosts" (2004:177). However, analysis within the RAD framework regarding this issue is itself embedded in an outlook that primarily engages with institutional challenges to bridging this gap. The complexities of interventions that aim to achieve a smooth transition from relief to development are consequently overlooked, and the actual outcomes judged primarily from the perspective of 'success' for institutions, without interrogating what this means for the subjects of the interventions.

Self-reliance

A third aspect of the RAD literature that has transferred to policy is the focus on self-reliance. Self-reliance to a considerable degree underpins the other two elements; that is, refugees can shift from being 'burdens' to 'benefits' *through* being self-reliant, and self-reliance is at the centre of a 'developmental' approach designed to bridge the 'gap'. Self-reliance also forms the cornerstone of the assertion that RAD approaches are in the interests of refugee welfare. As Collinson sees it, self-reliance models should be advanced,

on the basis of evidence that refugees and internally displaced persons who have been able to lead a productive life, receive an education, develop skills and accumulate resources are usually better prepared and equipped to return home than those who have been confined for long periods of time in camps surviving only on minimum levels of humanitarian assistance (2005:44).

While this may indeed be accurate, the way that self-reliance is presented in the RAD literature is as a way to mitigate refugee ‘dependency’ on relief. This creates the paradox evident in the SRS, that self-reliance is therefore defined as a process of reduction of external inputs and support for refugees. In contrasting self-reliance to dependency, this approach fails to analyse the conditions for refugee self-reliance, or what this would mean in practice. A consultancy report prepared for UNHCR states that self-reliance is positioned as the opposite of dependency, which “is seen to be a tendency inherent in refugees”. The report continues that this approach is “singularly unhelpful because [it] repeatedly ‘problematizes’ the refugee, rather than focusing on the role that UNHCR’s own management and operating procedures play in creating ‘dependency’ and narrowing the scope of refugee self-sufficiency and self-reliance”. The report suggests that the focus of much analysis has been on combating dependency, rather than “creating appropriate conditions for refugee self-sufficiency” (CASA Consulting, 2003:63-64).

The RAD approach presupposes that dependency is an aberrant behaviour exhibited by refugees, and self-reliance a policy that can mitigate this behaviour. However, as Bakewell suggests, “there is a growing body of research that rejects the idea of dependency syndrome and sees the observed behaviour as a greater reflection on the aid agencies than the refugees” (2003:9). For example, during fieldwork in Imvepi, refugees’ claims that they needed a full food ration to survive were often characterised as evidence of dependency syndrome, given that refugees sold some of their food rations to local Ugandans at markets. However, refugees in Imvepi explained that they had stopped receiving non-food items and other essentials, due to the implementation of the SRS, and were therefore forced to sell food rations for soap, medicine and school supplies. This demonstrates Bakewell’s argument that actions that are defined as dependency may often actually be resourcefulness and livelihoods strategies shaped by aid interventions and responses to the inadequate provisions of the aid system overall (cf. Kibreab, 1991, 1993; Hyndman, 2000). Despite this, in the RAD literature, self-reliance is seen as a way to end refugee dependency. ‘Refugee dependency’ is – in policy and practice – commonly accepted as an incontrovertible outcome of refugees’ interactions with aid resources, yet empirical research does not bear out viewing it as such, and, moreover, such a perception does not link to appropriate policy interventions. Despite this, refugee dependency – which, as a way of describing restrictions on livelihoods and related refugee responses, may be a useful analytical tool – is more often used as a justification for policy approaches that refugees may not discern to be in their ‘best interests,’ as was the case in the SRS.

Central critiques of the literature

These three underpinning notions in the RAD literature are inextricably linked to empowerment. Empowerment is presented by the literature as a necessary process for shifting refugees from constituting a ‘burden’ to host countries to being a ‘benefit’. Empowerment is taken to be a constitutive element of the development paradigm that

the approach advocates, and the means towards achieving refugee self-reliance. Refugee empowerment can hence be seen as both the tool for achieving the objectives of the RAD approach, and the objective itself. It is assumed that empowerment will lead to self-reliance, and that self-reliance, in and of itself, is empowering for refugees. Despite this, the literature focuses on macro-level obstacles to RAD approaches, focusing on institutional and state-level agreement to designing, funding and implementing RAD approaches, for example, co-ordination between the United Nations Development Program [UNDP] and UNHCR. This focus comes at the expense of examining the underpinning notion of empowerment of refugees, and critically analysing the benefits of the RAD approach for refugees.

The real difficulties with the RAD approach are more significant than institutional agreement, and require a deeper critique to get to the heart of the question of what self-reliance entails for refugees. Empowerment of refugees is understood throughout the literature as an inevitable outcome of implementation of the approach, however, the link between self-reliance and empowerment is assumed, rather than proven. The concept of 'empowerment towards self-reliance' that the RAD approach suggests presupposes that self-reliance and empowerment are mutually reinforcing and inextricably linked, rather than in tension and contradictory, as the case of the SRS showed.

Refugee aid and development: agendas and policy processes

Politics, agendas and interests

The conceptual flaws in the RAD literature examined above are not simply the result of theoretical failings. They are also reflective of the agendas, interests and politics encapsulated in the RAD approach, and reflected in the SRS in Uganda. The current incarnation of the RAD approach appeals to a range of interests of a number of actors - UNHCR, refugee-hosting governments and donor countries. This section explores these interests through examination of UNHCR and GoU's interests in RAD and the SRS specifically, making reference to the way these approaches link to donors' agendas.¹³

UNHCR

UNHCR wishes to maintain or increase funding for its programs and renew commitment from donors and host governments for improved refugee protection. The ubiquity of protracted refugee situations has meant that host governments are increasingly reluctant to host large refugee populations, creating a context in which the norm of *non-refoulement*¹⁴ of refugees has been violated (for example, in the case of Rwandese refugees from Tanzania in 1996; cf. Chaulia, 2003). Donors are increasingly unwilling to fund care and maintenance operations. Given that the UNHCR relies on yearly donations from donor states, rather than guaranteed assessed

¹³ It should be noted that in examining the interests of actors, it cannot be assumed that spheres of actors have homogenous interests. This discussion hence does not purport to be an exhaustive examination of the conflicting interests *within* spheres of actors. However, this discussion does demonstrate that the key themes outlined above can be related to a range of interests of policy actors.

¹⁴ The norm of *non-refoulement* is enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, and entails that a refugee should not be returned to any country where he or she is likely to face persecution or torture (Goodwin-Gill, 1996).

contributions from the United Nations as is the case for many other UN agencies, there is an institutional imperative to appeal to donors. Loescher argues, “[t]he UNHCR’s dependence on voluntary contributions forces it to adopt policies that reflect the interests and priorities of the major donor countries” (1993:137).

The central elements of the RAD approach reflect these interests. The emphasis on transforming refugees from a ‘burden’ to a ‘benefit’ is a way to appeal to both host governments and donors. If refugees can be transformed into ‘agents of development,’ host governments will be more willing to host them for longer, and donors will not be expected to contribute to protracted care and maintenance situations. The emphasis on the relief-development gap also speaks to an institutional imperative, of UNHCR accessing increased development funding to address refugee situations.

Moreover, for UNHCR, RAD is a way to increase refugee protection in regions of origin, while simultaneously proving the continuing relevance of UNHCR as an organisation in protecting refugees’ rights and providing for their needs. A senior UNHCR manager in Geneva noted that the current focus on RAD approaches within UNHCR should be analysed through an understanding of the political pressures faced by UNHCR when other UN agencies gained prominence in the humanitarian sphere in the late 1990s, the consequence being that “UNHCR loses its crown...[and has to] cling to being the lead agency” (Interview, 25/5/05). Current RAD processes can be interpreted, therefore, as an effort to emphasise UNHCR’s importance in solving current refugee problems. In this light, a high-level UNHCR Geneva official commented on the SRS, “I think we need to show that this is successful, and that it works” (Interview, 23/5/05), recognising the institutional need for a successful RAD program. In the context of the SRS, the significant interests tied up in the ‘success’ of the program has entailed that, despite recognition in policy documents (cf. UNHCR 2002e, 2005g) that self-reliance can only be successful in certain hosting environments with conducive host government policies, and material conditions, UNHCR has not fully engaged with or recognised these issues in the case of the SRS.

The conceptual flaws in the RAD approach reflect the political underpinnings of support for the process. In the case of self-reliance, Crisp argues that the expanded focus on self-reliance within UNHCR thinking and research is due to

declining levels of relief available to refugees in many parts of the world, especially Africa, [making] it...increasingly clear the UNHCR cannot meet minimum humanitarian standards by means of long-term assistance programmes. At the same time, donor states and other actors have become increasingly interested in strategies that might in the long term lead to a reduction in the levels of relief expenditure (2003b:3).

While framed as a way to empower refugees and release productive potential, self-reliance has also emerged for instrumental reasons including lack of donor willingness to continue to fund care and maintenance programs. In many ways, then, UNHCR’s hands are tied on this issue, and attempting to implement a self-reliance policy within this context is an understandable, while flawed, response to an impossible situation. In the case of the SRS, and the current focus of the international refugee regime on RAD

approaches, these issues are often masked in an ‘empowerment’ discourse. This discourse presents the interests and agendas of a wide range of actors as concerned primarily with promoting refugee empowerment towards the outcome of self-reliance.

Recognition of the interests that a RAD approach can serve has led, however, to the notion that a convergence of interests is possible. For example, UNHCR proposes a range of interests that a self-reliance approach can address:

self-reliance brings benefits to all stakeholders. For host states, self-reliant refugees contribute to the sustainable social and economic development of the country and have the potential to attract additional resources which also benefit host communities. For the international and donor community, the achievement of self-reliance reduces the need for open-ended relief assistance...For refugees, it helps them regain better control of their lives, provides greater stability and dignity, and may help them become ‘agents of development’ (2005g:3).

This discussion makes it clear that UNHCR conceives of the RAD approach, and specifically the concept of self-reliance within it, as achieving a convergence of interests. Hence, that self-reliance is beneficial for refugees is seen as incontestable.

Host governments – GoU

For GoU, in the case of the SRS, a RAD approach is seen as an opportunity to be compensated for the refugee ‘burden’, and ensure that developmental benefits that can be accrued through refugee-hosting are leveraged prior to repatriation of the refugees. Hence, it is seen as a way to achieve ‘burden-sharing’ and ensure that their ‘generosity’ to refugees is repaid with developmental benefits for host communities before repatriation. Deputy Prime Minister, Moses Ali, stated, “the Sudanese refugees are beginning to prepare to go back – so what do we do? We have to introduce a kind of development or recovery...we don’t want them to go and leave us with problems” (Interview, 18/7/05). This recognition of the potential benefits of refugees fits with the RAD approach, and is supposed to be in the interests of refugee protection; the tensions that come to light when host governments in fact *do* recognise refugees as ‘benefits’ are explored further in chapter V. Self-reliance is framed as an empowerment strategy, but is also in the interests of redirecting donor funding from simply maintaining refugees through food rations towards more long-term benefits for refugee-hosting areas.

Overall, the conceptual flaws addressed in the beginning of this section relate substantively to the political agendas to which the RAD approach appeals. Despite UNHCR proposing that the self-reliance element of RAD approaches can concomitantly serve host governments’ interests, donor’s agendas and refugees’ wellbeing, there are in fact tensions in these connections made, and contradictions in the self-reliance approach as operationalised within the RAD approach and the SRS specifically.

Current policy process

Current global RAD approaches emerged in 2002, when UNHCR launched the Global Consultations on International Protection. The reasoning behind this process was explained by a UNHCR manager involved in the Convention Plus process in Geneva, who stated,

a few of the European countries, especially the United Kingdom, had actually very clearly announced, publicly so, that if UNHCR was not a relevant organisation, and if the Convention did not make sense anymore, then probably they would have to find other ways...to see how their interests could be better taken care of by other institutions...So, we were sort of at this crossroads and we had to say – what can UNHCR do?...at the same time, we were faced with so many refugee crises in Africa, so we were saying – what can we do to make the burden sharing better, and how can we find solutions? (Interview, 23/5/05)

The process was therefore an attempt to balance the interests of donor states with UNHCR's efforts to maintain or improve refugee protection in the face of increasingly difficult global challenges, whilst keeping host governments engaged in effective refugee protection. The Agenda for Protection [AfP] emerged from these Global Consultations and was endorsed in 2002. The third goal of the AfP – of “sharing burdens and responsibilities more equitably and building capacities to receive and protect refugees” – was effectively transformed into Convention Plus [CP], which was launched by the then UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, in 2002. CP focused on three strands of central concern – the strategic use of resettlement; addressing irregular secondary movement; and targeting development assistance [TDA] to achieve durable solutions (UNHCR, 2004f).

TDA – an example of the renewed focus on RAD approaches – can be seen to appeal to a range of the agendas detailed above. An issues paper on TDA, prepared by the lead countries in the process, Denmark and Japan, states that, “[t]argeting of development aid will enhance burden-sharing with poor refugee hosting countries and communities, and allow refugees to become self-reliant, equipping them for one of three durable solutions” (UNHCR, 2004d:2). As such, the assumptions that improved burden-sharing and self-reliance necessarily go together – hence, serving the interests of host governments – and that self-reliance will lead to durable solutions – addressing donor concerns regarding long-term funding of care and maintenance situations – are embedded in this approach. The key challenges in developing and operationalising RAD policies identified in the TDA issues paper are the funding and conceptual differences between development and humanitarian paradigms, concerns over “additionality” of funding for such policies,¹⁵ and involvement of UNHCR with the broader UN system and development actors. That the policies, once implemented, will be in the best interests of refugees is assumed. Again, the concerns relating to refugees' wellbeing and institutional agendas are seen to be reconcilable, and in fact, mutually reinforcing.

¹⁵ “Additionality” is the term utilised to denote additional funds for refugees over and above usual development funding to a host country.

The current global policy focus and the elements encapsulated in the SRS are not new or without precursors (Betts, 1993). A more detailed account of historical antecedents to current RAD approaches can be found in Kibreab (1991) and Betts (2004). Gorman argues, however, that through the 1980s ICARA process, a ‘consensus’ emerged regarding the focus of RAD approaches. This ‘consensus’ included that “assistance to refugees should encourage self-reliance,” that burdens placed on hosting areas by refugees should be addressed with additional development funding, and that the RAD approach required “closer linkage between refugee and development programming” (1987:155-156). It is evident that the themes of mitigating the burden of refugees, bridging the relief-development gap and promoting self-reliance have continued into the current global processes.

The Self-Reliance Strategy: The refugee aid and development approach in practice

The SRS in Uganda has been held up as a successful outcome of the CP process and a ‘best practice’ example of how the RAD approach can work (Interviews, UNHCR Geneva). However, it is important to note that the SRS was not developed specifically in relation to CP. A manager from the Convention Plus Unit stated, “it existed before Convention Plus even existed, so [we] never claim that as a success of Convention Plus” (Interview, 24/5/05). It was, however, later taken up as an example of TDA in practice, and, “Uganda has found it useful to use Convention Plus to put back on the table their old SRS” (Interview, 24/5/05). While developing separately to the CP process, the SRS has been neatly slotted into this international policy process, to bring attention to the hosting practices of Uganda and attract interest from donors. The themes that emerge in the SRS, which are substantively continuous with the concepts addressed in the beginning of this chapter, demonstrate the congruence between the RAD approach, the renewed focus on RAD approaches in the recent CP process, and the SRS in Uganda, which has been slotted into the global policy framework.

The SRS contains the three elements discussed above, of self-reliance, bridging the relief-development gap and improving ‘burden-sharing’. Yet the policy focused on institutional agreement and interests, and marginalised key concerns relating to the context of and obstacles to self-reliance. The outcomes of the SRS are perceived by policy makers, GoU national and district officials to have been empowerment of individual refugees and communities.

Local context of the SRS

The SRS was implemented in 1999 in the West Nile region, which hosts 72% of the refugees in Uganda [see Appendix 2]. Made up of Arua, Moyo, Nebbi, Adjumani, Yumbe (formed in 2002) and Koboko (formed in 2005) districts, the West Nile region is significant for its underdevelopment and recent conflict. Leopold has described the West Nile region as “deeply alienated from much of the rest of Uganda and mired in poverty and insecurity” (2005:16). Conflicts generated by rebel groups after now-President Yoweri Museveni’s National Resistance Movement take-over in 1986 only ended in 2002 (Hovil and Lomo, 2004). A number of national and district officials framed the introduction of the SRS as an overall development strategy and means to mitigate not only the impact of refugees on the West Nile region, but also address broader post-conflict development needs.

Another relevant factor in the West Nile region is its history as a refugee-producing region. Many authors have described the impact that the early 1980s “large-scale exodus” (Pirouet, 1989:248) of West Nilers had on the region (cf. Crisp, 1986; Piroeut, 1989 and Leopold, 2005). At the height of the refugee crisis, there were around 200,000 Ugandan refugees from West Nile in South Sudan and more in then-Zaire, who fled fearing reprisals after the overthrow of Amin. The refugees returned in the mid-1980s to an area that had been largely decimated by conflict. Given this history, “[i]t is no exaggeration to say that almost all Ugandans living in the border region have either been refugees themselves, or have hosted refugees at some point in their lives” (Kaiser et al., 2005:8).

The self-reliance strategy: elements of policy design

The SRS was a joint strategy between UNHCR and the GoU with the overall goal “to improve the standard of living of the people of refugee hosting districts, including the refugees” (UNHCR/GoU, 2004a:42), focusing specifically on districts in West Nile. The program had the central objectives of “[e]mpowerment of refugees and nationals in the area to the extent that they would be able to support themselves” and “establish[ing] mechanisms that will ensure integration of services for the refugees with those of nationals” (Ibid., 2004a:42). In the SRS policy documents, empowerment is conceptualised as a process towards the eventual outcome of self-reliance. This outcome, it is argued, is beneficial for both refugees and host communities, as well as development for the host country, given that self-reliant refugees will transform from being a ‘burden’ to a ‘benefit’ for hosting communities.

Self-reliance is defined within the SRS as:

- “ability to grow or produce their own food;
- access to and ability to pay for the cost of the health and educational services provided to refugees by themselves (at the same level as the nationals) and take care of the vulnerable within the community;
- ability to take part in socio-economic activities, particularly income generation activities; and
- ability to maintain self-sustaining community structures by providing opportunities for better organising and responding to issues concerning them by themselves” (Ibid., 2004a:42)

Notwithstanding this definition, the overwhelming focus of self-reliance in the SRS was on point i), entailing that self-reliance meant independence from food rations. A UNHCR staff member in Geneva saw this concept of self-reliance as being in the interests of donors, refugees and the host government. He argued,

we made a calculation that WFP was spending \$30 million a year [on food rations], year after year. And we were saying, if we manage to get this self-reliance project going, instead of giving out \$30 million in food distribution, which you lose at the end of

the day...we would try to convince donors to use that \$30 million in a different way, for local development (Interview, 24/4/05)¹⁶

On the issue of integration of services, the aim in the SRS was to integrate assistance implemented in refugee settlements by IPs into the mainstream district structures and programs. UNHCR would fund, for example, the District Health Service, to provide health care for refugees, rather than providing health care separately through a UNHCR-funded, IP-provided service. These elements were understood to be able to achieve a shift in refugees' impact on local host communities, from 'burden' to 'benefit,' and to empower refugees such that self-reliance would translate to refugees acting as 'agents of development'.

Policy planners' descriptions of the impetus for the SRS relate substantially to the underpinnings in RAD literature. Refugees are positioned as burdens in refugee-hosting districts, and the burden they have placed on scarce resources must be addressed through an area-based, developmental approach. Further, both the reduction of food rations and integration of services are understood as processes to help bridge the relief-development gap. Refugees are seen to be past the 'relief' phase, and therefore no longer generally needing separate services or provisions. Self-reliance is the underpinning concept of the strategy and is positioned within the policy as the key to ensuring refugees will become 'agents of development'. Consistent with the polarity between self-reliance and dependency that is presented in the RAD literature, proponents of the SRS say it is a way to "empower [refugees] to live without handouts" (Interview, Staff Member, DAR Secretariat), while an account of the SRS in a UNHCR/GoU policy document argued that "over time [the SRS] has also helped in 'attitude change' among refugees and host communities alike – from free handouts to self-help and capacity building" (2004b:3). A UNHCR Geneva staff member stated, "we were basically saying, if you do it well, it's a win-win situation; because the refugees have a better life and a higher self-esteem because they are producing their own food and being part of the district, not idle in a camp-like situation, and the hosts benefit as well, because they get better schools, better health services. That was the reasoning behind it" (Interview, 24/5/05).

The mid-term review

The Mid-Term Review [MTR] of the SRS in Uganda was commissioned by UNHCR with a review team consisting of UNHCR, WFP, Office of the Prime Minister [OPM] Uganda, and Ugandan Ministry of Local Government officials, and was conducted in February 2004 through field visits to West Nile. As a UNHCR Geneva manager argued,

the review was one milestone in a way because it gave us a basis for moving on, and to start afresh...the Review came as an opportunity to redefine the objectives (Interview, 23/5/05).

The MTR is significant in that it is understood to have been the catalyst for the DAR approach in Uganda, along with global policy development in UNHCR that focused on DAR as an approach to achieve 'solutions' for refugees (cf. UNHCR, 2003c).

¹⁶ As is described in Chapter Five, this did not occur, and in fact the SRS coincided with further budget cuts on UNHCR services, including agriculture and education.

More broadly, the MTR is of central importance in defining the parameters of the 'problems' of the SRS, and creating a framework for certain critiques. At the same time, however, many of the central critiques of the SRS outlined in the MTR are sidelined or ignored in latter evaluations and descriptions of the SRS by GoU and UNHCR.

The MTR does address some of the key concerns from refugees' perspective concerning the impact of the SRS. That is, the MTR gets to the heart of the problematic linkage between empowerment and self-reliance, which the report argues is narrowly defined and lacking substantive definition in the SRS. The MTR highlights that the host country's legal framework is inadequate in terms of the rights granted to refugees, and that, "[w]ithout an established legal framework, important issues relating to self-reliance of refugees such as freedom of movement, employment and taxation will remain unresolved and/ or left to arbitrary interpretations" (UNHCR/GoU, 2004a:9). Regarding self-reliance, the MTR argues that "the conceptualisation of self-reliance is over simplified" (Ibid, 2004a:10) and critiques the SRS for assuming a linear process from dependency to self-reliance that does not account for drought, shocks or other challenges. The MTR emphasises the *limitations* of self-reliance, stating:

[t]he SRS should set realistic goals as to the level of self-sufficiency that it is reasonable to expect under the present arrangements and conditions, and not assume that 100% self-sufficiency is always attainable. This is particularly true of refugee hosting areas with poorer land quality and/ or less favourable climactic conditions" (Ibid., 2004a:19).

One of the central concerns raised by the MTR is the flaws in the notion of self-reliance within the SRS, and the report argues that an understanding of the contextual elements of self-reliance is necessary. The MTR brings to light the problem of an approach that proposes refugee empowerment without taking into account the social, political and economic context.

In spite of these shortcomings, subsequent documents focus substantially on the success of SRS in achieving self-reliance (taken as food self-sufficiency), alongside the other elements including integration of services. For example, the account of Uganda in the UNHCR 2006 Global Appeal states that the MTR "revealed significant improvements in food crop production, greater access to social services, better provision of training and increased consultations between refugees and host communities" (UNHCR, 2006a:163). The critiques within the extended version of the MTR regarding the problems with the definition of self-reliance in certain areas of SRS implementation are largely left aside for a more positive image of the impact of the SRS. The problems associated with the SRS are overwhelmingly translated into a technical problem of lack of consultation that is seen as being addressed through the subsequent DAR program in Uganda. The findings of the MTR are thus transformed from a significant focus on the limitations of self-reliance to simply a problem with the *process* of policy implementation, rather than the actual content of the policy itself. The significant interests in the success of the SRS, or at least perceptions of its success, entailed that the criticisms included in the MTR have in fact been excluded from latter assessments by a range of policy actors.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined and critiqued the central body of RAD literature. Central elements that emerge in the RAD literature – the burden paradigm, the effort to bridge the relief-development gap and the focus on self-reliance – feed into the recent global policy processes and, specifically, the SRS program in Uganda. These elements that emerge as central to the RAD approach appeal to a range of agendas, some of which have been outlined here. In seeking to address these agendas, it is assumed that RAD can create a ‘convergence of interests,’ such that concepts such as self-reliance will achieve desired outcomes for host governments, UNHCR, donors and refugees. Yet, despite the connection made throughout the RAD literature, there is in fact a tension between the RAD approach, and self-reliance within it, and empowerment of refugees, which is proposed as one of the underlying objectives of RAD.

III. Self-reliance and empowerment

Refugee empowerment has been a central focus of the RAD approach, especially in the case of the SRS program in Uganda. It became clear through numerous interviews that policy actors involved in the SRS policy process in Uganda largely understood the approach as a means towards refugee empowerment, linking this to the aim of refugee self-reliance. Therefore, analysis of the specific outcomes of the SRS in its context requires engagement with the concept of refugee empowerment. This section seeks to analyse empowerment through a theoretical framework, examining how different approaches have accounted for refugee power and agency. It also proposes that in the context of the SRS there is a *tension* between self-reliance and empowerment. Therefore, it begins with a critical analysis of self-reliance as operationalised through the SRS policy in Uganda. It concludes that self-reliance as defined and put in place by the SRS is substantively different than refugee empowerment.

However, there is some difficulty in understanding and conceptualising what is meant by refugee empowerment. The concept also serves a range of agendas, and cannot be taken at face value. This chapter therefore explores two paradigms of refugee empowerment – the ‘advocacy’ approach, which over-emphasises the impact of institutional constraints as they translate to structural constraints, and the ‘institutional’ approach, which proposes the transfer of ‘agency’ through policies and programs, while lacking an account of the impact of structural constraints on the exercise of agency.

Self-reliance

The stated objective within the SRS is ‘empowerment towards self-reliance’, yet the definition of self-reliance within the SRS is flawed on two counts. Firstly, on a theoretical level, it contradicts an adequate approach to refugee empowerment. Moreover, on a practical level it disconnects the process of self-reliance from the structural obstacles to refugees achieving self-reliance, as will be discussed in the following two sections.

UNHCR defines self-reliance as

the ability of an individual, household or community to depend (rely) on their own resources (physical, social and natural capital or assets), judgment and capabilities with minimal external assistance in meeting basic needs...It is understood to mean that refugees are able to provide for themselves, their household and community members in terms of food and other needs, including shelter, water, sanitation, health and education, and that they can cope with unexpected events, and are no longer dependent on outside assistance under normal circumstances (2004e:64).

The MTR proposes that this definition of self-reliance be adopted in the SRS; no other more substantive definition is offered in SRS planning documents. On two levels, this definition is problematic. Firstly, self-reliance is linked to ‘minimal external

assistance,’ whereas previous experiences of attempting self-reliance programs in refugee settlements have shown that self-reliance is a process that may require *increased* external inputs at certain points to enable refugees to access livelihood opportunities (cf. Payne, 1998). For example, the definition of self-reliance in the SRS includes access to income generating activities. In the context of refugee settlements in Uganda, this would presuppose at least some initial input from external agencies, and possibly a continuing role in supporting businesses through small loans or finding markets for goods. Secondly, in assuming that refugees can ‘provide for themselves’ in areas as diverse as food, water and health, this ignores that in most contexts, not even host communities are expected to achieve this. This definition does not address the fact that local host community members may access services such as health through provision of external inputs, including international donors. Kibread has argued that despite continual references to self-reliance in refugee policy and planning, the concept is “ill-defined and there is no established criterion by which to measure it” (1991:43). This was certainly the case with the SRS.

The dual imperatives of reducing costs of care and maintenance and empowering refugees through a self-reliance approach are contradictory in this context. The concept of self-reliance has been decontextualised, presented as disconnected from specific material conditions and disembedded from recognition of the structural constraints on refugees’ lives. UNHCR apparently recognises that “[s]elf-reliance can...only be achieved if there is an enabling environment. This includes a viable economic situation, availability of affordable housing or access to land, as well as receptive attitudes within the host community” (2002e:3). However, in the case of the SRS, these elements were not addressed or recognised, ostensibly to achieve institutional agreement and serve the interests of different spheres of policy actors. Therefore, an essential tension between self-reliance and empowerment emerged.

Crisp’s argument relating to the focus on livelihoods and refugee rights and protection here is worth examining at some length. Crisp’s major critique of the notion of self-reliance in these approaches is that it lacks an account of rights. He argues that there has been a tendency “to approach the issue of livelihoods and self-reliance from a technical perspective” (2003b:3). But, as Crisp continues, “[w]hile this technical perspective is important – as is the question of financial resources – there is also a need to link the question of livelihoods with the issue of rights and protection” (2003b:3). His analysis reveals that self-reliance approaches have focused on institutional issues, questions of implementation and funding, *at the expense* of engagement with how such approaches could benefit refugees in terms of rights and protection, and how such approaches also depend on refugees’ access to rights and protection. As he argues, “many of the world’s refugees are unable to establish and maintain independent livelihoods because they cannot exercise the rights to which they are entitled under international human rights and international law” (Ibid., 2003b:3). For example, he cites issues of access to land and labour markets, legal status and documentation, insecurity and freedom of movement. Crisp therefore highlights that self-reliance approaches need to take into account opportunities available to refugees and obstacles that exist.

This argument points towards the problems of self-reliance as a rights-deprived concept. Rather than focusing on the conditions necessary to enable such an approach, or the outcomes for refugees, self-reliance approaches have engaged with the interests

and agendas of external actors. A more substantive focus on refugee rights in this context would examine the obstacles and opportunities for refugees, also including advocacy to host governments to achieve the conditions needed for self-reliance. Moreover, the rights referred to in this case may not necessarily have to be refugee rights as conceived in international refugee law strictly, but are analysed by Polzer as elements that rely on access to authoritative resources and spaces for the exercise of agency. As Polzer has argued, “[t]he *freedom* to act politically and strategically...may be the much more important criterion” (2005a:15) than strictly legal rights as such. This freedom may rely on fulfilment of basic refugee rights as enshrined in the 1951 Convention, yet is also enabled through effective exercise of agency *vis a vis* other local power holders (2005a:7). Polzer argues for recognising the importance of “space to actively negotiate access to rights and resources” for refugees (2005a:8); indeed, she argues that international refugee rights are “one of many possible strategies that refugees can use to access rights within a set of structural constraints” (2005a:12).

In conclusion, it is clear that the potential for refugee self-reliance should be determined contextually, recognising material constraints and the limitations on refugees in host communities, both in terms of refugee rights and access to spaces to negotiate with local actors. There are significant limitations to a rights-deprived notion of self-reliance, which Smith has argued can only translate to a practice that “rarely transcends marketing folkloric handcrafts and cultivating kitchen gardens in camps” (Smith, 2005:24). As a legal policy officer in UNHCR Geneva argued, the rights in the 1951 Convention “provide the legal framework for bridging the gap between relief and development, relief and self-reliance” (Interview). Polzer’s contribution broadens the conception of rights to recognise that spaces for the exercise of agency are central to achieving self-reliance. Essentially, the notion of self-reliance embedded in the SRS, and the RAD approach more broadly, may appeal to the agendas of GoU, donors and UNHCR. However, when critically examined, proposing that reduction of external inputs and expectations that refugees can access goods and services in a manner above and beyond that of local citizens is empowerment is disconnected from what would be commonly understood as empowerment. Moreover, it is theoretically flawed if the concept of empowerment is addressed in terms of an understanding of structure and agency.

Approaches to refugee empowerment

Having argued that self-reliance as an approach defined and conceptualised within the SRS contradicts the objective of refugee empowerment, it is essential to develop a framework for understanding refugee empowerment. The aim of refugee empowerment emerges, both explicitly and implicitly, in a range of fora. The following account will address approaches to refugee empowerment through two broad paradigms – the ‘advocacy’ approach and the ‘institutional’ approach. This examination will analyse how these approaches locate power, and how each approach addresses structure and agency, given the importance of these concepts for any account of empowerment.

Analysis of the question of structure and agency in the field of refugee studies has focused on accounting for the *forced* nature of forced migration. This has led to a dichotomy of accounts, between a neo-classical rational choice model, emphasising migration as a rational choice refugees make, and structuralist models that suggest that individuals and communities have little or no choice in their movement and

subsequent livelihoods (Bakewell, 2000:105). Richmond's approach is a notable exception to this, and attempts to reconcile "social psychological determinants of individual motivation" (1993:9) with "structural determinants which influence behaviour" (1993:10) to analyse people movement in terms of a "continuum between proactive and reactive migration" (1993:7). Despite this, Richmond places most refugees in the category of "reactive migration," thus diminishing the possibility of refugees exercising agency due to the very definition of their status under international law (1993:11).

Bakewell has argued that refugee decision-making can be analysed through the lens of Giddens' theory of structuration, refugees should in fact be "viewed as social actors working with some room for maneuver while constrained by the wider social context in which they exist" (2000:105). Utilisation of structuration theory within the field of refugee studies need not only apply to analysis of why and when people choose to leave their homes, but can also be applied to understanding their responses upon arrival in an asylum context, whereby their own coping strategies interact with the actions of other social actors, including international institutions and their interventions. Despite these theoretical advances, approaches to 'refugee empowerment' in literature and policy are still substantially embedded in one of two paradigms. In the 'advocacy' approach, refugees are powerful and exercise agency when or if they are given the opportunity to act *outside* of 'structures', which are taken as constituted by institutions. In the 'institutional' approach, conversely, refugees are powerless and the institutions of the international refugee regime have the power to 'empower' refugees, primarily through policy processes. The central flaw in both approaches is where power is located and how it is understood, suggesting that the understanding of empowerment within both frameworks is also problematic.

The 'advocacy' approach to refugee empowerment

The first perspective, the 'advocacy' approach – most commonly expressed in the work of Harrell-Bond (1986, 2005) – argues that refugees have the capabilities and skills to attain independence, integrate into host communities and establish livelihoods. This perspective posits that these capacities are often stripped through the actions and practices of international aid agencies and the international refugee regime. This approach does not necessarily explicitly reference empowerment, yet implicit in the account is the idea that refugee rights and welfare can be better achieved through a framework that allows for refugee empowerment. This perspective positions refugees as potentially powerful social actors, but the attribution of agency, power and capabilities to refugees within this approach is dependent on a determinist view of structure. The basic argument is that agency is constrained and restricted by structure – primarily by aid agency interventions and practices – and that refugee agency can be discerned only when the impact of such social systems is completely, or largely, absent.

The understanding of agency this approach draws upon is normative. It emphasises agency in order to overturn perceptions of refugees as passive recipients of aid, and therefore to challenge top-down policy interventions. However, this approach actually often perpetuates the perception of refugees as passive. For example, an advocacy report by the Refugee Law Project in Uganda, in this vein of reasoning, maintains that in the settlement context, refugees

have become totally dependent on the refugee structures to make decisions for them. Such dependence has made them unable to move...[s]uch restrictions have turned settlement refugees into passive victims who are dissatisfied by their current circumstances, yet are also constrained in their ability to move (Hovil, 2002:13).

The settlement context, where “over-dependent refugees are being forced to live in relative isolation with limited choices, undermining their ability to sustain and improve their own lives” (Hovil, 2002:23), is contrasted to the agency of self-settled refugees who exercise “control and creativity”. This is viewed as “a luxury that is not illustrated by the majority of those in the settlements, who had neither the power nor the resources to consider, let alone pursue, alternative locations” (Hovil, 2002:9). This is an example where refugees *outside* of the institutional remit of the international refugee regime – self-settled refugees – are seen to have agency, whereas those who live under the aid umbrella and the associated restrictions of the settlement system have little, or no, agency. However, developing a cause and effect narrative between the impact of institutional interventions and policies and the diminishing potential of refugees to exercise agency draws on a notion of agency as a concept that individuals or communities either have or do not have, determined primarily, if not solely, by the institutional context.

Many critiques of the SRS have largely emerged from this paradigm. However, the analysis presented in this paper shows that it is possible to critique the SRS while still recognising that refugees exercise agency, albeit in a constrained environment. The approach taken in this paper shows that agency should be understood as ever-present, and limitations on refugees’ ability to achieve intended outcomes should not be interpreted as a lack of agency. However, within this ‘advocacy’ approach, power is only recognised where it is visible and is understood as solely located in the hands of the ‘intervenor’ who, through their actions, strip power from refugees. This positioning of power lends itself to a view of empowerment as a top-down process where spaces for agency can be created through changes in external interventions. This approach would propose that the constraints experienced by refugees under the aid umbrella in the settlement context are all-encompassing. Despite recognising the impact of institutional interventions on refugees’ lives and livelihoods, this paper rejects such an account, recognising differential constraints and opportunities for refugees in this context.

The ‘institutional’ view of refugee empowerment

At the other end of the spectrum, there is the ‘institutional’ view of refugee empowerment. This approach assumes that once refugees ‘have’ agency, power relations do not have an impact and can be ignored in creating ‘empowerment’. This approach in fact begins from the starting point that refugees are *powerless*, perpetuating an image of refugees as helpless victims through “established representational practices” (Malkki, 1997:234) that legitimate humanitarian intervention of various forms. Empowerment is made possible, in this account, through policies and processes that the global refugee regime implements for refugees. This view conceptualises empowerment based on a notion of agency as a good that can be transferred to refugees through policy initiatives. The impact of structural constraints is completely discounted and the dichotomy presented in the

‘advocacy’ approach is reversed. This results in an over-emphasis on the free exercise of agency – as transferred to refugees through policies – without any explanation of the conditions which bound agency in this context.

In disembedding agency and empowerment from the material context, and ignoring the impact of over-arching structures on the space available for the exercise of agency, this perspective ignores the experience of being a refugee within a certain framework of institutions, laws and policies. It disregards what Zetter has called the “the structural determinants of life chances which [refugee] identity engenders” (1991:39). It is notable, moreover, that this perspective rarely engages with what refugees might define as empowerment, assuming that self-reliance may be equated unproblematically with empowerment. This paper critically examines the assumption that refugee empowerment can be achieved in a context where structural constraints on refugees’ livelihoods are not recognised or addressed, arguing that self-reliance as proposed in the SRS relies on a widening of spaces for the exercise of refugee agency.

Rejection of both the ‘advocacy’ and ‘institutional’ accounts does not necessarily lead to the prosaic argument of advocating for a middle-ground approach; instead, it reveals that along the continuum, the question of power continues to manifest. The determinist view of refugee empowerment argued by Harrell-Bond vests power in the international refugee regime and aid agencies. Through attempting to advocate for changes in these institutions in order to empower refugees, this perspective inadvertently reasserts a view of refugees as completely passive and powerless when under the refugee aid umbrella. On the other hand, the ‘institutional’ perspective over-emphasises refugees’ empowerment as achieved through policies and programs. This perspective serves a political agenda that seeks to propose a bureaucratic solution to a structural problem, and create a shift in policy framework and outcome without any questioning of basic assumptions and structural constraints.

UNHCR and the institutional approach to empowerment

The concept of ‘empowerment towards self-reliance,’ which continually emerges both in the SRS and in global conceptualisations of the RAD approach, employs the ‘institutional’ approach to refugee empowerment.¹⁷ This approach is a reflection of UNHCR’s constrained position, negotiating the tensions of appealing to host governments’ interests and maintaining donor support. The fact that UNHCR’s approach to empowerment is firmly embedded in the institutional approach is an outgrowth of the interests it has to appeal to, and consensus it seeks to achieve in implementing RAD approaches. It is this very confluence of agendas that creates the tension between self-reliance and empowerment. As the central institution in the refugee regime, UNHCR both reflects and reinforces an institutional view of empowerment, due to pressures it exists within as an organisation, and imperatives it seeks to achieve to fulfil its mandate.

Within UNHCR policy documents and statements, empowerment is seen as linked to input and participation in decision-making. For example, the UNHCR’s definition of

¹⁷ It should be noted that different implementing partner agencies use diverse definitions of empowerment, and hence the approach in particular refugee settlements will vary. However, the SRS employed the mainstream UNHCR outlook, and IP staff in both Ikafe and Imvepi reflected on the barriers the program created in their desired approach (Discussions, IRC and DED staff, Ikafe and Imvepi).

empowerment as “the capacity...to participate, negotiate, change, and hold accountable those institutions which affect their well-being” (UNHCR 2004:3) brings into play a notion of refugees accessing decision-making spaces and having input into processes that affect them. This definition seems to imply that UNHCR recognises that the process of empowerment requires identification and analysis of the complex power relations that impact on refugees’ lives, and addressing these constraints. The UNHCR argues that “UNHCR has been instrumental in opening spaces in which refugees could organise around their rights such as violence within displaced populations, reproductive health or income generation” (UNHCR, 2001:7). However, the limited extent to which such spaces were opened for discussion and contestation with policy makers, aid agencies and government officials in the case of the SRS in Uganda calls into question such claims in this context. Other evaluations of UNHCR practices (Bakewell, 2003; Kaiser, 2002) have also questioned the extent to which this discourse has permeated into practice. There is no reference in this definition as to how empowerment could allow refugees to claim rights from host governments, or how host government constraints or UNHCR practices, such as the settlement system, could in fact restrict refugee empowerment, an issue Crisp brought to light in his overall critique of recent livelihoods approaches as examined above.

Moreover, within UNHCR’s definition of empowerment of refugee women – the primary focus of UNHCR’s empowerment discourse – empowerment is defined as a “process through which women and men in disadvantaged positions increase their access to knowledge, resources, and decision-making power, and raise their awareness of participation in their communities, in order to reach a level of control over their own environment” (UNHCR, 2001:3). This positions UNHCR (and other institutions including host governments) outside of the power relations that need to be shifted to achieve empowerment. Empowerment is to be achieved in relations *between* male and female refugees, not in the larger local political economy of refugee aid. It is therefore assumed that refugees can be empowered, in the example of the SRS, through changing their perspective on material assistance and imbuing them with a sense of self-reliance, as opposed to dependency. Yet, in not addressing these structural relations of power, this perspective on empowerment is fundamentally flawed. The significant limitations of such an approach become clear in the analysis of the outcomes of the SRS.

Empowerment, structure and agency

This section goes on to develop a view of empowerment using Freire and Giddens’ theoretical approaches. This account of empowerment directly addresses the flaws of the ‘advocacy’ and ‘institutional’ accounts. Unlike the ‘advocacy’ approach, it allows for the possibility of agency despite structural constraints, and unlike the ‘institutional’ approach, it recognises that structural constraints do matter in the process of empowerment.

Freire’s conception of empowerment is as a process that entails radical shifts in power relations. For Freire, empowerment is not a ‘mere tactic’ or technique to involve the ‘oppressed’, but a process done by ‘the people’ and not enacted from the outside through help or intervention (1970). Therefore, empowerment cannot be a top-down process, but is achieved through pedagogical practice with the oppressed. Contrary to the ‘advocacy’ approach, Freire recognises that empowerment cannot be facilitated by actions of the ‘oppressors’, and in contrast to the ‘institutional’ view, Freire argues

that power relations matter and in fact are the main obstacles to empowerment. Drawing on his general theories, it is clear that Freire's perspective on refugee empowerment would entail recognition of the contextual power relations constraining refugees, and create a process to shift these relations through bottom-up action. Furthermore, for Freire empowerment is both a process and an outcome; the outcome of empowerment cannot be achieved through a disempowering process.

Freire's approach directs analysis of the process of empowerment towards a conception of oppression that focuses substantially on binary relations between oppressed and oppressors. However, in presenting a "contradistinction of men as oppressors and oppressed" (2000:51), Freire does not adequately address how social interactions between actors can actually create surprising outcomes, in that the 'powerful' are not always able to achieve their desired outcomes. Moreover, this approach assumes that actors are non-agents simply because they cannot achieve their desired outcomes. Freire's approach, in other words, substantially underestimates the opportunities for the oppressed to change power relations within current structures, using opportunities inherent in the structures themselves. Agency may be bounded and situated within structural constraints, but the mere existence of such constraints does not preclude the exercise of agency.

Giddens' approach offers two key contributions to complement Freire's account of empowerment. Firstly, it addresses how structure can create opportunities for agency. Secondly, his approach allows for structural constraints that substantially limit the exercise of agency. For Giddens, social actors are agents who can influence and shape structures. Structure both constrains and enables the exercise of agency. Structures are dialectics of control, such that "power within social systems which enjoy some continuity over time and space presumes regularised relations of autonomy and dependence between actors" (1984:16). Therefore, Giddens refers to 'bounded agency', in that structural properties of the social system constrain the free exercise of agency. However, despite the fact that structural properties "express forms of domination and power" (1984:18), all social systems "offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors" (1984:15). The outcomes of structural constraints are not pre-determined by the very existence of structure, and agents can use structural properties to create opportunities for the exercise of agency.

The exercise of agency is restricted and delimited, or enabled and extended, by the distribution of resources, given that "resources provide agents who have access to them a range of facilities to achieve outcomes" (Cohen, 1989:151). Resources are taken to be made up of authoritative resources – "capabilities that generate command over persons" and allocative resources – "capabilities that generate command over material objects" (Cohen, 1989:28). Resources, as Cohen argues, "refer to the facilities or bases of power to which the agent has access, and which she manipulates to influence the course of interactions with others" (1989:28). They need not only be material goods; for example, this research focuses primarily on access to decision-making and power in relation to other social actors, that is, authoritative resources. Richmond argues, "[n]either material or symbolic resources are distributed equally between individuals and collectivities. This asymmetrical distribution gives rise to 'structures of domination' embedded in political, economic and social institutions that can be oppressive" (1994:6-7). For Giddens, agency does not exist in a vacuum, and

accounting for distribution of agency requires an account of power relations which shape and are shaped by distribution of rules and resources, such that structure can place “limits upon the range of options open to an actor, or plurality of actors, in a given circumstance or type of circumstance” (Giddens, 1984:177), while enabling other actors with more power to influence the system.

Taking on Giddens’ definition of authoritative resources as generating command over other persons, the concept of political space as a central element of empowerment can be explored. Giddens argues that access to authoritative resources can increase the space available to actors for the effective exercise of agency, such that the exercise of agency will eventuate in the actor’s intended outcomes. Hence, this conceptualisation of empowerment proposes that power is increased and exercised when social actors are able to have their practices recognised as legitimate and voices heard in official decision-making spaces. This speaks to Malkki’s argument that recognition of refugee voice entails the ability of refugees to establish “authority over [their] own circumstances and future, and, also, the ability to claim an audience” (1997:242).

Political space is defined by Engberg-Pedersen and Webster as “the possibility of moving from a situation of political exclusion to one of political inclusion” (2002:10). Applying their theoretical framework to the context of refugees in Uganda, political space can be seen as the institutional channels available to refugees to exercise political voice (though the mere existence of these channels need not imply their effectiveness), political discourses in which refugee empowerment is a significant issue, and the social and political practices of refugees in seeking to influence decision-making spheres regarding refugee policy. The focus on political space as constituted by concrete spaces of decision-making is most useful for this paper and its examination of the SRS. During fieldwork, refugees’ sense of marginalisation from official decision-making continually emerged, and many refugees expressed that the design and implementation of the SRS would have been different had they been able to provide input in official fora. The concept of political space provides a framework through which to understand empowerment, as theorised above.

Conclusion:

The notion of self-reliance embedded in the SRS approach is flawed. Drawing on the theoretical discussion of empowerment, a more appropriate formulation of self-reliance would recognise that self-reliance entails that refugees are able to exercise agency in the local context, negotiating with the range of local-level, national-level and international social actors, to improve their situation, meet their own needs or access ways of meeting these needs in the same way as local host community members. This recognises that self-reliance requires rights and freedoms, and is not simply a technical process of withdrawal of aid provision and may, in fact, in some contexts require additional input of material resources. These theoretical failings have concrete implications for refugees, as the continuation of this paper explores. Political space, a concept drawing on Giddens’ notion of authoritative resources as an aspect of the structural properties of social systems, is a useful lens through which to analyse the process of empowerment in the case examined.

IV. Refugee welfare councils and integration

This chapter and the next will examine fieldwork findings on the impact of the SRS on refugees. This one will explore the institutions of refugee representation in refugee settlements, the refugee welfare councils [RWCs], and their role in local planning processes and the implementation of the SRS. This analysis engages with the local power relations, institutions and interactions, including the decentralisation process in Uganda, the recentralisation of refugee policy and the interaction between the Ugandan Local Council [LC] system and RWC system. In particular, discussion of the RWC system reveals the limitations and boundaries on political space for refugees within the pre-existing power relations in the UNHCR-GoU nexus. It is argued here that the local institutions for refugees' representation, combined with centralisation of refugee policy in Kampala, disconnects refugees from the district system. This calls into question the potential for refugees to input into decisions that impact their lives and challenges the 'empowerment' discourse surrounding the SRS.

This first part primarily addresses the contradictions evident in the refugees' representative systems, bringing to light the tension between self-reliance and refugee empowerment when the process of implementation of the SRS is examined. This process actually sidelined refugees' concerns. In appealing to external agendas, the notion of self-reliance in the SRS was imposed on refugees. This section also addresses the element of the SRS that focused on integration of services, examining the limitations of this in light of the framework of local-level institutions and GoU's rejection of local integration for refugees. Both this and the next chapter begin with a short outline of central findings from fieldwork and continue by expanding on and analyzing these points.

The following chapters are based on interviews with refugees from two refugee settlements – Imvepi, in Arua district and Ikafe, in Yumbe district, both in West Nile region. Imvepi refugee settlement has approximately 23,000 refugees – all Sudanese of a range of different ethnic backgrounds, apart from approximately 500 Congolese. The IP agency is the German Development Agency [DED]. The settlement is quite established, having been operational since 1996. The SRS was implemented in Imvepi, leading to the transfer of education, health, forestry and community services functions from DED to the district. The other services – for example, water and sanitation – are still in the hands of DED, and the integration of services has halted. The SRS also entailed reductions in food ration, to between 40 to 60% of a full food ration for 'old caseload' – the 7,290 refugees who had arrived between 1996 and 2002, while 'new caseload' – the 14,760 who had arrived in Imvepi after 2002 – still receive a full ration, as do the 860 refugees classified as 'extremely vulnerable individuals' (all data from DED Imvepi).

Ikafe, in the newly formed district of Yumbe, has around 9,000 refugees, primarily from the Acholi ethnic group, in a very spread out area centring around Ikafe Basecamp, from where the implementing partner, International Rescue Committee [IRC], provides the full range of services. Ikafe was not targeted for the SRS, given it is a new settlement for refugees displaced from Achol-Pii by the LRA and moved from Kiryandongo by GoU (see Case Study Five, chapter V.). It provided a comparative example to contrast to Imvepi and also produced relevant findings

regarding refugee involvement in decision-making, views on GoU and UNHCR and perspectives on integration with local Ugandans. Over seventy interviews were conducted over a five-week period in these settlements, as well as focus groups and interviews with local Ugandans. These findings from these interviews are reinforced with observations and discussions with IP agency staff, district officials and UNHCR staff.

Fieldwork findings – process of implementation of the SRS and integration of services

Systems of representation and involvement

Refugee Welfare Councils are the refugees' representative councils. The stated aims of the RWC system is to provide a structure through which the IPs, UNHCR and GoU can consult with refugees and an avenue for refugees to communicate problems and concerns (Payne, 1998:60). Refugees in both Imvepi and Ikafe saw the RWC system as an effective system for solving intra-communal disputes and communicating with the refugee community. For example, refugees stated that RWC leaders had been effective in educating refugees about hygiene practices and health-related matters.

However, limitations to the RWC system were reported in relation to the system's efficacy in communicating concerns to and solving issues with local Ugandans, UNHCR and district officials. The limited efficacy of the RWCs *vis a vis* their LC counterparts was largely related to levels of integration and interaction between refugees and local Ugandans overall. RWC leaders often stated that when an inter-communal problem emerged, refugees were forced to wait for the LC leaders to agree to talk about the issues. This was particularly the case in Ikafe, where inter-communal relations were tense due to ethnic tensions, lack of common language, religious differences and historical memory of the local Ugandans of their treatment when refugees in Sudan – to the extent that the camp commandant had banned inter-communal football matches due to incidences of violence (Interview, Ikafe Camp Commandant). In this sense, the potential for the RWCs to act as political space and a sphere whereby some refugees¹⁸ can access authoritative resources is dependent on contextual factors. Yet, in Ikafe, and even Imvepi, where relations with local Ugandans were reported to be free of overt conflicts, the 'visitor' status of refugees – as perceived by refugees, local Ugandans, national level GoU officials and UNHCR, given the focus on repatriation – entailed that RWC systems did not enable refugees to negotiate some issues central to livelihoods and self-reliance with local Ugandans, for example, land usage.

In terms of access and representation to the district, RWC leaders considered themselves 'under OPM'. The institutional frameworks at the district level, which excluded RWC involvement, created concrete barriers to involvement and representation of refugee concerns at the district level. Despite the SRS purporting to achieve integration of refugee affairs into the district, no changes had been proposed to solve this issue. Camp commandants – the representatives of OPM in the

¹⁸ RWC leaders are primarily male (except for the single position reserved for females in each committee), English-speaking and educated. Therefore, RWCs can act as a conduit towards reinforcing local-level power relations and promoting the concerns of a specific constituency within the refugee community. Despite this, it should be noted that this issue is not addressed in more depth in this paper primarily because most non-leader refugees interviewed felt that RWC leaders were representing their concerns to the best of their ability, not because such issues are unproblematic overall.

settlements – in both Ikafe and Imvepi argued that they were able to represent refugees at that level, despite some refugees’ accounts of concerns they had raised with the camp commandant being sidelined.

Integration of services

On the issue of integration of services, refugees in Imvepi uniformly pointed to reductions in the quality of services and lack of access to certain services due to the transfer to the district. Diminished provisions cited by refugees due to the SRS included lack of transport to health centres or hospitals for the very sick and lack of availability of drugs at the health centres. It should be noted that some local Ugandans felt that refugee presence and the possibility for them to utilise services put in place because of refugee-hosting had increased the quality of services they accessed, for example, availability of drugs in health centres. Two things can be drawn from this; firstly, these comments were in the context of Ikafe, where Ugandan nationals still utilised services provided by IP agencies. This suggests that integrating local Ugandans into IP-agency services, as occurs in many refugee-hosting areas in Uganda, enables local Ugandans to experience refugee presence as an increase in service provision, and recognise refugee presence as a benefit. Secondly, the SRS at base may have the potential to be an appropriate area-based strategy. Yet, while the objective of an RAD approach may be to equalise access to services for all people in a refugee-hosting area, IP agency staff questioned whether the district yet had capacity to provide services of adequate quality, despite agreeing overall that separate services should be avoided.

The fraught relationship between refugees and district providers also emerged as a concern in the outcome of the handover. A primary school headmaster remarked, “if we need anything connected to humanitarian background, they [the district] will not solve it, because they are the government, they will refer us back to the UN” (Male refugee, Imvepi, 19/9/05); another elderly male refugee remarked, “the district is very far,” stating, “I prefer UNHCR because she is the owner of refugees, at least UNHCR is here with us, we can face them, but the district takes time to meet our needs” (Male refugee, Imvepi, 11/9/05). The transfer of services to the district both impacted on quality of services provided to refugees and also the accessibility of service-providers to refugees in the settlements.

Refugee involvement and institutions of representation

The integration of services element of the SRS is premised on the concept of self-reliance. It is argued by a number of policy actors that refugees should no longer need special and separate services, as, having been settled as refugees in the area for so long, they are of the same, if not better, socio-economic status as local Ugandans. Despite the suppositions of policy makers and officials that there are no longer differences between refugees and local Ugandans in the area, there is a complete separation of refugee policy and representation from local district systems.

Decentralisation in Uganda and recentralisation of Refugee Policy

Decentralisation of power from national to district level has been a stated priority for Ugandan President Museveni’s National Resistance Movement government since they came to power in 1986, and there is significant external donor support, both

financially and ideologically, for the process (cf. Nsibambi, 1998a). An extensive local representation system has developed alongside the decentralisation process. The LC system consists of committees of ten members – including a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, as well as secretary and representatives for areas such as women, agriculture, education and youth – which are elected by communities. The system is tiered such that there are LCIs at the village level, LCIIIs at the parish level, LCIIIs at the sub-county – which, having been allocated funding from the district, can also develop and implement projects – and a LCV committee at the district level [see Appendix 3].¹⁹

However, as Tukahebwa has noted, the promises of decentralisation to increase participation for local citizens in district affairs have not been fulfilled (1998:29). Brock's discussion (2004) of power relations in local district systems brings to light the obstacles that exist for local citizens' involvement, despite the decentralisation process, while De Coninck emphasises that despite participatory discourses surrounding local government, practice on the ground can be elitist and exclusionary (2004). Therefore, highlighting the limitations of the local-level decentralised systems for refugees does not equate to assuming a scenario whereby all local citizens are empowered through the LC system. Despite this, there are specific limitations of the decentralisation process for refugees. Refugee leaders understood and experience their role as less significant and powerful than their LC counterparts, and the exclusion of refugees from the local district planning systems reflects the continuing separation of refugees from local-level processes.

The SRS is seen by policy actors as strengthening the decentralisation process, given it transfers control over some refugee services to refugee-hosting districts (UNHCR, 2003a:4). A manager in UNHCR Geneva stated that the SRS “follows very nicely with the decentralisation process”, given that “the real programming and planning has been taking place with the local districts, and the local authorities, and with the refugee-hosting communities” (Interview, 23/5/05). Yet, paradoxically, the decentralisation process in Uganda has not seen a parallel devolution of control of refugee policy or functions. There has been, in fact, a concomitant process of *recentralisation* of control and power over refugee issues. The responsibility for refugee policy and programs was transferred from the Ministry of Local Government to Office of the Prime Minister [OPM] in 1998, where the Ministry of Disasters and Emergency Preparedness was established, with refugee policy as a central focal point.²⁰ This centralisation of power in OPM entails that OPM has representatives in each district with refugees; the Refugee Desk Officer [RDO] who is situated in the refugee-hosting district capital, and representatives in each refugee settlement, the camp commandants, report to the RDO. The RDO is completely separate from the district administration. In Arua, the OPM building was separate to the district government buildings and the RDO had little, if any, interaction with district officials. This inscribes the presence of Kampala central government at the district level as the control point for refugee management. The RDO is accountable to OPM in Kampala,

¹⁹ The LCIV level of sub-district has been abolished.

²⁰ Refugee policy has been moved from department to department in GoU in the past decades, reflecting the status of GoU concerns about refugees (see Bernstein, 2005:7). GoU's concern regarding refugees has by no means been static. In the early 1980s, refugee policy reflected the security concerns over the presence of Rwandese refugees, and refugee policy was located in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The recentralisation of refugee policy to the centre, under OPM, is therefore by no means simply an administrative move.

rather than involved in district policy or processes. The placement of control of refugee affairs in OPM ensures administrative, political and social separation of refugees and refugee-related issues from district planning and political processes.

Despite being positioned in the RAD approach, and SRS specifically, as ‘agents of development’, one impact of this administrative separation for refugees is actually their exclusion from district development planning. The Arua LCV described the district development planning process:

district development plans are actually generated at village levels [through LCs]...it is bottom-up approach, where the village councils meet, identify areas of priority, identify the development issues, and then they push them to parish, then from parishes, they are synthesised and then identified in order of priority, after which they are pushed onto sub-county where they are combined with all the parishes, and then with the sub-counties we have a conference for the whole district to discuss (Interview, 1/8/05).

District development planning processes do not include refugees; the Arua District Planner reflected, “I am not aware of any consultations going on with refugees...that’s a challenge, there is a limit to integration” (Interview, 1/8/05). The responsibility of GoU *vis a vis* refugees is clearly upholding refugee rights, and not necessarily taking on board refugees’ planning proposals or development needs. Yet this institutional structure at the district level does call into question the underpinning notions of the SRS, the integration of services and empowerment of refugees within this framework. Refugees are supposed to become ‘agents of development,’ but the SRS was implemented in a context where the political space of development planning actually excludes refugees.

Devolution of planning for community development needs is a central element of decentralisation, and, moreover, is a focal point of the new DAR program in Uganda. The DAR program document states, “[a]lthough the local councils are primarily political governing bodies, efforts will be made to ensure that the RWCs play a central role in fostering their community’s socio-economic development, as they do not have the same level of political authority as their local counterparts” (UNHCR/GoU, 2004b:32). This limited recognition assumes that the RWCs can be given more power within the centralised system of control.

There is an immense contradiction in decentralisation as it pertains to the SRS. Whereas the SRS is seen as supporting and extending decentralisation, when seen in light of the recentralisation of refugee policy in Uganda, this claim is questionable. The recentralisation of refugee policy grants a strong element of control to Kampala level officials, divorces refugee policy from mainstream district functions and dissociates the refugee policy hierarchy at the district level – literally, into a separate building, with different levels of accountability and representation. Local, national and international institutions, social interactions and behaviours of social actors create regularised social systems, such that refugees’ exercise of effective agency is constrained. Giddens’ argument, regarding the opportunities that structure can create for the exercise of agency, can be understood in this context through identifying degrees of access to authoritative resources. In contrast to the RDO, for example, who has direct access to Kampala policy makers, significant symbolic and political power

in the district capital and social standing due to educational credentials, refugee leaders are offered limited space for generating command over other social actors, and are bounded within power relations that translate to contingency of representation in many spheres.

Refugee Welfare Councils and district systems

A constitutive element of the system ostensibly structured to facilitate refugee participation and empowerment is the RWC system. RWCs operate at point, block and refugee settlement levels – RWCI, II and III respectively. Each committee is made up of ten members, mirroring the LC system. Payne states, the structure aimed to put “in place a system for refugee decision-making that would give refugees who already felt disempowered...some control over events” (1998:60). Payne argues that the structures were designed in order to be

parallel to the LC systems established by the Government of Uganda. It was hoped that adopting the Ugandan model would facilitate integration between the two communities on a formal level, and eventual integration with national structures (1998:61).

In this way, RWCs seem to act as political space for refugees *vis a vis* local actors, district government, GoU and the UNHCR aid umbrella. The RWC system may have been designed to integrate refugees and local Ugandans and mirror the LC system, providing refugees with political space, yet it fails on that count. The RWC system stands apart from the LC system. The RWC system stops at the RWCI level, within the settlement. As a political space, the RWC system is explicitly bounded within the settlement system, with access to the district dependent on the OPM representative, the camp commandant, taking the refugees’ views forward to spaces from which they are disallowed access. The assistant camp commandant in Imvepi reflected on the role of RWCs in bringing issues to the district, that anything the refugees want to present will come through OPM, “it will be us to present that grievance” (Interview, 19/9/05). The actual RWC structure itself [see Appendix 4] excludes refugee involvement at the district level, where the centralised control of OPM acts as the refugees’ surrogate representative.

RWCs form a separate system, interacting and negotiating with aid agencies and UNHCR. In this sense, it is clear that separation from the district system is not simply a function of GoU creating systems that *include* citizens, but that systems are in fact also created that *exclude* refugees. This stems from a fear emanating from GoU that integration of refugees entails their permanent settlement, an outcome national level GoU officials want to avoid. In the sense that the SRS actually attempts to address the problems that exclusion of refugees from district planning can have on development and local hosting communities, RWCs do not offer a conduit to this. Many staff of the IP agencies and some district officials recognised that the RWC system actually served a very different purpose than that of the LC system. For one IP staff member, the RWCs in the refugee settlement and the LCs in the area are “parallel systems” (Discussions, IRC staff members, Ikafe). The Assistant Chief Administrative Officer in Arua also reflected on the substantial separation between the refugee leadership structures and the district structures, stating, “the refugee councils operate within the camps, but we allow the local councils to operate outside, because the camps are separate geographical places, our LC systems is for the nationals” (Interview, 1/8/05).

The district is one of the central political spaces in determining policies that impact on the socio-economic conditions of people within the district. In some districts in West Nile, refugees constitute up to 30% of the population in the district (UNHCR/OPM, 2004c:vi). Despite this, refugees are specifically excluded from presence or input into these decisions, given they are acted upon as separate and distinct to Ugandans, and therefore marginalised in local political processes. Moreover, the control afforded to RWCs does not extend to control over resources, and the SRS process has not seen any devolution of power from the aid agencies to refugee committees or communities. As Hyndman argues in her critique of refugee representation systems in Kenya, “[r]esponsibility for meaningful decision-making cannot be separated from the resources necessary to carry out the decisions taken” (2000:141). Political power and access to economic resources is detached from the RWC structure: responsibility for decision-making is separated from resources needed to make these decisions effective.

Refugees in Ikafe refugee settlement reflected on their interaction with the district. A young male refugee stated, “for we refugees, we have no way to go to those people” (Male refugee, Ikafe, 7/9/05). For some refugees, the absence of avenues for presence at the district level reveals a wider voicelessness of refugees that is due to their status as non-citizens and foreigners; “they [the government] say you should not go to another level here in Uganda – they have LC 5, but they refuse to let us go there, because LC 5, they are the people who are managing the towns and districts, [they] don’t want refugees to go there and participate, because we don’t have nationality” (Male refugee, Ikafe, 7/9/05). OPM mediates and controls the access refugees have to decision-making spaces. A RWC leader in Imvepi refugee settlement termed the structure “an incomplete hierarchy,” stating that “that is why we are facing difficulties – it should have reached to a certain level so as to allow us to discuss the issues there as well, but RWCs only have power within a gazetted [settlement] area” (Male refugee, Imvepi, 11/9/05). One of the aims of the RWC system may be empowerment, yet the structures do not offer integration into the district political system, but efficient administration and management of refugees. The SRS offered the integration of services, whereas refugees perceive empowerment to involve integration into district political systems.

Case Study One: RWC and LC interaction in Ikafe Refugee Settlement

Odravu Sub-county meeting

The involvement of RWC leaders in meetings and interactions with LC leaders is limited by logistical issues. These logistical obstacles are significant in that they emerge from institutional assumptions. For example, LC officials receive ‘incentives’. A sitting allowance of 5,000 shillings per meeting is given to LC members, ostensibly to pay for their lunch during the course of the meeting. The payment is at least five times the cost of an average meal so the incentive is also a means to facilitate and motivate attendance at meetings. RWC leaders are not given this incentive, as they are expected to work for the ‘good of the community’

(Payne, 1998:26) and offering incentives in many refugee settlements and camps is associated with creating ‘dependency’. One refugee leader stated, “for the hours we spend [working as leaders], we are not supported, we just get thanks of appreciation, but that cannot satisfy the family, the hunger” (Male refugee, Imvepi, 18/9/05).

In a meeting at the Odravu sub-county on the DAR on 31/8/05, refugee leaders’ presence at the meeting was strongly encouraged by the LCIII Chairman. However, given the distance of the refugee settlement from the sub-county capital, refugee presence could only be provided through transport provided by the IP agency, and was not forthcoming. LC officials generally lived closer to the sub-county capital, or were able to attend the meetings given they are provided with incentives.

The lack of incentives for RWC leaders – a policy aimed towards mitigating dependency and encouraging self-reliance, a basic premise of the SRS overall – actually has the outcome of impeding refugee representation and involvement.

Despite the empowerment discourse of the SRS, when viewed in light of the local context of institutions, social interactions and power dynamics, it is evident that there have not been significant shifts in power relations. Structural constraints, which consist of embedded social interactions, exist such that the potential for ‘empowerment towards self-reliance’ through the institutions and frameworks in the context in which the SRS was implemented was substantially limited.

The case of the SRS: “Self-reliance is not possible, but since it comes from them, we can do nothing” (Male refugee, Imvepi, 19/9/05)

The limitations of the RWCs as a system have been brought to light in general terms above. These issues substantially limit the involvement of refugees in policy processes that significantly shape their lives, the SRS policy being an example of this. Refugee leaders reflected on the introduction of the policy in Imvepi, where they were contacted and introduced to the program by GoU and UNHCR officials. Despite their contestation and refusal to accept the program, they were forced to accept the implementation of the SRS. In the words of one refugee leader, “they said you must accept it, there is no option, being a refugee” (Male refugee, Imvepi, 16/9/05). Many refugee leaders reported complaining about the SRS and contesting its context and content on the grounds that the material conditions for reductions in food rations were not present, and that integration of services would diminish the quality of services for refugees. Eventually, these refugee leaders ‘agreed’ to the implementation of the policy as required, given that it would be imposed in any case. Here the issue of external agendas emerges – the interests that could be served through the SRS predominated over refugees’ concerns that the policy would actually undermine their wellbeing. It may be that in some cases, all that was required as better communication with refugees, for example, clarifying the reasons for cuts to secondary education scholarships and dissociating the SRS from other policies and programs, while in other cases, the intended process and refugees’ interests were intrinsically at odds, for

example, in the context of food ration reductions. In either case, a consultation process that took into account refugees' views in a serious manner – that is, conducted without an already-decided outcome in mind – is required, yet in this context was too challenging to the other agendas and interests served by the program. Despite the 'empowerment' rhetoric, the implementation of self-reliance in this case is actually in tension with refugee empowerment, which, as described in section III, entails increased effective exercise of agency, access to decision-making spheres and shifts in power relations. Freire's argument that the process and outcome of empowerment cannot be disconnected is pertinent here; in the case of the SRS, the process of implementation was experienced as disempowering for refugee leaders, further subverting the outcome of empowerment.

The SRS was seen as incontestable by refugees, given the 'beneficiaries' were refugees, with uneven power relations with the social actors implementing the policy. As one male refugee stated, "[w]e don't accept this SRS as refugee leaders, but it was imposed from above, they implemented it at a top level, we find ourselves in a situation we don't choose to be in" (Male refugee, Imvepi, 13/9/05). Another refugee leader stated that the self-reliance policy "was made with the absence of refugee leaders, made in Kampala with UNHCR representatives, then just enforced using that channel", and hence "by surprise we happened to get the information that UNHCR will withdraw the assistance of GoU and UNHCR with the coming up with SRS, without getting opinions, interest or details about the area from the people" (Male refugee, Imvepi, 11/9/05). Despite the significant impact that the implementation of the policy would have on refugees, the RWC was utilised in this case more as a way to implement the policy and convince refugees to take it on board than to actually enable input from refugees.

The process of implementation of the SRS is seen by some refugees as paradigmatic of the relationship between refugees and the GoU, UNHCR and the related aid umbrella. The policy was designed and decided upon by external actors to suit their own institutional needs and bureaucratic processes, and the spaces open for refugee participation and representation – for example, the co-ordination meetings organised by the IP agencies, where RWC and LC leaders, IP agency staff and UNHCR staff meet to discuss issues – did not provide space for the refugees to contest this policy. One refugee leader in Imvepi reported on the impossibility of raising the issue of self-reliance at co-ordination meetings, stating, "any complaint regarding that policy, they will just disqualify...anything related to SRS – even if we have rights – for example, since the policy of cutting the food, no matter how much we suffer on this, they will not put that one forward" (Male refugee, Imvepi, 11/9/05). Other refugees found this process out of the ordinary in terms of usual consultation processes, and argued that co-ordination meetings usually did provide an adequate forum to discuss a range of issues, but the SRS was implemented in a qualitatively different manner. The significant interests tied up in the policy – including UNHCR's interests to have a 'successful' RAD example, GoU's interests in leveraging development funding for a marginalised region, and the overarching concern to promote self-reliance to save money on food rations and provision of services – translated to a process whereby the SRS was implemented, ostensibly in the interests of refugees, yet actually in the face of their opposition.

Integration of services

Impacts of the integration of services

Refugees in Imvepi described an overall decline in services once the sectors of education, health, forestry and community services were transferred to the district. Accessing health services, for example, of the same quality as those offered by the district to local Ugandans was a decline in service provision for refugees. Refugees explained this as unfair due to their categorisation as refugees, a claim to be deserving of greater resources due to refugee identity. In many cases, the label 'refugee' entails access to a set of resources and entitlements (Zetter, 1991), and for refugees in West Nile, this has for over a decade entailed access to higher quality services than local Ugandans.

Hence, although the label 'refugee' excludes refugees from many spaces in the district and strongly influences local-level power relations, refugees do recognise that they have UNHCR and the IP agencies as additional 'resources', and exercise agency through attempting to utilise their relationships with these organisations to improve their situation. In this sense, refugees attempt to create political space through mobilisation of their identity and its links to resource allocation. For example, one refugee stated, "we came from Sudan because of fear of death and thought we would be served under the mandate of UNHCR, but we were not – but a refugee should be given food, health, services, education and shelter" (Male refugee, Imvepi, 18/9/05). While the local-level system overall has not created avenues for refugees to access political space, refugees often attempt to gain access to resources through mobilising their identity as a refugee. However, this strategy has become far more difficult since the cuts under the SRS and donors' focus on repatriation (Interviews, IP staff and refugees in Ikafe). The label 'refugee' has less power currently, in the context of impending repatriation. Moreover, under the SRS, fitting into the 'refugee' category and living under the aid umbrella resulted in a loss in some of the additional services they had enjoyed, without a gain in rights or freedom. This mobilisation of refugee identity in order to access resources creates a paradox whereby refugee leaders assert the need to be treated the 'same' as local Ugandans, to receive incentives for their work and be represented at the district level, but also to access goods and services based on their different status as refugees.

The SRS does seem to address some of the flaws in refugee-hosting policies brought forward by Chambers (1979) and Harrell-Bond (1986). Their analyses focused on the problems of 'refugee-centric' planning, showing that aid delivery that focused on refugees at the exclusion of local hosts' needs was detrimental to development and both refugee and host communities. Their analyses showed that local systems should be strengthened rather than implementing separate delivery systems for refugee aid. There are convincing arguments for abolishing parallel service provision in Harrell-Bond's and Chambers' work, as well as revealed through discussions with IP and UNHCR staff. For example, a UNHCR Geneva staff member reflected on the case of Zimbabwe after the Mozambican refugees repatriated: "you have an empty camp, and you don't leave anything behind...if you were really interested in local development, you could deliver refugee aid in such a way as to leave things behind for the district and for the local host population" (Interview, 24/5/05). Therefore, it is unclear whether the integration of services element of the SRS was necessarily flawed, despite the decline in service provision refugees experienced. Integration of services could

ensure that refugee aid provision could actually strengthen local service provision and ensure that refugee aid delivery does not develop redundant systems. In this sense, this aspect of the SRS could in fact ensure that refugee-presence creates local development, improving the quality of services for local hosts and refugees as well as facilitating increased social integration. Yet, in practice, in West Nile region, the connections made by district officials between refugee-presence and development has actually created tensions between IP agencies and district officials, and integration of services did not lead to social integration. For example, IP agency staff reported that the equation of refugees with development resources in the minds of many district officials had forced the IP agencies to provide services or administration in a way contrary to what they felt was in the best interests of refugees, for example, placement of settlements in specific locations.

The integration of services under the SRS was framed by policy makers as recognition that the salient differences between refugees and local Ugandans that justified the provision of different services had disappeared. For example, the District Education Officer in Arua argued that the basis of the integration of refugee services into the district was that refugees and nationals “have grown within the same environment, they are now the same people, therefore the same services should be given to them, the same hardships” (Interview, 1/8/05). This presupposes that refugees and local Ugandans experience the same constraints or opportunities on livelihoods, such that they should be able to cope with accessing the same services.

Several questions emerge in reference to this assumption. Firstly, do refugees experience constraints over and above those similarly experienced by local Ugandans in referring concerns or complaints to the district officials, given they are now service providers for refugees? The analysis of local-level institutions in this chapter suggests this is the case. Case Study Two, below, displays that refugees experienced a decline in the quality and quantity of provision of services *at the same time* as experiencing a decline in opportunities to address these issues. While integration of services was framed as a form of empowerment of refugees, there has actually been a transfer of power in the form of control over certain services from the aid agencies to the district. This shift in control has disempowered refugees, who feel that their level of interaction with and ability to reach the district is extremely limited, given it is ‘very far,’ both in terms of physical distance and their capacity to exercise effective presence in the political spaces of the district.

Secondly, aside from institutional constraints, are the continual assertions that refugees are ‘better off’ or the ‘same’ as local Ugandans well-founded? In the context of institutional perceptions of refugees in Kiryandongo settlement in Masindi district, Northern Uganda, Kaiser found that “[t]he UNHCR team took the position that the refugee community was “as well off” as the surrounding Ugandan communities, despite having never conducted library or field research to confirm this” (2002:20). In the context of reduction of assistance in Kiryandongo that Kaiser studied, and in Imvepi refugee settlement where the SRS was implemented, there was a failure “to take into account the social and political ramifications of the refugees’ situation, even when this has consequences for their economic survival” (Kaiser, 2000:2). Assertions that refugees had attained the same, if not better, socio-economic status as local Ugandans were not founded in any research, but in the assumption that if refugees stay in an area for long enough, they must be able to attain some degree of ‘self-

reliance'. Kibreab found that UNHCR's phasing out of assistance is "seldom based on scientific studies" (1991:43). In other words, there is an external decision that the relief phase is 'over', a decision not necessarily based on empirical findings. Fieldwork findings revealed that the assumptions in the SRS ignored the restricted livelihood opportunities available to refugees given GoU legal restrictions and the barriers to social integration which host communities with create obstacles to self-reliance. Kaiser has argued that "programming for refugees needs to include a remedial component that redresses any disadvantages experienced by them by virtue of their refugee status" (2005:4). In the context of the SRS, such 'disadvantages' were poorly understood, or ignored.

And finally, if refugees are effectively 'the same', is there a continuing need for protection of refugees, as entrenched in UNHCR's mandate? The elements of refugee protection emphasised by staff in UNHCR Kampala as essential to their mandate in Uganda included protection from Sexual and Gender Based Violence. This protection is assumed to be necessary simply given that refugees are refugees, not based on whether or not rates of violence are higher among refugees than local Ugandans. Yet, if refugees are self-reliant, and the same as local Ugandans such that there need not be substantial differences in the provision of services, the question remains why such protection is necessary. Have refugees achieved a socio-economic status such that they can be treated effectively the same as local Ugandans? Or do they require protection from sexual and gender-based violence, which is programmed for regardless of if the same services are provided for local Ugandans, or if rates of violence are higher amongst refugees? The issue of the relationship between self-reliance and the UNHCR's continuing mandate of protection for refugees has not been adequately resolved, an issue that will be further examined in the conclusion of this paper.

Case Study Two: Integration of Services in Education in Imvepi

Based on interview with Male refugee, Imvepi, 19/9/05

'John' is a primary school headmaster in Imvepi refugee settlement. He reflected on the impacts of the integration of the service of education into the District Education Service. He stated that the SRS had caused a lot of problems in the sector of education. There are twenty one primary schools in Rhino Camp [another refugee settlement in Arua district] and Imvepi, and the district had not budgeted for the headmaster and deputy in every school. He argued that the district had deceived them by saying that it was budgeted but it was not. The payment had not yet come for June, and the district always just told refugee teachers to keep working until the end of the month, and then would say that there is no budget to pay them. John argued that this would not have happened if education was provided under the IP agency. Despite 'integration,' the payment for refugee teachers is still only an 'incentive' wage, much less than the local Ugandan teachers

receive.

The handover to the district has also created problems in resolving complaints about issues affecting provision of education services. He explained that since the service has been handed over to the district, the district has not been solving their problems. He described the district as ‘very far’. When refugees go to the district to complain, the district tells them to go to UNHCR, and vice versa, so “now we are in a dilemma”.

Integration and self-reliance

The question therefore emerges – what is the purpose of the integration of services? It is clear from the local-level practices and institutions described here and discussions with GoU national officials that the SRS was specifically aimed towards integration of services, not integration of refugees within local communities. Literature on local integration suggests that this in fact subverts some of the aims of the SRS and undermines refugee self-reliance. In the case of Uganda, the integration promoted is not the durable solution of local integration, or a form of integration based on gradual granting of rights in the 1951 Convention. It is based in bureaucratic integration of services with concomitant marginalisation and exclusion of refugees from the political sphere.

This exclusion of the possibility of integration – either of an interim nature (Jacobsen, 2001) or the durable solution of local integration, including full naturalisation – creates significant obstacles to self-reliance, subverting the stated goals of the SRS. As Dryden-Petersen and Hovil have found, “[b]y divorcing the two areas – integration of services and social integration – rather than acknowledging that they are mutually dependent, the SRS ensures that it cannot bring about self-reliance” (2003:9). Payne argues from the experiences of Oxfam when they were an IP agency in refugee settlements in Uganda, integration with local host communities is a central element in achieving self-reliance for refugees, as “a refugee settlement never functions in an economic and physical vacuum” (1998:5). Some UNHCR documents recognise the links between self-reliance and the durable solution of local integration, but see self-reliance as an interim measure towards local integration, saying, “[t]he process of local integration is greatly facilitated by refugees becoming self-reliant” (2002a:2). Payne, however, recognises the role of integration as prior to self-reliance. Yet, the structural constraints to integration – which emanated both from institutional structures and social relations with local hosts – were not addressed in the SRS. This is due to GoU’s imperative to exclude the possibility of integration and maintain the priority of repatriation, and overall supported by UNHCR.

Conclusion:

This chapter has explored the tensions and contradictions inherent in the SRS. Local-level constraints to self-reliance were not addressed in the program, and an ‘institutional’ perspective of refugee empowerment was operationalised, which did not address the structural constraints to refugee self-reliance and in fact, for many refugees, reinforced their sense of marginalisation. The tension between the external

agenda of self-reliance and the process of refugee empowerment becomes clear in this context.

The local-level interactions between LCs and RWCs were examined to show that on two levels the claim that spaces for refugees to access authoritative resources necessarily exist should be challenged. Firstly, RWC leaders, even in contexts where inter-communal relations were positive, felt at a disadvantage in terms of power and voice given they are 'visitors' while LCs are the 'landlords'. This fact relates to the final point made above, regarding the lack of local integration and continuing assumption of the impermanence of refugees, who still see themselves as 'visitors'. Secondly, the actual structures of district administration and planning explicitly exclude refugees. The fact that the structures of refugee representation have no impact on district planning brings to light substantial contradictions in the argument that the SRS process is supposed to be an area-based, participatory development approach; the planning mechanisms lag far behind. This is not simply due to bureaucratic inertia but a product of the political positioning of refugees within the district system, as objects to be controlled from Kampala, as marginalised visitors in the district. The RWC system reflects that political space for refugees is restricted to within the settlement structure, and even this has limitations, given the uneven power relations with aid agencies and OPM within the settlement.

V. Self-reliance in practice

This chapter examines refugees' perceptions and experiences of self-reliance as implemented through the SRS, further critiquing the overall notion of empowerment towards self-reliance as proposed in the policy. It also argues that refugees' perceptions on self-reliance and the SRS are substantially shaped by the continuities of social systems and interactions, expectations of different social actors and structural constraints in this context.

To explore these issues, this chapter describes refugees' experiences with UNHCR as an institution and their relationship to material aid in the settlement system in Uganda. The regularised interactions and expectations derived from this relationship are examined in light of refugees' perceptions and experiences of the SRS. Moreover, elements of GoU refugee policy that shape refugees' livelihood opportunities and societal position are examined, emphasising the ambiguous position of refugees in Ugandan society overall. The previous section showed the local-level institutions with which refugees interact and the constraints these present to refugee empowerment. This chapter further emphasises the constraints on refugee self-reliance, and the impacts of the SRS, highlighting the tension between self-reliance as operationalised in the SRS, and the experiences of refugees.

Fieldwork findings – Refugees' perceptions of self-reliance

Refugees identified the concept of self-reliance as meaning that they were expected, as individuals, to stand by themselves, independent of external assistance. Self-reliance means “you can be on your own, stand by yourself, without support” (Female refugee, Imvepi, 15/9/05); “we are supposed to defend ourselves” stated a male refugee in Imvepi (12/9/05). One refugee leader noted that “self-reliance is a good idea, people want to be independent – that is why we took up arms in Sudan” (Male refugee, Imvepi, 16/9/05). However, refugees argued that it was material conditions in the refugee settlements that constrained their struggle for self-reliance. This situation was often compared to Sudan, in terms of access to resources and full freedom. Refugees reflected on their experiences of being self-reliant in Sudan and felt that depending on themselves was a favourable situation compared to reliance on food rations, as one refugee leader argued, “we were initially self-reliant [in Sudan] and if we were taken from this place somewhere we would be self-reliant – we would not wait by the roadside for distribution, for rotten maize” (Male refugee, Imvepi, 13/9/05). Refugees referred to wanting to be self-reliant, but recognised that the constraints under which they lived – economic, social and political – posed significant barriers to this.

Refugees continually referred to education and other basic needs, including non-food items, as basic necessities for self-reliance. As one female refugee stated, self-reliance means you “have enough food to eat and sell, to buy things World Food Programme doesn't give, like salt and soap” (Female refugee, Imvepi, 15/9/05). Education, particularly, emerged as a central concern; one refugee leader stated, “UNHCR is giving us enough not to build our body, but to keep us alive. But what use is life without education? A person is already dead without education” (Male refugee, Imvepi, 18/9/05). Refugees interpreted cuts to secondary scholarships for refugee

children as evidence that agencies and donors did not recognise their priorities, and they did not have political space available to discuss these issues. Repeatedly, refugees argued that self-reliance also required the ability to pay school fees, and prioritised education as central to self-reliance.

Case Study Three: The challenges to Self-Reliance in Imvepi

Based on interview with Male refugee, Imvepi, 16/9/05

‘Mark’ is an older male refugee leader who argued that refugees initially saw the SRS as a positive idea, and that refugees want to be self-reliant. He soon realised, however, that refugees in Imvepi faced significant problems since the SRS had been implemented. The land is not fertile and is exhausted from digging the same small plots for ten years. The climate in Imvepi is not good enough to produce sufficient crops. They were not given hoes or seeds to assist with production. Two major crops do sometimes survive – sim sim (sesame) and sorghum – but if refugees do get a market for the sim sim, it is often buyers from Kampala who pay a low price and the organisations do nothing to ensure refugees get a fair price. Someone who is a local Ugandan has less problems in this area, because if their land is exhausted they can move from place to place but refugees have to stay here.²¹

The main impact of the SRS was on food security. The SRS initially meant that food rations were reduced to 2kg a month, but after a lot of complaints, they raised it to 8.1kg, which is still not enough. Because of this, at many times of the year, he stated, the settlement will be ‘empty’, when refugees leave and go to do lejaleja (low-paid work for local Ugandans), but this is very disruptive for families and does not bring in a good wage.

Mark believes that the idea behind self-reliance is good, it’s only that the conditions cannot allow it. Because of all these obstacles, he will try to repatriate as soon as possible, but he stated he would not be so eager to leave if the conditions in Uganda were a bit better.

Self-Reliance in the SRS

The notion of self-reliance in the Ugandan context, as implemented both by UNHCR and the GoU, focuses primarily, if not solely, on independence from food rations. Despite this focus, it falls far short of achieving food security for refugees. Independence from food rations is held up as a pillar of Ugandan refugee policy, as evidence of a positive hosting strategy. It is lauded in an advertisement for WFP which stated that “[a]lmost 51,000 refugees have been completely phased off food

²¹ These local obstacles to self-reliance were also cited by the Imvepi camp commandant, the DED Assistant Programme Co-ordinator and DED staff.

rations with improvements in food self-sufficiency under the Government and UNHCR Self-Reliance Strategy/Development Assistance for Refugees” (*Daily Monitor*, 30/8/05). This operationalisation of self-reliance proposes that ‘empowerment towards self-reliance’ can be achieved through a reduction of material inputs, without any other substantive changes in refugees’ lives. This is a significant contrast to a view of self-reliance that fits with the approach to refugee empowerment outlined in section III, whereby self-reliance means that refugees are able to exercise agency to achieve desired outcomes, and access a range of goods and services to improve their situation, in line with self-defined priorities.

Reductions in food rations are taken as evidence of self-reliance. However, in Imvepi refugee settlement, self-reliance was not observed during fieldwork to be either the outcome or the cause of the reduction in food rations. IP agency staff in Ikafe reflected that food ration reductions were due to start in a few months, despite the fact that they judged refugees’ wellbeing as ‘barely surviving’ (Discussions with IP staff, Ikafe). A report notes that UNHCR self-reliance strategies are increasingly “strategies for removing refugees from the clientship of UNHCR...Under this view, a refugee who is removed from assistance rolls is by definition ‘self-reliant’” (CASA Consulting, 2003:65). Self-reliance therefore serves external interests of cutting costs or appealing to host governments by proposing that self-reliant refugees can be a ‘benefit’; this was certainly the case for refugees in Uganda.

However, as the report continues, “[s]elf-reliance should not be used as a euphemism for ‘no longer a beneficiary of UNHCR assistance’” (2003:65). Self-reliance is said to be a success given that less food is provided by WFP, but “[f]ood insecurity continues to be a major problem for a large percentage of the refugee population in Uganda” (CASA Consulting, 2003:74). The claim that self-reliance was achieved simply because less food was provided is flawed. Refugees who reflected on the impact of the SRS primarily referred to the impact on food security. One refugee leader argued, “people don’t understand the word self-reliance. For them, it is just reduction of food, that is the area where mostly people are experiencing problems” (Male refugee, Imvepi, 16/9/05). Given that self-reliance did, for the most part, in the SRS policy simply mean food reductions, this is not only an understandable perception, but an accurate one. Independence from food rations is not refugee empowerment, yet is framed as such in the SRS.

Case Study Four: Crop Yield Assessments

Based on interviews with three refugees involved in crop yield assessments in Imvepi (Female refugee, 15/9/05; Male refugee 16/9/05; and Male refugee, 16/9/05)

One of the three forms of gathering information to determine levels of food rations are crop yield assessments [CYAs], which determine how much food it is expected refugees will be able to produce, and therefore determine the net food gap between

refugees' food production and food needs (Interview, Head WFP Sub-Office, Arua).²² Refugees are involved in CYAs, as supervisors of information gathering and enumerators.

However, refugees involved in these CYAs argued that the process is flawed. They saw the reductions in food rations as determined by institutional imperatives, rather than empirical analysis of refugees' needs and understandings of broader constraints on self-reliance, material and otherwise. The baseline ration provided by WFP was not enough because they "assume that people are settled here and can produce food and because of self-reliance can stand on their own" (Female refugee, 15/9/05). One supervisor recognised that the real reason behind the system is that "refugees in the world are too many, and the food given is not just in one place, but worldwide, that is why they want us to be self-reliant" (Male refugee, 16/9/05). The reductions show that GoU wants "refugees to be like nationals" (Male refugee, 16/9/05), and suffer from reductions in rations even though "as refugees we should get 100% ration" (Male refugee, 19/9/05).

Refugees' concerns with the SRS and their interests in maintaining full food rations and high-quality services (characterised, by some officials and policy makers in terms of self-interest and even selfishness) are thought to have been resolved by refugees 'realising' that the policy was beneficial to them. A staff member of the DAR Secretariat argued that refugees' perspective on the program was sometimes "fear, that if they go to the district system they will lose out what UNHCR has been giving them." He continued, the refugees "are looking for handouts, but this program is to empower them to live without handouts – they thought the quality of services would go down, but they are now living with the same quality of services, or even better in some aspects" (Interview, 18/8/05). This perspective was not expressed by a single refugee interviewed in Imvepi. Refugees' rejections of the policy are defined as interests: the question that refugees may object to reduction of food rations because this reduction threatens their ability to survive at an acceptable level is rarely, if ever, entertained. The contrasting perspective of refugees in the case of the SRS policy is explained as a lack of *understanding* of the policy, not a fundamental contestation of the underpinning notions of implementing self-reliance in a context without the material conditions for self-reliance.

Implementing self-reliance, in the form of reduction of material inputs, specifically food, in the context of the constraints analysed in the previous section and the context of relationships with IP agencies, UNHCR and GoU in refugee settlements, is inconsistent with the discourse of 'empowerment for self-reliance'. Utilising a depoliticised notion of empowerment *as* self-reliance actually minimises refugees' agency by diminishing access to allocative resources and implementing this policy in the context of limited authoritative resources and avenues to contest this program.

²² The other two methods are Emergency Food Needs Assessments and nutritional surveys, carried out twice a year by IP partners. These three methods together determine the food ration.

Cuts to food rations are a direct result of overall cuts to WFP's budgets and other priorities within Uganda and refugee crises globally. However, in framing these cuts as a self-reliance strategy, the idea of self-reliance has been inextricably linked to reduction of assistance, rather than capacity-building. Timing of the implementation of the SRS – supposing increased agricultural production – coincided with reduction of inputs of hoes and seeds. Despite a number of actors recognising the tensions this created, self-reliance has still been implemented in a way that was predominantly related to reduction of inputs. The issue of reduction of food rations was the most controversial during fieldwork, and two issues emerged in particular. Firstly, the reduction in food rations has impacted household well-being *in conjunction* with other cuts to inputs in other spheres, including health and education. Secondly, the cuts in food rations are understood by refugees in the context of such inputs having represented the major contributions of UNHCR towards their welfare. The following two sections analyse two central elements in shaping the perceptions and experience of refugees of the SRS.

Refugees' relationship with UNHCR and aid structures

The role that UNHCR has taken in Uganda, centred primarily on the provision of material aid, has created a relationship, embedded in the power relationships previously described, whereby refugees now have certain expectations of UNHCR. In attempting to implement the SRS in this framework, the context of a decade of refugees' associations of UNHCR with material aid provision must be addressed. Bakewell has argued, "the more radical agenda of transforming the relationship between aid agencies and refugees is one worth pursuing" (2003:17). It is notable that the SRS did not acknowledge, nor address, this relationship.

UNHCR and material aid

The UNHCR as an organisation has a mandate of providing protection for refugees, yet its role in provision of assistance for refugees has increased in the past decades and in some contexts, particularly protracted refugee situations, eclipsed its mandate for protection. The rise in UNHCR's role in assistance to refugees occurred with a shift in the character of refugee situations. UNHCR's decision in the 1960s to assume responsibility for refugees displaced by conflict led to "its direct involvement in large-scale assistance programs throughout Africa" (Loescher, 1993:82). Therefore, by 1970, Loescher has argued, "the material assistance function of the UNHCR enjoyed higher priority than did its legal protection function" (1993:83). The assistance function of UNHCR has increased and is currently both a large part of resource allocation and significant element of its role in refugee situations, primarily in the developing world.

This focus on the provision of material aid is especially strong in Uganda, a fact highlighted in an evaluation of UNHCR's community services sector, including an account of its role in Uganda (CASA Consulting, 2003). This report evaluated the community service and assistance elements of the Uganda program positively, while arguing that "the role of the Protection function and senior management in negotiating the legal basis for the SRS appears to be weak" (2003:73-74). The UNHCR's emphasis on the assistance aspect of its function is further highlighted in Kaiser's analysis. She argues that in Uganda, the UNHCR's protection role "appears to have been overridden by the logistical element of the work they do. A concern with the

protection of refugee rights seems to have been sacrificed to a preoccupation with their material circumstances, which are themselves inadequate” (2000:22). The RAD approach in which the SRS is embedded proposes to improve refugee protection, yet in focusing on the facilitation of self-reliance, UNHCR has neglected to define and operationalise its continuing protection role. This appears to derive from UNHCR Kampala’s concern to keep GoU onboard in making changes relating to the legal framework, and while this did eventuate in the passing of the Refugee Bill which enshrines many of the rights in the 1951 Convention, the balance between the protection and assistance functions of UNHCR in Uganda, and more broadly, in protracted refugee situations, requires new thinking and analysis.

The role that UNHCR has fulfilled up to this point in Uganda has been primarily that of material aid delivery. While this is clearly a necessary and complementary role to that of protection, there are contradictions in this role. For example, as Bakewell has argued, there are tensions between protection and assistance: “[t]he management of aid demands targeting and possibly encampment, whereas the best protection for refugees may demand local settlement and different forms of aid delivery” (2001:4). Moreover, the emphasis on material assistance prior to the SRS has meant that refugees expect certain actions from UNHCR, based on their experiences of previous interactions and understandings of the social system. The SRS as a policy attempted to shift these social interactions not through changing the institutional workings, but through changing refugees subjectivities from ‘dependency’ to ‘self-reliance’.

Refugees’ associations with UNHCR

This predominant focus on material assistance in the Ugandan context has shaped refugees’ expectations of and associations with UNHCR. These expectations are particularly high in the West Nile region, given many Sudanese refugees also saw UNHCR refugee programs for Ugandan refugees in South Sudan in the early 1980s, in a very different donor funding climate, and questioned why they did not receive the same provisions that Ugandans had in that context. Many refugees expressed their relationship with UNHCR as that of a mother and child – the mother, UNHCR, needing to protect and provide for the child, the refugee. The relationship is by no means one of social actors with equivalent or even comparable access to power, but one in which refugees have been positioned as, and widely understand themselves as, beneficiaries of interventions that are determined by external actors.

In the context of uneven power relations with UNHCR, and refugees’ predominant understanding of the overwhelming focus on the provision of material aid, the SRS was understood by many refugees as a severing of UNHCR’s relationship with them and a cessation of their status as refugees. The SRS is widely viewed as ‘UNHCR leaving us alone’; the program is understood in the context of impending repatriation as representative of ‘the UN’s time being over’ (Refugee interviews and discussions, Imvepi). Refugees relate UNHCR’s assistance function *with* its protection function, therefore seeing the end of assistance as an end to protection as refugees. One female refugee reflected that “we are staying as nationals now, facing everything for ourselves,” continuing, “I am Ugandan now” (Imvepi, 14/9/05), reflecting that the lack of provision of non-food items and reductions in food rations placed her in the same standing as local Ugandans in the area. In the context in Uganda where refugee status relies upon residence in settlements, and delivery of material aid is tied to this

settlement system, there is an inextricable association between being a refugee and receiving material aid.

On the other hand, UNHCR was seen as separate and external to refugees' lives given, many refugees argued, UNHCR did not respond to their needs. One refugee, when asked about the role of UNHCR, reflected that he did not understand the role of UNHCR, "we just see the handwriting on the vehicle but we don't know what they are doing, any problem we raise, no one comes to solve" (Male refugee, Ikafe, 7/9/05). In this sense, it is clear that refugees often seek to achieve their desired outcomes without the assistance of UNHCR, yet frame their concerns and complaints to this actor, given their perceptions of UNHCR's power and resources. Refugees do identify a continuing role for UNHCR in terms of the impending repatriation. All refugees interviewed referred to wanting to wait until UNHCR had declared Sudan safe, put in place provisions for their return and facilitated the actual process of repatriation. Some expressed concern that the 'pull-back' through the SRS entailed that they were no longer entitled to this protection.

The perception of SRS as a pull-back on the part of UNHCR was reinforced by the UNHCR funding cuts experienced at the same time in Uganda. A UNHCR Geneva staff member reflected on this issue, stating,

we launched this SRS in 1999, and at the same time, simultaneously, our programs were cut. There was no connection, there was no linkage...[but] it was clearly seen from the local communities that UNHCR was trying to sell this self-reliance strategy as a way of actually pulling out...It [the SRS] came to be known as UNHCR wanting to take money (Interview, 23/05/5).

Despite there being 'no linkage', self-reliance is in fact a cost-cutting measure for UNHCR and international donors, framed in a discourse of empowerment. These additional cuts in Uganda at the same time as the SRS most significantly impacted the number and availability of secondary and tertiary scholarships for education for refugees. The coincidence of timing of cuts in scholarship support and implementation of the SRS has convinced many refugees that these cuts were a central part of the actual policy itself. Hence, refugees' perceptions of SRS as a pull-back and withdrawal of support was not only shaped by their relationship with and expectations of UNHCR, but also associated shifts in provision at the same time as the implementation of SRS.

The predominant experience of refugees in terms of material aid is shaped and influenced by the context in which they experience this material aid provision – that is, the current refugee regime. Bakewell argues that refugees' reluctance to view the UNHCR community services sector's success in terms of self-reliance "suggests that refugees may not see community development and empowerment being delivered through the existing refugee regime" (2003:5). The relationship between refugees and UNHCR in this context is not addressed in the SRS process and this fundamentally shaped refugees' perceptions of the SRS, and shapes future expectations and perceptions of the DAR program. The SRS process attempted to achieve change in a central part of refugees' lives – namely, socio-economic status through self-reliance – without addressing the structural constraints that substantially determine this socio-economic status.

The national context: the settlement system and refugees as a development 'benefit'

The settlement system

GoU policy also has a significant impact on refugee self-reliance and the structural constraints experienced by refugees. The GoU policy that refugees must live in rural settlements in order to receive material aid has a significant impact on the livelihood opportunities, participation and potential for self-reliance refugees living under the aid umbrella in Uganda. The issue of encampment of refugees has been the subject of fierce academic debate (Kibreab, 1989; Crisp and Jacobsen, 1998; Harrell-Bond, 1998; Veridame and Harrell-Bond, 2005) and advocacy campaigns against refugee 'warehousing' (USCRI, 2006). Essentially, as the debate between Crisp and Jacobsen (1998) and Black (1998) shows, the question is between whether camps and settlements are often inevitable outcomes due to host government preferences (Crisp and Jacobsen's position) or outcomes of institutional and bureaucratic priorities and biases (Harrell-Bond 1998, Black 1998). In this context, it is significant to note that UNHCR has not raised the issue of rural settlements as an obstacle to self-reliance, recognising the interests GoU has in maintaining these structures and hoping to implement the SRS in this context, despite the tensions this entails.

In the Ugandan context, two issues arise from the settlement system – the constraints the system has on self-reliance in the material sense, and the political marginalisation entailed by the settlement structure. For example, refugees are supposed to farm the same plot of land the entire time they remain in the settlement. Many refugees reported being unable to produce crops given that their land was exhausted after ten years of farming. Refugees are largely unable to move plots of land or buy land, and as such experience significant constraints on their livelihoods. Therefore, the way in which the SRS implemented a practice of self-reliance within the settlement system is questionable (cf. Kaiser et al., 2005). Moreover, the settlements provide a circumscribed space for political involvement of refugees, separating them from local government and district structures, and structured interventions from external actors. One Ugandan Community Development Worker at base-camp of Imvepi stated that despite the integration of community services into the district, "the settlement is a separate institution" (Interview, 20/9/05), and interaction between the district and settlement was extremely limited. Given this, the settlement system is both a complex system of control and marginalisation from formal political participation, an instrument that acts to segregate refugees, and also a constraint on self-reliance activities.

Societal positioning of refugees

Finally, despite the ubiquity of the 'African brothers' discourse surrounding GoU refugee policy discussed in the first section, the reality of refugees' position in Uganda is far more complex. Tight control on how refugee policy is portrayed is evident. In July 2005, the Premier banned filming of refugee settlements by human rights activists, stating these films portray a negative image to donors ("Premier stops filming of refugee camps," *Daily Monitor*, 21/6/05). Furthermore, refugees are explicitly banned from buying land or anything that might make their stay more permanent ("Do not sell land to Rwandese," says PM", *New Vision*, 26/8/05). Recognising this societal positioning of refugees in Uganda, it is also important to note that, as exhorted in the RAD literature, refugees have been recognised as a

benefit – albeit, in a way that utilises their presence to draw in development resources, rather than implementing policies or allowing conditions such that refugees exercise enough freedom to be ‘agents for development’. As Jacobsen has seen,

for the past twenty years, refugee flows have also been accompanied by a significant resource transfer in the form of international humanitarian assistance and human capital. Refugee camps...therefore represent political leverage for savvy actors in the region (2001:2).

Many IP agency staff commented on the geographical positioning of refugee settlement in impoverished and marginal areas, particularly in Northern Uganda, to draw in development actors to provide refugee aid. Far from being recognised as political agents, able to participate to a degree in determining interventions in their lives, refugees are widely understood within Uganda as tools for development. One IP agency staff member in Imvepi commented, “when the government puts refugees into an area, you know there are problems there, they just want development there” (Discussions with IP staff, Imvepi).

Case Study Five: The Recognition of Refugees as a ‘Benefit’

The case of the forcible displacement of refugees from Kiryandongo to Ikafe and Madi Okollo

The understanding of refugees as ‘development benefits’ has had a significant impact on refugees in Uganda, both overall in the placement of refugee settlements in isolated and underdeveloped areas, but also, in tangible cases of violations of refugee rights.

One such example, the forcible move of refugees from Kiryandongo refugee settlement to Ikafe refugee settlement, was recounted numerous times during fieldwork. LRA attacks on the Achol-Pii refugee settlement intensified in 2002, culminating in August 2002 with the killing of 100 refugees. The 24,000 refugees in Achol-Pii fled, and were moved by GoU to Kiryandongo, a refugee settlement in Masindi district, below the West Nile region. GoU then argued that there was not enough land available in Kiryandongo to grant the new refugees land there, and suggested moving a majority of them to Yumbe district, in West Nile. Yumbe had been a site of other rebel movements – the West Nile Bank Front – and previous violence against refugees in the first Ikafe refugee settlement (cf. Payne, 1998). Refugees perceived the move to an insecure area to not be in their interest. IP agencies and UNHCR Kampala office agreed. The UNHCR Representative was expelled from the country by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Refugees, Moses Ali, for contesting the move. Refugee leaders wrote letters to GoU and

UNHCR officials begging not to be moved.

Eventually, in September 2002, the Government brought policemen to Kiryandongo to enforce the move, shooting teargas and rubber bullets to force over 15,000 refugees, some of whom turned to violence to resist the move, into trucks and removed them to Ikafe and another refugee settlement, Madi Okolo, also in Yumbe, that were set up for these refugees.²³ One elderly male refugee in Ikafe calls himself “Never Die,” for having survived attacks in South Sudan, and in Uganda, both by the LRA, and by the GoU, bearing scars from rubber bullets from the forcible move from Kiryandongo (Male refugee, Ikafe, 23/8/05).

While there is widespread agreement amongst IP agencies and refugee advocates that the material conditions in Kiryandongo were not satisfactory for the displaced refugees to stay there, the issue is whether the refugees should have been moved to the North, an area with recent and recurring security problems. Many IP agency staff and refugee advocates in Uganda are convinced the reason for the decision to move the refugees was to bring development resources into a newly-formed district and to ‘bring development’ to the conflict-ridden and underdeveloped North, which had been getting increased attention from donors and concern about lack of investment. One refugee stated, “we are used like tools, to develop the place” (IK1). This reflects Kaiser’s argument that “the rights and well-being of refugees in Uganda are subordinated to the government’s wider political objectives” (2005:351), and reveals that host governments equating refugees with developmental benefits does not necessarily translate to improved refugee protection.

Conclusion:

Refugees’ perceptions and experiences of the SRS were substantially shaped by their relationship with UNHCR and their position within the GoU refugee policy framework. As such, ‘empowerment’ was implemented within a context of significant structural constraints, and hence, the SRS can be said to have not achieved its stated aims – most importantly, of refugee empowerment, on a number of levels. On one level, the material impact was widely reported by refugees in Imvepi to have been detrimental in terms of food security and broader issues such as access to non-food items, ability to pay school fees and access to quality medical services. This is a result of a flawed conceptualisation of self-reliance that must be re-examined, given it is at the centre of the RAD approach. Moreover, the process of implementation and context of the program of the SRS in Uganda has created an association between the RAD approach and ‘pull back’ of UNHCR, such that refugees’ perceptions of self-reliance is certainly *not* as empowering. Finally, the ‘recognition’ of the

²³ UNHCR news reports at the time reveal that UNHCR was taken by surprise by this move (www.unhcr.org, accessed 2/1/06).

developmental benefits of refugees in Uganda has been as instruments of development for marginalised rural areas in Uganda, rather than conceptualisation of refugees as ‘agents for development,’ able to participate in and integrate with local development processes. In light of these findings, the linkages proposed between improved protection and the RAD approach should be analysed, while the ‘empowerment’ discourse of the SRS, and the RAD approach it is embedded in, should be questioned.

Conclusion

This paper has critically engaged with the RAD approach and the operationalisation of this approach through the SRS in Uganda, challenging the ‘empowerment’ discourse that surrounds the approach, the notion of ‘empowerment towards self-reliance’ and the links between the RAD approach and improved refugee protection.

Having examined the context of refugee-hosting in Uganda in section I, section II examined the roots of the RAD approach. This analysis brought to light the threefold themes of self-reliance, bridging the relief-development gap and shifting refugees from being a ‘burden’ to refugee-hosting areas to a ‘benefit’. Underlying these themes is the proposal that ‘refugee empowerment’ is both a means and an end to achieve these objectives. The conceptual flaws in the RAD approach are related to broader interests, of UNHCR, host governments and donors, such that the discourse that connects refugee empowerment and self-reliance should be interrogated.

Chapter III outlined the approach the SRS took to self-reliance, and contrasted this with the notion of refugee empowerment. Two common conceptualisations of ‘refugee empowerment’ in the field of refugee studies and policy – the ‘advocacy’ approach, which assumes that refugees can exercise agency only outside of institutional constraints, and the ‘institutional approach,’ which substantially downplays the impact of structural constraints on the effective exercise of agency, an approach the SRS utilised – were examined. The tension between self-reliance as proposed in the SRS and empowerment as framed through the discussion of Freire and Giddens emerged.

Sections IV and V presented in-depth analysis of the two central elements of the SRS, the integration of services and the reduction of food rations, towards ‘empowerment for self-reliance’. An extended discussion of the RWC and its position in the constellation of power relations in the refugee settlement and local district showed the limitations of this system in the context of the implementation of the SRS. The integration of services is explicitly not the integration of refugees and host communities. The salience of refugees’ identity as ‘visitors’ in the area, often after more than a decade in the settlements, demonstrates that the settlements act as a significant obstacle to social, political and economic integration. In Section V, refugees’ perceptions of self-reliance were explored. These perceptions were substantially shaped by power relationships that impact on refugees’ lives, their relationship with UNHCR and their position within the Ugandan refugee policy framework. In relation to the impacts the SRS had on material conditions of refugees’ lives in Imvepi, the notion of self-reliance as defined by UNHCR and as encapsulated in the RAD approach needs to be re-examined.

Policy implications

Drawing policy implications and recommendations from the research and argument in this paper requires an analysis of ‘what went right,’ ‘what went wrong’ and implications of this for future policy and practice. Notably, the SRS was been framed as a policy ‘success’ in many publications, and the following discussion attempts to

draw some preliminary conclusions, as well as raising further policy questions, relating to the issues raised throughout this paper.

Moreover, the objective of an academic analysis of these policy processes is best summarised by Turton, who argues that the role of academic analysis is to “examin[e] the normally taken-for-granted assumptions upon which policies are based and which powerfully determine action, precisely because they are not made explicit” (1996:96). In the case of RAD approaches, and the SRS policy in Uganda, these assumptions are based in a framework in which empowerment can be achieved without shifts in power relations. This paper hence argues that in the case of SRS, a primarily bureaucratic process has both precluded participation of refugees in development, design and implementation of the policy, and, given this, resulted in outcomes that cannot be termed as empowering. Yet, at the same time, given the strong critiques put forward in the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants’ ‘anti-warehousing’ campaign (USCRI, 2006), which bring to light the violations of rights of refugees in protracted refugee situations, it is clear that a ‘new’ approach to such cases should be developed to increase refugee protection and enhance refugee rights in countries of asylum.

The question is whether the RAD approach is such a ‘new’ direction, or whether the tensions inherent in ‘empowering’ refugees while ensuring cost-cutting for donors and that host governments’ interests are addressed so that they will continue to host refugees, undermine RAD as an approach. On one level, it is clearly important to gain macro-level agreement regarding these approaches, or they simply will not be funded or implemented. Yet, this agreement is achieved at the expense of the actual objectives these approaches purport to aim towards. If ‘refugee empowerment’ actually is the aim, this requires a political approach, including negotiation of rights for refugees with host governments, shifts in the modes of delivery of material aid to refugees and recognition of local contextual constraints.

The following is a list of a range of policy-related issues that emerged in this research, suggestions for future thinking and analysis, and identification of some areas that currently present obstacles to operationalising a RAD approach to protracted refugee situations.

1. RAD and empowerment:

This paper has analysed elements of the SRS in light of the empowerment discourse that surrounds it and related programs. Refugee empowerment is undoubtedly one of the aims of some UNHCR programs, and does in fact underpin the RAD approach. RAD programs should attempt to build refugees’ capacity to be ‘agents of development,’ ensuring participation in local livelihoods systems, markets and decision-making spaces. This process of empowerment would, in an ideal form, best achieve the shift from a ‘care and maintenance’ paradigm to a development process. However, the argument in this paper – that such a process of empowerment relies on shifts in power relations, recognising the constraints on refugee rights, and allowing refugees access to decision-making and input into policy development and implementation – reveals that ‘refugee empowerment’ is in fact a complex, while necessary, objective. As such, recognising the potential for or obstacles towards refugee empowerment in certain settings could be framed through analysing the *rights* and *relationships* refugees have – to local, national and international actors. As such, this would require recognition of the degree of fulfilment of refugee rights, according

to the principles of the 1951 Convention, in the hosting context, and the relationships of refugees to local communities and officials, national officials and international actors. In protracted refugee situations, as examined in this paper, this may require careful analysis and negotiation of the tensions inherent in scaling back material assistance.

RAD programs do in fact require a process of refugee empowerment, but to transform this discourse from a language that, in the case of the SRS, was dissonant with the actual processes and outcomes, to a realistic and effective objective, the obstacles and opportunities to refugees' rights and relationships need to be recognised.

2. Spaces of decision-making: Refugees as political actors:

This paper has also examined the role of refugee decision-making, in relation to bridging to relief-development gap – whereby refugees' identification of the gaps they experience as opposed to identification of purely institutional challenges could improve institutional responses – and in relation to self-reliance – whereby refugees' involvement in development planning and program implementation could improve the perception of self-reliance as purely 'UNHCR pulling out'.

Refugee decision-making and involvement is recognised in policy planning of the SRS to be of central importance. To quote a joint UNHCR-GoU document again, a publication states that policy and programming for refugees in Uganda is

based on the principle whereby refugees, when empowered with resources and the capacity to be actively involved in the prioritisation and implementation of their own development agenda, can play a key role in their own socio-economic development and contribute to the development of their host communities (2004b:5).

To achieve this, it is important to identify whether and where linkages between refugee councils and local community processes do exist – a factor which often relies on a degree of social integration, which is often precluded from occurring due to host government's concerns over refugees' political integration. Many of the barriers to refugees' active participation in decision-making with local communities, district officials and UNHCR and IP agencies stem from institutional structures that are embedded in many protracted refugee situations, as well as specific concerns of host governments. Moreover, power dynamics – where, for example, many refugees interviewed recognised that despite their presence at meetings, they were unable to voice their true opinions – impact refugees' capacity for active involvement. However, this form of active involvement is central in gathering ideas about opportunities and obstacles to self-reliance. Refugees often regarded self-reliance as preferable to relying on material aid, but felt that a more adequate form and process of consultation about the elements of livelihoods and rights that caused constraints on self-reliance would have achieved a more positive outcome.

3. Conceptualisation of self-reliance

The central failings of the SRS – identified both in the Mid Term Review and in the research in this paper – relate to the flawed conceptualisations of self-reliance. This paper has explored some of these issues, emphasising that self-reliance is a process as

well as an outcome, relies on adequate analysis and recognition of constraints on rights and livelihoods and requires critical analysis of the concept of dependency.

Self-reliance of refugees – defined in terms of independence from material assistance – is contingent on contextual factors that require technical assessment – for example, harvest yields, land quality and district service capacity. Developing and implementing methods of livelihoods analysis – which could draw upon the wide body of literature developed regarding livelihoods in conflict and humanitarian situations and development interventions – would be able to capture these contextual factors, while analysing these frameworks in the context of refugees’ rights as they pertain to establishing livelihoods. The SRS was implemented in a context whereby the need for a ‘successful’ program predominated over recognition of findings that questioned the ability of refugees to build the livelihoods necessary to achieve self-reliance in many refugee settlements in Uganda.

Adopting a livelihoods approach is essential to self-reliance programs. Livelihoods are comprised of capabilities, assets (both material and social) and activities required for living, and much analysis within this framework recognises the centrality of intervening structures, and the roles of policies, institutions and processes, that enable or constrain livelihoods. As such, a livelihoods analysis would capture both the contextual factors affecting refugees, in terms of their assets, activities and capabilities, and also allow for recognition of the impacts of interventions, policies and structures in assisting or constraining refugees establishing livelihoods. Moreover, it bridges the two empowerment paradigms explored within this paper, avoiding analysing the potential for establishing livelihoods solely by looking at refugees’ capabilities, and focusing on refugee dependency (the ‘institutional’ perspective), while also avoiding the assumption that interventions and policies fully determine refugees’ livelihoods (the ‘advocacy’ position).

Considerable rethinking of the concept and definition of self-reliance is required if it is to continue to be a central aspect of RAD approaches. Two elements of rethinking include its relation with reduction or increase of material aid inputs, and definitions and conceptions of dependency. Self-reliance programs may in fact require additional resources at the beginning, to establish income-generating activities, small businesses or tools required for agricultural livelihoods. As such, the implementation of the SRS, in a context of decreased donor funding, may inevitably have the results experienced in the SRS. Future programs could be piloted in contexts of donor interest and higher funding capacities, and evaluations of self-reliance programs that include an ongoing element of material support could support the hypothesis in this paper that self-reliance cannot be assumed to equate to reductions in material assistance. This relates to the second issue, refugee dependency. Self-reliance has been positioned as the polar opposite of refugee dependency. This perspective proposes that whereas dependent refugees are dependent due to receiving material aid, self-reliant refugees are able to exist without such assistance. A more complex and attenuated view of both refugee dependency and self-reliance would recognise the role and influence of external interventions in shaping these responses, understanding many actions framed as ‘refugee dependency’ as livelihood strategies in a context of diminishing humanitarian support.

4. The political nature of RAD approaches:

The difficulties in negotiating the interests and agendas of different actors, from agencies to district officials to refugees, in the RAD process have been explored in this paper. The findings point to an inherent tension in negotiating institutional interests and appealing to institutional incentives – most importantly, galvanising donor support – and achieving the desired outcomes of RAD programs. As such, a key question to be asked in any context of development and implementation of RAD programs is – to what extent are the interests of refugees and of the refugee regime more broadly able to be reconciled? Answering this question requires a complex understanding of which refugees’ interests are voiced, how representative they are, and how they converge or diverge with broader institutional priorities, for example, ensuring host governments’ willingness to continue to host large populations of refugees.

In interviews, UNHCR staff members reflected that a key element in developing and implementing RAD programs is identifying contexts whereby host governments are willing to allow greater refugee rights. As such, it is important that RAD programs are accompanied by sustained advocacy to make the most of such opportunities. Furthermore, collaboration with different agencies and broader recognition of domestic influences would create a more accurate perspective on the reasons and impetus that lies behind refugee policy decision-making, which is often largely determined by local, contextual factors. For example, further research and analysis on the role of international pressure regarding IDPs and the conflict in Northern Uganda in influencing Uganda’s refugee policy is necessary.

5. RAD and protection:

Current RAD approaches that fall under the framework of Convention Plus were explicitly developed to increase refugee protection in regions of origin, ensuring against refoulement through promoting refugees as ‘agents of development.’ This paper has examined one context where the recognition of refugees as development resources has created situations that in fact violated tenets of refugee protection. Two further issues arise: firstly, if refugees are self-reliant, what elements of UNHCR’s protection mandate are still relevant? Arguably, the refugees in Uganda that are the most self-reliant are those who are self-settled in towns and villages, many of whom have not registered with UNHCR, or have left refugee settlements, thereby losing their entitlements to material assistance. There are some inherent contradictions in the proposed relationship between self-reliance and protection, and an important direction for policy and research is to elucidate this relationship. Furthermore, in a context where material assistance has come to be equated with protection by many refugees, it is also important to recognise the potential tensions *between* the material assistance function and protection roles, and issues arising from refugees’ understandings and associations of protection and assistance as inextricably linked.

On a final point regarding policy implications, it is important to note that this research brings up the issue of expectations – both of policies, and of refugees. In both senses, it is important to be realistic about possible outcomes, and adjust and change policies accordingly. Yet, in the case of the SRS, significant vested interests in its ‘success’ meant that the policy encapsulated a number of ‘ideal type’ expectations, assuming, for example, additional development funding to take the place of care and

maintenance activities. The limitations of such expectations were raised in the Mid-Term Review, yet a number of central criticisms in this evaluation were ignored. As such, the flaws in the concept of self-reliance continue to emerge. Moreover, self-reliance, as currently utilised in the international refugee regime, contains unrealistic expectations of refugees and their capabilities to access power and resources and achieve self-reliance in a constrained environment. Despite the discourse of empowerment in the RAD approach, refugees are often still subjected to policy, rather than involved in it. Policies such as the SRS are a compromise, appealing to a range of interests, and in doing so, refugees' interests cannot be explained away or marginalised.

Suggestions for future research and analysis

Fieldwork for this research was carried out at the time of the beginnings of the implementation of the DAR program – district consultations were being carried out and district officials and refugee and local Ugandan leaders called to meetings to learn about the program. The DAR was understood by the vast majority of actors as “building on the successes of SRS and addressing its failings” (Interview, Assistant Program Co-ordinator, Imvepi, 20/9/05), yet in the context where the successes of the SRS that are presented are problematic, and the failings barely recognised, it is evident that the DAR requires critical analysis.

At a deeper level, the question remains of how micro-level research and case studies can bring to light some of the flaws embedded in the RAD approach discussed in this paper. The necessity of incorporating the micro-level, case-based analysis with the macro-level research on host government and donor agreement becomes clear when the impacts of self-reliance, as presented in this research, come to light. During fieldwork, I came across refugees who were expected to fetch wood for their elderly disabled neighbour, refugees who only ate one meal a day due to food rations having run out, and refugees who were unable to access medical services for serious medical conditions. These same refugees had been defined as ‘self-reliant’ due to a combination of bureaucratic and institutional requirements. The central argument of this paper has been that the notion of ‘empowerment towards self-reliance’ does not occur in a vacuum; empowerment is a process that entails shifts in power relations. Yet, in the context of the SRS, and in RAD approaches more broadly, refugees' interests and perspectives have been subverted in order to achieve the interests of other actors. In this sense, implementing self-reliance obtains a range of outcomes in the interests of host governments, UNHCR and donors, yet contradicts the objectives of refugee empowerment and protection.

The challenge to future research on this issue is to question underpinning assumptions of the approach while at the same time proposing alternative frameworks and approaches to facilitate empowerment of refugees towards self-reliance, defined by conditions, rights and livelihoods. Kibreab has noted that recognition of interests and agendas has actually impeded critical research, arguing that many researchers recognise that regardless of their findings, “in refugee matters, it is ultimately the political and security related considerations that play the decisive role in decisions and responses of national governments and international donor agencies” (1991:63). Yet, as Kibreab notes, this should not “constrain us from subjecting the existing policies and practices of governments and agencies to rigorous and constructive criticisms, nor

suggesting non-conventional solutions” (1991:63). This paper is a step towards applying such an approach to self-reliance approaches and the RAD approach overall.

The notion of self-reliance embedded in this current approach appeals to host governments, donors and UNHCR, which, as an institution, wishes to improve refugee protection through ensuring asylum in developing host countries, and needs to negotiate significant tensions in order to achieve this in the current global context. Yet in negotiating these tensions, as Goodwin-Gill has argued, “[t]hat portion of UNHCR protection work that was rooted in international law, standards and principles, has been eclipsed by so-called pragmatic approaches to refugee problems, in which everything seems to be negotiable” (1999:235). Refugee wellbeing, livelihoods, access to necessary material goods and involvement in local processes should not be negotiable elements of refugee protection. The conundrum of the RAD approach, in the case of the SRS, is preserving the quantity of asylum at the expense of the quality of hosting conditions. ‘Refugee empowerment’, however, entails something substantially different, to host governments, donors and the international refugee regime overall.

Acronyms

AFP	Agenda for Protection
CP	Convention Plus
CYA	Crop Yield Assessment
DAR	Development Assistance for Refugee-Hosting Areas
DED	<i>Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst</i> [German Development Agency]
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GoU	Government of Uganda
ICARA	International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IP	Implementing Partner
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LC	Local Council
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MTR	Mid-Term Review of the SRS
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister, Uganda
RAD	Refugee Aid and Development
RDO	Refugee Desk Officer
RWC	Refugee Welfare Council
SRS	Self-Reliance Strategy
TDA	Targeting Development Assistance
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme

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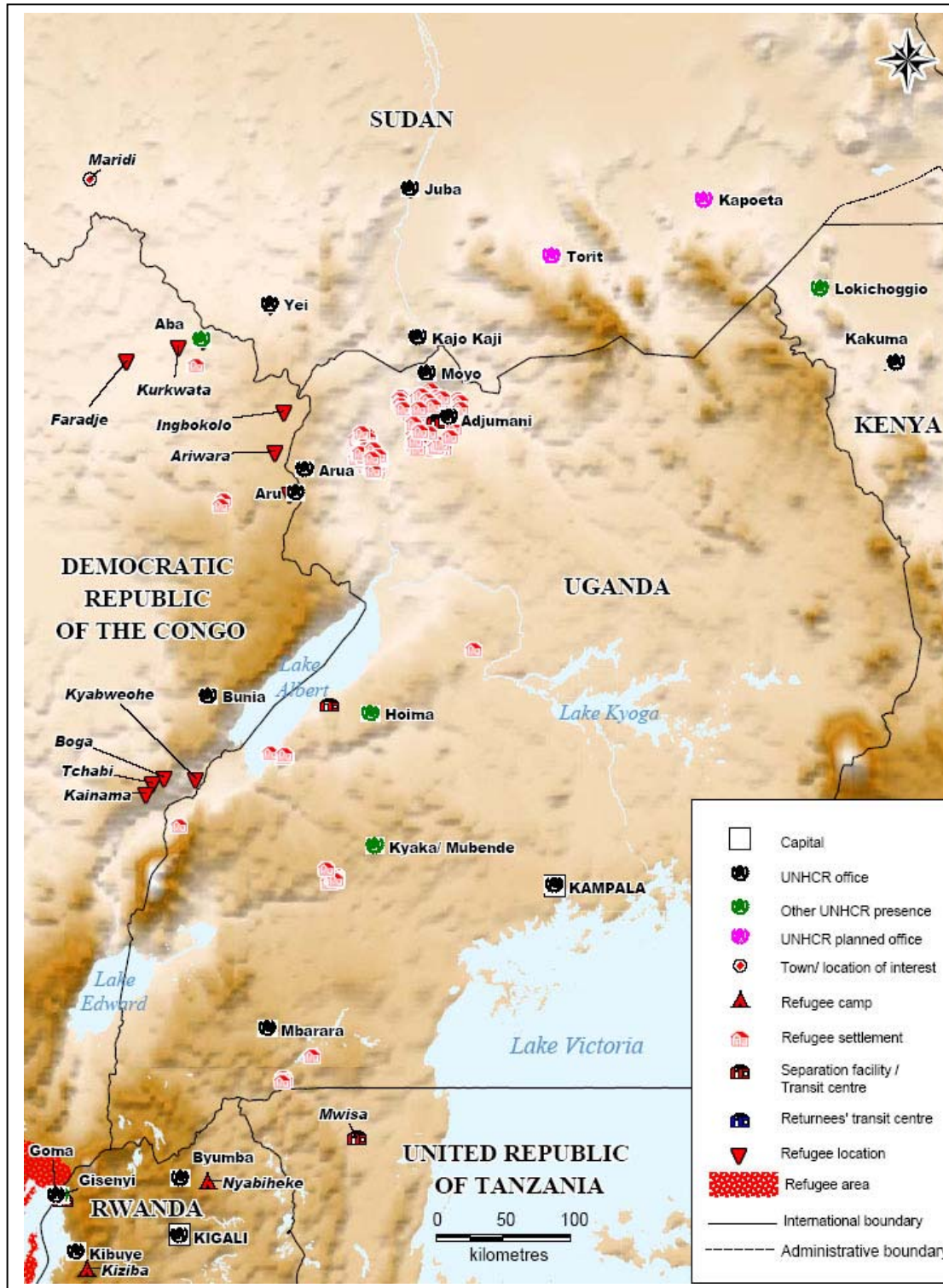
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Appendix 1. Map of Uganda and refugee settlements



Source: UNHCR 2006 Global Appeal, Uganda.

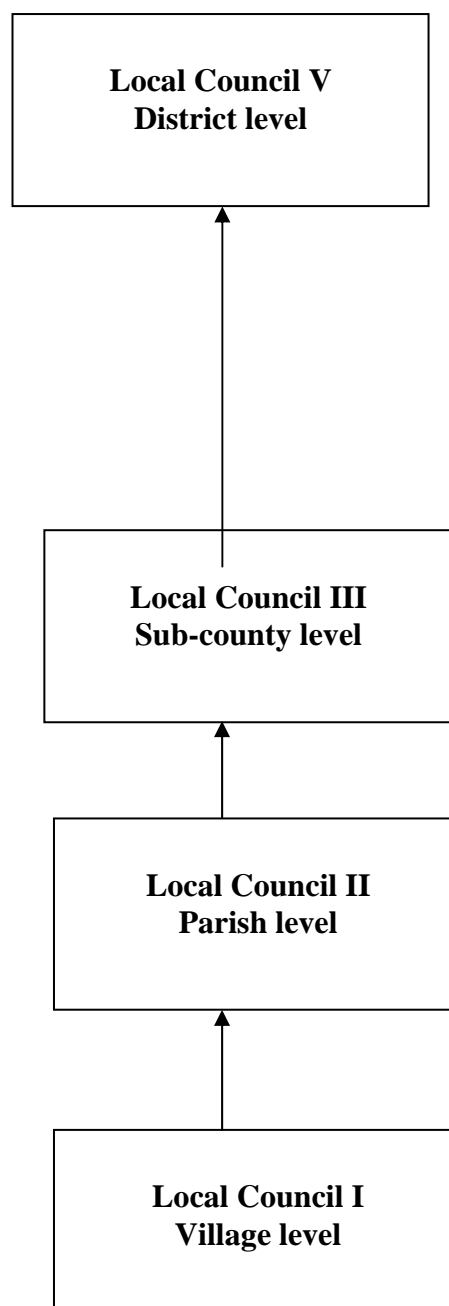
Appendix 2. Refugee population by district

District	Refugee Population	Percentage of Total Refugees	Total District Population	Refugees as percentage of total district population
West Nile: Arua	62,393	28	201,493	31
West Nile: Adjumani	56,373	25	855,055	7
West Nile: Moyo	33,079	15	199,912	17
West Nile: Yumbe	9,445	4	53,325	18
Hoima	17,842	8	349,204	5
Kyenjojo	7,951	4	380,362	2
Masindi	14,984	7	469,865	3
Mbarara	19,252	9	1,089,051	2
Total	221,319	100	3,598,267	6

Source: UNHCR Uganda/Office of the Prime Minister Uganda (2004c). Self Reliance Strategy – Development Assistance for Refugee Hosting Areas in Uganda: Programme Document, 2004-2007, p.vi. Figures from August 2004.

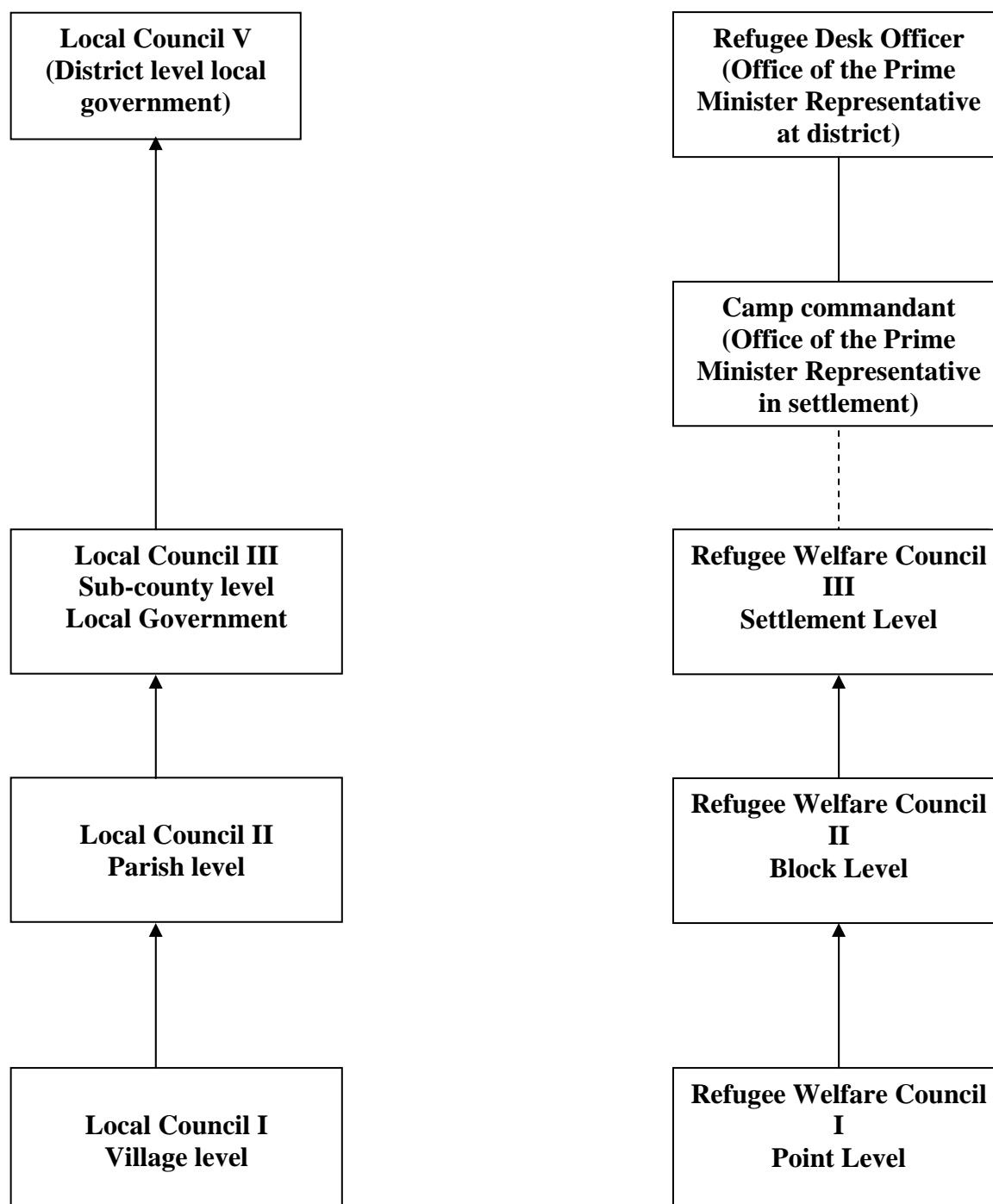
Appendix 3. Functions and responsibilities of local councils

Functions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise all political and executive powers • Provide services • Ensure implementation of and compliance with government policy • Plan for the district • Enact district laws • Monitor performance of government employees • Levy, charge and collect fees and taxes • Formulate, approve and execute district budgets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enact by-laws • Monitor performance of government employees • Levy, charge and collect fees and taxes • Formulate, approve and execute sub-county budgets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in maintaining law, order and security • Initiate, encourage, support and participate in self-help projects • Serve as a communication channel to government • Monitor the administration of projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in maintaining law, order and security • Initiate, encourage, support and participate in self-help projects • Serve as a communication channel to government • Monitor the administration of projects • Make by-laws • Impose service fees



Source: **Brock, Karen, McGee, Rosemary, and Gaventa, John** (eds.), *Unpacking Policy: Knowledge, Actors and Spaces in Poverty Reduction in Uganda and Nigeria*, Fountain Publishers: Kampala, p.302.

Appendix 4. Local council system and refugee welfare council system



Source: Fieldwork, Uganda, 2005.