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**FACING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN
DISPLACEMENT:
THE EXPERIENCES OF THE BATUKU PASTORALISTS
AT THE UGANDA-DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF
CONGO BORDER AREA**

Alfred Katabyama Nuwamanya¹

Abstract: The Batuku cross-border pastoralists have not just been passive spectators in relation to the border dynamics at the Uganda-DRC border; they have typically constituted their own “cross-border societies” that do not emphasise national citizenship (Truett, 2006). They have been able to produce their own context, rooted in their social practices that transcend nation-state boundaries. However, it is this spatially constructed “border cultural context” of the Batuku pastoralists that has been challenged by the militias, and their struggles for territorial control, and political and military hegemony in DRC. This antagonism exposed the cross-border pastoralists’ source of resilience so much so that some lost their sources of income (livestock) and started to live in internally displaced camps in Uganda before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. This paper thus draws on the border theory perspectives, to examine the extent to which COVID-19 pandemic and the programmes and activities to contain its spread affected the borders as contested spaces that shape aspects of social reality, surmising that the Batuku cross-border pastoralists had constructed an identity that is embedded in and informed by their spatial context (the border cultural context). Grounded in the findings of ethnographic fieldwork at the Uganda-DRC border, this paper argues that the Batuku pastoralists have constructed a “border cultural context” through maintaining ties with their kin groups across the border, creating routes that are not known to border officials, and developing networks and institutions based on cattle exchanges to facilitate their movements and access to resources and services as they secured their livelihood. It is this “border cultural context” as a source of their resilience to the spatial conditions of drought and other ecological uncertainties and vulnerabilities that was found to have been greatly challenged by COVID-19 Pandemic and

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national health emergency supply chain systems and programmes to stop and contain its spread.

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The case study of the Batuku pastoralists on the Uganda-DRC border is used to question the assumptions above by explaining how people who used to make journeys in this border region describe these processes, and documenting pastoralists' stories of survival, struggles, and failures amidst drought, conflict and COVID-19 pandemic. This paper discusses how COVID-19 pandemic affected the Batuku pastoralists' livelihood system amidst their displacement at the Uganda-DRC border. Some of the pastoralists lost their livestock to militia groups in the DRC and have lived in the Ugandan government protected camps for service accessibility. The Semliki region's pronounced aridity and single season of rainfall shape the distribution of grazing resources and explains the region's historical Batuku's cross-border transhumance patterns. This paper recommends that regional states talk peace and reduce on the conditions that favour existence of militias; regional states need to create corridors or easy access to pastoral resources by cross-border pastoralist, as well as appreciate of local cultural contexts and how they could be used in policy designs.

The Batuku pastoralists on the Uganda-Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) border have established their livelihoods as cross-border pastoralists through negotiations, struggles, and conditions as their everyday life experiences. They have also formed networks and institutions over time to facilitate their survival along, astride, and at times bounded by the lines that nation states have drawn and now with increased restrictions due COVID-19 pandemic. These have helped them to access most public services, including schools, hospitals, markets, and facilities for animal vaccination, are designed for citizens who move from place to place only infrequently. Thus, this paper is prompted by the need to look at what cross-border pastoralists experienced, as their mobile lifestyle requires negotiating access to government resources, support, and services on either side of the border and how COVID-19 affected kind of lifestyle. This paper contributes to pastoralists-border studies literature by investigating the experiences of the Batuku pastoralists and how their livelihoods have been affected by COVID-19 pandemic lockdown programmes and activities on the Uganda-DRC border. This is because borders as Goodhead (2008), points out delineate different forms of sovereignty, citizenships and regulatory regimes and always transient and fluid they are continually negotiated and contested.

Earning a living on many state borders can require people to disregard state sanctioned lines and move as if there were no borders. This is heightened with mobile, nomadic communities with whom states often have an

ambivalent relationship (Galaty, 2016; Anderson & O’Dowd, 1999; Cooper & Rumford, 2013). Exemplifying this are pastoralists whose existence depends on movement unfettered by borders and boundaries within and outside of their territorial surroundings (Galaty, 2016). As Vinuesa (2003), has observed, understanding borders requires understanding the people who move back and forth from one side to the other, their efforts so as to make sense of a dual identity, and their struggles to survive. A considerable number of anthropological studies have looked at groups of people who live along nation-state borders. Examples include ethnographies of people living on the border between Venezuela and Colombia in Latin America, the US-Mexico border in North America, and communities straddling the French and German border in Europe (Scott, 2012; Meehan & Plonski, 2017; De Leon, 2013; and Alvarez, 1995). In Africa, studies of borderland groups tend to emphasise cross-border conflicts (McCabe, 2002; Husken, 2010; Oba, 2012; and Galaty, 2016), and to highlight the fact that borders were drawn without due regard to the ethnic character and cultural areas of the people who live(d) on either side of the line (Wilson & Donnan, 2012; and Englebert, Tarango, & Carter, 2002). Other studies have detailed how nation-state borders become peripheral zones with few services to offer to their inhabitants (Nugent & Vincent, 2008; Vinuesa, 2003; Kolossov, 2005; Anderson & L. O’Dowd, 1999). These studies have also employed different perspectives, including human ecology, history, and political economy, to understand the different forms of engagements between pastoralists, and with their neighbours. Human ecology approaches have been used to explain the ways in which human populations exploit physical resources to survive, and how they interact with other human groups through cooperation, trade, and intermarriages on the one hand, or competition, subjugation, and warfare on the other. These perspectives, however, tend to overlook pastoral mobility within and outside borders as a way to exploit drylands optimally and sustainably for animal production. Instead, sedentarisation is depicted as the first step of development (Schlee, 2012).

There are numerous studies of the movements of cross-border pastoralists. Previous work includes studies of Arab and Zaghawa pastoralists who move from eastern Chad into the contested land of Dar Fur (Mamdani, 2009); of the Anywaa and Nuer from South Sudan who relocate during drought to the Gambella region of Ethiopia (Hutchinson, 1996; Feyissa & Hoehne, 2008); of Somalis who routinely crisscross the borders of Somalia, Puntland, Somaliland, and Djibouti (Feyissa & Hoehne, 2008); of the Borana, Gabra, Dassanetch, and Garre who reconnoitre the Kenyan-Ethiopian border (Galaty, 2016); of the Pokot, Turkana, and Karimojong who move between Kenya and Uganda (Gray, 2009; Broch-Due, 2000); and the Maasai who straddle the Kenyan-Tanzanian border (Galaty, 1982; Hodgson, 2000). What tend to predominate in these studies of “borderland pastoralists” are the conflicts that erupt between them as they access pastoral resources. As Galaty (2016) has argued, borders create a system of political and economic differences that pull or push pastoralists back and

forth on either side of the borders. On opposite sides of a border, land use and state policies invariably differ, creating abundant or limited space, verdant or arid pasture, stronger or weaker currencies, attractive or constrained market conditions, more or less security, and different degrees of conflict and harmony. These differences create incentives for people to move back and forth over state borders in search of optimal conditions. In the same line of argument, Barth, (2000:17) refers to borders as rich “affordances” and as “fields of opportunities for mediators, traders, and middle persons of all kinds”. Nugent and Vincent (2008) have put forward that links across state borders render trans-border communities and ethnic ties an asset rather than a source of loss.

At the Uganda-DRC border, there are Batuku cross-border pastoralists who have not just been passive spectators in relation to the border dynamics at this border; they have typically constituted their own “cross-border society” that does not emphasise national citizenship (Truett, 2006). They have been able to produce their own context, rooted in their social practices that transcend nation-state boundaries. However, it is this spatially constructed “border cultural context” of the Batuku pastoralists that has been challenged by the militias, and their struggles for territorial control and political and military hegemony in DRC. This antagonism exposed the cross-border pastoralists’ source of resilience so much so that some lost their sources of income (livestock) and started to live in internally displaced camps in Uganda before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. This paper thus draws on the border theory perspectives, to examine the extent to which COVID-19 pandemic and the programmes and activities to contain its spread affected the borders as contested spaces that shape aspects of social reality, surmising that the Batuku cross-border pastoralists had constructed an identity that is embedded in and informed by their spatial context (the border cultural context). Grounded in the findings of my ethnographic fieldwork at the Uganda-DRC border, this paper argues that the Batuku pastoralists having constructed a “borders cultural context” through maintaining ties with their kin groups across the border, creating routes that are not known to border officials, and developing networks and institutions based on cattle exchanges to facilitate their movements and access to resources and services as they secured their livelihood. It is this “border cultural context” as a source of their resilience to the spatial conditions of drought and other ecological uncertainties and vulnerabilities that I find to have been greatly challenged by COVID-19 Pandemic and national efforts and programmes to stop and contain its spread. The paper focuses on their experiences with state policies that created camps for those cross-border pastoralists whose livestock were taken by the Militia groups in the DRC as they crossed during drought seasons. Their experiences as well as their struggles to access state resources, protection, and services amidst political conflicts, ecological variabilities and COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

2. BORDER THEORY PERSPECTIVE

This paper draws on the border theory perspective to analyse how COVID-19 has affected cross-border pastoralists. This theory owes its origin to scholars of the American Southwest (Coplan, 2010). In the 1990s, events taking place in the European Union compelled scholars to contribute significant theoretical insights and concepts to border studies. With focus on Africa, Anthony Asiwaju, (2011, 1983, 19885, 1990), Paul Nugent, (1996), and Donna Flynn, (1997) pioneered this theoretical orientation. These scholars dealt with the friability of African nation states, their lack of popularly rooted social identity or morality, and the porousness and negotiability of their borders. Most policies in African states work to restrict border crossing and aim at enforcement and tax realisation.

A major contribution of perspective has been to establish that borders are not the product of geography. Borders in North America and Europe were established through war, domination, and resistance. During the 1885 Berlin Conference, many processes, events, and territorial claims were not recognized, based on the effective occupation of Africa (Katzenllnbogen, 1996). Contributors to this theory, especially in the African context, have also highlighted the reality that whether borders are arbitrary or intra-ethnically or politically divisive, they are often an accepted and reproduced grounding of social and economic life of borderland communities (Flynn, 1997). Borders hold meanings for people who live stride them and such meanings are contested by other social formations (Migdal, 2004). What Migdal calls “mental maps” incorporate elements of the meanings people attach to special configurations, the loyalties they hold, the emotions, and passions that groups evoke, and their cognitive ideas about how the world is constructed. These act to establish and maintain a “culture context” that connect people and their practices at the border and in so doing they also mark the separation between groupings. Through this special logic cross-border pastoralists at the Uganda-DRC border have produced a territorial dimension that is composed of code words, secret names, signals, established routes of travel, and sanctions for divergent behaviour. Through this territorial dimension cross-border pastoralists are able to bypass, erase, neutralize, and outwit the state border monitoring systems.

The comparative and analytical foundations of border theory perspective are informed by a focus on the characteristics of border management, border life, and borderland communities. Work on border theory is well placed to explain how African borders and borderland communities operate and for this matter how COVID-19 pandemic disorganised the operations of the communities at most African borders. As Truett (2006: 8) explains “border people are not spectators in the border dynamics, they typically constitute their own cross-border society that does not emphasise citizenship”. Border subjects produce their own context, rooted in social

practice that transcends nation-state boundaries (Donnan & Wilson, 1999). However, as Coplan, (2002) has argued, African borders have particular salience that need further study in order to contribute to the field more broadly and to influence its theoretical foundations. In contrast to borders elsewhere in the world, African borders exhibit what Coplan (ibid.) has termed as “mixed inefficiency” and “inconsistent enforcement” but for once in the history of these border the African state became strong at most border points in Africa. Therefore, as Truett (2006:9), puts it that:

“By treating the borderlands as a shifting mosaic of human spaces- some interwoven, others less so; some transnational, others national; some colonial, and others modern... .. we avoid simply replacing one historical container with another. A history bounded by cross-border networks of corporate power would, just like national history, exclude much of the lived experiences of border people”.

So, using border theory perspective we must also track historic border crossers along their own local paths. For only then can we appreciate how ordinary people emerge on their own terms from the shadows of state and corporate control to reshape the borderlands and again how pandemics like COVID-19 reshape the border dynamic (Truett, 2006).

In the context of these cross-border pastoralists and COVID-19 pandemic the border’s perspective where the authority and economy of the two adjacent states have been equally weak, the emphasis always on performance rather than control; on gatekeeping and taxation rather than service suddenly changed. People living in this environment who found reason to identify with others locally, regardless of national identities, in order to create networks and institutions for mutual assistance and to work together to outwit the state. Border theory perspective perceives such communities as constituting a border culture that is defined by social interaction. In this paper I consider the borders that were perceived to be constructed by much more than the institutions of the state to have turned to state controlled, rather than remaining meaning-making and meaning-carrying entities they have always been. For residents, the border used to be a facet of life and a form of meaning shared with people on the other side of the legal demarcation (Donnan & Wilson, ibid.).

COVID-19 pandemic forces border theorists to reflect deeply on how people should be governed and policy priorities in order to understand how the pandemic preparedness, response and recovery policies all affected not just border set ups but also the most communities that earned a living by criss-crossing. As Flood et.al., (2020) say the sweeping changes to people’s lives, social interactions, government functioning, and global relations that COVID-19 pandemic has caused need to be understood from experiences of the border dwellers. The vulnerabilities and interconnectedness made visible by the pandemic and the legal, ethical, policy responses made to it.

These include vulnerabilities for people who have been harmed by measures taken to slow the pandemic's relentless march; vulnerabilities exposed in people's institutions, governance, and legal structures; and vulnerabilities in other countries and the global level where injustices harm all people.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Border Insecurity, Abductions, Confinement And COVID-19 Pandemic Restrictions

Amos is a resident of Nyakasenyi and has his home in the sub-county of Rwebisengo where he left his family explains that every morning, he takes them milk from where he works or even his wife sometimes comes and picks up milk if Amos fails to take it to her. Amos started to narrate what befell him sixteen months ago when he fell a victim of cattle raiding by the militias in DRC in early January of 2019. When the drought intensified in Butukuland and as usual he had to cross and save his cattle from dying. He could not afford to see his cows die and decided to take them to DRC. Like he had normally done, and his father had also done so long time ago. Amos took his herd of 127 cattle across the border to DRC but lost all of them and he was abducted by the militias and was later rescued by paying a ransom of seventy-two million Uganda shillings. This is a usual demand by the militias whenever they abduct a person. On top of the raided cattle, they continue to demand more, or they kill the person. "They wanted to kill me if they had not paid that ransom". The money that saved his life was contributed by his relatives and especially his uncle who he works for now, friends, and the village community. In the view of the people life is more precious than cattle. They assert that cattle are owned by the living not the dead. He will get other cattle with time. He spent many days in the militias' custody as money was being gathered in the village. This continues to torment his wellbeing remembering the situation they went through greatly depresses him.

Such abductions and the eventual loss of herds of cattle have led to a lot of fear among the Batuku pastoralists and they are now contented to watch their cattle die due to drought than seeing them raided by the armed militia in DRC. "Yes, there are fresh pastures in DRC in this dry season but of what good are they if the person has to lose the cattle and their lives at once?" Amos asks in disappointment. His experience points to the bigger situation in the region now that the border that used to be porous has become so "hard" that crossing it is now a matter of risk. The border on which they have dwelled for generations has changed its perspective in a short time. These are the effects of the change that people must adjust to in a very short time. It is great depression as Amos referred to it. He kept on calling it "ekiina omu bwomezi bwangye" loosely translated as a depression in my life. It is hard for the Batuku pastoralists to restrain themselves and watch their cattle die in Rwebisengo. But when such

incidents happen fear develops among people and the government put in the camps for easy provision life necessities. Although people have to depend on other social assistance institutions, the pandemic rendered them useless as COVID-19 demanded that people should not interact because of the lockdown and its associated standard operating procedures. Amos's life and other cross-border pastoralists like him will take time to be back to the state they were in before break out of the COVID-19 pandemic and their cattle were raided. After his cattle were raided by the militia in DRC, Amos was not a "man before men" than when he lived on the hand out from government in internally displaced people's camps. The symbolic interpretation of a man who is looked after by the state through handouts of maize flour and beans needs to be understood in the Batuku's context. Among the Batuku pastoralists power, influence, wisdom and knowledge, and "manhood" are all understood and attributed to the ownership of cattle. It is this reason that they have put in place some institutional mechanisms that obligate them to contribute cattle when a person experiences a tragedy like the one that occurred to Amos. People give that person cows as loans to start with and when those cows reproduce their calves will be returned to the giver. This exchange is called "*empaano*" a rotational exchange of cows within friends, relatives, and in laws. However, with the demands of minimising the spread of COVID-19 pandemic people who livestock were raided militia in DRC had to depend on state provisions especially food.

Using my conversation with Amos where he repeatedly said "I have ever been a man"; which meant that before his cattle were raided, he was regarded by other Batuku as a man with power, influence, wisdom and knowledge in the context of him owning cattle. So, to him now that he was living on care of the state people consider him as powerless, and therefore of less influence on other members of his community. Indeed, to be a man means marrying, which requires to pay bride price in form of cattle, and it is called "*Omukaaga*" literally meaning six. It is said that they only pay six cows and hence the name of the practice as "*Omukaaga*". Drawing from this practice of paying bride price, power, influence and manhood are proven to the community through ownership of cattle. There are no other practices that transit a person from childhood to adulthood among the Batuku. A boy's transition is through marriage. When a person marries, he/she is initiated from childhood to adulthood. Since men must pay bride price for them to marry and therefore, those who have no cattle and are dependent on the handouts from government are not 'men' in the real sense of the word. That kind of man never talks anywhere among people or else they remind him that he is depending on the handouts from government. So, most times people who earn their living by handouts from government and live in camps must keep a low profile or in a way must know their position among the Batuku people.

The importance of cattle among Batuku life and thought is further exemplified in personal praises, names that their peers give them in public

spaces in relation to the number of cows they own. While I sat in the bar at Rwebisengo Trading centre in the evening with many pastoralists who were coming from Nyakasenyi livestock market. One of the men in the bar got emboldened and started to talk about the strength of his dominant bull. He said “Enumi yange n’entale” literally translated as my bull is a Lion. This implies how the bull’s strength is compared to the strength of a Lion and its dominant position in the animal kingdom. The understanding I picked from these words is the dominating position the owner of the bull wanted to portray to his bar colleagues. The strength of the bull in the kraal is related to the position and strength of its owner in the area. When the bull beats all other bulls of other herdsmen in the common grazing areas, the owner is praised and respected as the bull is talked about among all herdsmen. Drawing from Evans-Prichard’s phrase of “social idiom as a bovine idiom” the Batuku can be said to define their social relationships and processes in terms of cattle. Cattle share the clan and lineage of their owners. The bond of cattle between brothers continues long after each has a home and children of his own, for when a daughter of any one of them is married the others receive part of the bride wealth. To use Evans-Prichard (2008) understanding kinship is customarily defined by reference to those payments, which are the most pointed aspects of marriage, when cattle move from kraal to kraal are equivalent to lines of a genealogical chart. A man establishes contact with the ghosts and spirits of his ancestor through his cattle. If one obtains the history of each cow in a kraal, one obtains at the same time not only an account of all the kinship links and affinities of the owners but also of all their mystical connexions.

Another important aspect of power, influence, knowledge and wisdom is the number of cattle the person owns. The number of cattle a person owns determines the kind of position the person holds among the Batuku society. This is expressed in terms of the seat and place he/she sits on in a community meeting, wedding or burial ceremonies, in the church, markets, bars, and any other gatherings of people. People with many heads of cattle are always given special seats and in front rows not behind. The person is given a priority if he/she intends to speak in such ceremonies. To the Batuku the number of cattle a person owns elevates him/her to public worthiness and social substance even when sometimes the individual does not merit the status. It is said that even a woman and here the word “even” is the participants’ emphasis who owns many cattle either from her late father, husband, or self-generated, moves from the position of “womanhood” to a position of a “man” and she can speak among men in public places. She has the capacity to drink alcohol and speak with men in bars, in weddings, burial and church ceremonies. The number of cattle can elevate children to adulthood when they preside over an increasing number of cattle their parents left them with when they died. The reverse is also true for children whose fathers leave many cattle and the numbers dwindle in their hands. In such a situation people pour scorn on those children who ‘eat’ the cows as it is called in Rutuku language; “*okurya ente*” literally

translated as “eating the cows”. That kind of “finishing” up the inheritance by the children is discouraged by the Batuku pastoralists through contempt and scorning the child whose parents’ property especially cattle, and land he sells off. This kind of criticism is directed at boys more than girls because girls are considered not able to manage their father’s inheritance since they are supposed to get married and live among their husbands’ kin groups.

There are symbolic rituals of initiating newly born babies. These rituals differentiate the social roles between girls and boys in their parents’ homes as well as in the community in general. This ritual is part of a practice they call “*okugwetesa*” literally translated to ‘signify’. In this practice it is said that the newly born child of a week or two is taken out of the house and if the child is a boy; he is put on the back of a “sacred cow” “*ente enzizi*”. This is a cow that has never produced a male calf or lost one of its calves to death. The boy is then told to protect his inheritance with his blood if need be. It is also said that if the paternal grandfather of the baby boy is alive, he must give the child a cow there and then. In situations where the baby is a girl; she is lifted by the tallest man in the family on the shoulders and shown a hill far away and told that her inheritance belongs to that hill. This symbolically means that the girl is expected to get married in another family and another clan and inherit resources from her husband’s family. She does not have any claim over her parents’ property. Therefore, a boy who works hard and multiplies the number of cattle in his family is honoured and gets a special position and becomes a point of reference in the community.

Therefore, the transformations at the Uganda-DRC border due to COVID-19 pandemic have created a situation that is understood to be depriving the cross-border Butuku pastoralists of their definition of personhood. If we understand pastoralism in form of property and social identity, then cattle become the media through which people shape their social biographies. This flows from the fact that, for Batuku, cattle are the supreme form of property. In the words of Comaroff and Comaroff, (1991:45) “it is very widely the case that persons objectify themselves in things, goods either produced or circulated; that, by investing their identities in matter, they seek to project their being through space and time, enhancing their value as they are united with qualities outside themselves”. So, when the existence and well-being of such a property is threatened by insecurity, drought and COVID-19, as it is for Batuku, vulnerability and destitution set in as they fail to access state resources like education, livestock markets, both animal and human health services.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The question of access to state resources by cross-border people including mobile pastoralists remain difficult, especially when it comes to public goods and services like water, land, routes used for migration, grazing pasture for livestock, education for their children, livestock markets, and human and animal health services. This relates to the fact that East and Central African governments tend to focus on the welfare of communities that are settled in specific spaces. Yet lifestyles of some pastoralist groups are predicated on movements over large areas and across national borders. For them, state borders are often porous. At the same time, as Good head, (2008) argues, whenever there are violent conflicts and pandemics like we witnessed for COVID-19 borders are taken seriously; simultaneously acting as sources of security and antagonism, inclusion and exclusion. This means that border areas are not isolated peripheries, but places where populations travel, form networks and political alliances, exchange knowledge and conflict in respect to the historic trajectories and specificities of that borderland. This paper draws from border theory epistemologies to show how the cross-border pastoralists (the Batuku) at the Uganda-DRC border had developed a “border cultural context” that is embedded in the networks, institutions, and practices that these cross-border pastoralists have developed over time through cattle-people relations and exchange systems. It is this “border cultural context” that has been disoriented by the state restrictions against the spread of COVID-19 that spatial conditions including drought and other ecological uncertainties as well as their peripherally in terms of accessing state resources and services took a toll on the cross-border pastoralists as they could not cross the border. Through this “border cultural context”, the cross-border pastoralists created migration routes that are not known to state border officials, and thus succeed in outwitting the state border surveillance systems but with the pandemic they could not use them hence loss of their livestock. This “border cultural context” has been a form of resilience to extreme arid conditions of the region. The paper observes that due to the changing dynamics caused by militia activities of abductions, strict border surveillance by the Ugandan and DRC states, the Uganda-DRC porous border has changed to a “hard” one. This has brought about changes that threaten the Batuku’s livelihood as a cross-border pastoralist group and exposed their cattle complex economy and social system to great stress than never before.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional states ought to come to the table and design ways of maintaining peace, this is especially so in the eastern DRC where militia groups have continuously disrupted the socio-economic well-being of surrounding communities including cross-border pastoralists.

Regional states should create corridors where public goods and services like education, livestock markets, and human and animal health services could be accessed by borderland communities including pastoralists irrespective of their citizenship. In this idea of corridors, cross-border pastoralists could be given an opportunity to freely cross boundaries to access pastoral resources in the times of crisis.

Governments in the region should appreciate the cultural contexts of border communities in order to benefit from designing policies that are compatible with the institutions, networks and practices that have been developed over time in their relations and exchange system. This is hoped to bring policies closer to the borderland people.

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REFUGEE STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH THE CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC: CASE STUDIES IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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Abstract: Addis Ababa is home to an estimated 31,000 refugees, of whom about 20,000 are registered and another 11,000 are unregistered. Particularly, unregistered refugees have no access to health care, education, legal services. Moreover, they do not have a permission to work in the formal sectors. Hence, forced to work in the informal labor market. Besides, the number of unregistered refugees, especially from Eritrea, is estimated to be more than three times the total number of urban registered refugees. Hence, they suffer from the economic and social predicaments of the pandemic because of a lack of systematic response mechanisms for unregistered refugees. The difficulty they faced became complicated because even before the corona virus pandemic, many refugees in Addis Ababa lived and worked in precarious conditions and were often unable to make a living. The livelihood of many refugees has been completely lost due to the new approach to controlling the spread of the pandemic, which crashed the informal economic activities into which many unregistered refugees were enrolled. The study focuses on the refugees in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, who come from Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, and the Great Lakes regions. The study also points out the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on urban refugees and their strategies to sustain their livelihoods. A case-based qualitative research design was used to conduct 20 interviews with affected refugees. The result of the study found that there is a lack of adequate services and social protection systems outside the camps. Yet, refugees develop both strong pro-social coping strategies through networking and basic individual strategies of personal or strong faith.

Keywords: Urban Refugees, Livelihood, Challenges, COVID-19

1. INTRODUCTION

Much has been reported about the impact of the corona virus pandemic in the developed world, less about the impact in the developing world. Even

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less is said about a very vulnerable group in the latter states. Who is focusing on the refugees, especially those who find themselves in African states outside the national and international aid systems, those who have left refugee camps to build an independent existence in another country and earn a living for their families? The present study focuses on the group of refugees in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, especially against the background of collecting data that can be incorporated into an aid system for unregistered refugees in particular.

With a long history of hosting refugees, Ethiopia is the sixth largest refugee hosting country in the world after Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, and Uganda (UNHCR, 2019). At the end of 2018, the country hosted 905,831 refugees which increased to 964,798 by 2019 (UNHCR, 2019). The country hosted refugees from some 26 countries by 2019, South Sudanese having the largest refugee presence followed by Somalis and Eritreans (UNHCR, 2019). Addis Ababa is home to an estimated 31,000 refugees, of which about 20,000 are registered and 11,000 are unregistered. The unregistered refugees in particular have no access to health, education or services and often work in informal labor markets. Refugees in particular suffer from the economic and social consequences of the pandemic.

Even before the corona virus pandemic, many refugees in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, lived and worked in precarious conditions and were often unable to make a living. Due to the crisis, the livelihood of many refugees has been completely lost.

COVID-19 is a viral infectious disease posing great challenges to humanity across the globe, testing the ability of host governments and refugee agencies to contain the pandemic and to protect the lives of refugees inside and outside of camps. As health care and support systems are proving to be susceptible to the impacts of COVID-19 and emergency health care responses of countries to their citizens are hindered, it can be anticipated that the supply of medical services to refugees and those engaged in refugee care and protection is even less adequate now. Refugees are also impacted by measures such as travel restrictions and curfews, implemented by governments in order to contain and curtail the spreading of COVID-19.

The epidemiology of COVID-19 in Africa remains speculative Achoki et al. (2020) claim to be the first systematic attempt to provide prevalence, incidence, and mortality estimates for all of Africa. Gilbert et al. (2020, p. 874f) provide an important tool to map continental risk for the spread of COVID-19 in Africa. They assess the preparedness and vulnerability of African countries to the risk of COVID-19 introduction from China. Kitenge (2020, pp. 2 - 9) looks at the situation from an economic perspective and examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on African economies. Visagie & Turok (2021) examined the economic impact in South Africa and the particular differences between urban and rural areas in a quantitative study. They conclude that rural areas were more adversely

affected by the economic collapse, despite the expansion of government cash transfers.

Research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and migrants is not yet very broad. Among the first studies is this by Ekanayake & Amirthalingam (2021). The authors examined the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Sri Lankan migrants in Qatar and found that wage cuts were the most common financial problem across all skill levels (high-skilled, skilled and semi-skilled), with almost half of the respondents reporting salary deductions. The survey also showed that the three groups of migrants studied used different coping mechanisms to mitigate the financial impact of the pandemic. Highly skilled migrants weathered the initial impact better than others because of their savings.

Abbasi-Shavazi (2020) makes initial hypotheses about the impact of the pandemic on the lives of Afghan refugees in Iran that are transferable to the effects in Addis Ababa: Lower and middle class refugees, with temporary, low-skilled and low-paid jobs, often already live in poverty and will have to look for new jobs due to the pandemic, take longer commutes and be even more vulnerable due to the use of public transport. COVID-19 is likely to lead to loss of livelihoods and an increase in poverty among the refugee population. As refugees and migrants rarely have savings, increasing debt and depletion of individual savings will become challenges, leading to anxiety and stress. The disadvantage of children will worsen, especially if boys have to drop out of education to work and support the family. In addition, access to education is interrupted as online education systems often cannot be used. Refugee women and girls are at even greater physical and psychological risk during the pandemic. Recession and unemployment in an immigrant society are often attributed to refugees and migrants, so xenophobia and discrimination are to be expected.

To date, there are no valid surveys on these hypotheses and no qualifying research in the area of African cities. As a contribution to this state of research, the following case studies exemplify the impacts of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of refugees in Ethiopia and their strategies to cope with these impacts. The purpose of these studies is to subsequently derive appropriate support measures for refugees from the findings. Sufficient knowledge about the situation of the vulnerable population is necessary for both national and international development policy (Akkaya et al. 2020).

1.1. The COVID-19 Situations In Ethiopia

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Ethiopia was reported on March 13, 2020, in Addis Ababa (OCHA, 2020, p. 52). As of April 30, 2020, Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) reported 130 confirmed COVID-19 cases, three deaths and 58 recoveries in Ethiopia (Africa CDC Dashboard, 2020, April 30). This number has gradually

increased, forcing the Ethiopian government to declare a state of emergency that was lifted in August 2020. Africa CDC updated the COVID-19 numbers for Ethiopia on March 23, 2021, to 188,902 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 2,674 deaths, 148,571 recoveries and 2,286,394 tests (Africa CDC Dashboard, 2021, March 23).

The population groups most affected and at risk in Ethiopia include people living in and traveling from countries with a high number of infections, health professionals caring for COVID-19 patients, schoolchildren and teachers, hospitality industry workers, nomadic shepherds, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, the homeless and residents of informal settlements. While the chains of infection were not yet disrupted, schools were already restarting face-to-face teaching. Numbers were feared to rise should the people go back to their everyday lives. As the conflicts in the north of Ethiopia were keeping the government busy, with internal displacement and difficulties to enforce authority adding to the problem, the pandemic started fading into the background. However, the government's attempt to control the pandemic continued with the ongoing emergency activities of the Ethiopian Public Health Institute's Emergency Operation Center. The Center's emergency activities included: risk communication and community engagement, screening at points of entry, tracing and laboratory capacity, case management and infection prevention and control, planning and training, logistics and supplies, leadership and coordination. This also included the closure of all schools and a ban on public mass gatherings during the state of emergency. Response gaps and challenges, however, were evident in their operations (OCHA, 2020, p. 52).

People in Ethiopia, like in many other countries, are suffering from a triple shock: the direct impact of the pandemic, the economic consequences of the lockdown, and the negative consequences of the global recession. This is particularly evident in countries of the Global South, where millions of people are slipping into poverty due to the pandemic.

The major gaps and challenges included a lack of infection prevention and control facilities in health centres; large class sizes in since then reopened schools and limited hand washing and sanitation facilities in schools; a social protection sector unprepared to address the shock to the livelihoods of vulnerable, marginal and poor people; insufficient attention to the control and treatment of other diseases; as well as challenges due to incompatibilities of COVID-19 responses with the efforts undertaken by the agricultural sector in fighting locust infestations. Moreover, deep-seated cultural and social norms characterized by sharing, ritualistic gatherings and physical greetings interfered with social distancing, the key intervention method (OCHA, 2020, p. 52).

1.2. Materials And Methods

The research uses a qualitative approach and a case study design. The researchers collected data from different refugee groups from the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Eritrea. Twenty individual interviews with refugees were conducted in Addis Ababa between May and August 2020. From the 20 interviews, we developed 8 case studies that illustrate the living conditions of refugees both in camps and outside camps.

The interviewees are from Eritrea (3), Democratic Republic of Congo (3) and South Sudan (2). The refugees arrived in Ethiopia between the years 2010 and 2015. The age of the interviewees ranges from 20 to 50 years. Of the eight interviewed, three are female and five are male. The two South Sudanese refugees and one Congolese refugee live in the Sherkole refugee camp. Two refugees used to live in the Sherkole refugee camp and only one person lived in the Hitsats refugee camp. In total, three of the interviewees still live in refugee camps. The five other persons are currently living in Addis Ababa. Only one of them is legally and formally an Out of Camp Beneficiary (OCP). The others hope for the same status but are currently living in Addis Ababa without legal urban refugee status. Only one person lives alone, all the others are part of a family. Four of the interviewees are married and have children. The size of the families ranges from three to eight members. In two of the families there is a child suffering from a disease, which makes these people even more vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. The main findings from the 8 case studies are presented below. The criteria for selecting the eight case studies were gender, age, origin, individuals, families, with official and non-official refugee status and employment.

Access to the study population was already provided in part by the Economic Innovation of Refugees research project, and the target group was reached in part through the snowball principle, in which people who had already been interviewed established contacts with further interviewees. The goal of directly interviewing those affected and gaining direct insights into their situation and coping strategy with the coronavirus pandemic can be methodically achieved with qualitative interviews. Data collection was carried out with the help of semi-standardized interviews. On the one hand, the interviewees were directed to specific questions, but at the same time they had the opportunity to answer openly. A semi-structured guided interview was developed for the survey. The questions of the guided interview followed the thematic blocks: Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on livelihoods and daily life, challenges and coping strategies, support programmes from government and international organizations.

To maintain ethical standards and protect participants from exposure to COVID-19, data was collected digitally using social media applications

such as WhatsApp, Zoom and other messengers, as well as by telephone. All interviews were audio-visually recorded. The interviews were conducted in English and transcribed. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The interview data was transcribed and coded. The analysis was based on qualitative content analysis according to Philipp Mayring (2015). In the process, both a deductive and an inductive category formation process was carried out.

2. IMPACT ON LOCAL ECONOMIES, LIVELIHOOD AND SECURITY OF REFUGEES

Unemployment is already a major concern in African countries since the public and the private sectors do not generate adequate jobs to encompass the majority of the population, especially new graduates. This means most people are forced to create alternative employment for themselves by establishing small businesses, engaging in agriculture, or other activities. If such activities are forced to discontinue as a result of COVID-19, losses of jobs are likely to escalate (Kitenge, 2020, p. 4f.). The informal economic sector employs 71% of Africa's workforce, in arrangements that require working outside the home for most of them. In all those cases, the stay-at-home order endangers job and income security. According to UNDP (2020), "income losses are expected to exceed \$220 billion in developing countries. Without any social protection, immediate threats include basic food security (see UNDP, 2020).

IDPs, refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, and migrants face multiple challenges. There are the 'normal' complications with health care access due to administrative, financial, legal, and language barriers. This problem is now intensified by increased restrictions concerning mobility. Because of the language barrier, refugees might also have problems accessing information regarding self-protection, current measures adopted, the progression of the pandemic, etc. (see OCHA, 2020, p. 16). The crisis might also cause disruptions of the humanitarian supply chain (see Refugees International, 2020, p. 3).

Refugees frequently live in crowded conditions and suffer from poor sanitation and "physical and mental stress; and deprivation due to lack of housing, food and clean water" (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2020, p. 3). Migrants suddenly unemployed face fundamentally different challenges compared to a local resident losing their job. The shutdown of production, the closure of trade enterprises, the freezing of construction sites — all this has led to the loss of income for a large part of the migrants employed in these sectors. In the current situation refugees can no longer hope for support from the majority population because the majority is also in need.

In general, for migrant workers the loss of their job is connected to a further loss of their legal status and thereby connected to complications concerning access to health care or other public services (Newland, 2020, p. 1). Travel

restrictions and the closing of borders have put a stop to the chance of returning home (Ivakhnyuk, 2020, p. 50). This means that they are unable to return home while also being unable to make a living abroad (Moroz et al., 2020, p. 4).

The World Bank conducted two High-Frequency Phone Surveys of Refugees (HFPS) in October and November 2020 among a total of more than 3,000 households to assess the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among Ethiopian nationals and refugees. The HFPS results show that households' ability to purchase medicines and basic food items improved slightly among Eritrean refugees and refugees in Addis Ababa between October and November 2020. However, among Somali refugees, access to food deteriorated between the two survey rounds. This is attributed to the acute loss of income among this group. Access to schooling is highest among Somali refugees, followed by and lowest among Eritrean refugee children. Refugees lost their jobs due to the pandemic. While about 28 percent of refugees surveyed had jobs before the pandemic, only 18 percent had jobs in October/November 2020. But support to refugee households during the pandemic increased between September and October 2020 by 41 percentage points for free food, by 26 percentage points for food or cash in exchange for work, and by 35 percentage points for direct cash transfers (Wiesner 2021).

2.1. Coping Strategies Of Refugees In Health Crises And Natural Disasters

Following the multi-axial coping model (Hobfoll & Buchwald, 2004), the three dimensions (a) active vs. passive coping, (b) prosocial vs. antisocial coping and (c) direct vs. indirect coping will be used to analyse the cases in this paper. The extent and intensity of coping activities (a) can only be determined as present or absent in a qualitative study. However, the study of the social dimension (b) can yield a qualification, between "seeking social support" and trying to form coalitions with others ("social joining") and the other extreme of isolated social action. Case analysis can also provide a qualitative extension of knowledge about socio-cultural influences (c), which include an evaluation of coping strategies from the perspective of different cultural groups. Thus, in a direct way, the interaction partners can be asked to behave in a certain way or they can be given to understand in an indirect way which behaviour is desired (Hobfoll & Buchwald, 2004).

There are some studies that deal with the coping strategies of refugees, for example, by Robert Schweitzer et al. (2007) and Khawaja et al. (2008), in which Sudanese refugees were asked in narrative interviews in Australia. Schweitzer and Khawaja identified coping strategies that focus mainly on religious beliefs and cognitive strategies such as reframing the situation, trusting inner resources and focusing on future wishes and hopes. The use of social support networks was also identified as an important coping strategy.

These networks were seen as a source of social and material support (Schweitzer et al. 2007 / Khawaja et al. 2008).

Studies on coping strategies of refugees under the double burden of refuge and a pandemic as a global crisis are not yet available. In addition to the personal burden of fleeing to a safe country, there is now the burden of the loss of safety in this country of refuge. In order to be able to react more quickly in preventing the spread of the coronavirus, it is crucial to learn lessons from historical epidemics and pandemics. The experience from these situations could be analysed to find solutions for the current pandemic. For example, the SARS outbreak of 2002-2004 taught us that a primary focus should be on full personal protection of health workers. The experience of COVID-19 from China and Italy teaches the same lesson (see Bong et al., 2020, p. 2). Also, due to Ebola, most African countries already have isolation infrastructures in place, which can be of life-saving importance in the current situation (see Makoni, 2020, p. 483). The Ethiopian culture of mass cleansing and rubbish burning ("hidar sitaten") and the ancient tradition of segregating patients known as "wusheba" are practices that need to be revived in the country's efforts to enforce treatment in isolation. However, too little attention is paid to the current situation, especially that of refugees and migrants. This study addresses this problem. It is part of the larger project in *Economic Innovation of Refugees* that aims to: (1) examine the impact of COVID-19 on the economic activities and livelihoods of refugees both in and out of camps, and (2) provide an overview, including public statistics, of the measures taken by national and local government to contain the spread of the virus and ways to heal those affected. This publication aims to highlight strategies that refugees in Addis Ababa have used outside of refugee camps to survive in the context of COVID-19 and the impact on their livelihoods.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Loss Of Informal Work As An Income Base

People working in the informal employment sector are particularly exposed to the impacts of COVID-19. The informal sector is almost completely collapsing with the government's lockdown measures. A refugee works as a *hairdresser* in a beauty salon. She earned 1000 Ethiopian birr (ETB) a month plus daily tips from her clients. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, customers gradually decreased. First, the tips fell away. The owner of the shop closed the business because of the measures, but promised to pay the salary for the next months. A refugee with three children used to *teach French in a kindergarten* nearby. As the salary was too low to cover living expenses in Addis Ababa, he started teaching French as a *home teacher*. Four weekly sessions resulted in a monthly income of 6000 ETB. After deducting rent, 1500 ETB remained for food and utensils. This income has also been lost due to the pandemic, as people

are not willing to continue home teaching. Remittances received from his relatives had been saved by this family man to buy a washing machine, which enabled his wife to start a business *doing laundry for clients from the housing complex*. However, they could not sustain this business either because of the COVID-19 pandemic. He and his family decided to stay in Addis Ababa until their resettlement process was finalized. Unfortunately, the resettlement program they applied for were discontinued before they could leave.

Another refugee works in metal processing and runs a *metal workshop* with his friends. Even before the pandemic, there was not a good business year. COVID-19 made business even worse. The price of metal went up and they had to close their workshop. He also *performs songs at Eritrean wedding ceremonies*. This money started to become important for him with COVID-19. He was able to perform at about 15 weddings a year. This is related to the high number of Eritreans in Addis Ababa who prepare a “wedding ceremony to provide proof of marriage for a visa application.” However, because of COVID-19, many weddings were also cancelled. The refugee interviewed was even asked to repay some advance payments, but he had already spent this money.

This refugee worked in a *local supermarket* where she earned 2500 ETB per month. She had to give up her job because of COVID-19 and the stress of transport that comes with it. One reason was the poor health of her brother, who suffers from a kidney problem. Her work in the supermarket would have exposed her to an increased risk of infection. Her boss supported her by paying her half a month's salary. Her father works as an *estate agent* with his Ethiopian friends. They connect buyers and sellers of land and houses and work as agents connecting people who need house maids as well as waitresses and waiter in hotels and cafes. However, with COVID-19, there were not many job seekers and employers left. Her brother worked as a *waiter in a college cafeteria*.

“But the college was closed immediately following the implementation of the state of emergency procedures and he also lost his job due to the closure of the cafeteria.”

He does not have an Ethiopian identity card, which means he was not working legally and cannot claim an official salary now. This interviewee had a special arrangement with a *private primary school*. She taught French and in return her three children could attend the school for free. In addition, she received a salary of 3000 ETB. She supplemented her income by tutoring her students. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the school was forced to close and she had to stay at home with her three children. The money from the tutoring sessions and her remittances were already falling away. She worked informally because she has neither a work permit nor an

Ethiopian identity card. Now she does not know how long her salary will be paid. The money could be cut off at any time and she has no legal protection.

A refugee has been “highly engaged in an out-of-camp mining business for a long period of time”. With his friends he *mines gold* in Menge Woreda. This is a district near the Sherkole refugee camp where he and his family live. Apparently, he was directly affected by the virus because they were taken away by the mining company and forced to stay in the camp. He stated that at that time he was “on the verge of finding gold” and he calculated a loss of at least 10,000 ETB.

This refugee in the camp was a farmer in South Sudan and also engaged in agricultural activities for the host communities in Ethiopia. He used to *cultivate the local farmland* twice a year and received a daily wage and food for this. When he heard about COVID-19, he did not immediately stop his farming activities. But now the refugee camp is under sharp restrictions and he cannot go to work. This creates challenges as the refugees and the local communities were highly interdependent.

This South Sudanese interviewee used to live in the Sherkole refugee camp. After he finished high school, he went to Assosa University. In 2018, he returned to the Sherkole and started a job as a social worker for the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Because of the low salary, he opened a *cinema* in the camp where he earned a good income. With the spread of COVID-19, he was officially ordered by the Agency for Refugee & Returnee Affairs (ARRA) to close the cinema and thus lost this source of income. He is not idle or afraid of these difficult circumstances but talks of many plans and prospects for his future. Maybe he will manage to reopen the cinema soon. He is also “thinking of establishing a mobile dance group composed of refugees from different nationalities.” Another idea is to start his own business as a tailor to meet the great demand for face masks.

3.2. Loss Of Remittances As An Income Base

Many refugees depend on remittances from abroad. Now they face a serious situation because this money is suddenly missing from their everyday lives.

Several interviewees used to receive support from relatives living abroad. But the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the situation for all of them. One refugee summarizes this as follows:

“Now all people are concerned about their survival and staying

safe and have no resources left to support others.”

In several cases, remittances have stopped since the outbreak of the pandemic. One refugee, for example, used to be supported by her family in Canada.

“Now the pandemic has put their restaurant in Calgary in bankruptcy (...) and they weren't able to send her remittances anymore.”

One interviewee confirms this and states that his relatives can no longer send him money. They are not doing well financially because the pandemic forced them to give up their business.

3.3. Precarious Housing Conditions

Many refugees moved, informally or formally, to Addis Ababa and left their camps to stay with friends or relatives who were willing to take them in. They often live in cramped conditions. Staying in small spaces significantly increases the risk of contracting the virus. Staying at home is therefore a challenge for many of the refugees interviewed. Refugees' houses are often small huts and if all family members stay at home, they are overcrowded. One interviewee explains that refugees often stay with friends or relatives. For example, an Eritrean refugee is staying in her uncle's house. She is grateful to be hosted by a family, but she does not feel comfortable in the home environment. Since she has lost her source of income, her dependence on her relatives is even higher.

3.4. Reduced Food Base

One of the biggest challenges from the pandemic impact seems to be the task of getting enough food to feed the whole family every day. Many refugees have lost their sources of income, which directly affects the money available for food. Social discrimination and isolation

In terms of awareness and precautions to prevent infection, refugees and their families follow general health advice, including frequent handwashing and keeping physical distance. One refugee says the housing unit they live in has a public handwashing facility at the main gate. Their children do not leave the house, only the adults leave to go shopping.

A woman with three children describes her situation as follows: The owners of her house seem to be afraid of catching COVID-19 from her because she is a foreigner. Then they started discriminating against her and restricted her stay to her small room. She was only allowed to fetch water

twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. Her children were not allowed to play in the compound to avoid contact. This was not good for her children.

Staying at home seems to be the best option, not only to protect themselves from the virus, but also to avoid discrimination. Some report that attitudes towards English and French speakers on the street have changed dramatically since before the pandemic. Before, it didn't matter what language people spoke. Now people are no longer happy to hear speakers of foreign languages because they are afraid of travellers and generally tend to associate all foreigners with risk groups.

In fact, this is not the first time they have been discriminated against. One refugee king recalls that two years ago, when he came to Addis Ababa for his resettlement interview, people were shocked to hear that he was from Congo because it was associated with Ebola. A Congolese refugee told how she experienced discrimination in her refugee camp and how she moved to Addis Ababa because of it. She faced ethnic discrimination because she is Tutsi. Her husband is Hutu, but he left her alone and went to another country.

3.5. Future Prospects And Further Migration

Most refugees in Addis Ababa see Ethiopia as a temporary solution. Many of the interviewees had plans to continue their journey to Europe or America. But the outbreak of COVID-19 has changed this reality for some refugees. The travel restrictions imposed by COVID-19 have made their lives difficult and hopeless as they strive every day to figure out how to leave Ethiopia. One refugee wanted to leave for Dire Dawa, but public transport was temporarily closed as part of a control measure to contain the spread of the virus. She hoped that public transport would be reopened soon and was also considering options to cross the borders. For another refugee, the possible migration routes have become inaccessible as the two routes through Djibouti and Moyale Kenya are not safe to escape. There is a high number of COVID-19 cases in these countries and they are already sealed off.

One interviewee paid an advance of about 8000 ETB to a broker who promised to organise a visa for her to Canada. The broker is currently untraceable, which puts her in a difficult financial situation. A refugee can no longer earn money because he has to stay in the camp. For him, this means that he can no longer finance his planned trip to Saudi Arabia via Djibouti. Many of the refugees interviewed feel stranded in the current situation. The hopes and dreams of their future life have been rendered uncertain.

4. COPING STRATEGIES

4.1. Looking For Aid

The refugees interviewed and their families outside of camps are worried because their savings are dwindling and they have no means of earning money as COVID-19 spreads. This is why they appreciate the *Ethiopian State of Emergency Declaration*, which explicitly asks homeowners to give a substantial discount to their tenants. This gives them, and all refugees in a similar situation, much needed relief and prevents them from losing their homes. They are now spending what little money they have left on food and necessities.

The government is building safety nets and support programmes for poor people. However, refugees are not covered or included in these programmes. As schools are closed, families incur additional expenses for food. There are school meal programmes, but one refugee criticised them for not being impartial. She could not benefit from this support because she does not have legal residence. Some are considering returning to the camp because the challenges of COVID-19 are becoming worse. One refugee explains,

“In the refugee camp at least there is a food ration good enough for all of my family members.”

If things continue like this, says one refugee family, their plan will be as follows:

“If things go on like this or if the government imposes a complete lockdown, I am planning to return back to the Sherkole refugee camp. Right now, I am only waiting for my relatives or my friends in Addis Ababa to come up with some money to help us to get to Sherkole. At least there is enough food in the refugee camp for my family. My relatives in the camp are receiving my share. but we are starving here. Thus if things don't get better, I will go back to the camp.”

Most of the refugees living out of the camp do not have the status of urban refugees. As living in Addis Ababa is their personal choice, they are not entitled to the support they would receive in the camp. Neither the Agency for Refugee & Returnee Affairs nor UNHCR are responsible for their livelihoods. One refugee reports that pending applications for urban refugee status are now taking more time because refugee agencies are busy with COVID-19 relief work. Some of these refugees feel that there is no one responsible for them and do not know where to turn when they can no longer cope with their problems.

The Jesuits Refugee Service (JRS) supports the refugees with special packages. They distribute goods like rice and oil. They focus their support mainly on refugees who are particularly vulnerable: families, people with HIV/AIDS, disabilities, pregnant women.

4.1.1. Shared Living Space

The refugees' cramped, overcrowded living situations increase the risk of contracting the virus. In addition, since the COVID-19 outbreak, the atmosphere in the refugee homes seems more stifling, sluggish and depressing than usual. A family with three children shares their one-room flat with a friend who has left the camp. The guest is also a Congolese refugee from the Sherkole camp who came before travel restrictions were imposed. He shared his experience as follows:

...me and my family are living in a single room. Now we have guest from Sherkole camp. The guest came before the pandemic. Yet, he has nowhere to go and he stayed with us. Me my three children, my wife and my friend from sherkole are staying at this small house for the whole day because we have nowhere to go and nothing to do.

The above quote clearly shows how many the refugees' house is crowded and the obligation they have to share small spaces with their family, relatives and friends. This is also confirmed by other refugees from different nationalities.

4.1.2. Change In Dietary Behavior

The refugees living in the city describe how they struggle every other day to organize enough food for their families. They have reduced their food portions and try to cope with the situation with the resources they have. One refugee family reports that their favorite meal used to be rice with potatoes. Now they save the rice for the uncertain future. Therefore, they are forced to eat maize flour porridge without butter every day. The father of the family adds the following:

"We stop drinking a tea with breakfast. My children always ask me about the reason. but we are not able to find sugar. Hence, there is no tea for breakfast."

4.1.3. Learning The Local Language

As the people in the shops cannot communicate with the refugees in English, they are forced to use their limited Amharic to shop. In fact

refugees from Eritrea are lucky in terms of communication. Most of the refugees from Eritrea can speak Amharic. This is because most of them are either born in Ethiopia and went to Eritrea or the adults and old people learnt in Amharic when Eritrea was part of Ethiopia. But, refugees from other countries also try to learn Amharic language, which is a lingua Franca in Addis Ababa to easily integrate and communicate with the host community.

4.1.4. Stop Planning And Come To Terms With The Situation

For some interview partners the only solution is to stop planning at all. Many refugees no longer talk to their friends about further migration. They try to come to terms with the situation, although for many, Ethiopia is seen as a transit country. Nevertheless, they try to come to terms with the circumstances and hope that the situation will change in the near future and that they will then be able to continue their journey.

4.1.5. Religion As Hope And Support

The interviews showed that religion plays an important role for the refugees in the current situation, giving them support and confidence that the future and their situation will improve. The continuation of religious services seems to be unchangeable for some.

Some of them even perceive their faith as protection from COVID-19. One refugee stated that Ethiopia is not affected by COVID-19 compared to other countries because the state of emergency is strictly enforced in the country, including televised national mass prayer programs led by various religious leaders. Another refugee believes that the virus must not attack African people because they strictly adhere to their religious belief systems.

5. DISCUSSION

The individual case studies clearly show that refugees working in the informal sector no longer have a guaranteed income. Some have tried to establish themselves in economic niches and secure a living for themselves and their families. Suddenly, the income falls away. Some of the interviewees were able to survive on their wages and with additional remittances from their relatives living in Europe, North America, the Arab Emirates, and in some cases even save a little. The cases highlight the challenges refugee families face to sustain their livelihoods and manifest struggle against social inequality.

Another problem mentioned by some refugees is discrimination. Since the first COVID-19 case in Ethiopia was a Japanese national, many Ethiopians see foreigners and strangers as a threat. Some of the refugees experienced

discrimination because of their origin and language. As a result, they withdraw from public spaces into their private sphere. Some of them are socially isolated as a result. One Sudanese refugee asserts the case as follows

“During the first two weeks of the pandemic we were ashamed of speaking in English. Because most of the people perceived that every foreigner is infected by corona virus.”

The pandemic also has an impact on the refugees' future plans. Due to the travel restrictions and border closures, they are forced to stay in Addis Ababa and cannot realize their goals. Many hopes can no longer be realized. Some can no longer travel and so they live in "transit" in Ethiopia.

Many refugees are hoping for support from the government and aid organizations. The government's declaration of emergency has brought relief to refugees regarding housing rent. This passive coping strategy partly becomes an active one when families with children consider returning to the camps because they can at least secure food and access to water there. Since some of the refugees do not have urban status and have come to Addis Ababa themselves, they do not have access to support from international organizations here. The passive strategy would only be possible in the camp. Many are forced to put their travel plans on hold and come to terms with the new circumstances. Clearly part of the prosocial coping strategies is that the refugees use the social networks to their relatives and their own community. Many of the interviewees share living space with relatives. This helps to save on rent costs.

Individual strategies involve some refugees restricting their daily diet. They have reduced their food portions and are trying to cope with the situation with the resources they have. In order not to stand out socially and to avoid discrimination, some learn the language and use their limited skills in shopping, in public spaces and in communicating with the majority society. Others find hope and support in religion and are confident that the situation will improve.

With this study, we were able to determine what impact the coronavirus pandemic has on the refugees' living conditions and what strategies they have developed to deal with it. The results highlight the multi-layered impact and coping strategies of the refugees. The study found that COVID-19 challenged refugee communities and pushed them to their limits as they tried to make a living. A qualitative approach that looks at the everyday lives of refugees is important to clearly show the problems they and their families face in their daily lives. In the interviews, the everyday life of the refugees was depicted. The perspective of those affected is indispensable in science and in practice.

Unfortunately, the interviews had to be conducted virtually due to the pandemic. As a result, the interviewees were reluctant to answer the questions. If the interviews could have been conducted face to face, spontaneous answers could have been given and further questions could have been explored. Another point that always needs to be clarified in interculturally composed teams is the question of different ideas and approaches.

The findings show that the protection of refugees and their access to services and the health system, social support needs to be improved. The findings are intended to sensitise the government and international aid organisations to the special situation of refugees and their needs. Last October 2020, Institution A organised a fundraising day on public radio for International Solidarity to COVID-19 in the Global South. The author was allowed to discuss the results on the radio. This made it possible to draw attention to the precarious situation of refugees.

6. CONCLUSION

The study found that the COVID-19 pandemic poses major challenges to refugees and severely limits their ability to earn a living. In a context where adequate services and social protection systems meet the urgent needs of refugees in and out of camps are not available, refugees without clear legal status are even more at risk of deprivation. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the weakness of support systems for refugees, while underscoring the importance of ongoing work to address social inequalities among refugees in an already poor, unprotected urban context. One of the biggest challenges is getting enough food to feed the whole family. Many refugees have lost their income, which directly affects the money available for food. They have to reduce portion sizes and try to make do with the resources they have. Some of the refugees in Addis Ababa plan to go back to a refugee camp when they can no longer cope with the situation. Their hope is that they can at least get enough food for themselves and their families in the camps.

Refugees must be part of the strategies and measures developed by governments against the pandemic. It is known as the informal sector is the major economic sector in which people without legal status are working and supporting their family. Obviously the COVID-19 shock attacks the informal sector in a very horrific way. This study confirmed that refugees, especially those who are living in urban contexts have suffered a lot. Addis Ababa as one of the most suitable destinations for urban refugees by providing lots of informal business opportunities failed to protect these people from the smash of COVID-19 shock. Lack of systematic protection of refugees in urban context also makes the problem

worse. As a result, significant numbers of refugees in Addis Ababa were affected severely by the unexpected pandemic.

A strengthening of community engagement attempts to improve livelihoods. Extended capacities of national and local authorities are yet another effort to change the situation for the better. Community engagement and community-based organizations are key elements for the local implementation of response plans. For many families, these organizations are the only source of information on COVID-19. Due to the pandemic, the international humanitarian presence is being reduced and the access of international organizations and NGOs to camps is now limited.

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IRREGULAR CASH TRANSFERS AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19, EXPERIENCES AMONG SOUTH SUDANESE URBAN REFUGEES IN KAMPALA, UGANDA

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Abstract: Humanitarian aid directed to urban refugees is minimal and often time's urban refugees are left to negotiate their own survival. The COVID-19 pandemic presented new dynamics to the already existing challenges faced by urban refugees. The preventive measures put in place by the Ugandan government to prevent the spread of COVID-19, resulted to a strain on the livelihoods of the urban refugees. During the pandemic, cash transfers proved to be an effective way to render humanitarian assistance, especially for urban refugees because money is a necessity for their daily life in the urban areas. However urban refugees received irregular cash transfers and some did not receive any cash at all. This paper examines the irregular cash transfers and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among the South Sudanese urban refugees. The paper describes the strategic processes and networks that the South Sudanese urban refugees negotiated in order to acquire cash transfer assistance during COVID-19, and the challenges of the irregularity of the cash transfers to their survival in the urban areas. The paper also emphasises that urban refugees require regular cash transfers in order for them to adequately improve their livelihoods and become self-reliant in the urban areas.

Key words: Irregular Cash Transfers, COVID-19, Urban Refugees.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cash transfers as a form of humanitarian aid are gaining popularity (Tirivayi, Waider, & Otchere, 2021; Sardan & Piccoli, 2018). Receiving cash instead of tokens or food rations especially where there are available markets arguably gives agency to the beneficiary (Bailey, 2016) and has been considered as a more dignified way to render aid (WorldVision, 2018). Cash transfers refer to the distribution of money to eligible persons, this can be done either electronically⁶ or cash in hand/ envelope (Namuddu, 2007; GSMA, 2019). These can either be conditional or unconditional cash transfers (Sardan & Piccoli, 2018). Conditional cash transfers, dictate how

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⁶ Through the use of mobile money transfers, or banks

the money is utilized by the beneficiaries for instance; cash for work, while unconditional cash transfers have no restrictions on how beneficiaries utilize the money (Namuddu, 2007; Sardan & Piccoli, 2018). Studies indicate that regular and unconditional cash transfers improve the livelihoods and wellbeing of the beneficiaries (Bruin & Becker, 2019; Tirivayi, Waider, & Otchere, 2021). Because regular cash transfers are scheduled, it becomes easy for the beneficiaries to properly plan the utilization of the money. On the other hand, irregular cash transfers are void of schedules, they are received randomly and cause anxiety (Save The Children, 2020) therefore planning becomes difficult and so is the possibility of self-reliance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic cash transfers proved to be a sustainable way to render aid (Walter & Bing, 2020; Dev, 2020) to vulnerable refugee populations. The pandemic changed social realities, redefined mobility, and livelihoods were renegotiated thus reconstructing everyday lives. Globally, as governments endeavored to mitigate the spread of the virus, mobility of persons was restricted. This action might have left many refugees and displaced persons stuck in flight (Bukuluki, Mwenyango, Katongole, Sidhva, & Palattiyil, 2020) while others trapped indoors of large cities thus steering a feeling of isolation (Mukumbang, Ambe, & Adebisi, 2020). The case was the same in Uganda, the government stopped welcoming and registering new refugees as of March 2020 (Bukuluki, Mwenyango, Katongole, Sidhva, & Palattiyil, 2020), however this policy remained flexible to welcome people fleeing for refuge (UNICEF, 2022). Restriction in mobility was not only geared towards refugee cross border mobility, but also to the internal mobility of all persons Ugandan or alien. To an extent, this inflicted the mobility of humanitarian outreach services offered to refugees. During this period of immobilization, cash transfers were credible as a way to render assistance. Through the use of cash transfers, large beneficiary populations were able to receive assistance (Walter & Bing, 2020) while at the same time avoiding crowding of persons which could accelerate the spread of the virus.

For refugees hosted in developing countries, the COVID-19 pandemic magnified the challenges that they were already facing (Bukuluki, Mwenyango, Katongole, Sidhva, & Palattiyil, 2020) and introduced new dynamics to these challenges especially among urban refugees. Urban areas are gaining popularity as refugee hosting spaces today, with half of the world's refugees residing in them (UN Habitat, 2015; ICSC, 2020). An urban refugee is a refugee who resides in an urban area, instead of the alternative of residing in a refugee settlement or camp. The opportunities that the urban life promises are the main attraction for the refugees, and these include better; education, employment, accommodation, security and health care (Stevens, 2018; Rosenberg, 2016). However, an urban refugee foregoes most of the humanitarian aid that is rendered in the settlements (AGORA, 2018), therefore, urban refugees depend on their own social

networks, and innovations to survive (Stevens, 2018; Betts, Omata, & Sterck, 2020).

Although the mandate of refugee hosting governments is to protect refugees in both the urban or rural settings (Refugee-Act, 2006), the government support and humanitarian assistance given to urban refugees is usually irregular and not guaranteed (AGORA, 2018; Stevens, 2018; Willems, 2005; Muindi & Mberu, 2019). Arguably, for a refugee to self-settle in the urban areas, he/she is expected to be self-reliant (UNHCR, 2018). The reality is far from this expectation, most urban refugees find themselves sharing similar experiences with the urban poor and their refugee status makes it more challenging for them to access opportunities that the urban life promises (Stevens, 2018; AGORA, 2018; Rosenberg, 2016). Everyday life in the urban is facilitated by the availability of cash, therefore, access to the better opportunities sought after by refugees and urban dwellers are manipulated by the availability of cash. The failure of urban refugees to acquire adequate employment opportunities (Mukumbang, Ambe, & Adebisi, 2020) makes the access to cash a challenge for them and this increases their vulnerability.

The existing contrast between humanitarian assistance and protection rendered to settlement based refugees and urban refugees, influenced the magnitudes of the impact of COVID-19 among refugee populations. In Uganda the case of this paper, settlement based refugees were shielded under the support from the government of Uganda, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations (IDInsight & GiveDirectly, 2022). On the other hand, urban refugees who mostly depend on their own networks to survive (Betts, Omata, & Sterck, 2020), experienced the impact of COVID-19 more severely. As both the Ugandan government and humanitarian agencies developed initiatives to cushion the impacts of COVID-19, cash transfers were arguably a favorable alternative to render aid (ISER, 2021). However urban refugees in Kampala, received irregular cash transfers and some did not receive any cash. This paper examines the impact of COVID-19 and the irregular cash transfers received by South Sudanese urban refugees during the pandemic in Kampala. It also elaborates the strategic networks negotiated in order to access cash transfers.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research used qualitative methods of data collection under an ethnographic research design. The data was gathered from November 2020 – February 2021. The period of data collection was just after the 1st wave of COVID-19 and the country had only lifted the first COVID-19 total lockdown. The main participants were the South Sudanese urban refugees located in Namuwongo-Kisugu area in Kampala. Data collection methods

comprised of participant observation, life histories and ethnographic interviews. A total of 24 participants were interacted with over a period of four months, while engaging with each participant more than twice. Some COVID-19 standard operating procedures were still active for instance the curfew from 7pm to 5am, no group gatherings and some sectors like education and informal employment like bar attendants, hair dressers in saloons were still restricted.

3. SITUATING SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES IN KAMPALA

By the end of 2020, out of the 1.5 million refugees and asylum seekers recorded in Uganda (UNICEF, 2022), South Sudanese made up the largest number comprising of 951,713⁷ and of these 6,185⁸ are located in Kampala. The complexity of urban life drives urban refugees to live in near proximity to fellow refugees with whom they share nationality, religion or belief (Rosenberg, 2016; Kaplan, 2020). This behavior is common among immigrants or displaced persons, they forge their place in urban areas so as to find a sense of belonging. In London for instance, Chinatown was established by Chinese migrants who lived together to protect their rights and find a sense of belonging (Hatziprokopiou, et al., 2011). In Jordan, Sudanese refugees reside in near proximity to each other for both security and a sense of belonging (Johnston, Kvittiggen, Baslan, & Verduijn, 2019). While in Kampala, this practice is similar, refugees of same nationality forge emplacements for the same reasons. South Sudanese are densely populated in Makindye Division⁹ and are settled in; Namuwongo, Kisugu, Kabalagala, Nsambya, Muyenga and the surrounding areas.

For the South Sudanese urban refugees, beyond a shared nationality, a shared ethnicity is very crucial. While settling in Kampala, the South Sudanese urban refugees choose to reside in close proximity with their fellow refugees with whom they share ethnicity. This then further subdivides them amongst themselves i.e. refugee ethnicities from the Equatorial region in South Sudan live in near proximity to each other while those from Bahr el Ghazal also live close to each other. This ethnic divisionism presented in Kampala streams back to the ethnic differences in South Sudan (O'Byrne & Ogeno, 2021; Ntambirweki-Karugonjo, 2014).

This ethnic based clustering poses a challenge, it dictates and determines the social networks among them. Refugees and migrants are known to use resources embedded in their social networks (Johnston, Kvittiggen, Baslan, & Verduijn, 2019). Some ethnicities through their social networks

⁷ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/uga>

⁸ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/southsudan/location/1925>

⁹ Makindye Division is one of the five administrative Divisions in Kampala and is located in the South East of Kampala.

were able to access assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic while other ethnicities lacked access to such social networks. The Bari ethnic group for instance, had an already existing organized Bari urban refugee women's association known as Parara. The association which is exclusively Bari, worked as a support network and provided financial assistance, companionship and access to markets for its members.

The households are mainly comprised of women and children with few men. Most of the men either returned back to South Sudan or remained in South Sudan during flight in order to secure livelihood opportunities (Tasha, 2021). The women mostly depend on remittances from their family back in South Sudan. Some women are engaged in informal livelihoods like; hair dressing, vending vegetables and also knitting or crocheting¹⁰ in order to supplement the remittances they receive. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these streams of income on which they mostly depended on to survive were disrupted. Saloons for instance were not operational therefore hair dressers lost their source of income, remittances on which they mostly depend were also affected. The remittances received were reduced, delayed while some were stopped. This therefore led to an accumulation of house rent arrears, shortage of food and a desperate need to survive in Kampala.

Similar to other urban refugee populations, South Sudanese urban refugees in Kampala also have a community_ Uganda South Sudanese Urban Refugee Community (USSURC). The community is a network of leadership, social and economic support constructed by South Sudanese urban refugees. Studies indicate that refugees forge communities which imitate the roles of governance among them (Stevens, 2018). USSURC offers counselling services to victims of trauma, it acts as a center for reconciliation among disgruntled refugees especially those harboring grudges of violence perpetuated by individuals back in South Sudan with whom they find themselves with while seeking refuge in Kampala. The main objective of USSURC is to unite South Sudanese urban refugees despite of their ethnic differences. Other than that, it also bridges capital between South Sudanese urban refugees with Ugandan locals especially those in the host communities by offering free Arabic and Quran lessons to Ugandans. USSURC liaises and extends assistance from the Ugandan government, NGO's and Civil Societies to the South Sudanese urban refugees.

The outbreak of COVID-19 negatively impacted the functioning of the community, it slowed the work progress especially since the lockdown commenced in the first year just after the community was formally registered in 2019. 2020 was then the proposed year for the active implementation of the proposed projects. COVID-19 fueled challenges that

¹⁰ These are mostly traditional South Sudanese bed sheets & table clothes. South Sudanese refugees are their primary customers.

placed the South Sudanese urban refugees in desperate need of assistance especially from their community, however, the community was not yet in a capable position to render such assistance. This incapability on the side of USSURC was interpreted as a failure by the South Sudanese urban refugees and therefore negatively impacting its popularity among them. The interruption caused by COVID-19 in the implementation of USSURC's scheduled programming is explained by a staff at USSURC below;

"We began this organization in 2017 but then we were registered in 2019, so our first year to implement was supposed to be 2020-2021 but then we were struck by Covid19, we are hoping that next year be a good year for us... because during covid19 the youth were not going to school so we came up for them to start book making, we wanted to train them in order for them to be able to train others while we were doing this, we were hoping that when schools are reopened, the youth will have market to sell their books and will also earn some capital from it and also acquire a skill in book making however the reopening of schools is taking so long."

(Participant one, male staff at USSURC)

4. THE EXPERIENCES OF COVID-19

The ripple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is felt globally (Walter & Bing , 2020). Refugees globally registered an increase in the challenges they already faced before the pandemic (Bukuluki, Mwenyango, Katongole, Sidhva, & Palattiyil, 2020). Currently, 84% of the world refugees are hosted in low or middle income countries (Bukuluki, Mwenyango, Katongole, Sidhva, & Palattiyil, 2020), these host countries struggle with lack of enough resources for their citizens and mostly depend on foreign aid to support the refugees that they host. Uganda is only fourth among the countries hosting large numbers of refugees globally (ILO, 2021). Despite her low income status, Uganda is praised for her progressive refugee policy. The country allocates land to each refugee family for settlement¹¹, allows them free mobility and advocates for refugee- host community integration (ILO, 2021).

However the COVID-19 pandemic presented unfamiliar dynamics, the Ugandan government had to deal with the challenges of its 45.74million¹² citizens and also 1.5million refugees which it hosted at the time, in order to combat the spread of the pandemic (Walter & Bing , 2020). The country's already limited resources were strained (Walter & Bing , 2020) to the

¹¹ This only applies to refugees within the settlements.

¹² <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/uganda-population/>

extent that the head of State president Yoweri Kaguta Museveni called upon citizens, private companies, investors and organizations to donate financial assistance, in-kind assistance and vehicles to facilitate the COVID-19 taskforce_ the taskforce was generated to extend help to the people of Uganda (Agaba, 2020).

NGO's and Civil Societies the primary source of refugee support (ILO, 2021), were also challenged since most of their funding is derived from western countries, which at that time were also battling with COVID-19. Therefore their resources were limited, World Food Programme for instance had reduced the amount of food rations distributed to refugees (Stein, et al., 2022). With limited resources, attention was directed towards refugees in the settlements (IDInsight & GiveDirectly, 2022), and urban refugees in Kampala were forgotten_ an act that I refer to as a 'mismatch'. The negative impacts of COVID-19 were greatly felt in the urban areas more than in the rural areas, for the urban residents inclusive of the refugees, hunger was their main worry more than the virus (Agaba, 2020). Food prices nearly doubled and most could not afford (Agaba, 2020), since most urban poor and refugees live from hand to mouth, 60% of urban refugees could not access food (Atamanov, et al., 2021). However, this was not a challenge for rural communities where refugee settlements are located, food was available and reliable NGO support was also available (Agaba, 2020).

At this point, urban refugees had to fully make use of their social networks especially with fellow refugees living in the settlements. Some depended on settlement based refugees for food, while some others joined their families in the settlements until the lockdown was lifted. Below are two excerpts narrating the ordeal.

".... we had no food, I did not know what to do, I could not ask my neighbor because they also had no food, I had to call my family in Bweyale for them to send me assistance because I needed food. They sent me food and soap. Those people in the camp always receive these things from NGO's."

(Participant two, Female urban refugee)

".... life was difficult for me because there was no school and everything was going to be locked down I felt that I would be safer with my family in the camp, I went back to the camp and returned after the lockdown."

(Participant three, female urban refugee)

The livelihoods of vulnerable people are characterized by shock, uncertainty and stress (Fisher, et al., 2017), COVID-19 was a shock which

disrupted access to livelihood opportunities, and the World Bank reported an increase of poverty among refugees after lockdown (Atamanov, et al., 2021). Access to sustainable livelihood opportunities is still a challenge, and great majorities are engaged in informal employment (AGORA, 2018). In Kampala, the South Sudanese urban refugees are mostly depended on financial support from their family back in South Sudan, however, some are self-employed in small scale business especially the women, who engage in hawking vegetables and selling snacks to survive. The COVID-19 lockdown strained their businesses forcing them to use their business capital for basic necessities like food and thus ended up losing their businesses.

“I used to make snacks like daddies, and egg rolls and I could supply to the nearby retail shops and I could also carry some to the university campus and sell to my colleagues. Then covid-19 broke out, that is when I stopped my business of selling snacks because the business was not good”.

(Participant four, female urban refugee)

“Back then business was good but nowadays people no longer buy things like the way they used to. This is the year of Covid19, people say they lack money because of Covid19.”

(Participant five, male urban refugee)

Not only did COVID-19 negatively affect the livelihoods of the self-employed urban refugees, it also affected those employed in the informal sector for example those employed as shopkeepers, mobility to the place of work was a challenge because the cost of transport increased after the restriction on mobility by the government, this therefore caused them to lose their jobs.

The restriction on mobility and also crowd gatherings in places like churches impacted on the access to information especially about COVID-19. Most South Sudanese urban refugees used the church as a place to acquire information. These churches which are mostly Pentecostal preach in a native language best understood by the South Sudanese. USSURC, also uses the church to disseminate information to the South Sudanese. Because of the disruption in the streams of communication, information about distribution of food or basic items was constrained and those without close ties to the distributors missed out.

5. IRREGULAR CASH TRANSFERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Contrary to the settlements where humanitarian support is regular and guaranteed, refugees in Kampala receive irregular and unguaranteed

humanitarian support. The uncertainty caused by irregularity of aid impacts the wellbeing of the refugees, thus increasing anxiety, stress and exclusion (Bukuluki, Mwenyango, Katongole, Sidhva, & Palattiyil, 2020). Studies from Zambia indicate that inconsistent and irregular social cash transfers led to negative coping mechanisms like child labor among children (Save The Children, 2020).

In 2020, Denmark contributed a 1 million USD response fund for urban refugees in Kampala¹³, it was directed through World Food programme_WFP. The fund was to be distributed as an unconditional cash transfer for a period of three months to the urban refugees and was delivered through the use of Mobile Phones. For such cash transfers, implementing practitioners like WFP in this case, work closely with UNHCR and the office of the Prime Minister in charge of refugees to verify the identity of the urban refugees. The data used is normally retrieved from the information provided by the beneficiary during the time of refugee registration. This is a challenge, some urban refugees during their first registration lack Ugandan mobile numbers, while others filled in Ugandan mobile numbers that were not registered in their names. It should also be noted that refugees are called upon to update their information however some had been in Kampala for less than six months before the pandemic and therefore they missed out on receiving cash.

The observation among the South Sudanese urban refugees, is that they were not aware about the cash transfers going on. Some claimed to receive money through their mobile phones at the start of the lockdown but it was from UNHCR with specifications on how to withdraw the money, while others claimed not to have received any money through their mobile phones during COVID-19. As mentioned earlier, South Sudanese urban refugees have settled in near proximity to each other and to a larger extent share similar experiences, therefore it becomes complex to explain why some received cash while others didn't receive. The amounts received also varied and so did the number of times that the money was received, some claimed to have received it through their mobile phones thrice while others received it only once.

Some of the participants had this to say in regard to the money they received through their mobile phones;

“In July 2020 I received a message from UNHCR giving me 80,000/- the message instructed me to only go to an Airtel money agent for they are the only ones who knew how to

¹³ <https://www.wfp.org/news/denmark-contributes-us1-million-cash-relief-refugees-kampala>

withdraw the money. Even if the message was sent on an MTN line, all the withdrawals are made through Airtel. The next time I received 22,000/-, then in October I received 22,000/- then the money stopped coming.”

(Participant six, male urban refugee)

“I registered and I am happy because they gave us money from the refugee organizations. They gave me 130,000/- since we registered we received this money twice. When we registered for the refugee status, we registered two numbers, the Airtel number and MTN, so they sent on both the numbers 130,000/-. This was given to us just recently in November from the UNHCR, during COVID-19 we received nothing”.

(Participant seven, female urban refugee)

“..We do not get money from OPM we only get our refugee status from them. UNHCR, gave me little money on my phone this was during Covid-19, it was 140,000/-”

(Participant eight, male urban refugee)

“I did not receive any money during COVID-19, I do not know why yet am also a refugee”

(Participant nine, male urban refugee)

While trying to interpret the irregularity of the cash they received, traces of corruption by government officials arouse. During their first registration as urban refugees, some refugees claimed that an official at the office of the Prime Minister requested them to pay him 10,000ugx in order to include their name on the UNHCR list of cash transfer beneficiaries. The citation below is from an interview with a participant who was a victim of corruption by civil servant at the office of the Prime Minister;

“.... this very man at the OPM told me that UNHCR was going to help me with some money so I had to register for the assistance. He asked me to pay to him 10,000/- so that he could open for me a mobile money account where the UNHCR could be depositing for me money. I paid the 10,000/- as well as other refugees who were waiting in line. He had a form where we could register our names and phone numbers but didn't tell us how much money we will be receiving. Till now I have never received any money from UNHCR, but am not sure maybe it is the one we received during COVID-19.... I doubt because during COVID-19 we had a lot of challenges, we needed help from UNHCR so it sent us help therefore I am convinced that the help

I received during the COVID-19 pandemic was not as a result of the account.”

(Participant six, male urban refugee)

Limited access to information makes urban refugees vulnerable (Bukuluki, Mwenyango, Katongole, Sidhva, & Palattiyil, 2020) to exploitations such as these. The uncertainty of when cash transfers are received and how selection of beneficiaries is made, leaves them vulnerable for exploitation by corrupt officials. Arguably, all programs of providing social protection nets suffer targeting challenges (Development Initiative, 2021). This challenge is well demonstrated in the quotations above, participant eight and nine are both male South Sudanese urban refugees in Kampala, but as much as both of them needed assistance, participant nine did not receive any. As indicated above, participant six is also uncertain of how he qualified to receive cash during the lockdown, he believes UNHCR gave him money because he is a refugee and therefore vulnerable but there is a slight suspicion that perhaps the money he paid for registration at the office of the prime minister had a little contribution to his access to the cash.

As a strategy to mobilize help for themselves, South Sudanese urban refugee youths from private universities in Kampala united to form strategic networks which they forged to access cash assistance. Their greatest concern was accumulated rent arrears followed by lack of food. The cash received from UNHCR was only enough to buy some food however it fell short of covering even one month of house rent. With the possibility of eviction by landlords due to overdue rent arrears, accompanied by an uncertainty of receiving cash for assistance, the youths mobilized themselves and walked directly to NGO's that they were familiar with to request for help. The quotation below elaborates how urban refugees seek out for assistance;

“...They did not look for us, we sought for them. Money does not come when you are home, we went to their offices..., I even have their phone numbers and I follow their updates closely especially about their funding's. I do this closely because I have a right to that money...”

(Participant eight, male urban refugee)

Through their mobilizations, they proceeded to Jesuit refugee services JRS hoping to get assistance. However due to limited information of the bureaucratic procedure of aid distribution, JRS sent them back to their community_ USSURC. Apparently, JRS could only listen to their claims if they were forwarded through USSURC. As mentioned earlier, USSURC had not yet gained popularity among the South Sudanese urban refugees, but this did not stop the youth, they followed through to USSURC and finally were able to receive cash. However, the irregularity in the cash

received and also the very low amounts of cash received in comparison to their expectation triggered unrest from the youth. A youth leader had this to say in regard to the irregularity of the cash received;

“We could send five people at a time to USSURC to receive cards, which they had to present at JRS¹⁴ in order to get money. The money was given after one week. The first groups received 70,000/-UGX. We wondered because JRS had promised us enough money to pay our rent for at least three months and also assist with our feeding, but 70,000/- (20USD) was not even close enough to pay rent and buy food. From that day we lost our trust in JRS. The money was given direct to us from JRS but since we were the leaders we decided to wait and go last. The last group was given 40,000/-(11USD). We lost the trust we had for this JRS NGO. It was really unfair because the money we spent on transport to report our grievances to JRS was about 20,000/-(5.7USD) and why could I spend 20,000/- to go and get 20,000/- it makes no sense at all...”

(Participant nine, male youth leader urban refugee)

Cash transfers are mostly beneficial to the beneficiaries if they are regular (Fisher, et al., 2017), irregular cash transfers of limited funding are like a drop of water in a desert especially for vulnerable persons like urban refugees (ISER, 2021). Life in the urban is directly linked to the availability and access to money, for instance, payment of rent for accommodation is a main challenge recorded among urban refugees, and most times cash transfers provided to urban refugees are mostly directed towards payment of their house rent. However, from the quotations above, the irregular cash transfers received were too little to cater to the urban needs of the refugees. When asked to describe how ‘much’ was needed to qualify as a ‘helpful cash transfer’, the response quoted below is from an interview excerpt;

“When we talk of help, the degree of help varies because our statuses vary. Therefore the understanding of help varies because someone maybe given little and they pick up from the little and they appreciate but sometimes this “little” is too little for some...We had stayed for a long time without having any work that gives us money to cater for ourselves like me, I pay rent of 400,000/- but I have failed to pay my rent, I have not paid my rent for 6 months, every time the land lady asks me for rent...”

(Participant ten, male urban refugee)

¹⁴ JRS is now the Norwegian Refugee Council NRC.

Host governments, NGO's and civil societies working with refugees should realize that the expectation of self-reliance among urban refugees cannot be achieved especially with irregular assistance. One of the many ways to assist them is to consider large transfers of regular unconditional cash. For instance, Give-Directly an NGO known for cash transfers in Uganda, rolled out a one off unconditional cash transfer of 1000usd to 10,000 refugee households in Kiryandongo settlement and 5000 Ugandans in the host community over a period of three years (IDInsight & GiveDirectly , 2022). This cash transfer was provided to refugees for their livelihood recovery after COVID-19. Households that received the cash transfer had significant food security and improved mental wellbeing (Stein, et al., 2022). Studies indicate that Cash transfer interventions apart from being an emergency tool, they enable vulnerable individuals to prepare and cope with shock in the long ran (Fiala, Rose , Aryemo, & Peters , 2021).

6. CONCLUSION

The availability and access to cash facilitates the everyday life in the urban. However, the disruption caused by COVID-19 to the streams of income on which urban refugees mostly depend multiplied their vulnerability. It is argued that the pandemic exaggerated the already existing challenges faced by vulnerable populations. The use of cash transfers was credited as a better alternative to render aid and assistance to vulnerable populations during the pandemic. Although much of the humanitarian focus on refugee populations was geared towards settlement based refugees, urban refugees received 'crumbs' of aid. The cash transfers received by the urban refugees were irregular, inconsistent and some did not receive any cash. For the South Sudanese urban refugees in Kampala, the irregularity of the cash transfers caused discontent, increased uncertainty and vulnerability women lost their small business, and access to food became a challenge. Accumulated house rent arrears left many living in fear of eviction.

During this period of uncertainty, the presence of social networks was advantageous at least to an extent, for instance; urban refugees with connections to settlement based refugees often requested for a share of their food rations which they usually sent to them in Kampala. Some urban refugees also moved back to the settlement to join their family and relatives to at least wait out the pandemic. University youth urban refugees mobilized themselves to solicit for assistance among refugee based organizations in Kampala. However, their efforts did not yield much, they also received irregular cash transfers which they termed as 'too little' to solve their problems thus leaving most disgruntled and unsatisfied from the assistance.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Refugee policymakers prioritize self-reliance among refugee populations (Betts, Omata, & Sterck, 2020). For refugees to choose to settle in the urban, they are expected to be self-reliant (UNHCR, 2018). Therefore, regular cash transfers are highly recommended for urban refugees especially for them to achieve sustainable self-reliance. Large cash transfers like what was given by GiveDirectly to refugees in Kiriyaango refugee settlement as a COVID-19 livelihood recovery fund are much needed for urban refugees whose life in the urban is mostly depended on their access to cash. Therefore, NGO's, civil societies should strategize ways in which to prioritize and support urban refugees as much as settlement based refugees.

The government of Uganda should also include refugees in its initiatives to cushion the effects of the pandemic. In 2021 for instance, the government of Uganda rolled out a social cash transfer for the urban poor who were affected by the pandemic (ISER, 2021; Development Initiative, 2021) however, among the beneficiaries selected the urban refugees were left out. Organizations like ILO, encourage refugee host governments to also include asylum-seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants in their national income and related policy responses (Mukumbang, Ambe , & Adebisi , 2020).

Civil societies and NGO's working with urban refugees should consider supporting the refugee led community based organizations (CBO's) like USSURC the community for South Sudanese urban refugees. These communities work directly with the urban refugees and their greatest challenge is a shortage in funding.

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EDUCATION AMIDST CONFLICT AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT: THE CASE OF KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP

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Abstract: Education is a basic right to all learners irrespective of ability, status, or conditions which the learners find themselves in. Education provides stability and a sense of normalcy in unstable and difficult living environments; it engenders hope while preparing refugees to meet future challenges. With the skills and knowledge provided by education, refugees find it easier to integrate into new communities. In regions devastated by war and endemic violence, a skilled, educated population is vital for the reconstruction and long-term development of both host countries and countries of origin. Refugee displacement and protection is a transnational concern that is heavily impacting on the quality of education and threatening the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4. Currently, laws and policies are failing migrant and refugee children by negating their rights to education and ignoring their needs amidst the shrinking civic space in most African states. With the advent of the COVID-19 Pandemic, refugee numbers grow to unprecedented levels escalating the impact of conflicts. This paper examined the education of displaced children in the face of conflict attending schools in Kakuma refugee camp and established that displaced children along the borderlands and Kakuma refugee camp, experience a myriad of challenges that range from complicated learning environments, psychological instability, and gender based violence, lack of harmonised curriculum to lack of political goodwill among concerned member states. As the children and their families flee their homes to more secure environments, learning is disrupted. This begs the question, who benefits from these conflicts and the suffering of these children whose agenda is the constant conflicts serving? The paper recommends a harmonized curriculum for learners in refugee camps, policy frameworks on commitment of planning, implementing, and facilitating the management of such education as required for the benefit of the learners by all stakeholders.

Key words: *Educating, Conflict, Peace, Displacement, forced migration, Policy, Refugees*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic right for all learners irrespective of their ability, status or conditions which the learners find themselves in. School going children who have acquired refugee status face challenges that range from lack of harmonised curriculum, policy frameworks on commitment of planning, implementing and facilitating the management of such education as required for the benefit of the learners by all stakeholders. According to Connect, (1993), there were variables that needed to be addressed for example economic constrains, social pressures, political instabilities among others, if the desired values of education were to be realized.

Rojas (2011) asserts that nearly everything considered as “human” can be found in childhood. When this stage of life was happy, healthy, full of affection and properly directed, people are left with the strength to deal with anything. Being a child during a time of armed conflict, however, is not an easy experience. Armed conflicts affect millions of children, their daily life being disturbed by acts of atrocity which will mark their future. This reality affects a fundamental right of children: their education. All agents of education are affected in these circumstances: the education team, students, family, infrastructure, the school environment, curriculum, and the strategies delivered by teachers. It is estimated that “approximately 57 million children of primary school age did not attend school in 2011” (UNICEF, 2014, p. 18), and more than 13 million of those children are in the countries, directly or indirectly, affected by armed conflicts (UNICEF, 2015). It happens although decades ago United nations’ agencies and other International non-governmental organizations began to prioritize education as an essential component of humanitarian response due to the recognition that education can play a critical role in facilitating stability, imparting life-saving messages, establishing among other reasons (Mendenhal, 2014).

The e- Forum report of 2016 established that, Legal frameworks, institutional arrangements, and coordination are enabling factors for planning access to education for displaced populations. Access to education is recognised as a universal human right, enshrined in international law. Legally binding international treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child require governments to ensure access to education. Furthermore, non-binding international agreements such as the Education 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 establish global norms for access to quality education. For displaced populations, however, accessing learning can be challenging when international frameworks have not been ratified or adapted into national legal frameworks.

National laws and policies should provide a legal framework that allows refugees and IDPs to access education. However, sometimes laws and regulations may constrain access, for example through documentation or

certification requirements, imposition of strict age requirements for entry to different levels of education, or school fees, to name a few. National legal frameworks and policies should designate responsibilities to national authorities to plan for the provision of education to refugees and IDPs. This can help clarify roles and facilitate coordination with education partners. In situations of crisis, where there are multiple partners present, where human and financial resources may be limited, coordination among different government bodies and among the government and its international and national partners can help ensure that resources are used in an efficient and equitable manner. It can help avoid the duplication of activities, and favour synergies and complementarities. Strong coordination at national and local level increases the likelihood that displaced populations will have access to education. (e- Forum report, 2016)

Before the 20th century, Africa could be termed as having been a 'dynamic area' with people in constant motion. However, within the same century, the continent also had a period of inertia in relation to mass movements of people. Ironically it was during the same period that Sub-Saharan African States had posted over ten million displaced persons, the highest number than any other continent, (Ahmednassir, 2001). Today, Africa has more displaced people than any other continent in the world; Africa continues to experience expanding and record levels of forced displacement as a result of predatory governments, political fragmentation, and violent extremist groups. The advent of COVID -19 escalated the course and impact of conflicts. (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2021)

In Africa, especially in East Africa, displacement was a phenomenon that had existed since time immemorial and that was attributed to two major related factors that were power and vulnerability. The need to survive had always triggered displacement while advancement in technology facilitated the process. Examples of migrations of the Ngoni people Northward; Southward migration of the Nilotic communities from present day Sudan to East Africa and those of the Bantu speakers from today's Central Africa to South, East and West African regions, (Ahmednassir, 2001). Displacement took place in two levels, these were evolutionary and induced processes (using force). The latter process had two aspects. One was intro-notional. and the other international. Here were refugees and people who are internally displaced. According to UN Secretary General (1992), IOPs were persons who had been forced to flee their homes suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers as a result of armed conflicts, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights, natural or manmade disasters and who were within the territories of their own country. Internal conflicts within states and between communities were more prevalent in Africa than anywhere else in the world.

The need for mechanisms to improve adherents to international standards, to allow dialogue among communities and to resolve existing conflict emerging was likewise more pressing here than anywhere else. The lack of significant development in terms of tackling poverty meant the persons at risk, like the minority groups, children who were victims of the clashes, refugees, and street children suffered most. Bokweseqho. (1989L said that many people in the war and drought affected areas had withdrawn from productive labour and became reliant on outside relief. 3 Records of civil war and deteriorating economic performance in the horn of Africa had left large parts of Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan practically ungovernable, with unofficial leadership dislodging and replacing parallel official government structures in large parts of those countries. As a result of that, there was no guarantee of security and humanitarian aid and education for children.

In Kenya, the ethnic violence of 1992 caused approximately three hundred thousand to be displaced and about eight hundred people to be killed, (Kiliku report, 1992). But those displaced rose to approximately five hundred thousand by July 1993. Children who were the majority of Kenya's population had suffered disproportionately during tribal clashes, (Daily Nation, May, 29, 1993). "Africa Watch" (1996) found out that in most of the camps visited, the number of children were double that of adults, especially school age going children. Schools catered for over sixteen thousand children did not re-open in September 1993 due to violence, (Daily Nation, September 2nd, 1993).

In Baringo, a county that is prone to frequent clashes due to infighting between Pokot, Tugen and Turkana pastoralists communities, the tribal violence has deeply affected children. Those who witnessed their family members being killed and their houses burned down suffered a lot of psychological effects due to war. A School like Cheptuingeny Primary School had many of its children reportedly displaying aggressive behaviour or 4 bringing knives to school even outside the clash areas. Many children had long suffered of nightmares from the witnessed violence, (Ref. Daily Nation, May 31, 1993). In some areas, schools were overcrowded as a result of trying to accommodate the large influx of displaced children (1993). Education of majority of the children was disrupted or terminated. The ethnic clashes prevented secondary school graduates from continuing for higher education because of financial problems.

In Trans-Nzoia County, the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) estimated that over ten thousand children had been displaced and were no longer in school due to violence. A school of five hundred children that was started in February 1993, in Trans-Nzoia county by Endebes camp residence was quickly shut by local government authorities depriving the children of any formal educational opportunity whatsoever, (1993). These were some of the examples that showed the vulnerable nature into which

management of learning amongst the displaced children found themselves in conflict zones. Article 28, on convention on the rights of the child (1989) states that the child had a right to education and it was the state's duty to ensure that primary education was free and compulsory to all.

Different forms of secondary schools, which were accessible to every child, must be encouraged to make higher education available to all on the basis of capacity. Article 26, of the same convention also states "The child has a right to benefit from social security including insurance and shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of this right in accordance with their national law". Article 27 states 'every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his/her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. The states duty was to ensure that that responsibility could be fulfilled, and it stated the responsibility to give material assistance to parents and their children. Article 22 on the convention of the Rights of the child (1989), states on refugees 'special protection shall be granted to a refugee child or to a child seeking refugee status. It is the state's obligation to cooperate with competent organizations, which provide such protection and assistance like churches, non-governmental organizations among others. The UNHCR (2000), notes that the management of education was negatively influenced by little security or lack of it. Congestion in the camps, psychological instability, and shortage of basic necessities like food, clothes, and shelter further contribute to negative management of education. s In conclusion, there was need to single out factors that contributed to the poor management of learning and how 6 the same could be handled to allow the displaced child be resettled in order for him/her to gain maximally on their education services as proposed by the UN convention on the rights of the child.

Education is means for younger generations to be able to access the labour market and obtain sustainable livelihoods. While primary education at 80% is comparable between refugees and nationals, though slightly lower in Kalobeyei camp, only half of Turkana children attend primary education. Whilst transition into secondary education is a challenge nationally, it is even more so for refugees and Turkana children. In addition, camp-based schools face several challenges such as overcrowded classes, lack of learning enablers such as electricity, water and sanitation, and inadequate number of teachers, two-thirds of whom are unqualified but receiving training.

This paper examined the education of displaced children attending schools in Kakuma refugee camp and on the in the face of conflict. Among the questions that were set to be answered include: Who benefits from this conflicts and the suffering of the refugee children; whose agenda is the constant conflicts serving and who is responsible for education of this children, what are the main barriers that prevent displaced populations from

accessing education? And what approaches have been used to overcome these barriers?

Effective management of learning among children of whatever category and in any situation is of paramount importance for any meaningful, whole growth of a child. This could not be achieved in an environment that was not conducive as a result of either internal or external negating factors like wars. Children who had been displaced suffer most (Rop, 2007). According to Abraham Maslow hierarchy of need theory (1952), education takes the back stage on the face of adversary, giving precedence to security, food, clothes, and shelter.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The information about Education amidst Conflict and Forced Displacement was of paramount importance because that could form a much needed basis on how to competently plan for quality education of such learners in conflict zone and refugee camps. It was worth noting that the education of learners who had acquired refugee status required special treatment if the educational objectives set are to be achieved. Many of the learners had undergone a lot of psychological torture among other problems. Kakuma Refugee Camp was composed of a multinational community which provided a home for seven different nationalities as well as over twenty ethnic groups. The countries represented were Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo. All the refugees from these countries were put in one place to facilitate administrative duties like food distribution, health care, security and Education.. Ironically, putting together of these communities led to a number of issues, which had formed the basis from which the presumed problems was discussed, researched and the possible solutions or the same highlighted. The estimated population about 233,648 people in the Kakuma camp 188,526 and in Kalobeyei 45,122 according to the UNHCR – Kenya report (2020).

Basic needs like food, clothes, and shelter were constantly scarce; fertility rate in the camp was also high. Unfortunately, the assistance from well-wishers like church organizations, UNHCR, among others was hardly enough to meet the demands of the displaced people. Almost half of the population in the camp were school going children. The climatic conditions were too harsh, making the environment naturally inhabitable for human beings. This rendered the much-needed resources like manpower to man schools, health facilities and security scarce. The warring communities in the camp made life in the area even more psychologically and physically difficult. Those greatly interrupted and hindered formal learning of the children. A lot of effort had been put in place to curb those problems, among them, policy adjustment to institution or relevant bodies on increased security. But very little effort had been geared towards the quality

management of education in such camps. Therefore, the paper aimed presents education amidst conflict and forced displacement. Education continues to be a key priority activity in Kakuma refugee camp. The Education Programme in Kakuma Refugee camp currently has 13 pre-schools, 24 primary and 5 secondary schools which has enabled approximately 56% of pre-primary, 92% of primary and 6% of secondary eligible children to enrol.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design for the study was a descriptive survey in nature. The study design involved examination of factors that teachers, pupils, security officers, and education officers identify as hindering effective management of education amongst forced displaced learners. Questionnaires were designed for programme managers, education officers, teachers, and security officers while a pupil appraisal test was given to selected pupils in classes seven and eight. Descriptive research design was relevant because such a design enabled the researcher to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning the existing status of the phenomena and whenever possible to make relevant conclusions from the data collected, (McCormick, 1984). A descriptive survey determines and reports the way things are, (Gay, 1976).The method was non experimental because it dealt with relationships among non-manipulated variables for analysis (of their relationships) since the events had already occurred, (Best& Khan 1993). The sample included; 250 learners,100 Teachers, 3 Security Officers ,4 Educational Officers, 3 Programme Managers, 7 Category 'A' Primary Schools and 1 Area Chief making a total of 365 participants.

4. FINDINGS

The data obtained were analysed in order to obtain the actual factors, which hindered effective management of learning among displaced children in conflict zones, such as Kakuma Refugee Camp in Turkana County, of Kenya. Questionnaires for education officers and programme managers cantered mainly on how learning was managed at Kakuma refugee camp, the constraints faced by its management in line with funding, curriculum used, availability and relevance of books used, teacher qualification, accessibility to learning by all displaced learners and accessibility to quarterly and national examinations.

Table 1: Steps taken to improve management of learning

Steps taken to improve management of learning	Frequency responses	Percentage %
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Rules and regulations set	20	91
Establishment of teacher training programmes	17	77
Requesting the government support	16	73
Liaising with the ministry of education	14	64
Requesting for more basic needs from NGO's	19	86

Source: Field data 2022

From table 1 above, almost the respondents agreed that there were steps being taken to improve the management of learning in the camp. Approximately 91 % of the respondents said there were operational rules and regulations set out to discipline errant learners while 77% agreed that in-service programme for teacher training was being started to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge. Almost 73% of the respondents said that the government was 48 requested to assist in financial and material support, while 64% agreed that the camp was lasing with the ministry of education to post teachers with relevant training to the camp while 86% said that the authorities in Kakuma were spearheading campaigns for more provision of basics needs by existing and other NGO's to the learners.

Table 2: Programme managers' responses on the use of multi-disciplinary Teaching

Issue	Frequency of Response				Total Percentages
	SA	A	D	AD	
Learners fighting amongst themselves	-	100%	-	-	100%
Scrambling for limited resources	-	67%	33%	-	100%
Invasion by Turkana community	33%	67%	-	-	100%
Military trained	-	67%	-	33%	100%

Issue	Frequency of Response	Total Percentages
learners		

Source: Field data 2022

Table 2 above shows that the use of multi-disciplinary teaching approach was not practiced, 33% of the respondents disagreed while 67% strongly disagreed. Of all the respondents, 100% confirmed that not all learners had access to both quarterly and national examination. Asked whether all learners had access to learning in the camp, 67% disagreed, while 33% strongly disagreed.

Table 3: Responses on funding, government support, and nature of Environment

Issue	Frequency of Response				Total Percentages
	SA	A	D	AD	
Use of multi-disciplinary approach	-	-	33.3%	66.7%	100%
Accessibility to all examinations	-	-	100%	0	100%
Accessibility to learning	-	-	66.7%	33.3%	100%

Source: Field data 2022

As presented in Table 3, all the respondents were in the affirmative that there was no adequate funding on education for displaced learners in conflict zones. 33% agreed that the Kenya government partly supported the learning for the refugees; 33% disagreed while the remaining 33% strongly disagreed. Of all the respondents, 33% agreed that the environment was conducive to learning in Kakuma Refugee Camp while 67% disagreed. The data showed that the government's attention on learning for the category of learners was low.

4.1. Analysis Of Learners Appraisal Test Results

In order to establish the state of learning at the refugee camp, the study administered set learners' appraisal tests. Performance by the learners could point out whether the curriculum used was relevant and updated owing to the fact that Kenya curriculum was operational. Also it would indicate whether all learners had access to all examinations and learning in the camp. It would also show whether desired objectives of education were

being achieved. Pupil appraisal tests were given to sampled pupils that were 21 from class 8 and 22 pupils from class 7 all of whom represented all the nationalities found in the refugee camp. The respective results were as shown in the subsequent tables.

4.1.1. Appraisal Test Results For Class 7

The total possible score of the test was 12. Those with (0 - 3) were graded as poor; (4 - 6) graded as fair; (7 - 9) graded as good and (10- 12) graded as excellent.

Table 4: Appraisal test results for class 7 pupils

Grade	Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent		Total		
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Learners frequency of scores											
Boys	10	46	8	36	4	18	0	0	22	100	

Source: Field data 2022

Table 5: Appraisal test results for class 7 pupils per gender

Grade	Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent		Total		
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Learners frequency of scores											
Boys	4	40	6	75	3	75	0	0	13	59	
Girls	6	60	2	25	1	25	0	0	8	42	
TOTAL	10	100	8	100	4	100	0	0	22	100	

n = 22

Source: Field data 2022

From the presentation on the table 4 above, shows that majority of the learners in class 7 performed poorly in the appraisal test at 10 (56%) and this could be attributed to the challenges the children are going through for instance psychological instability, trauma, language barrier inappropriate placement, inadequate resources. All of these might contribute to poor access and quality of education. However, all is not lost, some students scored a good grade of 4 (18%), although was below average.

In terms of gender as presented on table 5, the boys are the majority and the do better than the girls. This could also be attributed to gender and stereotypes fasted on women and girls. Notable is the low enrolment although 55% of the refugees in Kakuma are children, over half of the school-age children do not attend school. Factors impacting school attendance include child labour, cultural barriers, and lack of resources, family needs, and marrying young.

4.1.2. Pupil Appraisal Test Results For Class 8

The total possible score was 12. Those who scored (0 - 3) were graded as poor; (4 - 6) graded fair; (7 - 9) graded good and (10- 12) graded as excellent.

Table 6: Appraisal test results for class 8 pupils

Grade	Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Learners frequency of scores										
Boys	7	33.3	9	42.9	4	19	1	4.8	21	100

Source: Field data 2022

The results presentation in table4 for class 8 pupils shows a similar trend where the majority of the learners 7 (33.3%) and 9 (42%) performance were poor and fair respectively, meaning the learners performed below expectation. This could also be attributed to psychological trauma, inadequate educational resources and communication barriers.

Table 7: Appraisal test results for class 7 pupils per gender

Grade	Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Learners frequency of scores										
Boys	2	29	7	78	3	75	1	0	13	62
Girls	5	71	2	22	1	25	0	0	8	38
TOTAL	7	100	9	100	4	100	1	0	21	100

Source: Field data 2022

Table 7 presents the gender dynamics among the learners and it shows that girls are below expectation whereas the boys perform relatively above average. This could be as a result of gender discriminations of early marriages and motherhood.

4.2. Response On Whose Responsibility Is The Education Of Displaced Children?

On responding to the question on the questionnaire, the participants stated as following groups as actively participating in the education process:

- The Government of Kenya through the ministry of education
- Religious groups
- None Governmental organisations
- International communities

4.3. Challenges Facing Provision Of Education Amidst Conflict And Forced Displacement in Kenya

From the interviews conducted, the following responses were solicited: The education officers in Turkana County reported that the challenges facing provision of education among the refugee children are; Lack of policy and legal frameworks or official rules for education offices to follow in terms of integrating IDPs and refugees into the system in the hosting educational area Development of a plan focused on incorporating the education needs of refugees, supplemented, Lack of documentation, age, education level, transfer certificates, proof of displacement, residency requirements; Official letters from the governors and education offices with instructions to education offices at county and school levels to accept displaced students even without the presence of official documents; Official manual guiding enrolment of foreign students in the country's schools for the academic year; the Host Community reluctance and general difficulties in the integration of refugee students.

In responding to this question, participants mentioned several types of challenges in concurrence and the following were captured:

- Uncertainty of refugee security and safety arising from the government of Kenya ultimatum on closure of refugee camps in Kenya
- Continued conflicts and in fights among the warring communities
- when Lack of space
- Lack of accountability by service providers because of lack of policy on who does what.

- Language of instruction is a major factor among the learners of diverse nationalities and backgrounds.
- Maintaining communication and information sharing among the plethora of partners involved in providing education for displaced populations
- Inadequate resources
- Insecurity and psychological instability of the children, family and the communities
- Curriculum choice for refugees is challenging for a number of reasons.
 - ✓ It can be a highly politicized and emotive issue for refugee communities and host governments, provoking sensitivities around identity, culture and ties to country of origin.
 - ✓ Curriculum decisions related to language of instruction, and accessing examinations and certification have far-reaching implications for refugee children, including future educational and livelihood opportunities during continued displacement or after repatriation.
- Teaching force Teachers are essential to the provision of quality education, including in situations of forced displacement.
 - ✓ Teacher shortages jeopardize the quality of education and consequently student learning achievement.
 - ✓ Using host country teachers or refugee teachers represents different planning challenges which include decisions on compensation and/or incentive schemes, transfer of payments in case of internal displacement of teachers and coordination with external partners, when the host government cannot compensate displaced teachers

4.4. Sustainable Strategies In The Provision And Management Of Education Amidst Conflict And Forced Displacement In Kenya

Participants forwarded the following suggestions;

- Mobilization of resources from communities, charities and the private sector, in addition to development and humanitarian partners.
- On the discussions on Management, there was a clear need to coordinate efforts with partners. Collaboration is necessary to share key information and make use of existing tools. It is also key to building robust education systems that are capable of managing crises and attracting the funding to manage displaced populations.

- Development of a refugee education policy to address some of the legal and policy bottlenecks restricting integration of refugees into national education systems Sensitization of relevant agencies on implementation of existing policies, better definition of roles and responsibilities of various bodies involved in education of refugees in Kenya.
- Development of a plan focused on incorporating the education needs of refugees, supplemented by NGOs to help reduce the overload on learners.
- A common framework for aligning partner activities with those of the government in support of education – especially important in situations where both development and humanitarian partners are participating
- A harmonizing emergency or early recovery education activities that may be specified in a Humanitarian (or Refugee) Response Plan with longer-term development priorities for the education sector, which can help countries to manage rapidly changing contexts as seen in the last five years since 2018
- A plan that will facilitate access to external education financing opportunities, including funding from the Partnership for Education, to ensure continued learning; A sense of ownership among those involved in the planning process, which will aid with implementation of the plan.
- Strengthen their governance and accountability mechanisms in line with frameworks for effective monitoring and evaluation system. Establish clear audit systems.
- Put in place management of information/communication and a coordination framework that provides an enabling environment for development partners and other stakeholders to participate in education for IDPs and refugees
- Coordination efforts do not end when a refugee has access to education. Returning home in safety and dignity, with access to social services, also needs to be coordinated. Ministries of education and their partners, including the Education Cluster, on both sides of the border must cooperate and coordinate returns. “This is currently the case in Somalia where Somali refugees have started to return from Dadaab refugee camp (Kenya). Cross border collaboration is key for their success after conflict.” Stated by the education officer.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings have by and large identified some of the factors that hindered effective management of learning among displaced children and youth in Kakuma Refugee Camp, which could also be factors that hindered the management of learning among displaced children in other conflict zones. Castro and Nielsen, (1989) in their book, 'Natural Resource Conflict Management' said that the existing scenario in conflicting zones, like transformation of social institutions and destruction of educational institutions was not what made up people, but ways of offering practical and effective solutions to such problems was the call of man.

The study concluded that education amidst conflict and forced displacement is an agenda for a plethora of partners led by the host government, communities, international communities, Non-Governmental Organisations and that there is need to harmonise these contributions from the many partners through policy frameworks that will help benefit the children and their education moving into the future.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends the following that:

1. Mainstreaming refugees in national education system.
2. There should be an Increased the number of security officers to curb the frequent conflicts arising in the camp.
3. Mixing together refugees from diverse backgrounds with intention of making them to stay like members of the same family in order to eliminate in-fighting.
4. Introduction of relevant teacher training to adequately equip the teachers with relevant skills and knowledge to handle the refugee learners.
5. Introduction of a harmonized curriculum for learners in refugee camps.
6. Development of policy frameworks on commitment of planning, implementing, and facilitating the management of education as required for the benefit of the learners by all stakeholders.

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THE NEXUS BETWEEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUTH, FORCED URBAN-RURAL MIGRATION, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN UGANDA

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Abstract: COVID-19 outbreak led to World Health Organization to develop Standard Operating Procedures as guidelines of responding, preventing and militating against its impact on the populations. Different countries responded to it depending on their political economic analysis. The government of Uganda responded to the first wave by declaring a total lockdown. This had ripple effects on the already vulnerable population, especially young people. A research conducted in Kampala, Masaka and Gulu on COVID-19 and the youth question in Africa, revealed that the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on young people sparked reverse migration, the urban to rural migration with a hope to better livelihoods because life in urban areas was unbearable. The aim of this article is to explore the causality between COVID-19, Government of Uganda response, the socio-economic impact on youth livelihoods, urban-rural migration, population pressure, and the environmental consequences of the reverse migration. This is one of the unforeseen consequences of COVID-19 and the responses by the Government of Uganda leading to the slow-on-set of climate change. This research adopted a mixed methods research with a Community-based Participatory Action Research approach. A socio-ecological model was adopted to analyze the individual, household and community perspectives. 890 youths responded to the survey and selected key informants were interviewed. The findings revealed that measures like total lockdown and failure of the safety nets put in place to support the vulnerable, rather than Covid19 per se, affected access to medical care, food, and transport. It also affected incomes and livelihoods, rent, internet and electricity bills were too high, leading to anxiety, stress in the family, drug abuse, and other social ills. Most of the youth who had lost their jobs in urban areas decided to relocate to the rural areas. This too had a negative impact on the destination points.

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Key Words: Covid19 Measures, youth, Induced-Migration, land pressure, and environmental-degradation

1. INTRODUCTION

Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world (YEE 2016, SUPR 2018, YouthMap 2011). In spite of this big youthful population, research shows that youth face a higher unemployment rate than adults, making them face a double burden of poverty and unemployment (Restless 2011, Kwesiga, Wamajji et al. 2019, OECD 2020). According to The Uganda Youth Policy, Ugandan youth are considered to be the country's most valuable assets and an integral component of the development process to safeguard the future of the nation. The national youth policy calls for all stakeholders to make a concerted effort to plan, implement, monitor, evaluate, and strengthen the activities of youths in the country (YLP 2013; SUPR 2018).

After the COVID-19 broke up, it took a slower pace in taking root in Uganda initially, but cases began to rise in July 2020 when Uganda registered its first death (MoH 2020). Cases of infection started on March 21, 2020 and by March 30th the cases had risen to 33. From then, numbers began to rise every passing day (BMAU 2020). The government of Uganda through President Yoweri Museni announced 35 drastic measures that involved most of the 42 million people of Uganda: students, Church, Mosque worshippers, and travelers (Mpagi 2020). According to the President, the total lockdown strategy was going to enable the government to plan and prepare for the Pandemic (Mpagi 2020). Initially, the airport was closed and all passenger traveling was suspended except for emergencies and humanitarian flights. Also, all land and water borders for all passengers were closed. The government embarked on a strategy of blocking the entrance of the virus into the country. The village leadership system assisted in guarding infiltrations against the neighboring countries through porous borders (Mpagi 2020). The government cautioned the natives to be vigilant and report strangers and those who entered their villages (Mpagi 2020).

There was active citizen engagement in preventing infections and the spread of COVID-19 (Ariba, Barbara Sebalu Sematimba et al. 2020). Since essential goods and international trade was allowed but with strict checking at border points, some of the civilians protested this policy and became hostile to lorry drivers who continued to enter and leave Uganda (Aid-UG 2020). The President defended these traders and referred to them as a manageable risk (Mpagi 2020). He added that stopping the cargo drivers would collapse the economy. Additionally, as community members engaged in being vigilant and reporting cases of those who had traveled

abroad and sneaked back into their villages, this also exposed corrupt security personnel who sometimes colluded with the smugglers.

The public was cautioned to fight the pandemic by strictly adhering to the public health standards and operation procedures (SOPs) to prevent the spreading of the pandemic as follows; Not getting near anybody coughing or sneezing; Not shaking hands or hugging; Not touching the mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands; Regularly sanitizing all the surfaces that are touched by many people — table-tops, door handles, chairs, arm-rests, microphones, etc, and washing hands with soap and water or using sanitizers, regularly; Keeping a social distance of, at least, 4 meters in public; Good nutrition. And lastly, the extra mechanism is of using the face masks as a crucial instrument in stopping the spread of the virus. On 18 May 2020, the government promised to provide a face mask free of charge to all Ugandans of 6 years and above. However, many other promises were made by the government like radio and a TV in every village for the youth to study but those promises have never been fully realized (MoH2020).

During COVID-19, the head of state maintained an interactive, clear, simple, continuous and scientifically facts-driven communication to the citizens of Uganda. The Head of State himself led what was termed as the ‘battle against COVID-19’. Apart from The National Task Force (NTF) on COVID-19 and the Ministry of Health, only presidential representatives at the district level (Residential District Commissioners (RDCs) handled COVID-19-related activities during the lockdown. The Head of State during a national-wide address on COVID-19 continually used both cultural-historical and religious approaches while making national addresses and mobilizing the citizens against the pandemic. On several national addresses on Covid-19, local language was used to make vivid explanations and draw live examples both in the history and the Bible. This made his national address very interesting and interactive to all audiences including the youth. Some excerpts from his speeches are captured below:

I normally remind everybody that we Africans are the original human beings that have been here for the last 4½ million years. The first vaccine, against smallpox (*Omuze-Kawaali*), was discovered by Edward Jenner in the year 1796. The last epidemic of smallpox here in Uganda, before colonialism, was in 1893. My great-grandmother, Nyinanchweende, as well as my grand-fathers, were alive at that time. The only solutions the people had against that epidemic were: avoiding (*okwewala, okwetantara*) by not going where an outbreak was reported; and strong immunity to defeat the disease. Some of my great grand-parents and grandparents defeated smallpox (*Kacokora, Nyinanchweende*, etc). I, myself, defeated smallpox in 1963. The school had to close (Ntare School). Although the vaccine was long available by that time, nobody had bothered to immunize us. For many centuries, many diseases were

simply avoided by human precautions. Diseases like yaws (*ebinyoro*), syphilis (*ebihooya*), leprosy (*ebibeembe, ebigenge*), etc., were controlled by avoiding (*okwewala, okwetantara*) and distancing (*tonseemberera*) (Mpagi 2020).

In the Bible, in the Book of Luke chapter 17, verses 11-19, you remember the story of the 10 lepers. It says: “11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy[a] met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, pity us!” 14 When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed. 15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. 17 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” The crucial words here are: “they stood at a distance” (*tonseemberera, otampika*). This was 2000 years ago (Mpagi, 2020).

Table 1: List of presidential directives on covid-19 on 30th March 2020

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1. All the Educational Institutions were closed.
 2. Communal prayers were suspended.
 3. All gatherings or conferences were stopped.
 4. Ugandans from moving to or through category one (I) countries were banned.
 5. Initially, returning Ugandans were allowed but with quarantine, at their cost, for 14 days.
 6. The non-agricultural gathering points were allowed e.g. factories, hotels, large plantations.
 7. Ugandan-style weddings of the hexagonal, extravagant were discouraged.
 8. Burials were for a maximum of 10 people.
 9. Weekly or monthly markets were suspended.
 10. At that time, allowed the public transport systems.
 11. All the discos, dances, bars, sports, music shows, cinemas, and concerts were suspended.
 12. Advised the public to maintain hygiene measures.
 13. Advised the public on good nutrition.
 14. Stopped all passengers coming into Uganda by air, land, or water.
 15. Prohibited pedestrians from entry into the country from the neighbouring countries.
 16. All public passenger transport vehicles were stopped.
 17. Only food sellers to remain in the markets.
 18. Private vehicles allowed to continue but with only 3 people maximum per vehicle.
 19. Ambulances, army vehicles, garbage collection vehicles, etc.,
 20. Banned the movement of all privately owned passenger vehicles.

21. Suspended the shopping arcades, shopping malls, hardware shops.
22. Directed all the non-food shops (stores) to close.
23. The super-markets were allowed to remain open at that time.
24. Established Food Markets in Kampala and the other towns were allowed to continue open.
25. The food sellers were not allowed to go home during the 14 days.
26. Salons, Lodges and garages were ordered to be shut for the subsequent 14 days.
27. Like the farms, factories were allowed to remain open.
28. Construction sites were allowed to continue operating but encamp their workers.
29. The essential services i.e., the medical, agriculture, etc., were allowed to continue.
30. Cargo transport by train, plane, lorry, pick-up, *bodaboda* and bicycle, were allowed
31. URA could not to close business;
32. Later, gatherings of more than 5 persons were prohibited.
33. except for cargo planes, lorries, pickups and trains, no other transport in and out of the country
34. Health emergencies were allowed

Source: Mpagi, 2020.

Thus COVID-19 led to the Government of Uganda responding with total lockdown (devinit.org 2020, Mpagi 2020, UNDP-Uganda 2020). Uganda's efforts resulted in flattening the curves of transmissions, especially during the lockdown (Mpagi 2020). The lockdown greatly affected the economy as it disrupted the market and production supply chain in the country (BMAU 2020, FSD 2020) especially the informal sector which employs most of the urban poor youth. According to (FSD 2020) Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) (2016), 13.67 million persons are engaged in the informal sector, 55% operate in Kampala alone. The pandemic impact therefore would outlast itself causing a serious negative impact on youth livelihoods, especially the urban poor youth (BMAU 2020, FSD 2020). It led to high cost of living in urban areas. The youth then opted to relocate to their rural areas. This move had both positive and negative effects in the rural areas. This paper explores these interactions and the effect of the reverse migration to climate change (BMAU 2020).

According to a World Bank report, (World Bank, 2020), the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) projections were revised downwards for most African countries. Uganda's GDP growth rate projections were revised from 6% to between 4.6% and 5.1% for the Financial Year 2019/20 (MoFPED, 2020). It was further projected that those employed in the informal sector in urban areas were more likely to bear the most severe economic and social repercussions and were at high risk of slipping into poverty. The youth in the urban centers mainly live in the slums characterized by extreme poverty, lack of quality services, and infrastructure (Kwiringira, Atekyereza et al. 2014). Youth are mainly employed as casual laborers, hawkers, boda-boda riders, tailors, hairdressers, market stall operators, and food vendors, among others

(Kwiringira, Atekyereza et al. 2014). However, because of the lockdown, many young people lost their sources of regular income (Ariba, Barbara Sebalu Sematimba et al. 2020, Sentamu 2020), creating financial instability, since many had little or no savings to resort to (Kwesiga, Wamajji et al. 2019). It was estimated that about 23% were at risk of losing 100% of their daily income (FSD 2020).

In the early weeks of the outbreak, Uganda registered high rates of recovery for its COVID-19 cases (Aid-UG 2020, BMAU 2020, UNDP-Uganda 2020). Recent reports (Aid-UG 2020, devinit.org 2020, JoiningForces 2020, Mambo, Sikakulya et al. 2020) show that ever since the outbreak, youth livelihoods have been greatly interrupted, as access to education, employment, and participation in governance processes, decision-making, and public life has been greatly disrupted. It is envisioned that the long-term effect of the crisis will include increased levels of youth unemployment and aggravation of their vulnerability and exclusion in Uganda (Ariba, Barbara Sebalu Sematimba et al. 2020, BMAU 2020, UNDP-Uganda 2020). At the same time, while the COVID-19 crisis reveals many challenges to the youth in Uganda (Ariba, Barbara Sebalu Sematimba et al. 2020, Mambo, Sikakulya et al. 2020), little was thought about the impact of the pandemic on migration and the environment. The government's response to the pandemic was gender-blind and youth-blind. Covid-19 did not only cause a public health emergency in Uganda but has also caused unprecedented suffering at different levels of the community (Aid-UG 2020, FSD 2020). The pandemic posed a threat to human security and the economy in general (UNDP-Uganda 2020). Uganda's growth was expected to fall to 3.5 percent down from 4.9 percent in 2019, while per capita GDP growth declined to -0.2 percent (IMF 2020). The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) in the early days of the outbreak (anticipated a short-term impact to entail, an increase in the number of poor people, a severe reduction in exports, tourism, and worker's remittances from Ugandans in the diaspora, the shortfall in domestic and an overall customs revenue loss as a result of the pandemic (MoFPED)(BMAU 2020). The National budget 2020/2021, was passed under the theme "Stimulating the Economy to safeguard Livelihoods, Jobs, Businesses and Industrial Recovery". This demonstrated the government's commitment to addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic. The budget elaborated an economic stimulus and growth strategy that addressed several critical interventions including the introduction of tax relief to businesses; expansion of social protection for the vulnerable; improvement of household incomes through work programmers and credit facilities; and, reduction of mobile transaction costs to prevent the spread of the pandemic (BMAU 2020).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Literature on COVID - 19 in sub-Saharan Africa is scarce as many scholars have not carried out studies on it, especially the social and economic effects or impacts of the disease. Empirical studies on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are scanty. For example, the nexus between rural - rural migration and COVID-19 pandemic has not been empirically examined in the presence of on-going migration incidents. Lockdown preventive measures helped to buy time for the health sector to prepare for increased COVID-19 cases, but these measures came at a high price (Olaro 2020, UNDP-Uganda 2020). There was a clear decline in economic growth (BMAU 2020, devinit.org 2020), and projections indicated that the response measures could be associated with hundreds of thousands of deaths without taking into account any deaths directly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNDP-Uganda 2020). The lockdown, for instance, was estimated to increase approximately 5.2 percentage points the poverty rate, meaning that 1,948,279 Ugandans could fall into poverty (BMAU 2020). However, as the duration of the lockdown extended, household-level economic impacts became worse in the urban centers. This led to induced urban-rural migration of the urban poor youth to the rural areas seeking food from their rural ancestral homes. What was not anticipated is what the urban youth would do in the villages and how that could translate into impacting livelihoods, land pressure, and environmental degradation in the rural communities. The government did not foresee their response mechanisms becoming drivers of urban to rural migration. Neither did they foresee the impact of the reverse migration on the land-use, environment and livelihoods in rural areas. Causality between COVID-19, Government of Uganda response, the socio-economic impact on youth livelihoods, urban-rural migration, population pressure in rural areas, and the environmental consequences of the reverse migration has been under researched. This paper seeks to fill this gap in knowledge by answering the following questions: What is the relationship between the Government of Uganda response to COVID-19, and reverse migration? (2) How do return migrants affect the rural land use and climate change?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

To answer the two questions above, the study adopted Veena Das's (1995) Critical Events theory. Das (1995) considers a Critical Event to be something that changes society. According to Das (1995) after a critical event happens, a new mode of action comes into being in a society that redefines traditional categories. Equally important are the new forms which are acquired by a variety of actors in the community and the nation. Das further argues that the terrains on which a critical event took place crisscrossed several institutions, moving across families, communities, the state, and multinational corporations. Therefore, a description of the Covid-

19 outbreak as a critical event helps to form a study that makes an incision upon several institutions, so that their mutual implications in the events are foregrounded during the analysis. The critical events approach to the study of covid-19 enables us to arrive at the truth of the victims through the daily suffering, daily humiliations, and everyday experiences. The pandemic is a critical event in which the traditional concepts of health-seeking knowledge and behaviors were altered in the community. Practices such as, identifying an epidemic, visiting the sick, giving care, death and funeral rituals, and communal support rendered to a person (s) or a family after recovery or losing a family member were transformed. This critical event devastated the lives of the youth and disrupted the status quo in their communities. Due to the high cost of living in urban areas that made life unbearable to most youth, they reversed the course of migration from rural to urban to urban to rural in search of better livelihoods. The youth chose reverse migration as an adaptive strategy to the suffering that they were experiencing in urban areas.

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 TO UGANDAN YOUTH

a. Unemployment

The Covid-19 pandemic worsened the vulnerability of young people (Peeru 2020). The government imposed a sudden lockdown in 2020 to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak, leading to a massive exodus of migrants from cities back to their homes. Complete and partial lockdowns and restrictions to contain the spread of the virus have forced many businesses and other forms of economic sectors to close. the pandemic has led to insurmountable socioeconomic and cultural setbacks. Multiple sectors such as tourism, health, education, remittance, transportation, including agriculture and forestry have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic (hereafter 'the pandemic') (Ssempebwa et.al,2021).

COVID-19 impacted the community disproportionately. Although the pandemic impacted all categories of people in the community, its level of impact could vary based on their socio-economic status. Understanding the socio-economic factors that explain the severity of the pandemic is crucial for post-pandemic recovery efforts and policy supports in the rural community. In as much as there is no official data from Uganda Bureau of Statistics on the number of unemployed youth, a report by Ssempebwa et al (2021) has estimated that more than 60% of the Ugandan youth lost their jobs due to the pandemic. The projections of the impact of covid-19 relied mainly on the disruptions that were to affect the youth employed in the informal sector, relying on informal jobs (FSD-MoFPED, 2020). Unemployment was projected to increase among the youths due to the lockdown. The FSD (2020) projected that 3.8 million people were likely to lose their jobs temporarily, while 625,957 were predicted to lose their jobs

permanently. The same report (FSD 2020) added that 80% of the workers in Kampala alone were likely to lose their jobs permanently. However, this report did not shed light on what youth will do as an alternative to unemployment.

b. High School Drop Out Rates

The young people and children were further exposed due to closing of schools and no movement from one place to another. Schools in Uganda remained closed for two years leaving 15 million children out of school (JoiningForces 2020, Peeru 2020). While children and youth, in general, were not considered to be most at risk of contracting Covid-19, they are extremely vulnerable to the 'secondary' social and economic impacts (Aid-UG 2020, JoiningForces 2020, Peeru 2020). The length of lockdown kept on being extended hence keeping children out of school. Some of them lost interest in school and got employed, others got married (Ssempebwa et.al,2021).

c. Lack Of Child Protection Systems

Specialized protection facilities such as youth-friendly were also closed, while restrictions on movement limited efforts for the outreach of careworkers and para-social workers to reach vulnerable youths (Aid-UG 2020). It was harder than ever for the youth to report and get a response to violence, abuse, and other protection issues. Besides restrictions on public gatherings and movement meant that normal community reporting, NGO activities, and referral pathways were limited (JoiningForces 2020). In addition, the lockdown not only caused isolation but also disillusionment and disorientated the young people in Kampala, especially because of strict mobility restrictions that affected interactions (Ariba, Barbara Sebalu Sematimba et al. 2020; JoiningForces (2020). The strict redeployment of security officers to enforce the curfew and Covid-19 prevention measures led youth to flee the urban centers to rural areas because of ruthlessness of the soldiers on young people (Ssempebwa et.al,2021).

d. High Cost Of Living And Crime Rate In Urban Areas

The government set out to distribute food to 1.5 million urban poor in Kampala and Wakiso districts, leaving other parts of the country (Ariba, Barbara Sebalu Sematimba et al. 2020). However, evidence shows that the food was inadequate to cover the set targets of the households for the duration of the lockdown (FSD 2020, Nambatya 2020). Therefore, as the lockdown hunger increased, the desperate youth turned (BMAU 2020). To escape from the police, some of them opted to migrate to rural areas to hide there.

e. Poor Water And Sanitation

During lockdown, the restricted movement of persons did not spare access to health facilities. Since most of the urban poor work in the informal economy and live in informal congested settlements, observing the WHO guidelines proved to be an uphill task. The urban poor youths for example live in neighborhoods with often-shared access to basic services like water points, and community latrines therefore social distancing was a challenge for them (BMAU 2020). In a survey conducted by Kwiringira, Atekyereza et al. (2014) in Kampala slums, it was observed that 70% of the urban poor use shared latrines. They also have limited access to safe water and many do not have access to improved sanitation facilities. COVID-19 exacerbated the already existing vulnerabilities of the urban poor with poor water and sanitation facilities. The urban-rural migration became a safety net for many.

f. COVID-19 Impact On Uganda's Achievement Of Sdgs

Uganda as a signatory to United Nations programs benefited from the support accorded to her during the pandemic (UNDP-Uganda 2020). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Uganda led the technical team to support the socioeconomic pillar of the UN support on COVID-19, emphasizing saving lives and protecting people (UNDP-Uganda 2020). The aim was to complement the health response, led by the World Health Organization (WHO), and the humanitarian response, outlined in the UN-led COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan that set a pathway for recovery and future resilience-building. This was anchored on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principles (UNDP-Uganda 2020). However, the UNDP report (UNDP-Uganda 2020), posits that most of the projections of the government and its development partners were not made under normal conditions, but with high uncertainty, volatility, and data gaps during the COVID-19 crisis (BMAU 2020). This called for the government and its development partners to be held accountable, to ensure quality service provision (Aid-UG 2020, Ariba, Barbara Sebalu Sematimba et al. 2020).

The UNDP made several projections on the economic impact of COVID-19 (UNDP-Uganda (2020)). Among them was a reduction in service and manufacturing sectors, especially in the tourism sector; deterioration of fiscal deficit due to reducing revenue collection and increased spending needs for response and recovery efforts; a decline in remittances and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) following the impending global recession. National poverty rates were also projected to rise. There was likely to be an increase in unemployment and inequality (FSD 2020). The UNDP also warned that some of the SDGs will be severely impacted, including: Eliminating Poverty (SDG1), Zero Hunger (SDG2), Good Health and Well-

Being (SDG3), Gender Equality (SDG5), and Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG8). These SDGs directly affect youths and their environment. The central government had to reduce its budget for local governments which impacted service delivery (BMAU 2020). This was compounded by the loss of Local government revenue from property income, sale of goods and services as well as other statutory fees and fines, leading to a combined fiscal gap of UGX 15.7 trillion (approx. US\$4.15 billion) (devinit.org 2020).

5. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This paper is part of COVID-19 and the Youth Question in Africa (COYOQA) project by Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) and funded by IDRC. One of the research objectives was to establish the gendered socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the youth and their livelihoods. The researchers focused on lived experiences of the youth in their communities during the outbreak to conduct a survey and an in-depth study of the epidemic among the youth in Uganda. Using both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms and phenomenological approaches, Data was conducted from nine (9) sites in Gulu City, Kampala City, and Greater Masaka. This was done following a cross-sectional survey design. The survey was based on a questionnaire, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. A convenient sample of 890 youths, who were randomly selected, was reached. Informants were asked to describe their lived experiences in detail, supported by field notes. These descriptions were analyzed to arrive at experiences relevant to the phenomenon of the pandemic from a viewpoint of the youths.

The use of the phenomenology approach allowed us to go back to the events of the pandemic outbreak when it started, to discover and lay bare what lies hidden in survivors' experiences to emerge and manifest in their descriptions. The interpretive phenomenology inquiry allowed us to reflect on the youth's experiences, and explicate their lives, hence enabling us to unravel the meaning of lived experiences during the outbreak. There was a clear path of causality showing that the lockdown led to high cost of living in the urban areas. Most youth lost their jobs and could not afford food, rent, electricity, internet, water among others. Even the food distribution was skewed. To escape from this misery, many of them looked to ways and means to going back to their rural areas where they believed life was better. This was one of the most unlikely impact of COVID-19. This paper therefore delves into this causality between COVID-19, Government of Uganda response, the socio-economic impact on youth livelihoods, urban-rural migration, population pressure, and the environmental consequences of the reverse migration.

6. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

We sought to find out the impact of the reverse migration from urban areas to rural areas that had been triggered by the high cost of living due to COVID-19. Our findings are presented below:

a. Impact Of Reverse Migration To Rural Areas

i. *Young People In Agriculture*

Return migrants could also be associated with potential changes in agriculture land use patterns. This was good news and a change from the norm. Contrary to the belief held for a long time that youth have a negative attitude towards agriculture, in this study, youth who migrated from urban areas to the rural areas actively engaged in agriculture to eke a living. University graduates from Makerere University whom we met in Masaka and Gulu agricultural vocational training centres told us that they wanted to acquire skills to run their own farms. This too was an unexpected outcome of our study and socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

ii. *Rural Youth Unemployment*

The unexpected and unprecedented magnitude of the reverse migration of migrant workers induced by the pandemic has taken a tremendous toll on their communities of origin. This set the daunting task for under-resourced local governments to meet and accommodate the socio-economic needs of returnees amidst a crisis-stricken and undeniably challenged rural economy. Before the outbreak young people were employed in the informal sector as street vendors, bar attendants, bicycle and motorcycle taxis (boda boda) riders, taxi operators, teachers, bar attenders, stage performers in music dance, and drama, DJs, night clubs' workers, and other were dealing in inform cross bode trade. Others were involved in the tourism industry and all underwent a radical change. The key concerns of returnees and their families were linked to lack of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, reduction or loss of income and, in some cases, ensuing rise in debt, and reduced household food security. Some of the respondents told us that they migrated to run away from accumulation of debts in urban areas. Unfortunately, when they had nothing to turn to in the villages, they started accumulating debts too. The multiple effects of loss of employment, depletion of savings and fear of COVID-19 contagion triggered a massive wave of reverse migration in Uganda to rural areas of origin, in search of ways of surviving.

Given that close to 40 percent of international remittances are sent to rural areas (IFAD, 2016), rural households highly dependent on income remitted from abroad and urban areas was considerably affected by the pandemic.

The return of migrant workers to their rural areas of origin, even as a temporary short-term solution, posed serious challenges not only to communities of origin, but also to the formal and informal sectors of the rural economy that faced the daunting challenge of absorbing these large numbers of returnees into the local labour market. Furthermore, the strain on the already limited local resources (employment opportunities, food, natural resources, etc.) to meet and accommodate the needs of returnees increased. This reignited former or heightening existing socio-economic vulnerabilities of these youth. Many returnees found themselves in precarious situations. Some of the challenges that returning migrant workers faced included greater loss of earnings, stigmatization or discrimination related to migration in general as potential carriers of the COVID-19 virus in the specific pandemic situation, and weaker social capital and social safety nets, often resulting in more challenging access to resources and services.

iii. Barriers To Self-Employment In Rural Areas

This study found out that most of the youth who returned to rural areas had difficulties in accessing credit to engage in self-employment. Furthermore, return migrant workers who had few assets or lack of access to land had even more restricted options to earn their living, with non-agricultural opportunities being limited in rural areas. Growing competition for limited resources led to social conflicts and social disruption, as well as increased pressure on natural resources. For instance, while most youth expressed their intention to be self-employed in a survey, they lacked finance to start their own business. In addition, those interviewed showed interest in participating in training to upgrade their skills in agriculture, masonry, construction, carpentry among others. However, most of them were depending on family land which hampered their options to build agricultural livelihoods in their rural areas.

iv. Food And Nutrition Insecurity In Rural Areas

Loss of jobs and unstable incomes, disruption of local supply chains and simultaneous food price increases due to the impact of the pandemic hindered the capacity of return migrants and their families to access and purchase adequate and nutritious food for themselves and their families (Ssempebwa,et.al.,2021). In this context, rural migrant households often found themselves in a position of trying to cope with the reduction of earnings and to provide for additional family members. Food insecurity was particularly high for those households that largely depended on income generated through remittances from urban areas or abroad. Food insecurity in the rural areas of Uganda was shocking a finding in this study. Uganda produces plenty of food and sells the surplus to its neighbours. It was surprising to hear from respondents in rural areas that they did not have food. On the other hand, farmers told us that the demand for food had

declined because the people did not have the purchasing power. The farmers told us that households had been forced to reduce the quantity and quality of food consumption due to declining income and simultaneous food price increase. Generally, the pandemic led to food insecurity in Uganda. Moreover, environmental stresses and shocks such as droughts and floods exacerbated food insecurity and the vulnerability of rural populations in the pandemic context. The return of migrants can put pressure on natural resources and have long-term implications for environmental sustainability.

v. Environmental Degradation And Slow On-Set Of Climate Change

The measures taken to control the spread of the virus and the slowdown of economic activities in Uganda had significant effects on the environment and sparked the slow on-set of climate change (Ssempebwa et al.,2021). This research found out that increased use of PPE (e.g., face mask, hand gloves etc.), their haphazard disposal, and generation of a huge amount of hospital waste had negative impacts on the environment. According to this study, the pandemic put enormous strain on the present waste collection and treatment system, resulting in ineffective waste management practices and damaging the environment. The extensive usage of face masks increased the release of microplastics/nanoplastics (183 to 1247 particles piece⁻¹) and organic pollutants in land and water bodies. Furthermore, the significant usages of anti-bacterial hand sanitizers, disinfectants, and pharmaceuticals have increased the accumulation of various toxic emerging contaminants (e.g., triclocarban, triclosan, bisphenol-A, hydroxychloroquine) in the treated sludge/biosolids and discharged wastewater effluent, posing great threats to the ecosystems. The accumulation of toxic chemicals in the soil resulting from widespread soap use may degrade soil quality. The sudden rise in soapy discharge from every household over a short amount of time could increase the number of contaminants and change the composition of grey water. Domestic waste will damage river water, which will eventually damage lakes and seas. This unwelcoming series of events will become a severe problem (Leal Filho et al. 2021). In the informal settlement of Kampala, the waste was not well disposed. This became a health hazard. In fact when the heavy rains came, most of the drainage was blocked by this waste.

COVID-19 may not have been directly caused by climate change, but there are strong parallels and linkages, pointing to environmental degradation as a common underlying risk factor. Although many studies are confirming the short-term improvements in air quality in several countries across the world, the long-term negative consequences outweigh all the claimed positive impacts.

Study on the impacts of COVID-19 on sustainable forest management in African countries found that returned migrants were more likely to

contribute to deforestation through illegal timber harvests, charcoal production, tenure conflicts, and land grabbing for economic gains (Attah, 2021). This study established this fact. Most returnees embarked on brick-laying in the available swamps in Uganda. They also started clearing forests to burn the bricks and also to get charcoal and wood fuel. The youth we interviewed in Masaka and Gulu told us that it was the only source of income and was paying them well.

The impacts of COVID-19 have been perceived to be remarkable in the forestry sector, including community forestry. Migrants that return to villages from cities or abroad are likely to increase pressure on the forests (FAO, 2021). Especially when they lose their jobs and source of income due to COVID-19. An influx of returnees could, thereby, trigger an increase in forest resource extraction and consumption, mediated by the increasing number of livestock and re-utilization of abandoned land including wetlands of Uganda. The influx of the masses in the rural greatly affected rural communities and the environment. The youth who were mainly employed in the informal sector and are daily earners found themselves with no food and income to sustain themselves. Young people traversed long journeys to escape the horrible situation from Kampala, and others jumped on the back of trucks to travel back to villages. The moving of people to rural was unprecedented. As the government had not planned that people will move out of Kampala and other cities like Masaka and Gulu. The head of state made it clear that people from the cities should not move and infect the village people. However, even with the tight security and roadblocks still, the urban youth found their way to the rural areas. These youth when they arrived in the villages they descended on the inadequate natural resources to make a living. They started to cut trees and the forest to make charcoal and get wood to burn bricks, mine sand, clear wetlands, and swamps to make bricks and grow vegetables. This was a lucrative business of cutting trees and making charcoal to load on the moving trucks to Kampala.

The relocation of people from urban to rural areas and the unemployment/failure of livelihoods due to the lockdown led to an increase in the quarrying of clay for brick-laying. This led to the degradation of wetlands. In many areas, it also accelerated the cutting of trees (for firewood to bake the bricks among other uses):

“Many people resorted to burning charcoal to earn a living. Men cut down all [the] trees around.”—Participant at females’ group discussion at Kiwangala.

“Many other people have also cut trees for charcoal and firewood.”—Participant at mixed group discussion at Kyabakuza.

“We didn’t have work to do so we made bricks and had to fire [bake] them [using energy from trees].”—Participant at males’ group discussion at Nabugabo.

“Many people lost their jobs and the sources of income became limited. They look onto trees as source to get income and buy food for their families. There was massive cutting down of trees for charcoal making.”—Participant at mixed group discussion at Amuru.

“During the second wave of COVID-19, when a man sees trees in his compound or neighborhoods, the first and last thought is to change it into money. The tress suffered and as people move urban areas to a rural setting, bush burning was rampant since people were looking for a place to settle.”—Participant at a mixed group discussion at Amuru.

“I and my ten other colleagues were involved in illegal sand mining to get some money. I don’t know how this will affect the environment.”—Participant at a mixed group discussion at Amuru.

“People had to change livelihoods overnight and even people who would otherwise not be involved in environmentally dangerous practices were forced to [do so] for survival. Many people left urban areas and came to the rural areas and got involved in things like charcoal burning for income generation. We have lost so many tree covers, particularly in the sub-counties of Ndagwe and Malongo largely because communities resorted to charcoal burning. We have lost wetlands with people changing livelihoods to go into farming, brick making, and sand mining...We used to have a very big swamp just next to Kyazanga trading center. Today the local government is fighting with people looking to move their farms into the swamp. We have more than 100 private schools in Lwengo District [and] all the teachers employed there are out of work. They are trying their luck into all sorts of farming, wherever they can, swamps inclusive and [they] degrade them.”—Chief Administrative Officer, Lwengo District Local Government.

“Many people started charcoal burning and others started to trade in timber. A lot of tree cover was destroyed. We have a poor track record of waste management. With COVID19 it became worse.”—Executive Director at a CSO in Masaka City.

This was evident in Masaka where fishermen joined the returnees to exploit forest lands to burn charcoal. Below are some of their responses:

“Here in Masaka, we are a fishermen community. The Lake is our livelihood. The government has stopped us from fishing. We have no alternative but to cut the forests, burn charcoal and sell to buy food for survival”(Male respondent in an FGD at Masaka).

“From the time I came back from Kampala, first I ran away from my family because I couldn’t provide for them. I came to live here with my mother. I cleared this field and made it a recreational centre. People come to swim in the river, drink soda and enjoy. I am conserving the environment”(Male respondent, Gulu FGD)

“My whole family depended on me as the bread winner. When COVID-19 struck and there was lockdown, schools closed. As we speak, the schools are still closed. As a teacher in a private school, I lost my job. My only refuge was the village. Our farm goes up to the river with a swamp therein. I am making bricks from the swamp and selling them. You know COVID-119 has taught us people who live in the city to come back home and build houses. Rent is very expensive.”

“For a very long time, I survived fruit farming especially mangoes. When they are in season, I sell and buy flour for my family. But with this pandemic, I had no otherwise. I cut down my mango trees and burnt charcoal. Now I have completely nothing. I am a begger.”(Male Respondent, Gulu).

What Is The Alternative?

This question, came up in the field from one of the respondents who sought to know what we thought was the alternative to the plight of young people in Uganda. He paused the question: When trees are cut for charcoal and wood, swamps cleared for vegetable growing, fish destroyed wetlands destroyed for brick marking and sand mining, and forests destroyed for survival, what is the alternative? An excerpt from our conversation is hereby captioned:

“the enforcement officers burn their nets and break their canoes, government policy rules that fishermen must have a certain size of big boats and particular nets, which are expensive. This is done to protect the lake from overfishing. It is true enforcement officers burn the nets and break the small canoes of all fishermen nabbed not complying with government policy. Same thing with charcoal. All people caught with charcoal are arrested. But most do not have electricity. Even those few who have found the tariffs charged for electricity too high that they cannot use it for cooking. What will they use? Sand beach here we also use charcoal because electricity is very

expensive. People have to use the environment to survive trees for fuel, sand and clay for building. What is the alternative? By the way, isn't it a contradiction of government policy that even the environment protection officers who arrest charcoal bunkers also use charcoal? It is a big problem. Over 80% people in towns use charcoal. Electricity tariffs and capital costs are too high. The issues surrounding electricity in Uganda contribute to the fact that domestically we do not even use 50% of the power generated" —Businessman, Masaka

7. YOUTH RESILIENCE AMIDST THE CRISIS: SWITCHING ROLES, LOCATIONS AND LIVELIHOODS

One thing is clear, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the youths in epic proportion, yet the youth were determined to live, by all means. Living required *Switching* roles, locations, and livelihoods. The crisis had presented monumental challenges, and yet some youths rose to the reality of the challenge with loaded opportunities. While young people are usually described as restless, unemployed, unemployable and with a poor attitude, (Mumbere 2020), this study countered these beliefs. The youth challenged the odds, found reverse migration as an adaptive strategy and worked hard to fit in the new normal. When we asked the youth to tell us how they were coping with the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, they responded as below:

Table 2: Mechanisms adopted to cope with the impact of Covid-19

S/N	Mechanism	Count	%
1	Engaged in additional income-generating activities	381	43
2	Relied on savings	269	30
3	Borrowed from friends and family	243	27
4	Reduced food consumption	219	25
5	Received assistance from family and friends	214	24
6	Reduced non-food Consumption	158	18
7	Sale of assets	134	15
8	Took a loan from a financial institution	87	10
9	Credited purchases	81	9
10	Sold harvest in advance	46	5
11	Delayed payment obligations	18	2
12	Received assistance from NGO	14	2
13	Took advance payment from the employer	9	1
14	Other	56	6

Source: Primary field data

n = 885; Multiple responses elicited

From the foregoing, most of the youth engaged in additional income-generating activities. They became innovative to survive. Some reported that they relied on their savings, borrowed money from family and friends, reduced the food consumption, relied on remittances from family and friends, sold their assets and took loans from financial institutions.

In one of the focused group discussions, we asked the respondents to register in the attendance list while indicating what they used to do before covid-19 and what they are doing currently as names from the attendance list of a mixed group discussion in Kyabakuza Masaka.

Table 3: Focused group attendance list in Masaka

Name	Switch from	To agriculture
Ruku	Used to be a builder	Now vegetable farmer
Sseba	used to be a builder	Now vegetable farmer
Kiba	Used to be a bouncer	Now tomato farmer
Kyeyu	Boda boda rider	Now carbage farmer.
Sekya	Used to be a motorcycle taxi driver	the motorcycle was taken now a farmer
Nsubu	Used to be a motorcycle taxi driver	I went back to farming
Bwa	Was a school cook	Now farming
Nassu	teacher	now farmer
Nansu	I was student but, school is off	I am doing farming
Namu	School canteen manager	now a farmer
Lindwa	Used to operate a roadside food stall	Now learning to farm
Nampi	A school matron	Now doing farming
Nabu	I had my own home	Sold the house I decided to do farming

Source: Primary field data

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Spite of Uganda’s success story of limiting the spread of Covid-19, the impact of the drastic measures especially the lockdown increased the vulnerability of urban youth. The difficulties that the youth faced in urban areas forced them to take reverse migration as an adaptive strategy. This did not end their woes. In the rural areas, they put pressure on local governments to provide them with social amenities and opportunities for employment. They quickly found themselves suffering again with food insecurity. They put pressure on the environment and started cutting forests, laying bricks, destroying aquatic life in the swamps and burnt charcoal. The best news is youth changed the negative narratives about

them and became creative. They engaged in agriculture including value addition of the agricultural produce.

Young people in urban centers resorted to gathering soil in sacks and reusing plastic containers like bottles and buckets for planting vegetables. While this is celebrated, most of the vegetables were coming from the cleared wasteland and swamps. The youths have now dominated the supply chain of food but the swamps and the wetlands, forests, and river banks have been cleared bare, this is a danger to the environment. It may lead to flooding and droughts in the future.

The youths who went to the rural areas affected the scarce natural resources that were greatly affected including the swamps and rivers for sand, making bricks, and growing vegetables. Lakes were used to do illegal fishing and get lake land sand for construction. The forest is used to get wood to burn bricks and make charcoal and cleared for vegetable growing. The demand for sand, charcoal, wood, and bricks in the city was so high mainly because of the construction industry remained open, and the food industry. Trucks and pick-ups were allowed to move. These carried timber, sand, bricks, food, vegetables, and wood to the urban centers.

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