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Refugee livelihoods in Kampala, Nakivale and Kyangwali refugee settlements

Patterns of engagement with the private
sector

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List of abbreviations

DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
HIP	Humanitarian Innovation Project
IP	Implementing Partner
OP	Operating Partner
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
SLF	Sustainable Livelihoods Framework
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1 Introduction

Background of the Humanitarian Innovation Project

This working paper is drawn from a seven-week mission in Uganda as a preliminary study of the Humanitarian Innovation Project (HIP) based at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford. HIP seeks to research the role of technology, innovation and the private sector in refugee assistance.¹

In our research, we focus on refugee livelihoods for several inter-related reasons. Despite growing academic work on refugee livelihoods, there has been little coherent research capturing and analysing existing practices, and identifying alternative approaches to livelihood development. Historically, many formal attempts to promote refugee livelihoods, or to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development approaches to refugees, have been state-led, often neglecting the role of the private sector and innovation as potential sources of solutions. We believe, however, that a better understanding of the role of the private sector, technology and innovation from a bottom-up perspective represents a crucial ‘missing link’ in better supporting sustainable livelihoods for refugees.

There is no universal definition for ‘the private sector.’ In this paper, the private sector is broadly defined as any businesses that are not owned by states – both formal and informal – at all levels from small-scale firms set up by refugee themselves to large global corporations, including for-profit and non-profit.

Case study country: Uganda

Our primary case study country is Uganda. Unlike many of its neighbours, which encamp refugees, the Ugandan government promotes the ‘self-reliance’ of refugees; this means that rather than limiting responses to refugees to humanitarian relief, a space is open for a development-based approach to refugee assistance (Betts 2012).

We conducted a one-month pilot research study of the livelihoods of refugees in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, between July and August 2012 (see Omata 2012). In order to provide a comparative perspective to our initial Kampala-based findings, our research sites have been expanded to both Nakivale and Kyangwali refugee settlements. The on-going comparative case studies of three research sites allow us to explore a range of variables (i.e. urban/rural, settlement/non-settlement, regulatory frameworks and nationality) to explain variation in the nature and depth of refugees’ engagement with the private sector, innovation and technology.

The duration of the whole project is initially two years, until August 2014, with the majority of fieldwork in Uganda expected to take place between March and November 2013.

¹ The authors are indebted, in particular, to UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister in Kampala, Nakivale and Kyangwali settlements; Settlement Commanders and their support teams; Implementing and Operating Partners of UNHCR; Refugee Welfare Council; and individual refugees who actively participated in our research in the three sites. We are also grateful to both our Ugandan and refugee researchers who contributed to this paper.

Research themes

The core research objectives of HIP are to understand: 1) the nature of the relationships between refugee livelihoods and the private sector; and 2) the role of innovation and technology in refugees' economic strategies. Given its limited duration, a significant proportion of this mission was devoted to exploring the first core objective. In particular, we aimed to gather initial qualitative data on the following two specific research questions related to refugee livelihoods and the private sector:

1. What types of livelihoods strategies are employed by refugees living in Kampala, Nakivale and Kyangwali refugee settlements, and what are the characteristics of their economic activities?
2. Which markets/private sector actors do refugees access and interact with through their livelihoods activities in each research site?

Research methodologies

During this initial phase of fieldwork, we have employed a multi-method qualitative approach consisting of interviewing, focus group discussions, and a range of ethnographic and participatory tools including semi-structured interviews, 'deep hanging-out', transect walks and participatory mapping, with both refugees and non-refugee stakeholders in each of the research sites.

Table 1 is a summary of interviewees we spoke with during this mission. To select refugee interviewees, we relied on stratified snowball sampling based on the country of origin. In addition to the 50 refugee respondents, we interviewed 18 non-refugee stakeholders in three research sites, including officials of the Ugandan government, staff members of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its Implementing Partner (IP) and Operating Partner (OP) agencies, and local traders in and around the settlement area.

Location	Refugees	Non-refugee stakeholders	Total
Kampala	8	4	12
Kyangwali refugee settlement (including Hoima)	30	9	39
Nakivale refugee settlement (including Mbarara)	12	5	17
Total	50	18	68

Table 1: Number of interviewees during the mission

In each research site, we also conducted livelihoods mapping and wealth breakdown exercises to understand the general features of refugees' economic activities in relation to the degrees of their socio-economic status. Additionally, existing secondary sources, including reports and assessments on refugees in Uganda, were widely collected and reviewed.

Limitations and challenges of the fieldwork

During the mission, we confronted some major challenges. The first challenge was the time constraint of fieldwork. Our responsibilities during the seven-week mission were split between research, staff hiring and training, and establishing necessary procedures for subsequent visits to our research sites. These administrative tasks substantially reduced our time for research. Within the given time, it was neither realistic nor possible to meet all key stakeholders and policy-makers involved in our research themes in the three different sites.

We faced a second challenge in terms of logistics, particularly transportation in and between research sites – although this issue was significantly mitigated by UNHCR's generous support and assistance. As the two refugee settlements are distant from Kampala, several days of our schedule had to be sacrificed merely for transportation between the capital and settlements. Furthermore, given the enormous size of Nakivale settlement, we had to allocate a considerable amount of time just for moving within the settlement, which shortened our available research time. During research in settlements, especially in Kyangwali settlement, we also had very limited access to electricity and the internet, which made it difficult for us to electronically store and organise the collected data in a systematic and safe way.

Third, as expected, access to specific groups of refugees, especially Eritrean and Rwandan refugees in Kampala, remained a major challenge. As highlighted in the previous working paper (see Omata 2012), Eritrean refugees proved extremely cautious and reluctant to talk to 'strangers', and thus largely refused to be interviewed because of political sensitivities and concerns about exposure. In addition, this year represents a particularly sensitive time for residual Rwandan refugees, due to the imminent invocation of a cessation clause regarding their refugee status at the end of June 2013.² According to our key refugee informants, many of the Rwandan refugees in Uganda are extremely worried about whether they can continue to remain in exile or not after the cessation clause is invoked (indeed, some are even pretending to be Congolese refugees).

Structure of the report

This report consists of six sections. After this introduction, the second section provides deeper contextual information about refugees in our three research sites. The third section surveys the existing literature on refugee livelihoods and identifies analytical gaps in current scholarship. The fourth section presents our provisional findings regarding refugees' livelihood activities and interactions with the private sector and markets in Kampala, Nakivale and Kyangwali settlements. The fifth section then draws some intriguing research implications emerging from our missions to date. Lastly, the report ends with reflections and a description of the project's next steps.

Since we are still in a relatively early phase of research, this working paper focuses on presenting provisional findings drawn from the initial fieldwork. Detailed academic analysis based on more empirical evidence will be included in subsequent work. In order to protect their privacy and to avoid any negative consequences from this research, we use assumed names for all refugee interviewees, regardless of their nationality.

²The cessation clause applies only to Rwandans who fled the country between 1959 and 1998.

2 The research context

Refugees in Uganda

Uganda is a signatory to all principal international legal instruments for refugee protection: the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1976 Protocol and the 1969 OAU (Organisation of African Unity) Convention. In 2006, Uganda adopted new refugee legislation, the Refugees Act, which reflected the international standards of refugee protection established within these preceding international legal instruments. The Act recognises the right of refugees to work, to move freely within the country and to live in the local community, rather than in settlements (Dathine 2013). In line with the Act, the Ugandan government promotes refugee 'self-reliance'. Within each settlement, land is allocated to each refugee household in order to facilitate refugees' economic independence through agricultural livelihoods.

With a less-stringent refugee policy than neighbouring states, and its relative peace, Uganda represents an attractive destination for refugees – as of 2012, the country hosts approximately 200,000 refugees/asylum seekers from diverse nationalities. These refugees are spread across several settlements throughout the country, and within the capital, as seen in Map 1 below.

Refugees in Nakivale, Kyangwali and Kampala

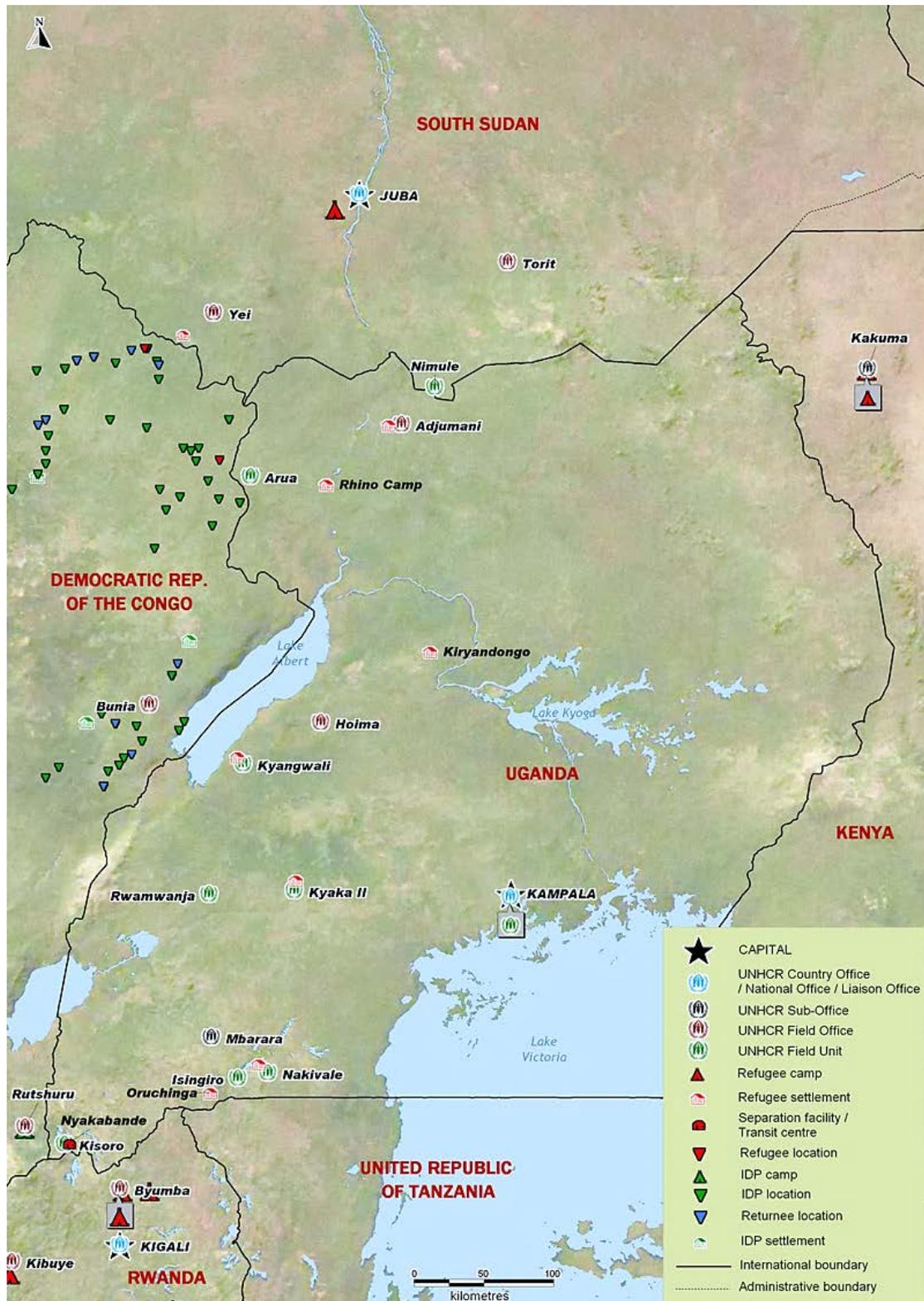
Nakivale refugee settlement, located near the Tanzania border in Isingiro district, Southern Uganda, currently hosts the largest number of refugees in the country, as shown in Table 2 below. Whilst refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) constitute the majority of the settlement's population, Nakivale also accommodates refugees and asylum seekers from diverse countries, such as Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi. Although the size of the settlement varies according to different sources, it is estimated at well beyond 100 square kilometres. This enormous area is geographically divided into three administrative zones – Base camp, Juru and Rubondo. These three zones, in turn, contain a total of 74 individual villages.

The administration of Nakivale is managed at the top level by The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) on-site settlement management team, led by the Ugandan Settlement Commander. Each zone is officially represented by selected members from the refugee population, who form the settlement's three Refugee Welfare Councils. Refugees in Nakivale are granted access to free land to build their shelter and are expected to use the rest for farming. Livelihood assistance is provided by UNHCR IPs, who as of 2013 include the American Refugee Committee and Nsamizi.

As shown in Table 2, Kampala is currently Uganda's second largest refugee hosting location, next to Nakivale settlement. As of 2012, more than 50,000 refugees were residing in the capital, despite very little direct support from refugee-assisting agencies. These refugees are motivated to settle in urban areas for a number of reasons including improved access to employment opportunities, better education and better social services (Dryden-Peterson 2006). In this regard, Kampala-based refugees mirror the growing global trend of refugee urbanisation, as refugees worldwide are increasingly likely to end up in urban areas rather than camps, attracted by similar benefits (Jacobsen 2006).

In Kampala, refugees are scattered in the city's low-income areas. But there are certain neighbourhoods where refugees from the same country of origin concentrate: for example, Somali refugees in Kisenyi, Congolese refugees in Katwe and Ethiopian refugees in Kabalagala (Women's Refugee Association 2011; InterAid 2009). Given the noticeable presence of self-

settled refugees in Kampala, in 2012, UNHCR organised a round table for refugees in urban centres to discuss new approaches and modalities for assisting self-settled refugees in the capital.



Map 1: Refugee settlements and UNHCR presence in Uganda. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e483c06.html>

Kyangwali refugee settlement lies in Hoima district in Western Uganda, near Lake Albert – the natural boundary between DRC and Uganda. Given its proximity to Eastern Congo, 85% of the settlement’s population of roughly 21,000 refugees are Congolese. The physical size of the settlement is estimated to be about 90 square kilometres, divided into 14 villages consisting of between 10 and 20 blocks in each village. Similar to Nakivale, the OPM operates on-site settlement management teams and oversees a Refugee Welfare Council comprised of selected refugee leaders, which constitutes the formal refugee representative body inside the settlement. Refugees are given a portion of land where they can build their own house and grow crops for their own consumption and sale. Action Africa Help (AAH) is the sole UNHCR IP in livelihood support as of 2013.

Location		Number	% of overall total
Nakivale total		62,849	32%
Origin	DRC	32,659	52%
	Somalia	11,007	18%
	Rwanda	9,452	15%
	Burundi	7,875	13%
	Eritrea	1,329	2%
	Other countries	527	1%
Kampala total		50,646	26%
Origin	DRC	23,190	46%
	Somalia	12,662	25%
	Eritrea	5,923	12%
	Rwanda	3,885	8%
	Ethiopia	1,843	4%
	Other countries	3,143	6%
Kyangwali total		20,847	11%
Origin	DRC	17,681	85%
	South Sudan	2,903	14%
	Other countries	263	1%
Kyaka II total		16,414	8%
Rwamanja total		24,564	12%
Adjumani total		8,894	4%
Oruchinga total		5,694	3%
Rhino Camp total		4,220	2%
Kiryandongo total		3,831	2%
Overall total		197,959	100%

Table 2: Number of refugees/asylum seekers in Uganda

3 The literature on refugee livelihoods

Our research in Kampala, Nakivale and Kyangwali settlements is situated within the broader academic and policy discourse surrounding refugee livelihoods. To that end, this section provides a brief review of the literature in order to 1) outline the conceptual development of

livelihoods; 2) explain the evolution towards an increasing interest in refugee livelihoods in the humanitarian community; 3) identify the analytical gaps in the existing scholarship; and 4) highlight some thematic topics relevant to the scope of the current project.

Development of the livelihoods concept

Although there is no single universal definition of ‘livelihoods’, the term typically refers, most broadly, to *the means used to maintain and sustain life*. The types of activities people engage in to secure their livelihoods are wide-ranging, and pursued both individually and in groups. Whereas the theme of livelihoods is relatively new within the UN refugee agency and in refugee studies, it has a much longer history in the social sciences and among development practitioners, with scholars such as Polyani first elaborating the theoretical underpinnings of livelihoods studies several decades ago (Kaag et al. 2003).

The concept of livelihoods was further consolidated in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Drawing upon insights from previous research, Chambers and Conway developed the concept of ‘sustainable livelihoods’. Chambers and Conway first defined ‘livelihood’ as the sum total of an individual’s ‘capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living’. The degree to which one’s livelihood is *sustainable*, in turn, is determined by how an individual or group can ‘cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation’ (Chambers & Conway 1991: 7). The noticeable feature of this approach is that it underscores disadvantaged peoples’ inherent agency in adapting to changes in their livelihoods, and in exploring livelihood opportunities through their own capabilities, despite living in adverse circumstances (de Haan & Zoomers 2006, Kaag et al. 2003).

Built upon this definition and alongside subsequent conceptual refinements, thinking about sustainable livelihoods has become widespread in the development arena. It is strongly reflected in today’s various livelihoods frameworks used by different organisations, such as UNDP, the World Bank, and CARE (Hussein 2002: 50-53). Among this body of guidance, perhaps the most widely known and enduring is the UK Department for International Development’s Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) (DFID 1999). Founded on a people-centred principle, the essence of the SLF is its emphasis on the strengths and potential that disadvantaged people have and the strategies that they employ to make a living, as opposed to focusing exclusively on their needs (Farrington et al. 2002: 2). The refinement of the concept of sustainable livelihoods and ensuing emergence of livelihoods analytical frameworks has also influenced how researchers deal with refugees’ economic activities, as discussed below.

The livelihoods agenda in forced migration

In the international refugee regime, the issue of how to assist the livelihoods of refugees has become an important area of work since the early 2000s. Its emergence is largely due to the failure of the refugee-assisting regime to provide any effective solutions for the numerous protracted refugee situations worldwide. Without any feasible remedy for their prolonged exile, refugee ‘warehousing’ has in fact become a *de facto* fourth durable solution. According to the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, nearly nine million of the fourteen million refugees worldwide have been confined for at least ten years in refugee camps or settlements, often with limited access to basic rights (USCRI 2009).

What is worse, as refugee situations become protracted, levels of international relief are normally reduced or entirely cut off after the emergency period (Jacobsen 2005: 2). As a result,

assistance programmes for long-term refugee situations are routinely deprived of adequate funding. With the declining financial commitment of the international donor community, it has become clear that UNHCR is unable to ensure that the essential needs of all prolonged refugee populations will be met (Jamal 2000: 3).

These challenges have pressed UNHCR and other refugee-supporting agencies to pay attention to refugees' economic capacity, and to improve their understanding of how refugees construct their livelihoods (Conway 2004). According to UNHCR's website, the discourse of 'helping refugees help themselves' has been employed as a means of enhancing refugee protection and reducing the cost of refugee aid (UNHCR 2011). Against this backdrop, the UN refugee agency has been increasingly engaged in promoting the 'self-reliance' of refugees, and encouraging the development of sustainable livelihoods (Jacobsen 2005: 73; Horst 2006a: 7). UNHCR's keen interest in refugee livelihoods and self-sufficiency has found articulation in key documents such as its *Handbook for Self-Reliance* (2005) and *Livelihood Programming in UNHCR: Operational Guidelines* (2012).

Analytical gaps in the existing refugee livelihoods research

Alongside such policy developments, and parallel to burgeoning academic interest in refugees' economic potential, the SLF has also gained popularity among scholars in forced migration studies. A considerable number of studies have sought to employ the SLF to analyse the livelihoods of those who are forcibly displaced or affected by conflict. For instance, in their research on Darfur, Young et al. (2007) use the SLF to help distinguish how conflict has impacted on components of livelihoods such as assets and strategies, as well as how some livelihood strategies in turn have fuelled the conflict (See also De Vriese 2006, Jacobsen 2006). Whilst the existing research based on the SLF and similar frameworks has given useful insight into refugee livelihoods, some important gaps remain in this body of literature.

First, the extant research on refugee livelihoods largely fails to capture their economic activities in relation to a wider economic structure in their host state. In particular, researchers who employ the SLF typically only 'go through the motions of headings and boxes' in employing the framework (Carney 2002: 28). As a result, such work tends to present descriptive inventories of refugee's livelihood activities, without capturing or analysing how these economic strategies are related to external economies. In entrenched refugee camps, however, refugees become embedded in the host economy: refugees move out into the surrounding villages to pursue trade and seek employment while locals enter the camp in search of cheap labour and business opportunities (Phillips 2003:14). Even in urban areas, refugees' livelihood activities cannot be divorced from the local economic systems. For instance, many of Somali commercial enterprises in Nairobi are an important part of the capital's economy (Campbell 2005: 16; see also Brees 2008 & 2010 for the case of Burmese refugees in Thailand). While micro-analysis of refugee livelihoods is crucial, the literature stands to benefit from work that also investigates these same livelihood strategies in relation to meso- and macro-level economic structures.

Second, as a closely linked point, few academic investigations provide in-depth study on the relationship between refugee livelihoods and the private sector and markets in the host country (Omata 2012). No refugee camps, regardless of their locations, are totally closed to traffic in goods, capital and people; as such, the markets in the camp are often connected with domestic markets through refugee and national traders (Werker 2007: 462). In urban settings, self-settled refugees are economically tied to the larger host economy, and inevitably, their

subsistence is inextricably embedded in relationships with local business sectors (De Vriese 2006: 17). The dearth of attention to the relationship between refugees and markets is particularly observable in studies based on the SLF and similar analytical models, which put little emphasis on market systems and their roles (Albu & Griffith 2005 & 2006).

Third, despite the burgeoning literature highlighting the importance of refugees' networks, surprisingly, relatively few studies have systematically explored the role of social relations in refugee subsistence. A large amount of scholarly work has pointed to the significance of personal connections in refugees' livelihood construction (for example, Buscher 2012, Andrews 2003, Amisi 2006, Grabska 2006, Campbell 2005). Besides the widely-acknowledged advantage of having transnational networks for accessing remittances (see Lindley 2006, 2007 & 2010, Porter et al. 2008, Monsutti 2005, Horst 2006b), refugees also turn to contacts in the host country (De Vriese 2006: 14). The research conducted by Kaiser et al. on refugees living in Uganda has indicated the important role of creating personal connections with their Ugandan hosts in shaping refugees' livelihoods (2005). Whilst the existing literature has engendered a general understanding of the role of social relations in refugee subsistence, little is known of what types of networks enable refugees to access markets and business opportunities in their host country.

The absence of systematic studies on the aforementioned themes, in turn, has consequently limited the application of academic research to the practice of refugee livelihoods assistance. Livelihoods research that lacks attention to local markets in refugee-hosting areas seriously limits its practical value for practitioners and policy-makers, who seek to formulate effective, sustainable livelihood interventions for the refugees based on such knowledge. As Werker warns (2007: 477), a training programme to assist refugee tailors, for example, sees little prospect of success in increasing their income unless there is a market for refugee-produced textiles and clothing. Studies on forced migrants should aim to meet the dual imperatives of scholarship and impact: both to satisfy the demand of the academy, and to ensure that the knowledge from studies is used to improve refugees' welfare and protection (Jacobsen & Landau 2003). Nonetheless, refugee livelihoods research has yet to generate substantial contributions to building 'good practices' of livelihood programming due to the aforementioned gaps.

Other research themes relevant to the current project

In addition to the research gaps identified above, two following thematic topics related to refugee livelihoods – refugee's multi-locality and mobility, and urbanisation of refugees – are also relevant to the scope of HIP's research.

Capturing multi-locality and multi-directional mobility

In the majority of previous studies, livelihoods are analysed in relation to a single location, seeking to capture the geographical and socio-economic micro-situation of individuals and households (de Haan & Zoomers 2006: 44). In the blurred boundary between forced and voluntary migration, however, multi-directional movement and multi-locality, both characteristics of economic migrants, are becoming hallmarks of the livelihood strategies of refugees.

In Afghan refugee populations, for instance, there is a clear pattern of multi-directional and cross-border movements that indicate the on-going nature of migration (Stigter & Monsutti 2005: 270; see also Lubkemann's 2008 work on Southern Africa). In the view of Afghan

refugees, migration is not only an inevitable response to conflict and violence, but also an efficient and positive livelihood strategy. Additionally, refugees' use of resources and activities often occurs in multiple locations. Somali refugees in the Dadaab and Kakuma camps, for example, have capitalised on their ties with those in Kenya's main cities, especially Nairobi and Mombasa, for benefiting their trading businesses (De Montclos & Kagwanja 2000: 216). Livelihoods studies on refugees need to capture the complexity of their movement and in the process explore the implications of such dynamism for their economic strategies.

Exploring the livelihoods of urban refugees

Urbanisation is a major emerging trend in the contemporary world of forced migration. The majority of refugees in the global South do not stay in camps and often venture to cities to seek better living conditions and economic opportunities. According to UNHCR's statistics, almost half of the world's 10.5 million refugees now reside in cities and towns, compared to the one third who live in camps (UNHCR 2009: 1). Against this backdrop, the UN refugee agency increasingly recognises the urbanisation of refugees and has adapted its policies to address their challenges and opportunities facing urban caseloads. Yet there continues to be a paucity of studies on self-settled refugees, with a particular gap in scholarship exploring how refugees in urban settings pursue their livelihoods and survive with little assistance from humanitarian organisations (Dryden-Peterson 2006: 382, Crisp et al. 2012: 536).

The research on self-settled refugees in urban settings needs to take into account several important considerations. First, people in urban areas are more likely to be dependent on local markets, compared to those in rural areas. A detailed understanding of markets and business sectors, therefore, becomes even more central to research on livelihoods of self-settled refugees in urban settings (British Red Cross 2012). Second, given the extensive mobility and networks of refugees, the labels of 'urban' and 'camp' refugees may fall short in capturing the ways that self-settled and camp-based refugees overlap and interweave through their economic strategies. For example, Kaiser's work in Uganda (2006 & 2007) questions the conventional dichotomy between refugees living in and out of the settlements, uncovering a more complex and interconnected dynamic between refugees in different locations. To this end, our fieldwork aims to address this gap by including Kampala – the second largest refugee site in Uganda – as a key opportunity to understand the specific features of the subsistence activities of self-settled refugees in an urban setting.

4 Findings on refugee livelihoods and the private sector in Uganda

The remainder of this working paper presents preliminary findings drawn from the field mission conducted between February and March 2013, divided between observations gathered in the urban context of Kampala and the rural settlement environments of Nakivale and Kyangwali.

Kampala

Our 2012 mission sketched an initial overview of refugee livelihoods in Kampala, while also broadly capturing some specific features of refugees' economic activities in the Ugandan capital (see Omata 2012). In sum, due to their limited access to farmland and humanitarian aid, most of the refugees in Kampala are making a living in the formal and informal business

sectors. The most recent mission between February and March 2013 aimed to expand our preliminary observations from 2012 by exploring the details of refugee livelihoods and their engagement with the private sector in Kampala in greater depth. Below is a list of the main findings identified or confirmed during the last seven weeks of research.

Popular livelihoods by refugees nationality

Refugees in Kampala are engaged in a wide variety of economic coping strategies. According to our key informants, however, there are certain types of livelihoods and businesses in which refugees from a specific country tend to be more involved.

For instance, Congolese refugees in the capital concentrate on petty trading of accessories, selling clothing materials, brokering with their country of origin, tailoring and running mini-restaurants and bars. By comparison, the popular economic activities in which Rwandan refugees are involved include retail trading of food commodities and other daily necessities, running bars, selling second-hand clothing and brokering. According to interviews with Eritrean refugee key informants in Kampala, a considerable number of Eritrean refugees receive overseas remittances as their main livelihood source, and many are also involved in running internet cafes. As documented in the previous working paper (Omata 2012), Somali refugees have more established, larger-scale and often more profitable businesses, including mini-supermarkets, restaurants, transportation services, garage businesses and guesthouses.

Certain refugee populations are adopting new trends in economic strategies. A growing number of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee youth, for instance, appear to be increasingly active in Kampala taxi businesses. Whilst there is a large number of taxi companies owned by Ugandans in the capital, these refugees target their own nationals and only work for them. In another recent trend, Congolese refugees are becoming involved in the construction industry through Ugandan companies (also see Buscher 2012: 25). Whilst we continue to ground such examples of 'emerging' businesses with further empirical evidence, our preliminary observations have already begun to shed light on new patterns of refugees' involvement in the private sector.

Economic differentiations within the same nationality

Even among the same national communities, refugees' livelihood strategies are differentiated by their socio-economic conditions. The previous mission identified three such degrees of socio-economic status within the Kampala-based refugee population: 'surviving', 'managing' and 'thriving'. In the Ethiopian refugee community, for instance, vulnerable refugees such as single parents with multiple children and those with physical and mental disabilities are employing less lucrative livelihood strategies, such as domestic work within the homes of wealthier Ethiopian business people.

Alternatively, a better-off group of Ethiopian refugees owns lodges, Forex bureaus, restaurants and salons. Whereas these businesses presumably generate constant profits, they also require a considerable initial capital investment to begin with. According to our key refugee informants and assistants, these richer Ethiopian refugees are endowed with better access to livelihood resources and personal connections in Uganda and often came into exile with a clear livelihood plan.

Economic activities embedded in a sub-regional context

Certain types of refugee livelihoods in Kampala should be understood in relation to a wider sub-regional context. The working paper drawn from previous fieldwork (Omata 2012), for instance, has already spotlighted a linkage between the economic activities of Somali refugees in the capital and their well-established trade networks in East Africa (also see Campbell 2005). This dynamic remains apparent in our recent preliminary research, and has been broadened with several interesting new observations.

Some refugee livelihoods appear to be linked to sub-regional development trends. Interviews with Eritrean refugees have indicated that a large number of this group travel to work in Juba, South Sudan, even though they are registered as refugees in Uganda. According to Eritrean refugee key informants, South Sudan's post-conflict reconstruction has spurred the growth of construction works in Juba, which seem to be generating demand not only for manual labour but also other types of service employment at lodges and restaurants there. While further investigation is required, some Ethiopian refugees suspect that the development needs in South Sudan might also be linked to an increasing number of Ethiopian and Eritrean taxi drivers targeting their co-national business people.

Importance of ethnic linkages in establishing livelihoods

Ample evidence illustrates that ethnic ties to host communities often play a facilitative role in enabling the subsistence of displaced people (World Disaster Report 2012: 192, Jacobsen 2006: 282). According to Grabska's study on urban refugees in Egypt (2006: 303), Sudanese refugees in Cairo are often employed by Egyptian-Sudanese owners who prefer hiring co-nationals to work in their restaurants and coffee shops.

Likewise, a considerable number of refugees in Kampala have built their livelihoods based around their ethnic connections. At Eritrean internet cafes and restaurants, for instance, some Eritrean refugees are employed by the co-national owners of these businesses. A similar pattern of employment between migrants and refugees from the same country of origin is also observed in Congolese and Ethiopian communities in Kampala.

The importance of ethnic bonds in supporting refugee livelihoods is perhaps most noticeable in the Somali community. The Somalis in Kampala are concentrated in the central neighbourhood of Kisenyi. Congregating themselves into a tight-knit, economically well-positioned neighbourhood serves to enhance their business opportunities (Buscher 2012: 21). In Uganda, some of the country's major businesses in the oil, transportation and trading sectors are owned by Ugandans of Somali origin. It is widely observed that Somali refugees often find employment opportunities among such Somali-owned private sector businesses (see also Buscher 2012, Women's Refugee Commission 2011). According to the study conducted by our Somali refugee researchers, for instance, City Oil, a Somali-Ugandan-owned oil company, employs nearly 60 Somali refugees as shop keepers, cashiers, security guards and clerks at one of its franchises in Kampala.

Business transactions between Kampala and the settlements

During the previous mission, Omata (2012) encountered refugee households who were officially registered in a settlement but were also sending some of their family members to the capital for economic reasons (also see Huff & Kalyango 2002). During the latest mission, we deepened this observation with the discovery that there are also frequent business transactions between refugee populations living in Kampala and the settlements.

In Kenya, commercial links between the refugee camps and Nairobi have been harnessed by Somali entrepreneurs (Pavanello et al. 2010: 2). Similarly, Somali trade networks between Kampala and Nakivale settlement appear to be particularly dense. From Kampala, a variety of items such as milk, canned food, pasta, clothing, cosmetics and medicines are sent to the settlement-based refugees. According to our Somali refugee researchers, there are some enterprises owned by Somali refugees, which ‘export’ these items to their relatives living in Nakivale settlement to sell there. Alternatively, from Nakivale, *digir*, a specific type of bean favoured by Somalis, as well as maize and cooking oil provided by UNHCR/WFP as free food rations, come to Somali traders in Kampala.

Kyangwali and Nakivale refugee settlements

The following findings were gathered from our initial visits to both Nakivale and Kyangwali settlements. Given the limited working days, we focused on sketching out the overview of refugee livelihoods and identifying potential research topics to be investigated further.

Snapshot of livelihood activities

Both Kyangwali and Nakivale settlements are situated in districts with rich soil and grasslands for livestock grazing. As such, the most common livelihood strategies among refugees in both settlements are agriculture and animal husbandry. Crops grown consist primarily of maize, beans, sorghum, cassava and potatoes. Animal husbandry typically involves goats, cattle, pigs and poultry, and to a lesser extent, turkeys and rabbits. Plot farming (referred to as ‘digging’ by most refugees) is also promoted as a self-reliance strategy: within five years, refugees are expected to sustain themselves with agricultural crops grown on individually-allotted plots.

A variety of non-farming economic activities, in turn, actively supplements or replaces refugees’ agricultural livelihoods. During the mission, we identified a diversity of refugee-run businesses and income-generating means in both Kyangwali and Nakivale, as summarised in Table 3 below.

Livelihood characteristics by the country of origin

As in Kampala, certain livelihood strategies are commonly associated with specific nationalities of refugees. For instance, several focus groups held with mixed Congolese, Rwandan and Burundian participants identified Rwandans as the leading nationality involved in middle-men trade, used cloth selling, butchery and lodge ownership, while Congolese were cited as owning the majority of music stores and hair salons.

Perhaps the clearest example of livelihood strategies unique to a particular nationality can be seen among the Somali refugees in Nakivale. This community maintains a strict geographic, though by no means economic or social, separation from the rest of the settlement – the majority of Somali refugees are found within one village in Nakivale’s Base Camp Zone. Somalis in this village largely reject agriculture as a culturally foreign concept. As a result, most Somali arrivals in Nakivale tend to quickly sell on or rent their allotted farm plots to other refugees and engage in small business.

It is important to note, however, that even within the ostensibly-homogenous Somali community, not all refugees pursue business over agriculture: the exception are ‘Bantu Somalis’, a distinct ethnic group descended from Central African Bantu migrants who migrated to Somalia several centuries ago, and who today primarily pursue agricultural livelihoods in Nakivale.

Types	Activities
Farming	Selling agricultural crops, brokerage of crops with locals
Animal husbandry	Rearing livestock
Petty trade	Selling general merchandise (i.e. soap, match boxes, cooking oil)
Wholesale businesses	Selling food items, beverage and general merchandise
Food-related businesses	Restaurant, bar, butchery, brewery, selling beverages
Entertainment	Running movie theatres, selling digital music
Technical services	Electrician, mechanic, carpentry, craft-making
Beauty care	Hair salon
Clothing	Tailoring, selling clothing textiles/second-hand cloth and shoes
Finance	Money transfer, Forex bureau, micro-finance
Transportation	Boda-boda (motorbike taxi), taxi, mini-bus
Medical work	Running a pharmacy, nursing
Accommodation	Running a guesthouse/lodge
Manual work	Construction, farming for others, housekeeping chores for others
Institutional employment	Working for UNHCR IPs and OPs
Electricity	Power supply using generators
Negative coping strategies	Commercial sex, begging

Table 3: Main livelihood strategies in Nakivale and Kyangwali

Internal economy in the settlements

Both settlements demonstrated an active in-kind and cash economy based on internal trade between different refugee populations within the settlements, carried out via a network of trading centres and markets.

As noted above, the vast size of Nakivale settlement, coupled by diversity of residential refugee populations, separates its economy from Kyangwali in terms of scale and complexity. Each of the settlement's three zones – Juru, Rubando and Base Camp – possesses markets and trading centres of their own. However, using the analogy of a city, it appears that Base Camp operates as the settlement's 'business district'. Base Camp contains the largest trading centre in Nakivale, Isangano market, a larger Rwandan trading centre known as 'Kigali', and a Congolese market known as 'New Congo'. In each of these locations, and in several other trading centres throughout Juru and Rubando, refugees sell their own crops, shop goods and services to one another, as well as to the Ugandan nationals who live within the settlement or in the surroundings. Alongside fixed trading centres, a number of daily, weekly and monthly markets can be found in all three Zones, and along the outskirts of the settlement.

We also observed clear evidence of economic interdependence between refugees. In Nakivale, our initial assumption of Somali economic isolation was dispersed by a quick walk through the main Somali market street with rows of produce like tomatoes, cabbage, and beans on the table markets. We were informed that most of these crops were directly purchased from Congolese, Rwandan, Burundian and other refugee farmers inside the settlement. Focus group interviews with Congolese and Rwandan refugees reported that they purchase certain

types of merchandises such as electronic items from Somali refugee traders living in the settlement.

External trade: local, regional and cross-border

Even a brief initial visit to both Nakivale and Kyangwali demonstrated clear evidence of robust trade activity, not only within each settlement, but also with the wider Ugandan and international markets. In both settlements, surpluses of agricultural crops attract Ugandan traders looking to resell in Mbarara, Hoima and Kampala, as well as small district towns surrounding both settlements. More often, however, those Ugandan traders do business with middle-men, which saves them the hassle of collecting small surpluses from individual farmers.

Ugandan traders also bring goods to sell in small retail shops throughout the settlements. Businesses in both Kyangwali and Nakivale thus often operate as a direct part of a supply chain by local private businesses, with Hoima, Mbarara and Kampala-based wholesalers ultimately distributing their goods via refugee retail shops in both settlements (for similar findings in Thailand, see Brees 2008: 391).

We also saw evidence of some degree of cross-border trade in both settlements, echoing our similar observations of sub-regional trade networks which we observed in Kampala. Foreign traders from bordering countries – Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania, Rwanda and the DRC – visit both settlements. Also, several Somali shops in Nakivale show clear evidence of Somali trade networks extending far outside Uganda, with stock imported from Kenya and as far away as Dubai.

Refugees' engagement with the Ugandan private sector

Both Nakivale and Kyangwali have attracted the attention of larger Ugandan private enterprises. In Nakivale, an example can be found in a rapidly-developing competition between Ugandan's largest telecom providers to corner the market on money transfer services in the settlement. Given the considerable size of the refugee population in this settlement, Ugandan telecom companies have launched several initiatives aimed at targeting refugee users of SMS banking and transfer services. The most notable example here is Orange, which has just invested in a large radio tower in the middle of the settlement to promote its 'Orange Money' service.

In Kyangwali, we observed a different pattern of relationships between refugees and the private sector in the host community. A refugee-established company named Kyangwali Progressive Farmers (KPF) Limited has been involved as one of the main suppliers of sorghum for a major Ugandan beverage company³. This local private enterprise contracts with Ugandan farmers to grow sorghum in order to produce beer. As the associations of national farmers are aware of the high productivity of refugee farmers in Kyangwali, the Ugandan farmers chose to sub-contract with KPF. According to one of the founders of KPF, 161 refugees in Kyangwali have participated in this business scheme as sorghum producers. Now the board members of KPF are considering signing a direct contract with this Ugandan beverage company.

³ Due to a confidentiality agreement, the name of this private company cannot be revealed in this report.

Significant role of social networks in refugee livelihoods

There was widespread perception in Nakivale that Somali refugees possess superior access to extensive connections. While the range of Somali businesses is on the surface similar to those in Nakivale's other communities, a close look revealed that these enterprises often operate at a higher level of scale and sophistication than their Congolese, Rwandan or Burundian counterparts.

Somali retail shops, for instance, are notably better-stocked and organised than those we visited in other villages, with products ranging from basic kitchen goods to luxury products such as perfumes and electronics. Somali shops we visited also sold some products arriving from as far away as Somalia, Kenya, and Dubai – indications of more advanced and far-reaching trade networks (also see Campbell 2005 for similar findings in Kenya). Somalis' extensive networks are also implied by the presence of money transfer services and the mini-bus business to Mbarara and Kampala in the Somali-concentrated village.

Economic divisions within the settlement populations

Just as the refugee populations of Kyangwali and Nakivale reflect a diversity of livelihoods strategies, our initial research implied economic divisions and varying degrees of self-reliance among refugees in both settlements. During a series of focus groups in Kyangwali and in Nakivale, wealth breakdown exercises revealed stratifications in the self-sustainability levels of certain groups of refugees, linked to several key variables.

In most communities, refugee respondents identified the wealthiest community members as those who had most aggressively diversified their livelihoods, as well as those who have successfully formed connections with the lucrative external Ugandan markets. This wealthiest category included, in most cases, two recurrent groups: successful shop owners (particularly multiple business owners) and agricultural 'middle-men' who buy in bulk from fellow refugee farmers and sell at a profit to these national traders. There was widespread perception in Nakivale that Somali refugees were the wealthiest community, as a result of their superior access to extensive connections. This finding points towards the clear advantages enjoyed by refugees who possess well-developed social networks with external/non-refugee business communities.

Livelihoods of vulnerable populations

Conversely, disabled people, orphans, elderly people, those who are chronically ill, widows and female-headed households and recent refugee arrivals were consistently identified as the 'poorest' and least self-sufficient groups.

The poorest groups are often forced to employ negative coping strategies. For example, among Congolese, Rwandan and Burundi refugee groups we spoke with in Nakivale, widows were identified as the key group involved in commercial sex, while orphaned children typically either begged or pursued small errands, such as delivering bottles of water for petty cash. People with disabilities and the elderly were also heavily engaged in begging. Our preliminary assessment indicates that these vulnerable refugees are not able to meet their basic livelihood needs. This is often directly tied to their limited access to internal and external markets and a limited capacity to diversify their income sources.

Livelihood challenges in the settlements

Respondents highlighted a number of challenges in the pursuit of their economic activities. A common problem identified in both settlements is decreasing land fertility due to over-farming. Newer arrivals in particular tended to complain of receiving the least productive land. We also encountered widespread complaints regarding the lack of sufficient food security tied to inadequate food rations, and a lack of adequate space and structures for longer-term food storage.

Lack of access to credit was likewise cited as a significant livelihood challenge facing both refugee farmers and shop-owners – very limited institutional microcredit schemes or cash transfer options are currently available in both settlements. The IPs we spoke with, however, noted the significant challenges involved with trying to implement and monitor microfinance programming among often highly-transitory refugee populations in both settlements.

5 Implications of the preliminary study

Drawing from our February to March mission in Kampala, Nakivale and Kyangwali settlements, this section highlights some intriguing research themes to be investigated in the remaining period of our fieldwork.

‘Nestedness’ of refugee livelihoods in the wider economies

The existing literature in forced migration has rarely explored refugee livelihoods in relation to different layers of economies, thereby ending up presenting a patchy picture of refugee livelihoods. As our provisional findings highlight, however, refugee livelihoods by no means exist in a ‘vacuum’, separated from wider economic contexts. The previous mission in 2012 had already revealed that refugee livelihoods in Kampala are actively engaged with the capital’s private sector. Despite its short duration, our recent mission has likewise captured compelling evidence that refugees’ economic activities in Nakivale and Kyangwali settlements are deeply embedded in the district and regional economies in Uganda.

The next step of our research is to situate refugee subsistence in the host economies and to sketch out the complexity of relationships between refugee livelihoods and the private sector and markets in greater details. This overview will also help us understand and analyse the impacts of refugees on the host economies, which has been a long-standing debate in studies and practices of forced migration.

Diversity in the patterns of refugees’ engagement with the private sector

Previously, research into the types of engagement between the private sector/markets and refugees had been predominantly concerned with ‘top down’ paradigms of either philanthropy or corporate social responsibility. However, we have seen ample evidence that refugees themselves can also engage the business sector in multiple roles, such as beneficiary, customer, employee and entrepreneur (Betts, Bloom and Omata 2012).

This recent mission has given us some indicative examples that can help nurture more a nuanced understanding of the relationships which exist between refugees and the business sector. For instance, Orange’s aforementioned initiative in Nakivale appears less driven by

corporate social responsibility than by competition with other telecom companies for control of an emerging refugee money-transfer market.

The case of Kyangwali Progressive Farmers (KPF) Limited may be considered a ‘bottom up’ example highlighting the different power dynamics between refugees and private businesses. The refugee farmers in Kyangwali seemed to have founded KPF to consolidate their production capacity and to increase their bargaining power with the local business sector. From this foundation, KPF now aims to formulate a direct partnership with a major beverage company as a main supplier of sorghum. Moreover, a considerable number of Congolese refugees have recently become involved in the construction industry through Ugandan companies. It is intriguing to examine whether these refugees are simply employed as ‘cheap labour’, or whether this example has more nuanced implications.

Reconsidering approaches to refugee self-reliance

In recent years, the international refugee regime has increasingly encouraged refugee self-reliance as a foundational principle of livelihood support programmes. However, notwithstanding a burgeoning interest in facilitating refugees’ economic independence, refugees’ self-sufficiency has remained an elusive goal to date.

Our initial observations in Uganda, although still developing, imply the presence of linkages between refugee livelihoods, engagement with the private sector and the success of refugees’ self-reliance. Even in the settlements where refugees have been deemed to be self-reliant with their agricultural subsistence, farming alone seems to be insufficient to enable refugees to achieve economic sustainability. In Kyangwali settlement, often portrayed and praised as the ‘food basket of Hoima’, refugees nonetheless emphasised the limited income-generating capacity of their farming activities. They instead highlighted the centrality of non-farming livelihoods and of linkages with the Ugandan private sector as a key differentiating factor in improving their economic status.

Given the indicative results from our missions, the nexus between refugees’ economic activities, levels of self-sufficiency and degrees of engagement with the private sector and markets clearly calls for more investigation. Further research on these provisional findings may help us conceptualise the private sector as an actor in promoting refugee protection and livelihoods.

Significant roles of social networks

Social networks are a vital aspect of people’s economic life, as these connections function as a system for the transaction of assets, services and information between individuals, households and communities. One of the key findings that has recurred throughout our qualitative research is the need to recognise and fully understand the ways in which refugee livelihoods are part of complex and interdependent networks.

The preliminary findings from our missions point to the existence of different patterns and layers of networks in refugees’ economic activities. While a growing body of literature highlights the significance of trans-continental linkages for refugees, our initial research in Uganda suggests that refugees’ local, district and regional contacts also play a crucial role in their economic strategies. Another analytical point of departure in our research is to further look into the livelihood strategies of refugees through their social networks by means of a systems-level approach.

6 Conclusion

While there is a growing body of literature on refugees' livelihoods, much of this work fails to draw a holistic picture of their economic activities in relation to a wider economic structure. In addition to creating an analytical gap, this point has a practical implication for enhancing refugees' economic capacity. Indeed, according to Jacobsen (2005: 86), a large number of traditional livelihood support programmes have failed because they were predicated on an inadequate understanding of local markets and business demands.

Despite a number of challenges and limitations, this seven-week mission in Kampala, Nakivale and Kyangwali has sketched out an overview of refugee livelihoods and their close linkages with the local market and private sector in each research site. Since we are still in a relatively early phase of research, this working paper has focused on presenting provisional findings drawn from our fieldwork. Nonetheless, our findings provide compelling evidence that refugees' livelihoods are deeply nested in the host economies and must be investigated in relation to wider economic contexts. Our next step in HIP along the lines explored in this paper will thus be to delve into preliminary findings in greater depth and detail with additional fieldwork.

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