

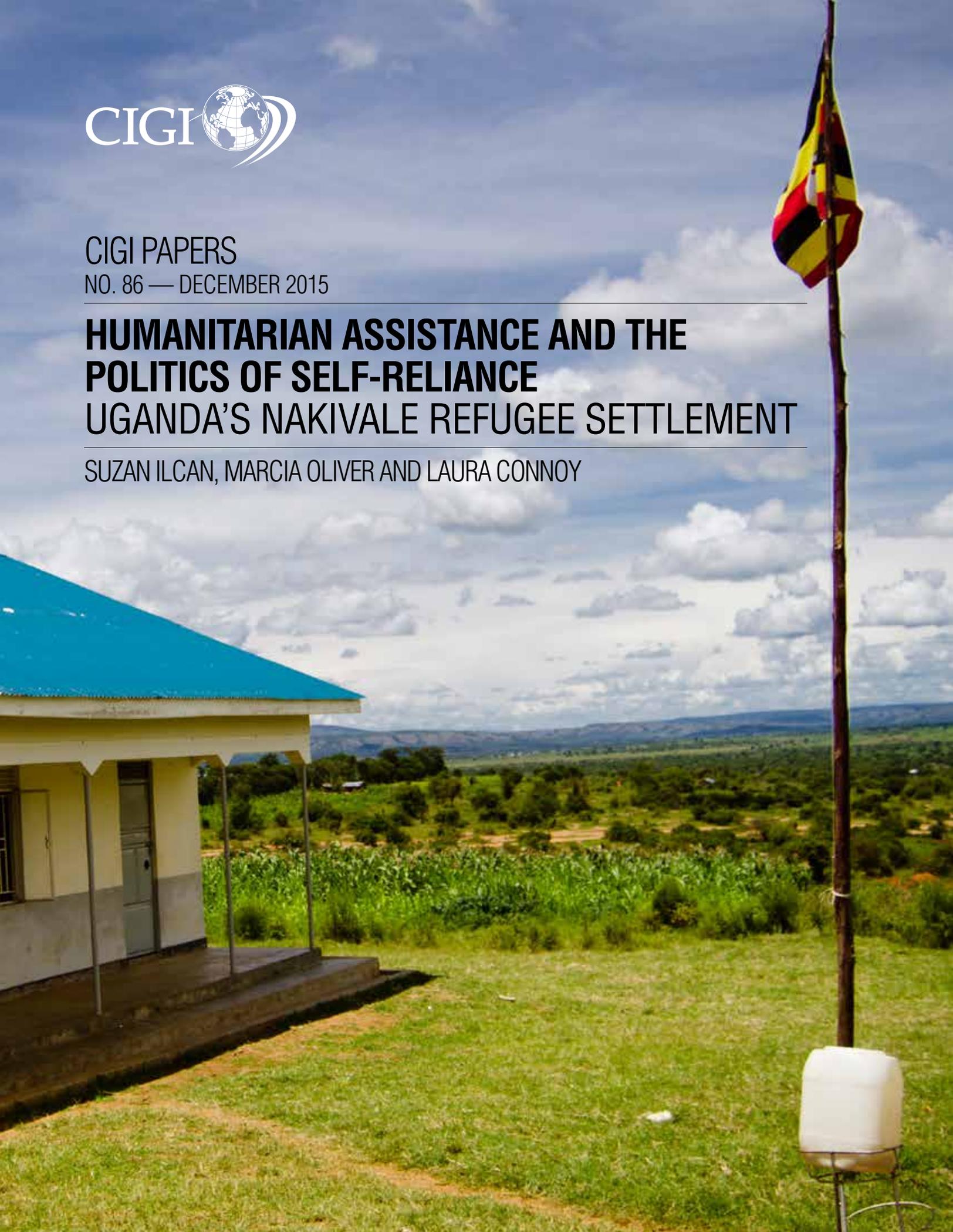


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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND THE POLITICS OF SELF-RELIANCE UGANDA'S NAKIVALE REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

SUZAN ILCAN, MARCIA OLIVER AND LAURA CONNOY



**HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND THE POLITICS OF SELF-RELIANCE:
UGANDA'S NAKIVALE REFUGEE SETTLEMENT**

Suzan Ilcan, Marcia Oliver and Laura Connoy



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Front cover: Nakivale Settlement secondary school. Stephen Luke. Used under Creative Commons 2.0.



67 Erb Street West
Waterloo, Ontario N2L 6C2
Canada
tel +1 519 885 2444 fax +1 519 885 5450
www.cigionline.org

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Suzan Ilcan is professor of sociology in the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo and the Balsillie School of International Affairs. She is also an adjunct scholar at McMaster University's Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition and York University's Centre for Refugee Studies. Her research focuses on themes at the interface of international governance, humanitarian and development aid, and migration, including: citizenship rights and social justice; the politics of poverty and development; humanitarian aid and refugee camps in Sub-Saharan Africa; and Syrian refugees and citizenship politics in Turkey.

She is the author of *Longing in Belonging: The Cultural Politics of Settlement* (Praeger, 2002), co-author of *Governing the Poor: Exercises of Poverty Reduction, Practices of Global Aid* (with Anita Lacey, MQUP, 2011) and *Issues in Social Justice: Citizenship and Transnational Struggles* (with Tanya Basok, OUP, 2013) and editor of *Mobilities, Knowledge, and Social Justice* (MQUP, 2013). She is the co-editor of the journal *Studies in Social Justice*, an editorial board member of *Globalizations* and *Journal of Namibian Studies* and consulting editor of the *Canadian Review of Sociology*.

Suzan's current research projects include a SSHRC-funded project (2015–2019) on humanitarian aid, citizenship politics and the governance of Syrian refugees in Turkey (with Feyzi Baban and Kim Rygiel).



Marcia Oliver is an assistant professor in law and society, and a research fellow at the Tshepo Institute for the Study of Contemporary Africa at Wilfrid Laurier University. Before joining Laurier, she was a postdoctoral fellow with the Canada Health Services

Research Foundation/Canadian Institute of Health Research Chair of Health Services Research (York University) and a Postgraduate and Early Career Academics Network of Scholars visiting scholar at the Research Centre for Law, Gender

and Sexuality at the University of Kent. She has also held visiting scholar positions in the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University and at the International Institute for the Sociology of Law in Oñati, Spain.

Marcia's research interests are in the areas of socio-legal studies, global governance and development, sexuality and gender, and inequality and justice. Her research has examined the intersections of moral conservatism and neoliberalism in development practices; the construction of a particular vision of civil society through new HIV/AIDS funding and governance mechanisms in Uganda; and conservative Christianity and antigay activism in Uganda. Her current research projects examine rape culture on Canadian university campuses (with Debra Langan and Rebecca Godderis) and international development and humanitarian responses to displaced populations in Namibia and Uganda (with Suzan Ilcan).



Laura Connoy is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo. Her dissertation research focuses on mobility politics, asylum and social justice. She has co-authored "Township Tourism and the Political Spaces of Katutura"

in the *Journal of Namibian Studies*. She has co-authored a chapter (with Suzan Ilcan and Marcia Oliver) entitled "Humanitarian Assistance, Refugee Management, and Self-Reliance Schemes: Nakivale Refugee Settlement," forthcoming in *Transnational Social Policy: Social Support in a World on the Move*, edited by Luann Good-Gingrich and Stefan Köngeter (Routledge).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increasingly, refugees residing in refugee camps are living in protracted situations for which there are no quick remedies. Existing attempts to address protracted situations for refugees engage with the concept and practices of the Self-reliance Strategy (SRS). This paper focuses on the SRS in Uganda's Nakivale Refugee Settlement. It draws attention to its disconnection from the social and economic relations within which refugees live in settlements, and the strategy's inability to provide refugees with sufficient access to social support and protection. In this context, the analysis highlights the failures of the SRS in terms both of shaping the conditions under which refugees experience restricted movement, social divisions and inadequate protection, and of placing greater responsibility on refugees for meeting their own needs with little or no humanitarian and state support. It also reveals how humanitarian and state actors, and their forms of assistance, manage the lives of refugees and are implicated in the creation of new challenges for refugees in Nakivale. In light of these issues, the paper emphasizes the gaps in the SRS orientation and calls for alternative approaches to humanitarian and refugee management that enable and support refugees to self-settle, access legal and social support, and participate in and contribute to their social and economic environment in meaningful and sustainable ways. The analysis for the paper is based on extensive refugee policy and legal documents, and on interviews with refugees in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, officials from the Ugandan government and representatives from international and national organizations that provide assistance to refugees.

INTRODUCTION

It is now considered the norm for residents of refugee camps or organized settlements to live in such situations for protracted periods. These are instances when groups of people live in exile for five years or more. While residing in the camp, refugees receive various forms of assistance that are shaped by international and national refugee management policies and practices, as well as by broader geopolitical and economic factors. Due to the protracted nature of existing refugee situations, such as in Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda, and the high costs associated with extended humanitarian assistance, refugees are increasingly called upon to be more responsible for their own well-being. This strategy is known as the Self-reliance Strategy; it includes practices and initiatives that encourage refugees to take greater responsibility for themselves and to do so in ways that engage them in supporting the values of enterprise and free markets, and in becoming active participants in small-scale entrepreneurial efforts to meet their own basic needs. Such self-reliance practices emerged in the late 1980s within neo-liberal policy agendas that emphasized political and economic ideas characterized by certain

beliefs, such as: that most activities are best managed without government interference; that the market is a key source of economic opportunity and independence for individuals; and that individuals, even those from vulnerable groups, should take on more responsibility for addressing their own economic and social challenges, such as poverty, marginalization, unemployment or conflict-ridden situations (see, for example, Brodie 2009; Ilcan 2009; Staeheli and Hammett 2013). In this neo-liberal context, self-reliance strategies are not place-specific; they can be (and frequently are) rolled out in diverse sites and arenas, such as refugee camps, development management, poverty reduction, security and public-sector privatization (see, for example, Duffield 2010; Lazar 2007; Oliver 2012), and through a multitude of governing actors. In Uganda, international and state actors, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), are promoting this concept and practice through the SRS.

There is little doubt that promoting refugee self-reliance and well-being in sustainable ways can be critical in assisting vulnerable populations to have more control over their lives and make meaningful contributions to their surroundings. The current manner in which the SRS is being implemented, however, hinders the positive outcomes that could potentially result from this strategy. As an attempt to make refugees less reliant on humanitarian assistance and more responsible individuals through market-based initiatives, SRSs, as we demonstrate below, do not take into account the existing political, economic and social relations that shape the environments in which refugees live. There are many examples that come to mind in the Ugandan context, such as the country's local settlement policy, reductions in food aid, high levels of poverty and malnutrition, poor market opportunities and the lack of post-elementary schooling for refugees. As a result of neo-liberal and decontextualized approaches to the SRS, our analysis below reveals how residents in Nakivale experience greater pressure to be responsible entrepreneurial subjects in a climate of increasing isolation, marginalization and poverty.

In this paper, our analysis is based on refugee policy and legal documents, and on interviews with refugees in Nakivale Settlement, officials from the Ugandan government and representatives from international and national organizations that provide assistance and social support to refugees. In what follows, we provide a brief overview of Uganda's refugee and local settlement policies, the SRS in Uganda's Nakivale Refugee Settlement, and an analysis of SRS as a form of refugee management that is promoted by international and state actors. Our analysis of SRS demonstrates how humanitarian and state actors (and their forms of assistance) manage the lives of refugees and are implicated in the creation of new challenges for refugees and refugee claimants. It also emphasizes the gaps

in the SRS orientation, which in turn enables us to propose alternative approaches to humanitarian and refugee management. These approaches draw from principles of social justice, specifically those that enable and support refugees to self-settle, access legal and social support, gain rights to citizenship, and participate in and contribute to their surroundings in meaningful and sustainable ways.

UGANDA'S NAKIVALE REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

Refugee camps are proliferating as a result of humanitarian and state responses to the 10.4 million refugees that exist today (UNHCR 2014a). International organizations and state actors provide humanitarian assistance, such as food, health and housing, to these populations living in camps. The UNHCR is the lead organization attending to the protection and rights of refugees through policy formulation, aid allocation, and camp organization and management. Although efforts to assist refugees are framed in emergency or temporary terms, protracted refugee situations are considered the norm (Hunter 2009; Ramadan 2010), whereby refugees are now residing in restricted, isolated or overcrowded camp spaces for five years or more. Such situations can be seen in many refugee camps today, including Dadaab in Kenya, Osire Refugee Camp in Namibia and Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda.

Uganda has a long history of receiving refugees. In the aftermath of World War II, the country hosted refugees from Eastern and Southern Europe in organized settlements (Sharpe and Namusobya 2012). Since the 1950s, Uganda has received numerous refugees and refugee claimants due to political turmoil and violence in the nearby countries of Sudan, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda (Refugee Law Project [RLP] 2009). This situation was exacerbated by the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and worsening security situations in the DRC and South Sudan. There are 350,000 refugees and 30,000 refugee claimants residing in Uganda's eight official refugee settlements — Adjumani, Kiryandongo, Kyaka II, Kyangwali, Nakivale, Oruchinga, Rhino and Rwamanja — and in the capital city of Kampala.¹

Uganda is a state party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Organisation of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. The country's Refugee Act of 2006 (hereafter referred to as the Refugee Act) speaks to this membership. Replacing the outdated Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960 — which emphasized control of “unwanted aliens” (Lomo, Naggaga and Hovil 2001, 8) rather than the protection of refugees — the Refugee Act has been hailed as a “progressive, human

rights and protection oriented” piece of legislation (RLP 2009, 3). It reflects international and regional conventions concerning refugee protection and rights (e.g., the right to an identity card, non-discrimination, elementary education, gainful employment, freedom of religion and legal assistance), and contains refugee definitions and status determination clauses (Refugee Act 2006, section 29). The Refugee Act also guarantees refugees' freedom of movement; however, this freedom is “subject to reasonable restrictions specified in the laws of Uganda...especially on grounds of national security, public order, public health, public morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others” (ibid., section 30 (2)). Refugees wishing to live outside of the settlement or relocate to another settlement must secure permission from the settlement commissioner (ibid., section 44 (1) (2), see also Uganda: The Refugees Regulations 2010, section 47), a process that has been described as overly bureaucratic and with little predictability and transparency.² The restrictions placed on refugee mobility serve as the legal basis for Uganda's de facto “local settlement” policy, whereby refugees have long been required to live in designated and enclosed settlements, such as Nakivale Refugee Settlement.

Nakivale is located in the Isingiro district in southwestern Uganda, where the nearest town, Mbarara, is roughly 60 km away. It is described as “a very isolated and lonely place.”³ It is one of the oldest refugee settlements in Africa⁴ and was officially established in the early 1960s to host the Tutsi population fleeing the civil war in Rwanda.⁵ Unlike other asylum countries in Africa and elsewhere, Uganda does not generally fence its settlements (Kaiser 2005), and Ugandan settlements often contain organized villages, small markets, churches, hair salons, phone-charging stations and access to computers. These markers of community life inform the distinction that is often made by government and camp officials between a “camp” and a “settlement,” with officials preferring the latter term to describe the Ugandan context. Settlements are taken to represent a significant departure from camps in that they are perceived to be more humane and to provide a more enabling environment for refugees to develop their capacities and become independent and self-reliant. According to an OPM officer, “[Settlements] are not camps; they are like a normal village setting. They are

2 Interview with RLP, Kampala, July 16, 2014.

3 Ibid.

4 Interview with settlement commandant, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

5 In the past, local integration played an important role in international efforts to address refugee crises in many African countries. However, Uganda has opted to utilize a more restrictive encampment orientation to refugees since the 1940s, settling them in rural settlements throughout the country. Although the UNHCR assumed responsibility for refugee management in Uganda in the early 1960s, encampment of refugees in rural settlements remained the dominant practice and continues today.

1 Interview with RLP, Kampala, July 16, 2014.

spacious and we put services there: schools, education. We give [refugees] food; we give them land for farming. They are able to work, farm and do business, and actualize themselves.”⁶

Nakivale’s settlement commandant makes a similar distinction: “[In the] camp system, refugees are clustered in one place. [...] But with [the] settlement policy we don’t have that system of clustering refugees. We give them enough space for both construction and cultivation for supplement[ing] the handouts given by humanitarian agencies.”⁷ However, we use the terms “settlement” and “camp” interchangeably to highlight that both “represent the maintenance [and management] of refugees within confined spaces” (Hovil 2007, 600). As we discuss below, the government’s local settlement policy and the in-built constraints of Nakivale Settlement itself tend to counter the UNHCR’s strategies of self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

Nakivale Settlement is jointly administered by the UNHCR and the OPM, the latter represented by the settlement commandant, who is responsible for the administration of the settlement, including its management (receiving, registering and settling refugees, for example, and allocating land), coordination of service delivery, and security.⁸ With more than 62,000 refugees and 5,000 asylum claimants, Nakivale is the second-largest settlement in the country (next to Adjumani in the north). It is estimated to be more than 185 km² and is divided into three administrative zones (Rubondo, Base Camp and Juru) and 79 villages, which are often organized according to nationality or cultural similarities. The most represented group (approximately 50 percent) in the settlement is from the DRC, followed by Somalia, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Kenya (UNHCR 2015).⁹

Due to the extended nature of the conflicts in these regions, refugees often reside in Nakivale for protracted periods, particularly the Rwandese, Sudanese and Congolese, many of whom have been living in exile for well over a decade (Hovil 2007). Most residents of Nakivale are beyond the initial emergency phase and are now expected to be more responsible for their own economic and social challenges. One interviewee noted that the residents are “to support [and] contribute to their own welfare and well-being.”¹⁰ The emphasis here on refugees being more responsible for addressing their own challenges and state of welfare reflects how the notion of “self-reliance” is used

by the UNHCR and its partners to manage refugees and refugee camps in protracted refugee situations. In broader terms, this notion links to neo-liberal ideas as a governing rationality, a rationality that shapes certain kinds of conduct (relationships, practices and habits) by advancing the values of the market as one of the ways to transform people’s actions and engagement with others (Brodie 2009; Dean 2007). Such neo-liberal ideas, however, may also work alongside other, newer forms of distribution and social protection initiatives, such as basic income grant schemes that are gaining increasing recognition in southern Africa and elsewhere (Ferguson 2015, 68-69; Ilcan and Lacey 2015) and upholding the aim of self-reliance. In the humanitarian assistance context, the use of the SRS by the UNHCR and its partners is transforming spaces such as refugee camps, and the lives of refugees, as well as making refugees less reliant on humanitarian assistance, such as in Nakivale Refugee Settlement.

POLICY OVERVIEW: THE SRS IN NAKIVALE REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

The UNHCR’s 2006 *Handbook for Self-reliance* defines self-reliance as “the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health, and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity” (UNHCR 2006, 1). Self-reliance aims to strengthen the livelihoods of persons of concern to reduce their “vulnerability and long-term reliance on humanitarian/external assistance” (ibid.) in a global context that is marked by erratic and inadequate donor funding for humanitarian aid. Self-reliance emphasizes building the capacities of refugees to “enable refugees to live with dignity and create a future for themselves and their families” (UNHCR 2014b, 8), including their “capacity to claim their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights” (ibid., 7). More recently, self-reliance has become “a critical component” of the UNHCR’s livelihood programming (ibid., 8), which calls for “the reduction of dependency through economic empowerment and the promotion of self-reliance” as central to its protection mandate (UNHCR 2012, 6). In recent years, the UNHCR has expanded its livelihood efforts; between 2011 and 2012, the global budget grew by more than 25 percent and 2013 saw an additional 15 percent growth, with the majority of these funds targeting vocational and skills training, entrepreneurship, agriculture, livestock and fisheries, and microfinance (UNHCR 2014b, 14).

As a concept and set of practices, SRS aims to reconfigure and manage refugees in a manner that stresses their responsibility to care for and support themselves with minimal external support, and to do so in ways that align with neo-liberal values of enterprise and market-oriented economies. The UNHCR is a key international actor that is promoting self-reliance globally as part of its current

6 Interview with the OPM, Kampala, July 18, 2014.

7 Interview with settlement commandant, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

8 Interview with the OPM, Kampala, July 18, 2014.

9 Interview with American Refugee Committee, Kampala, July 21, 2014.

10 Interview with the Windle Trust, Kampala, July 18, 2014.

refugee management approach. For example, in Eastern Sudan, the 80,000 refugees who reside in camps in the Gedaret, Kassala and Red Sea states are allocated between five and 10 acres of land by the government and encouraged to engage in self-reliance strategies as advocated by the UNHCR. Unfortunately, due to low rainfall and nutrient-depleted soil, crops have a high rate of failure, which has a direct negative impact on achieving self-sufficiency. Despite this, refugees are prohibited from accessing land outside of the designated camp area (*ibid.*, 13; De Vriese 2006, 7). Similar strategies are informing refugee policy in Uganda and having similar outcomes.

In 1999, the UNHCR and the Ugandan government jointly designed and implemented the SRS to manage the Sudanese refugee situation in the West Nile districts of Arua, Adjumani and Moyo (UNHCR/OPM 1999). The overarching goal of the SRS was to “integrate the services provided to refugees into regular government structures and policies,” thereby shifting the approach from relief to development. Although launched in 1999, it did not gain traction until 2002 (UNHCR 2004). Since then, the SRS has been rolled out nationwide as part of the UNHCR’s broader global strategy of Development Assistance for Refugees and the Refugee and Host-Community Empowerment (RE-HOPE) program. Uganda’s Refugee Act also reinforces the principle of self-reliance, instructing the “Commissioner, in collaboration with and the support of NGOs, the UNHCR, international organizations and the international community [to] promote self-reliance among refugees and sustainable development in the affected areas” (section 44, (4b)). Through the SRS, it was hoped that by 2003, “refugees would be able to grow or buy their own food, access and pay for basic services, and maintain self-sustaining community structures” (Dryden-Peterson and Hovil 2003, 8). While meaningful and sustainable self-reliance efforts can contribute to refugee well-being, the popularity and advancement of these efforts by the UNHCR and international donors do not seem to work in favour of the refugees themselves. This is largely because these self-reliance efforts do not bear in mind the conditions of life and lack of rights that refugees endure. Instead, they are most generally about viewing the market as a source of economic opportunity and independence for refugees, and conceiving refugees as having the capacity to engage in the market as entrepreneurial, productive subjects (Hyndman 2000; Ilcan and Rygiel 2015; Ramadan 2010). For the UNHCR and its partners, it also involves other, broader geopolitical and economic considerations, such as reducing the costs of international humanitarian assistance for refugees in host countries (Slaughter and Crisp 2009; UNHCR 2006).

The SRS was developed in response to the UNHCR’s decision to phase out refugee programs in the region due to both “a shrinking global resource base, and the fact that the West Nile region was no longer considered an emergency”

(Burham, Rowley and Ovberedjo 2003, 57). According to a UNHCR official, “[I]f UNHCR can empower people to be self-reliant, then we wouldn’t need a lot of money to support them.”¹¹ Similarly, government officials and NGO representatives working with refugees are emphasizing the need to reduce refugee dependency as a key goal of self-reliance. According to an official from the OPM, “the SRS was basically trying to put a framework in which people are able to stand on their own [and] not to depend on handouts.”¹² Likewise, a UNHCR representative states that in order “to stop [the] dependency syndrome,” the UN is “trying to instill into refugees [...] that they should be able to try and fend for themselves.”¹³ In the context of Nakivale (and other refugee settlements in the country), the UNHCR and the Ugandan government aim to facilitate refugee self-reliance through subsistence agricultural and small-scale market activities. Upon arrival to the settlement, refugees are allocated a small plot of land for residential and agricultural purposes (Uganda Refugee Regulations 2010, section 65), which they are expected to cultivate for personal consumption and, if surpluses exist, sell to traders or in the local market. The emphasis on small-scale agricultural activities as the primary way to attain self-reliance underpins a key objective of the SRS: to reduce food rations for refugees who have lived in the settlement for many years, based on the expectation that they have reached a point of self-reliance.¹⁴

Food reductions are a direct result of international and national refugee management practices in Uganda, which are themselves shaped by broader geopolitical and economic issues, such as the restrictive refugee policies of governments throughout the world or the insufficient funding from international donors for humanitarian refugee assistance. Refugees are experiencing declining food rations provided by the World Food Programme (WFP), in part due to the new emergency in South Sudan, which is shaping the UNHCR’s emphasis on self-reliance to “cover that gap.”¹⁵ The onset of “new emergencies” stretches already limited amounts of donor funding, which in turn renders protracted refugee situations, such as the one in Nakivale, less urgent and therefore less likely to receive funding. The practice of withdrawing food rations within the current restrictions of the settlement structure (for example, restrictions on freedom of movement) not only contributes to the highly difficult living conditions that refugees face but also obstructs the very possibility of refugees reaching or maintaining self-reliance.

11 Interview with UNHCR, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

12 Interview with the OPM, Kampala, July 18, 2014.

13 Interview with UNHCR, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

14 Interview with Congolese refugee, Nakivale, July 23, 2014; interview with UNHCR official, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

15 *Ibid.*

First, both the quantity and quality of food rations are inadequate for refugees to sustain themselves or their family (Omata and Kaplan 2013, 19). According to one Nakivale resident from the Congo, the food rations entail “only six kilograms of food, which cannot sustain a person for the month,” and food variation is severely limited, with no access to dietary staples such as fruits or vegetables.¹⁶ A UNHCR official also acknowledges that the food provided by the WFP “is not enough to sustain a family for a whole month.”¹⁷ Second, some residents are forced to sell their already insufficient food supply at local markets to purchase other essential household needs, such as soap, sugar, salt, medicines, candles for lighting, or plastic sheeting for roofs, or children’s school fees and supplies, thereby perpetuating a cycle of impoverishment, hunger and reliance on humanitarian aid. Finally, scaling back food rations also has gendered implications for women’s social reproductive labour, given that some refugees reproduce and have more children for the purpose of securing more food. As one refugee explained, “Refugees produce a lot [of children] because they want to add food. The moment you produce a child, you are added twelve kilos of food. It is not good, but there is nothing we can do.”¹⁸ Moreover, as the population grows in the settlement, access to arable land becomes more restricted, and in some cases reduced, which further undermines attempts at self-sufficiency (Omata and Kaplan 2013, 19). For example, a Somali refugee who has lived in the settlement for almost a decade comments, “This camp has thousands of Somali people who stay in one square kilometre. We don’t have enough space for cultivation. We don’t have enough space to hang the clothes when they are wet. We don’t have a ground [where] we can organize toilets.”¹⁹ The lack of access to adequate food and arable land reflects some of the key failures of the SRS and the settlement approach more generally.

In addition to promoting agricultural activities as the primary means for refugee self-reliance, the UNHCR also encourages refugees to become active participants in small-scale market initiatives. For instance, in Nakivale, the Nsamizi Training Institute for Social Development (UNHCR’s implementing partner for livelihood programming) provides refugees with training and small amounts of capital to engage in small business enterprises, such as restaurants, salons, phone-charging centres and local shops that sell merchandise not readily available in the settlement (such as salt, sugar and clothing).²⁰ Although initiatives such as these provide diverse opportunities for

refugees to pursue a livelihood and move toward self-sufficiency, the UNHCR’s budget for this program is “too small,”²¹ which negatively impacts the program’s potential and contributes to refugees feeling excluded from UNHCR-supported livelihood activities. For example, one refugee states that the livelihood program “is limited; the services reach very few people” with very little benefit.²² Moreover, like the situation noted above, there are also some refugees who have little choice but to spend the limited funds they receive from the UNHCR’s livelihood initiatives to meet other, more pressing, survival needs such as purchasing food.²³

Another important humanitarian and social support service that is key to refugee self-reliance, yet remains undeveloped and under-resourced in the settlement, is access to secondary and post-secondary education. Although refugees have been incorporated into Uganda’s Universal Primary Education System, which provides nearly free education, post-primary educational opportunities remain non-existent for the vast majority of refugees. For example, Nakivale Settlement has only one secondary school and one vocational institute for the entire refugee population.²⁴ The lack of education faced by refugees in Nakivale further reduces the UNHCR’s protection mandate for refugees, and prevents refugees from rebuilding their lives in ways that are self-sufficient. Within Nakivale, the ability of refugees to engage in meaningful strategies of self-reliance are undermined by underfunded services that, ironically, maintain dependency on humanitarian aid in an environment of aid reduction and neo-liberal policy approaches. Although the failures of the SRS can be partly explained through a critical analysis of international policies and practices (both within and outside the camp), we must also look to Uganda’s settlement approach to refugee management and the specific restrictions it places on refugee rights.

The SRS works within Uganda’s broader settlement approach. The very design and management of refugee settlements (in rural and isolated regions of the country) restrict refugee movement and segregate refugees from host communities, which effectively undermines self-reliance by fostering economic isolation and social divisions between refugees and the surrounding community. Under the settlement approach, refugees face restrictions to their freedom of movement, which can undercut self-sufficiency by constructing barriers to surrounding markets or by fostering exploitative labour

16 Interview with Congolese refugee, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

17 Interview with UNHCR official, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

18 Interview with Congolese refugee, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

19 Interview with Somali refugee, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

20 Interview with Nsamizi field assistant, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

21 Ibid.

22 Interview with Congolese refugee, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

23 Ibid.

24 Interview with Windle Trust, Kampala, July 18, 2014; interview with IRRI, Kampala, July 17, 2014; interview with RLP, July 16 and 21, 2014.

relations both within and outside the settlement. Such exploitation occurs when, for example, refugees sell their merchandise to local traders or other refugees at a very low cost, causing them to “not get much profit from their product,”²⁵ or when women refugees, specifically, are subject to physical and sexual violence both within and outside the settlement.²⁶ Refugees in the settlement also experience social divisions and tensions with nationals. Refugees reported that nationals “look at [them] as animals; they don’t consider them to be human beings. When they see them, they chase them with stones.”²⁷ Many of these conflicts are a result of the settlement approach to refugee management, which amplifies competition between the refugee and local populations over access to arable land and scarce resources such as firewood and boreholes (UNHCR 2004). The implications of the settlement approach, specifically in Nakivale, means that residents experience increased insecurity, tensions between refugees and host communities, and economic isolation, as well as violations of their basic human rights. These experiences and conditions are heightened among the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals in Nakivale, such as those who are physically challenged, widowed, orphaned or chronically ill, and those who have “limited access to internal and external markets and a limited capacity to diversify their income sources” (Omata and Kaplan 2013, 18). Sometimes these groups are compelled to engage in survival strategies that are potentially harmful or exploitative. For example, Congolese, Rwandan or Burundian refugees note that some widowed women are drawn into sex work for their economic survival, and others emphasize that some children are forced to run small errands for meagre pay (Omata and Kaplan 2013, 18).

In Nakivale Settlement, the SRS stresses the responsibility of refugees to care for and support themselves in situations that are, in actuality, quite complex. The concept and practice of self-reliance also positions refugees as dependent, lacking initiative or possessing poor attitudes. A UNHCR administrator explains the issue of refugee dependency: “At Nakivale [...] the refugees, for a very long time, they’ve had this kind of dependency thing; they just know UNHCR is supposed to give them everything [...] so they sit and wait for handouts. And we want this attitude to change. The attitude of refugees is something we really need to work on. They are so used to handouts, some of them just don’t want to work.”²⁸

Viewing refugees in such terms, as people who “don’t want to work” or who “wait for handouts,” obscures

the role of aid agencies and governments, as well as the effects of neo-liberal views on refugee self-reliance, in undermining refugee self-sufficiency. Situated within existing national refugee policies and sociopolitical environments, self-reliance strategies in Uganda, or more specifically Nakivale, encourage refugees to participate in disconcerting market activities and conditions where they face isolation, poverty, conflict, xenophobia and inadequate access to much needed social support. From a broader perspective, these strategies not only attempt to govern the relationships refugees have with each other and with market economies, but they also provide the terrain on which new relationships between non-status citizens, refugee camp communities, and humanitarian and state actors are to be enacted.

ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper focuses on the role of the UNHCR and the OPM in the implementation of the SRS. We acknowledge the broader connections that inform the practices of self-reliance in Nakivale, including the UNHCR and its operating partners’ aid activities in managing refugees’ lives, the effects of donor fatigue and restrictions on resettlement within the international community, and the role of restrictive national policies that limit refugees from engaging in strategies that enable self-reliance. These are all important background relations that underscore the rolling out of SRS.²⁹

Although SRSs are framed in terms of providing benefits to refugees, little attention has been given to understanding the challenges of integrating refugees into host societies. This paper’s analysis has focused on how policies and practices of humanitarian assistance and refugee management in Nakivale Settlement restrict refugees’ movements, create social conflicts and divisions, and undermine the protection and welfare needs of refugees. Looking specifically at the SRS, refugees are becoming increasingly responsible and enterprising actors who are expected to provide for their own needs and the needs of their families within an environment of minimal and declining social support. These initiatives contribute to the economic and social marginality of residents in Nakivale, and require them to engage in daily survival tactics rather than challenging their very harsh living conditions, and lack of rights to protection and social security.

In Nakivale, self-reliance practices are disconnected from the existing political, economic and social conditions that directly affect refugees’ daily lives. They work in such a way that they impede the possibilities for self-reliance, such as the lack of adequate schooling and arable land, as well as the settlement policy itself. In an attempt to make

25 Interview with UNHCR official, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

26 Interview with Somali refugee, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

27 Interview with Congolese refugee, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

28 Interview with UNHCR official, Nakivale, July 23, 2014.

29 For an extended analysis of this latter point, see Ilcan, Oliver and Connoy (2016).

refugees responsible to care for and assist themselves with limited support, self-reliance practices undermine the protection and security needs of these populations: they restrict refugee mobility; deny access to sufficient aid and social services; and contribute to experiences of marginality, xenophobia and impoverishment. It should be noted, however, that there are market success stories within the settlement as well. Markets and trading centres operate within each of the settlement's three zones where "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" (Omata and Kaplan 2013, 16). Trade also occurs with Ugandan nationals who come to purchase surplus crops for resale in Mbarara, Kampala and surrounding smaller towns, or with traders who bring goods to sell in the retail shops in the settlement. Traders from the bordering countries of Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania, Rwanda and the DRC also visit the settlement to establish trade networks (*ibid.*, 17). It is the intention of this paper to address the obstacles of the SRS and of self-reliance more broadly, and to draw attention to possible pathways that can create conditions that favour the development of meaningful social support and refugee self-sufficiency.

While humanitarian assistance for refugee self-reliance and well-being is important, what is required is a much broader understanding of humanitarian assistance and social support for refugees. The emphasis on self-reliance by the UNHCR and its implementing partners stresses technical issues of implementation and funding at the expense of understanding the limitations of standardized, top-down approaches, or of social and economic contexts; the challenges and politics of integration; and the broader implications of neo-liberal and geopolitical dimensions of humanitarian initiatives and state practices in the global South. Much research has emphasized how the management of refugees within camps and settlements can occur through humanitarian aid approaches to refugees (see, for example, Harrell-Bond and Verdirame 2005; Hyndman 2000; Ilcan 2013; Ilcan 2014; Ramadan 2010). Often, these approaches consist of discourses, policies, and practices that are shaped by humanitarian and state actors, and are understood as integral to managing the conduct and mobility of refugees (Ashutosh and Mountz 2011). And, in Nakivale, they shape the lives of refugees in ways that stress their responsibility to care for and support themselves as entrepreneurial and enterprising actors who are encouraged to engage with agricultural and business-oriented livelihoods to achieve self-sufficiency and self-reliance. These neo-liberal ways of thinking about refugees provide governing authorities such as the UNHCR with the rationale to manage them (see also Karakayali and Rigo 2010; Scheel and Ratfisch 2014), which in turn reflects other refugee management practices operating in diverse regions (Geiger and Pécoud 2010). In light of this work, we advance the view that humanitarian aid approaches to

refugees need to be informed by the diverse experiences of refugees themselves and their welfare needs, access to rights and protection, and the forms of exclusion and violence they often face.

Rather than working within universal, decontextualized frameworks such as the SRS, we suggest that humanitarian engagements be informed by a bottom-up, social-justice or grassroots sensibility. Social justice-oriented approaches emphasize the critical necessity for equitable participation, distribution and recognition in social, political and cultural relations (Fraser 2010; Young 2011). And in the refugee context, they support processes and relations that positively impact the lives, rights and well-being of refugees. Such approaches to current practices of refugee self-reliance yield the potential to challenge decontextualized and standardized approaches that situate refugees in highly precarious environments. They also alert us to the conditions that refugees live in "on the ground," the injustices that can result from the governing practices of humanitarian aid and the lived exclusions and inequalities that remain unaddressed by state and international actors. Consequently, greater awareness must be given to understanding how the SRS is fundamentally at odds with approaches to genuine refugee development, particularly within the context of Nakivale Refugee Settlement, and to the possibilities of engaging in meaningful dialogue with refugees about how they wish to conduct their lives.

In Uganda, the RLP, a respected Ugandan-based organization that promotes the protection, well-being and dignity of refugees and refugee claimants in Uganda, employs a social justice perspective to critically question existing refugee and humanitarian systems and practices that perpetuate inequalities and injustices. Their work promotes skills development, human rights and access to fair and mutually supportive economic and social activities. For staff members of the RLP, self-reliance is an important strategy for refugee protection that "must go hand-in-hand with other things."³⁰ It is therefore important to consider alternative and social justice-oriented approaches to refugee social support and self-reliance. These alternative approaches can take many forms; this paper identifies the following needs.

It is essential to provide greater access to social and legal support for *all* refugees living both within and outside the formal settlement structure, which includes urban refugees. Such support would include access to legal aid, psychosocial counselling, English-as-a-second-language training, post-primary education, affordable housing, sufficient food and gainful employment.

It is vital that international and state actors such as the UNHCR and OPM recognize the existing skills and knowledge that refugees possess, in addition to their

30 Interview with RLP, Kampala, July 16 and 21, 2014.

mobility rights, which are critical to understanding their experiences, vulnerabilities and potential. It is also imperative that these actors collaborate with refugees in problem solving and long-term planning to generate a fuller understanding of the implications of existing refugee policies, such as the SRS.

The social, economic and political integration of refugees in local settings is crucial. RLP staff emphasize the need for local integration of refugees and their host communities as opposed to confining refugees to isolated and harsh settlements. This change would facilitate conditions that favour refugee well-being and rights. The local settlement policy and restrictions on movement and access to labour markets, education, and so on, however, compromise meaningful integration (Long 2011; see also Dryden-Peterson and Hovil 2003; 2004) and sustainable forms of self-reliance. These restrictive policies must be addressed in ways that work toward offering a more flexible approach for refugees, including access to full integration, employment and rights in host or resettled countries.

Convention status must be given to those refugees with *prima facie* status (these are refugees from the DRC, Somalia and South Sudan, who also constitute the majority of refugees in Uganda [UNHCR 2015; Parker 2002, 151]). This status provides protection without individual case assessments and, as such, “individual security and protection needs are less likely to be addressed” and refugees are less likely to be considered for resettlement (*ibid.*, 185). Convention status may therefore yield additional protection. In other words, there is the need for a more flexible notion of citizenship so that fundamental human rights and the demands made by refugees for social inclusion are understood as a priority. In this regard, refugees are recognized as political agents capable of both voicing legitimate and meaningful concerns (Isin 2008) and contributing to the overall development of the host country or community. In Uganda, the RLP is pursuing legal action with the Constitutional Court and has requested clarification on the opportunities and procedures for refugees to gain citizenship via naturalization. This action thus speaks to the needs of refugees who are living in protracted situations (Crisp 2004, 7). Indeed, some groups of refugees have been in the country for more than 15 years and are still not eligible for permanent residency or state citizenship.

Finally, given that protracted refugee situations are becoming the norm, there is an urgent need for international aid organizations to alter their humanitarian assistance strategies from one of emergency-care-and-maintenance practices, to more long-term (rather than temporary) engagements that prioritize genuine refugee development in social, political, economic and cultural relations.

CONCLUSION

Conflict, violence and human rights abuses are contributing to the global proliferation of displaced persons and refugee camps. Increasingly, refugees residing in these places are living within protracted and complex situations for which there are no easy solutions (Crisp 2003). Existing attempts to address protracted refugee situations engage with the concept and practices of self-reliance. This paper has focused on self-reliance practices in Uganda, specifically the SRS in Nakivale Refugee Settlement. Here, the introduction of self-reliance strategies has failed and subsequently positioned refugees in situations where they have inadequate access to social support and protection. Self-reliance strategies are, as this paper has demonstrated, disconnected from the social and economic relations of refugee settlements, specifically in Nakivale. In Nakivale, refugees experience restricted movement, social divisions and inadequate protection, while becoming increasingly more responsible to meet their own needs with limited international and state support. Additionally, the rural and remote location of Nakivale hinders self-reliance attempts, whereby refugees are kept at a distance from mainstream economic and political activities.

Our study has revealed how humanitarian assistance provided through self-reliance in Nakivale can actually contribute to the marginalization and exclusion of refugees. To rectify the consequences of the SRS, this paper recommends: greater access to social and legal support for *all* refugees; the collaboration of humanitarian and state actors with refugees in problem-solving and sustainable, long-term planning; the social, economic and political integration of refugees in local settings; Convention status for *prima facie* refugees and a more flexible notion of citizenship; and, finally, prioritizing long-term engagements rather than temporary forms of humanitarian assistance. Engaging with alternative and social justice approaches to existing refugee situations, particularly protracted situations, will challenge the current approaches that situate refugees in highly precarious environments. They may also foster more engaged and thoughtful dialogues with refugees about their lives and meaningful resolutions to their highly precarious living conditions, livelihoods and futures.

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analysis of the historical role of refugee management policy in Uganda and of the regulation of refugee mobility in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, see Ilcan, Oliver and Connoy (2016).

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