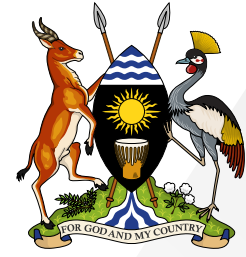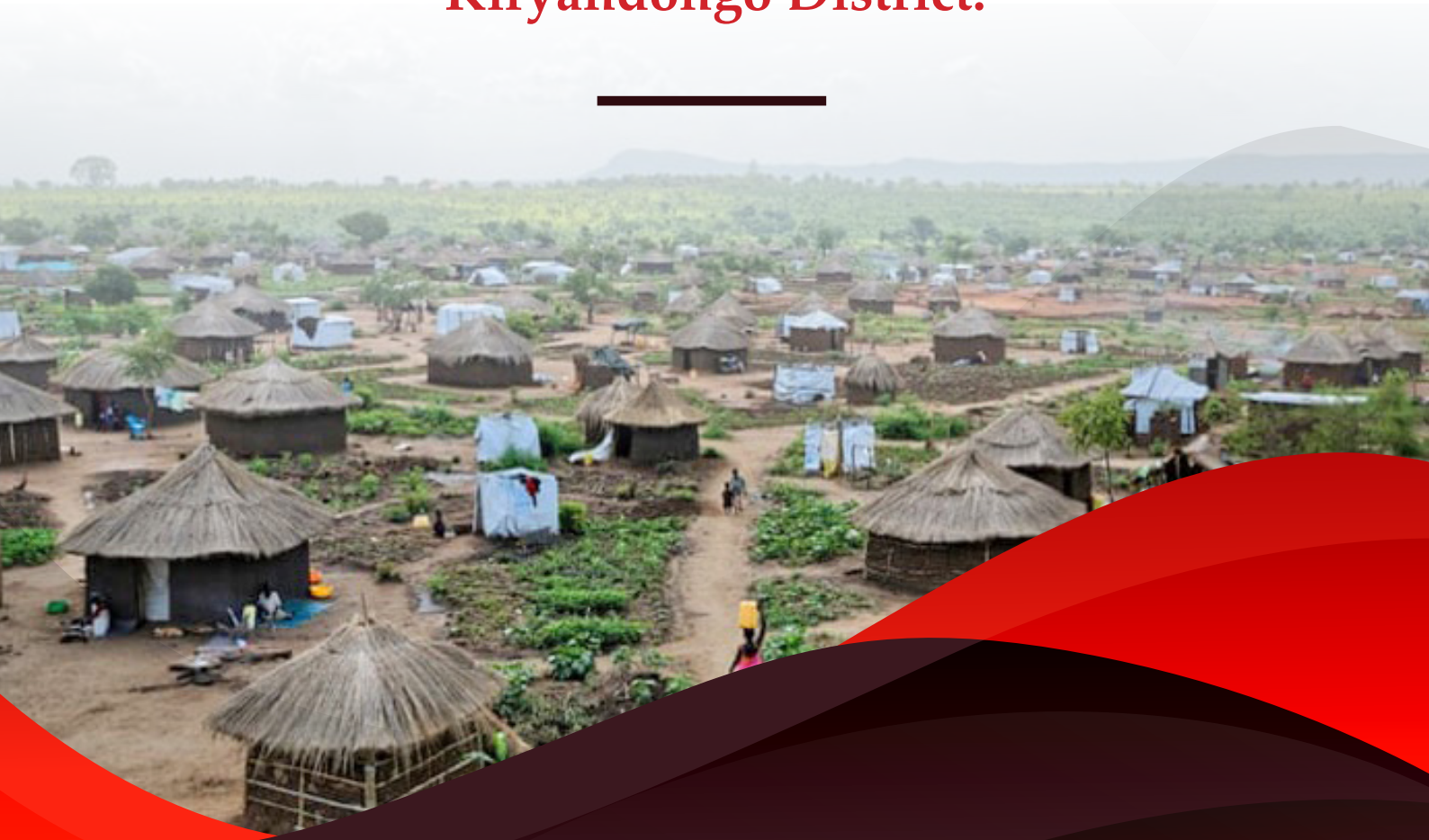**MAKERERE UNIVERSITY**

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

Building Bridges and Creating Social Cohesion for Harmonious Co-existence between Forced Migrants and Host Communities in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Yumbe District, and Kiryandongo IDP Sesettlement, in Kiryandongo District.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forced migration is increasing due to violent conflicts and natural disasters. By 2017 Uganda hosted the third largest number of refugees worldwide, with 1.4 million after Turkey and Pakistan with 3.5 million (United Nations High Commissioner for refugees, 2017). The Ugandan government established settlements to settle refugees and for the case of Internally Displaced Persons, the government resettled them to safe areas (Rukundo et al, 2015). Despite the existence of refugee and host population empowerment policy which directs aid resources to refugee as well as host communities, the relationship between the forced migrants and the host community has remained hostile and mostly characterized by tensions and violent conflicts. The project dubbed *"Building bridges and creating social cohesion for harmonious co-existence between forced migrants and host communities in Bidibidi refugee settlement, Yumbe district and Kiryandongo IDP settlement, in Kiryandongo District"* seeks to come up with lasting solution to the aforementioned tensions in the refugee and IDP settlements. The establishment of conflict resolution models using a conflict sensitive approach to working with forced migrants and host communities is what the study hopes to promote as a lasting solution to the tensions.

BACKGROUND

Amidst reported cases of conflicts and destruction of social fabric, and the rampant tensions between the refugees and the host communities, West Nile which has provided the greatest destination for refugees from other countries in the region, especially South Sudan. Kiryandongo which is equally centrally located with a favourable environment received refugees from countries within East Africa and the Horn of Africa, as well as internally displaced persons from Bududa District who were victims of landslides. These were resettled in Bududa District in line with Government of Uganda's Disaster Management Policy. It was therefore inevitable that the interaction between these communities would breed some conflict over the limited access to land and other productive resources, resource distribution, access to social services, competition over local jobs and employment, cultural practices, beliefs and interests.

STUDY APPROACH AND RESULTS

A purely qualitative - exploratory approach was used during this study. The approach was helpful in the analysis of the issues and experiences of refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as well as host communities. The approach enabled these communities, as well as other key stakeholders to describe their experiences, knowledge, perceptions regarding the best approach for building bridges and creating social cohesion for harmonious co-existence between forced migrants and host communities in Bidibidi and Kiryandongo Districts. Using qualitative research methods, the forced migrants – primarily the refugees and IDPs, as well as the host communities provided their voices and perspectives through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). As a result, the communities were able to describe the complex situation of conflict and the low level of social coexistence among themselves. The respondents were also able to provide suggestions and approaches that have the potential to build bridges and create social cohesion for harmonious co-existence between forced migrants and host communities in Yumbe and Kiryandongo Districts.

Key informants for the study were sampled purposively based on their knowledge, experience and their close engagement in the context of peace building, conflict resolution among the refugees, host communities and the IDP's in both settlements. A similar technique of purposive sampling was used to identify the zones in Bidibidi and Kiryandongo refugee settlements, as well as the ranches in Kiryandongo IDP settlement in Mutunda Subcounty. A total of 20 information-rich key informants were sampled, including officials from UNHCR, INGOs, CSOs, cultural leaders / elders and religious leaders from the host communities and the refugee settlement. Also, leaders in the refugee and IDP settlements, government officials at the district and lower local governments, were interviewed for this study. Meanwhile, a total of 10 Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in the two settlements, each comprising of at least 8 participants. These participants were selected randomly because of their homogenous demographic characteristics. The data collected was transcribed and analyzed thematically using ATLAS.ti version 7. Data codes were created and thematic categories generated to form the main themes for this study.

The study uncovered the major obstacles to social cohesion and building bridges dominant in the refugees and IDP settlements, as well as among the host communities. These included the conflict dynamics in the regions which were mostly both intra and inter refugee and IDP communities, as well as between refugees and IDPs on the one hand, and the host communities on the other. Also, the other issues identified include marital and cultural conflicts, as well as resource-based conflicts, perception of the refugees and IDPs, differences in the legal frameworks especially for the refugees, and religious conflicts, among others.

CONCLUSION

This study generated evidence-based findings on the dynamics of the conflicts among the refugees and the host community in Bidibidi, as well as between refugees and IDPs and host communities in Kiryandongo Districts. Conflict is normal and therefore, it is inevitable for a society to live with a reasonable degree of conflict. This is true for the refugee and IDP host communities in Uganda and elsewhere. The main concern, nonetheless, is when these conflicts turn into violence as has been observed. Stakeholders, thus, need skills and knowledge to identify such conflict dynamics, prevent them from escalating into violence, mitigate their effects when they happen, and ensure that the conflicting communities continue co-existing harmoniously even after some conflict incidents.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study generated insights from the field and therefore makes the following policy recommendation for all the stakeholders to consider in order to build bridges and creat social cohesion for harmonious co-existence between the forced migrants and host communities in Bidibidi and Kiryandongo refugee settlements, as well the IDP settlements in Kiryandongo District:

CONFLICT DYNAMICS

► There is need to historicize the genesis of the differences between the Dinka and the Nuer tribes in South Sudan because their differences seem to historical, cultural and political in nature. These historical issues have greatly undermined peace and, unless addressed, there may not be harmony among and between the refugees themselves, as well as between the refugees and the host communities. The governments of Uganda and South Sudan, as well as humanitarian agencies need to be mindful of these historical issues as they design and deliver services in line with their different mandates.

ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES TO MITIGATE RESOURCE-BASED CONFLICTS

► Consider revising the 70/30% policy for the distribution and delivery of services and investments and other resources among the host communities and the refugee settlements respectively. This seems to be breeding some conflict among the two communities as the host communities frequently complain about giving their resources to support the refugees. Besides, the ratio should be clearly defined, and clarity provided regarding which resources and services are provided under this arrangement. However, considering a 50/50% ratio for both communities would create economic opportunity as the situation is beyond relief aid, enabling both communities to experience recovery and development.

► Strengthen coordination mechanisms of the different programs implemented by the different development partners to avoid duplication of resources and man power.

► Emphasis should be paid on providing sustainable livelihood to the host community and refugees than humanitarian aid. As peace returns in neighboring countries, especially South Sudan, the refugees and host community need to be empowered to earn a living on their own in order to ensure self-sustainability.

APPROACHES TO PEACE BUILDING

► There is need to strengthen the security and justice systems in the settlements as there exists pockets of insecurity especially at night and during day time. Government needs to extend operations in the settlements so as to create peaceful co-existence among the refugees and the host communities.

► Empower the local leaders, stakeholders to understand the rationale of promoting peaceful co-existence among the host and refugee communities. Possibly setting up roles of peace Ambassadors in the settlement both in refugee and host community would ensure sustainable peace in the settlements.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

► Environmental conservation and protection is coming up as an issue which sets fault lines for future conflicts between the host communities and the refugees. This is particularly concerned with the depletion of environmental resources especially deforestation; government should strengthen and implement relevant laws to protect the environment in the settlements and among the host communities.

► Since it is investable that the refugees must access local resources for survival, put in place measures and arrangements for responsible resource sharing between refugees and refugee host communities.

► Considering the reality that conflicts and disagreements are normal and inevitable, establish mechanisms for grievance redress for refugees and refugee host communities. These mechanisms should be inclusive of key stakeholders among the refugees and refugee host communities. □