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# Attitudes of Refugees Towards Integration: The Experience of South Sudanese Refugees in Adjumani District in Uganda

Samuel Opono<sup>1</sup> · Frank Ahimbisibwe<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The question of how socioeconomic situations in and around refugees' settlement in Uganda affect their motivation and attitudes towards integration has not been clearly addressed in the literature. To address this gap, this study explores the integration framework, and uses thematic and content analysis to analyse data collected via in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The study finds that access to socioeconomic factors such as livelihood opportunities and social services, especially education and health, can either motivate and positively affect refugees' attitudes, or demotivate and negatively affect refugees' attitudes towards integration in the host community. Other motivating factors were family history and success stories of refugees who were successfully integrated in the host community. Suggestions for improving refugee integration included empowerment in vocational skills, access to grants and loans, access to land for agriculture, and access to labour market. These require greater cooperation among different stakeholders, including policy makers, nongovernmental organisations, international organisations, and governments, to coalesce resources and buttress integration of refugees in the host society.

**Keywords** Integration · Refugees · Motivation · Attitude · South Sudan · Uganda

## Introduction

The recent upsurge of refugee numbers, 25.9 million in 2018, 26.4 million in 2020, and 27.1 million in 2021 reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (UNHCR, 2019; UNHCR, 2021; UNHCR, 2022), has been a test to integration in developed countries (OECD, 2020) and, by extension, in developing countries, since large numbers of refugees are hosted in less-resourced countries. The majority of refugees (83%) are hosted by the developing countries and 72% in the neighbourhoods of the conflict zones (UNHCR, 2022: p. 2). Of particular concern to the UNHCR is Sub-Saharan Africa which hosts over 1/4 of the global displaced population (UNHCR, 2022: p. 14). Uganda, a focus of this study, is hosting 1.5 million refugees, tying with Pakistan as the 3rd largest refugee hosting countries in the world (after Turkey and Colombia) and the largest in Africa (UNHCR,

2022: p. 2). This high number of refugee inflow in different hosting countries is a test to integration in developed countries (OECD, 2020) and, indeed, a test to integration in developing countries like Uganda with less resources and scarce data.

The debate about integration has been controversial in the literature (Scholten and Van Nispen, 2015). However, the concept generally refers to a two-way process, a multi-dimensional process, and a long-term process that involves migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (MRAs), as well as members of the receiving society, and one that incorporates the rights and obligations of both members of the receiving society and MRAs (SIRIUS, 2019: p. 3). It is a complicated dual process, a multidimensional process with a goal of engendering a secure and inclusive environment for both the nationals and the refugees (Akar and Erdogodu, 2019). Generally, the term integration is socially conceptualised as a continuous and fluid process moulded by both the visitors and members of the host communities. It means being amalgamated into the social fabrics of the society (Seyidov, 2021) and being able to incorporate oneself and live harmoniously in the host society. In general, “this concept is concerned with forming a holistic structure in a society without losing its heterogeneity” (Seyidov, 2021: p. 9).

The process of refugee social integration is intertwined with economic, political, and environmental factors.

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✉ Samuel Opono  
oponosamuel@gmail.com

Frank Ahimbisibwe  
fahimbisibwe@must.ac.ug

<sup>1</sup> Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Mbarara, Uganda

Economically, despite being forcibly displaced and surviving in poor conditions, refugees can actively get involved in the economies of the host country. Refugee economic involvement is shaped by income and benefits of refugee households, human capital, and the economic context of the host state (Alloush et al., 2017), although they are very vulnerable in the new society and face huge impediments to economic and civic integration (Martén et al., 2019: p. 16,280). For example, in conditions of economic hardships such as unemployment in the host communities, citizens begin to develop resentment and negative attitudes towards refugees (Esses et al., 2017; Iwuoha, 2020; Altindağ and Kaushal, 2021).

Politically, economic conditions interweave with political burdens in the host country and affect social integration of refugees. Huge refugee influx affects political wills and administrative capacities of host states for refugee integration and generates probable economic, social, and political costs (Alloush et al., 2017; Bansak et al., 2018; Altindağ and Kaushal, 2021). Moreover, economic, legal, and political dynamics produce a scapegoat perception, discrimination, and hostility towards refugees and may weaken social integration (Bemak and Chung, 2017; Fitzgerald and Arar, 2018; Loyd et al., 2018). Environmental factors also blend with security threats and further complicate refugee integration. Due to the increasing number of refugees and protracted refugee situations, additional strain is put on the limited resources, strain on the environmental resources, and increased security threats (Ahimbisibwe, 2018; Ahimbisibwe et al., 2017: p. 5; Tulibaleka et al., 2021: p. 8). Therefore, negative attitudes towards migrants by some African governments such as Tunisia and Algeria are based on concerns of economic hardships and security challenges and are therefore unwilling to increase security burden by hosting refugees and other migrants, thus expelling migrants from their territories (Abderrahim, 2017; Alarme, 2020a; Alarme, 2020b).

In other African countries, refugees are generally not expelled but encamped in designated areas to control their movements, yet encampment policy of hosting refugees affects refugee integration into the host communities. For instance, the encampment policy in Zimbabwe constrains movements of refugees to other parts of the country and even within the immediate host communities, thus impeding refugee integration into the Zimbabwean society generally. Encampment is a form of repression, and it is applied in disregard of Article 13 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which guarantees freedom of movement to all people. Under the encampment policy, majority of refugees are unable to move or pursue livelihood opportunities—jobs or businesses—because their demarcated residences and radius of movements is only the camp. This restricted movement further disregards Article 23 (1) of the UDHR on people's right to work and freedom

of employment. By denying refugees these vital rights, the Zimbabwean encampment policy also does not grant them social, cultural, and economic integration, which also impede their political integration (Chikanda and Crush, 2016). The stoppage of refugees from enjoying these spheres of rights is a further abrogation of the UDHR, Article 27 (1), which states that all people are entitled to freely get involved in the cultural affairs of their communities to enjoy the arts, and to be part of scientific advancement and its gains. Other challenges refugees face in the camps are inadequate food supply by the UNHCR and World Food Program (WFP), inadequate housing and congestions, and limited accessibility to healthcare services, water and sanitation, nutrition, education, and other services (UNHCR, 2015; Taruvinga et al., 2021).

On a good and progressive note, to abide by international law, some African countries such as South Africa and Botswana scrapped off encampment policies and allowed those with refugee status to enjoy freedom of movement and the pursuit of various livelihoods (UNHCR, 2015). In Kenya, “the new Act provides that refugees shall have the right to engage individually or in a group, in gainful employment or enterprise or to practice a profession or trade where they hold qualifications recognized by competent authorities in Kenya” (Refugee International, 2022). However, like other low-income refugee hosting countries, Kenya struggles with the challenges of “poverty, weak social and economic infrastructure, internal tensions and institutional weaknesses, food crises and environmental stress” (Foni, 2020: p. 2). Besides, refugees and the local communities grapple with challenges of “lack of information, transparency and accountability of EU programs which are supposedly developed to assist them” (Foni, 2020: p. 2).

Unlike other refugee hosting countries, Uganda's refugee policy, in theory, stands out and provides refugees right to work, right to start businesses, access to social services such as health and education, and ownership of a piece of land (Government of Uganda, 2006). In Uganda, most refugees live in settlements with semi-permanent structures and the settlements are aimed at providing refugees with reasonable level of self-sufficiency. This policy has been lauded by the UNHCR, Filippo Grandi, as “the most progressive refugee policies in Africa, if not the world” (Bohnet & Schmitz-Pranghe, 2019). Because of self-reliant policy, by 2015 at least 25% of refugees in Uganda derived livelihood from different economic activities such as farming, vending, barbering, and other smaller businesses, to supplement the support offered to them by the international organisations (UNHCR, 2015). Nevertheless, these supplementary livelihood options are unstable, and refugees face shortage of start-up capital, government support, electricity, demand for their goods and services, and disposable income among prospective refugee clients and customers (Wamara et al., 2021:

p. 171). Moreover, the allotted plots of land are small and largely of poor quality, presenting difficulty for deriving livelihood from crop production (Bohnet and Schmitz-Pranghe, 2019: p. 5) Furthermore, in Uganda, while the government in collaboration with European Union built four vocational institutes to train refugees in skills such as “bakery, tailoring, carpentry and joinery, building, and metal fabrication to allow them to become competitive in the job market” which is a big step forward in achieving self-reliance and integration, refugees still face high level of unemployment and job shortages, employment insecurity, and discrimination (Ssemugenyi 2011, cited in Wamara et al., 2021: p. 172). It is also argued that whereas some refugees possess practical skills and the potential to offer their labour, most speak foreign languages such as Arabic, Eritrean, French, and Somali, but not the Ugandan official language—English—and other Ugandan native languages, although mechanisms have been put place to teach refugee children skills in English, literacy, and mathematics, to break the challenge of language barrier (Trudell et al., 2019).

All the above socioeconomic, political, and environmental situations show that integration is clearly not a smooth process and can be tensional. How then do the tensions and hard socioeconomic situations within and outside the settlements affect refugee motivation and attitudes to integrate? Current research does not cover how these socioeconomic situations operationalised as access to employment/livelihood, education, health, and how social connections such as ethnic ties between refugees and nationals (Ager and Strang, 2008; Penninx, 2004: p. 41) affect refugee motivation and attitudes towards integration in the host community. This research aims to fill this gap, examining the phenomenon from the perspective of South Sudanese refugees in Pagirinya Settlement in Uganda. This research argues that access to socioeconomic factors like livelihood opportunities and social services, can either motivate and positively affect refugees’ attitudes, or demotivate and negatively affect refugees’ attitudes towards integration in the host community. The remaining sections are ordered in terms of methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion.

## Methodology

In examining access to the socioeconomic elements livelihoods, education, and health from the perspectives of refugees, a qualitative research approach was most appropriate, to enable us to “understand the meanings and interpretations that refugees give to behaviors, events or objects” (Hennink et al., 2011: p. 9), as regards refugee integration in Uganda. We employed qualitative research design, using an interview guide to conduct in-depth personal interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with

the selected respondents (McIntyre, 2008) among the refugees and nationals.

The sampling strategy purposively considered individual interviews and FGDs with selected respondents who were refugees in Pagirinya Settlement and nationals in the host villages surrounding this settlement. We conducted one-to-one interviews with elders in block F; FGDs with other female and male refugees (non-leaders) in blocks B and D—blocks that correspond with even numbers (B, D, and F for elders); and respectively FGDs with female and male refugees of the first and last clusters of these blocks. From the ordinary refugees’ perspectives, they answered questions on issues that (de)motivate refugees and affect their attitudes about integration in Uganda.

Furthermore, we conducted with refugee leaders, that is, one-to-one interviews with all the block leaders (blocks A–F) and FGDs with all the cluster leaders (smaller administrative units within the blocks). We further conducted individual interviews with Refugee Welfare Council II and Assistant Settlement Commandant (the government representative in the settlement). These refugee leaders shared their views and clarified on the perceptions of refugees’ motivation and attitudes towards integration and refugee-host relations and interactions. Their views assisted us to compare, contrast, and clarify on the views received from the general refugees who were not leaders.

Additionally, we conducted individual interviews with key informants who were NGO staff operating in the settlement (Medical Teams International and Lutheran World Federation - UNHCR operating partner). These NGO officials were useful in shedding light on the issues of service delivery and integration of elderly refugees. Moreover, these officials were crucial in triangulating the information we got from the refugees and their leaders.

Lastly, we had personal interviews with host community leaders around the settlement, and technical and political leaders in Dzaipi sub-county where the settlement was located, plus FGDs with some host community members of Pagirinya village. These leaders and members of the host communities assisted us in understanding refugee-host relations and refugee integration and the responses were critical in comparing the perspectives of the citizens vis-à-vis refugees’ perspectives.

These range of 160 respondents led to a wider excavation into the depth of responses and inclusion of a range of views and experiences for triangulation. Data collection reached saturation level (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Hennink et al., 2011: p. 8). Data collection took place between 15 September and 5 October 2020 and 4 April and 25 April 2022. These ranges of respondents are tabularly summarised in Table 1.

Content and thematic analyses were used to develop themes from the data (Hennink et al., 2011). These involved

**Table 1** The number of respondents of the study

Respondents	Numbers	Methods
Assistant Settlement Commandant	1	Personal interview
Refugee Welfare Council II	1	Personal interview
Block leaders	6	Personal interviews
Cluster leaders	43	FGDs
Elderly refugees (men)	25	Personal interviews
Elderly refugees (women)	25	Personal interviews
Chairperson LC 1	3	Personal interviews
Chairperson LC 3	1	Personal interview
Sub-county chief	1	Personal interview
NGOs' staff	2	Personal interviews
Host communities' women	10	FGD
Host communities' men	6	FGD
Refugee women (non-leaders)	20	FGDs
Refugee men (non-leaders)	16	FGDs
Total	160	

describing, comparing, categorising, and conceptualising information. Findings from primary data were discussed in conjunction with the previous literature, leading to a derivation of appropriate conclusion. In addition, our analysis used some elements of integration framework (Ager and Strang, 2008), mainly indicators in the domains of markers and means, facilitating factors, and social connections, analysed against primary responses.

## Conceptual Framework

Integration, much as it is ubiquitously referred to, does not enjoy consensus definition or theoretical conceptualisation (Ager and Strang, 2008). Integration is broadly understood as a dual process where migrants are infused in the political, social, and economic fabrics of the host society (Global Migration Data Portal, 2022). This research therefore focuses on the socioeconomic aspects of integration as explained in the integration framework (Ager and Strang, 2008). Practically, the socioeconomic situations investigated include what Penninx (2004: p. 41) describes as immediate physical needs including livelihoods, health, education, and daily social interactions between refugees and members of the host community, and how access to these elements within and around the settlement affects refugees' motivation and their attitudes towards integrating in the Ugandan host communities.

Integration framework provides principal elements and indicators of integration. The framework contains “markers and means” which are widely viewed as important indicators for a fruitful integration of refugees, which comprise “employment, housing, education and health”; social connection for integration, including “social bridges, social bonds and social

links”; facilitating factors which include “language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability”; and foundations which include “rights and citizenships” (Ager and Strang, 2008: p. 170). This framework forms the conceptual lens for our analysis in this paper, zeroing on how access to employment/livelihood, education, health, and how social connection such as ethnic ties between refugees and nationals affects the motivation and attitudes of South Sudanese refugees in Pagirinya Settlement in their integration process in the Ugandan host communities. South Sudanese refugees in Uganda are mainly hosted in the greater northern districts of Uganda, including, among others, Yumbe and Adjumani districts, hosting approximately 1/3 of the total 1.5 million refugees (Statista, 2022). Pagirinya Refugee Settlement in Eastern Adjumani district was chosen because it was the most recent refugee settlement as of October 2016 (UNHCR, 2016) with new refugee arrivals that were not yet so much involved in research in Uganda; therefore, we selected them for this research.

## Socioeconomic Factors of Integration

### Livelihood Opportunities

By the time of conducting this research, there were refugees who have, hitherto, had access to certain livelihood opportunities in and around the settlement and were getting integrated well; they had acquired lands and were cultivating them; some who were teachers got teaching jobs in schools located within the settlement, some were bodaboda riders (motorcycles for transport), some were casual labourers, and some had businesses within the settlement. They were thus motivated and had positive attitude towards getting infused in the social and economic life of Ugandan society, despite limited economic and livelihood opportunities for many refugees compared with South Sudan. These refugees believed it was possible for refugees to acquire land, get jobs, make money, build houses, and live normal lives in Uganda like the nationals:

...you can get some money, get a plot... if my children can get good education and buy land and build for me a house, ... I will go to the Adjumani town and stay there... (FGD with a refugee leader in September 2020).

However, while there were refugees with relative livelihood opportunities and thus had positive attitude and optimistic about socially and economically getting integrated in Uganda, there were refugees who were demoralised and had developed negative attitude about ever being incorporated in the socioeconomic life of the Ugandan receiving communities. Their negative attitude was predicated on difficult livelihood: reduced and inadequate food rations and limited employment opportunities, yet they barely had means of generating income. The settlement's government

representative and an official of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)—the UNHCR implementing partner—confirmed that due to COVID-19 challenges, funding for refugees' maintenance had dwindled, and food rations had been reduced; for instance, 12 kg of maize had been reduced to 8 kg per refugee per month. In subsequent interviews with refugees in April 2022, respondents stated that food rations had been reduced further, virtually by a half: from 12 to 6 kg of maize a month, from 4 to 2.4 kg of beans a month, salt was reduced to 0.9 g monthly, and cooking oil was reduced to 2.8 L monthly. Due to limited livelihood opportunities in the settlement and its surroundings, some men were disempowered and could not provide for their families and, while some women pitied their husbands who were disempowered and staying redundant, some women abandoned their marriages and got married to men of the host communities due to their husbands' economic disempowerment, but also because others left their husbands in South Sudan and needed someone to help them take care of their families in Uganda. Moreover, cases of married men in the host communities going for other women in the refugee settlement were breeding rifts and fights between refugee women and the affected women in the host communities. For example:

When these people came, we were happy with them. But what is sorrowful is that some women in the settlement have left their husbands, now they come here and take away our husbands from the host communities, bringing logger heads in families. South Sudanese women come and take away our men. If a man is doing something here and getting some little money, they start neglecting their families and taking away money to refugee women in the settlement. It even interferes with the issue of producing children here, because men leave their wives here and they go and get another woman in the settlement. So, if a man leaves the settlement for another woman, the abandoned woman in the host community should also now get another man to give birth. So, this is making us women sorrowful (FGD with women of host communities in Pagirinya village 7th April 2022).

Furthermore, residential plots (30/30 feet) were distributed to refugees, and it is on this same plot that they built their houses and did small-scale cultivation to supplement food rations. For refugees with academic qualifications, despite freedom to seek employment as enshrined in the Ugandan 2006 Refugees Act and 2010 Refugees Regulations, it was very difficult for them to access jobs despite some of them being graduates with certificates, diplomas, and degrees, even if some of them had qualifications from Ugandan institutions. Based on this difficult livelihood, this category of refugees was pessimistic and had developed negative attitude about ever living a comfortable life in Uganda, although they would have loved to, if there were more economic

opportunities to buttress their livelihood. They viewed integration from the perspective of making a living in the host country, which relates to employability—one of the indicators of successful integration in the integration framework (Ager and Strang, 2008: p. 1712). However, these refugees faced tough living conditions which forced some of them to unofficially leave the settlement and returned to their troubled and risky country of origin, South Sudan. In fact, by the time of conducting this research, some refugees who had lost hope and by extension developed negative attitude towards integrating in the Ugandan society based on livelihood perspective had already returned to their homeland, especially those coming from less troubled areas, while others were contemplating returning any time irrespective of the security situation in South Sudan. In our subsequent fieldwork in April 2022, more refugees had already left the settlement unofficially due to hard conditions as stated by a respondent:

... you go to Pagirinya 1, Block B or C, you will find very many plots are empty. Those people have already gone back to South Sudan... because it is difficult to stay here... (Interview with an elderly refugee on 6th April 2022).

It can thus be deduced that lack of livelihood opportunities and hardship in the host country can lead to demotivation, negative attitude, and loss of hope among the refugees of making a living and integrating in the host society. Limited livelihood opportunities further breed rifts between refugees and their hosts, for example, refugee women leaving their refugee husbands for men in the host communities who can provide for them or give them land for cultivation, which leads to fights and hatred between refugees and host members and in some cases eruption of violence, causing injuries, animosity, death, and constant suspicions between the two groups, which hinder integration and progress of refugees in the host society. But where there were livelihood opportunities, for example, access to jobs and land for cultivation, refugees were happy, and they were working, were trading with host members, and were fast getting incorporated in the Ugandan society.

### Availability of Better Social Services

Some refugees' motivation and positive attitude towards integration in Uganda emanated from their perception of service provision in Uganda compared to South Sudan, and their interest to benefit from these services. Many refugees who participated in this research aspired to have good education for themselves but mostly for their children. In their personal and subjective observations, education level and health service provision in Uganda, which they and their children were already benefitting from, were of higher qualities than in South Sudan, as expressed:

...in South Sudan there are no good schools, so it is better to stay here... (FGD with female refugees on 5th April 2022).

Right now, people are coming from South Sudan to Uganda for treatment... all the food in South Sudan is coming from Uganda, which means South Sudan is depending on Uganda (FGD with Cluster leaders of Block F on 24th September 2020).

These sentiments can be validated since many South Sudanese move to Uganda to access education, many South Sudanese travel to seek medical attention in Uganda, and, in terms of food security, a high number of South Sudanese depend on food items exported from Uganda (Trading Economics, 2020; Wits, 2015).

Despite the fact that some refugees who had positive attitude and motivation for integrating in the social life of Uganda were already benefitting or had hope of benefitting from the available social services especially education and health which were comparatively higher in standard than in South Sudan, there were refugees who were demoralised and had developed negative attitude about educational access and health care, rationalising their negative attitude on the difficulty in accessibility of these services in Uganda, compared to South Sudan. According to these refugees, whereas education or healthcare was of higher standards in Uganda than in South Sudan, accessibility and affordability were challenging especially when one had to pay for them in private facilities, because there were always improper attention and treatment at the health facilities within the settlement—Health Centre II and III—and outside the settlement where they were sometimes referred to for further treatment in the hospitals, yet many refugees did not have any proper source of income, as asserted:

...like me, the time when I was sick, I went to Adjumani (hospital) there. Those people started to abuse us: you Sudanese, why are you disturbing us here? Your government, your president knows only fighting and not making peace. Don't disturb us here. Even taking my paper, they didn't want to write medicine for me (FGD with women of Block B, last cluster in April 2022).

... here, even if you complain that you are sick, you are not sent anywhere.... They don't refer you; they keep you there until you are very sick. The problem is there is no proper medical treatment for refugees. But in South Sudan, you have what to do and you can get money to go to the private clinic when you are sick (FGD with cluster leaders of Block E on 23rd September 2020).

In Pagirinya Settlement, there were Health Centres II and III where refugees were treated free of charge. When the medical condition could not be treated in Health Centre III,

refugees were supposed to be referred to Adjumani Hospital. However, we established that refugees were only referred when they were in critical conditions. As such, refugees who had negative attitude and demotivated about living in Uganda on account of high expense of social services opine that in South Sudan they can engage in productive activities and are free to move anywhere in their country at any time without requiring permission to do so. Therefore, they can earn money and seek treatment from health facilities of their choice (private or government) at any time without needing to follow a referral protocol. They can also work and afford to pay their children to schools of their choice because in the settlement there are free community schools with too many children and lower quality educational access, but there are surrounding private schools and within the settlement with better quality education but must be paid for, which majority of refugees are unable to afford even if they wish to send their children to those schools.

### Family History

Some refugees' motivation and positive attitude about socially integrating in the Ugandan society were based on family ties, because they had family relations in Uganda. They had family roots in Uganda: their grandparents were buried in Uganda, their parents lived in Uganda, and they were positive about being integrated in the Ugandan society due to their family ties. On this note, it is important to acknowledge that African national boundaries were drawn in 1885 by the colonisers, placing people of the same ethnicities in different countries; for example, the region of Bufumbira was carved out of Rwanda and given to Uganda (Nwanolue and Iwuoha, 2012). In the same vein, some South Sudanese are from the same ethnic backgrounds as some ethnic groups in Ugandan, for example, the Acholi, Langi, and Madi. In fact, in Pagirinya Settlement where we conducted this research, the dominant refugee ethnicity was Madi from South Sudan who spoke the same language as Madi from Uganda where the settlement was located, and some South Sudanese had long crossed informally and lived in Uganda, as these extracts confirm:

... my real home is here; my grandfather came here with my father... I have some people who gave me some land... (FGD with cluster leaders of Block C on 25th September 2020).

The Madi of South Sudan and those of Uganda are related. If you have old people who can introduce you, you can know your relatives across. Sometimes, events take place in Uganda or South Sudan and the relatives across are invited, so we are really related and generally in good terms. The border division was just political. The refugees who are not in good relationship with Ugandans are those of other tribes

who cannot speak either Madi or English; otherwise, we are okay. For example, I have a Ugandan who calls me an uncle! So, I deserve to go there, and they give me a piece of land because I am an uncle! (FGD with cluster leaders of blocks A and B on 21st September 2020).

Due to family connection as the extracts show, it is easier for this category of refugees (with family ties in Uganda) to acquire land for cultivation, make new friends in Uganda, and get integrated. Similarly, some South Sudanese refugees in Pagirinya belonging to Acholi ethnicity in South Sudan confessed that they would travel to Acholi land in Uganda (outside Pagirinya Settlement) to cut grass for roofing their houses in the settlement, and they would be treated well on account of their ethnic ties.

### Success Stories of Integration

Success stories of refugees who were successfully integrated in the Ugandan society were an important motivator for some refugees to persist in their quest to integrate into various socioeconomic domains of the Ugandan society. Some refugees were motivated and had positive attitude about settling in Uganda because other refugees who fled to Uganda earlier, especially during the previous wars and never went back to South Sudan, were relatively successful in Uganda and they were relatively doing well economically and helping the new arrivals to settle in and navigate the new society.

... some people came here in 1956 and they are still here in Uganda. Others came in 1989 and they are still here in Uganda. We went back and left them here, but for them they are now okay; they have stabilised in the Ugandan community. When we came back with nothing, they were the one helping us with little things here and there. They tell you to be in good relationship with the host community and they will give you a piece of land. So, these people are in the host community here: they are digging, they are getting their groundnuts, they are getting their millets, and so what will make me to go back to South Sudan? They point at you with the gun, again you run back here, and you find the people you left behind here are now okay! (FGD with cluster leaders of Block B on 21/09/2020).

These refugees were optimistic about getting integrated in the Ugandan community as they compared themselves with those who never returned to South Sudan after they ran to refuge in Uganda during the previous wars of 1950s and 1980s. These earlier refugees were now defacto integrated in the Ugandan society, exhibiting integration indicators as mentioned in Ager and Strang (2008): they had jobs and had lands, their children were studying, some of them even had Ugandan National Identity Cards, and they were living

peacefully with Ugandans in the host communities. Therefore, just as there were refugees who were well integrated in the Ugandan society, some of our interviewees who had positive attitude about being integrated in the Ugandan society were motivated and borrowed a leaf from their counterparts who had been well integrated in the Uganda society and living harmoniously with the nationals since the previous influx of refugees in the 1950s and 1980s. Because of the experience and successful integration of their earlier counterparts, some of our interviewees were optimistic and positive about integrating in the socioeconomic life of the Ugandan society like other refugees who were in Uganda before them.

### Conceptualising Socioeconomic Conditions of Integration

In examining how socioeconomic situations affect refugee attitudes towards integration in the host community, this research finds that access to socioeconomic factors such as livelihood opportunities and social services, especially education and health, can either motivate and positively affect refugees' attitudes, or demotivate and negatively affect refugees' attitudes towards integration in the host community. We discuss these findings in relations to the previous literature and the theoretical framework (Ager and Strang, 2008).

The theme of "livelihood opportunities" relates to employment which is one of the indicators of successful integration (Ager and Strang, 2008: p. 1712). It also relates to economic aspect of refugee integration which holds that, despite being forcibly displaced and surviving in poor conditions, refugees can actively get involved with the economies of the host country (Alloush et al., 2017). Although refugees are very vulnerable in the new society and face huge impediments to economic and civic integration (Martén et al., 2019: p. 16,280), especially in low-income refugee hosting countries of Africa with hard economic situations (UNHCR, 2015; Foni, 2020; Taruvinga et al., 2021), our research found that there were refugees who have, hitherto, had access to certain livelihood opportunities in and around the settlement and were getting integrated well; they had acquired lands and were cultivating them; some who were teachers got teaching jobs in schools located in the settlement, some were bodaboda riders (motorcycles for transport), some were casual labourers, and some had businesses within the settlement. They were thus motivated and had positive attitude towards getting infused in the social and economic life of the Ugandan society, despite limited economic and livelihood opportunities for many refugees. These refugees believed that it was possible for refugees to acquire land, get jobs, make money, build houses, and live normal lives in Uganda just like the nationals. On the other



hand, there were refugees who were demoralised and had developed negative attitude about ever getting incorporated in the socioeconomic life of the Ugandan receiving communities. Their negative attitude was predicated on difficult livelihood: limited employment opportunities and reduced food rations, coupled with little or no extra income. Refugees were distributed plots on which they built houses and did small-scale cultivation to supplement food rations. For some refugees with academic qualifications, despite freedom to seek employment as enshrined in the Ugandan 2006 Refugees Act and 2010 Refugees Regulations, it was very difficult for them to access jobs despite some of them being graduates with certificates, diplomas, and degrees, even from Ugandan educational institutions.

The success of some refugees in earning a living outside of humanitarian assistance while others were unable to created a mix of positive and negative attitudes among refugees about getting integrated in Uganda, which is both the testament to the intended positive outcome of the policy of self-reliance, but also exposes the difficulty in achieving such a highly praised Ugandan policy. Much as self-reliance underlies the 2006 Uganda Refugee Act which provides refugees access to land, employment and education, and freedom of movement, the situation on the ground is contrary to the policy provision, with limitations similar to encampment policies of the neighbouring states like Kenya and Tanzania. Inadequate plot size, poor quality of allocated land, and lack of water limit the self-sufficiency of many refugees, usually compelling refugees to borrow or beg for food or sell non-food items to top up meagre harvest and food rations (Bohnet and Schmitz-Pranghe, 2019: p. 29). Furthermore, numerous refugees are unable to gain from the right to employment and freedom of movement, due to scarcity of job opportunities in the settlements' areas, and poor road connection to the markets (Bohnet and Schmitz-Pranghe, 2019: p. 29). Even the skillful and educated "refugees must navigate the labour market to acquire even the lowest-paid jobs and at the same time fight to be accepted by the Ugandan employers. They work in precarious conditions that manifest in the form of low pay, discrimination at work, and other poor working conditions" (Tulibaleka et al., 2021: p. 8). For refugees who start small businesses, buyers and markets are not enough to achieve self-reliance, forcing the majority of refugees to keep depending on the dwindled food rations (Bohnet and Schmitz-Pranghe, 2019: p. 29). In fact, some authors argue that Uganda's self-reliance policy was not aimed at providing a full socioeconomic integration of refugees—and much less naturalising them—but rather designed with the underlying intention of only allowing refugees to have temporary local integration up to the time of their return to their country of origin (Bohnet and Schmitz-Pranghe, 2019: p. 30). However, it is important to recognise that the challenge of refugee integration into the labour market is not confined to

refugees in developing host countries such as Uganda, but it is a current challenge for refugees in many countries around the world including Europe (Loiacono and Vargas, 2019; van Dijk, 2021). Integration of refugees into the job market is impeded by various challenges, among which are limited networks, discrimination, language barriers, illiteracy, or inadequate level of formal education (Van Dijk, 2021). The difficulty in accessing employment opportunities also relates to the argument that refugees integrate in the labour market at a slower pace than the labour migrants, because they were not initially selected for host country's labour market (Bevelander, 2020: p. 1).

In Uganda, initiatives such as joint agricultural projects involving both refugees and host communities could help refugees acquire land for cultivation in rural areas. For example, we were informed by a refugee leader in Pagirinya Settlement that refugees and nationals were organised in groups of 25 (10 nationals and 15 refugees), the nationals gave land, ox ploughs were given to the group members by the funding organisation, and the produce after harvest was divided equally among the group members. This initiative improved relationship between refugees and host communities and some refugees, in this way, acquired land freely for cultivation from the group members who were nationals. Additionally, despite reported discrimination in the labour market (Tulibaleka et al., 2021: p. 8), vocational skills trainings were viewed by some of our refugee respondents in Pagirinya Settlement as an option to help them acquire skills outside agriculture so that they could seek employment in these areas or become self-employed and earn income to help them feed their families and afford private social services such as education and healthcare.

Some refugees in Uganda have entrepreneurship skills and experience, and run businesses in Uganda (Betts et al., 2019; Ebere and Mwesigwa, 2021). Around the settlement areas, both refugees and the nationals have set up shops, markets, or central business trading areas (Tulibaleka et al., 2021: p. 8). It is vital to promote self-employment through "soft loans for refugees and entrepreneurship education and trainings for both urban and rural refugees" (Tulibaleka et al., 2021: p. 8). This is similar in Pagirinya Settlement where there were shops, small restaurants, grinding machine, and bodabodas (motorcycle for transport), which were businesses run by refugees. Refugees who were business oriented requested to be granted access to business loans just like Ugandan citizens, to improve their businesses. Relatedly, cash grants could also help to economically empower refugees to start businesses as it was being done in Pagirinya Settlement by LWF.

On the theme of "social services" in the education and healthcare provisions, some refugees were happy and benefiting from the comparatively higher standard of healthcare and education services in Uganda and were motivated and

had developed positive attitude about integrating further and settling in the Uganda society; yet, other refugees were demoralised and had developed negative attitude about ever integrating and living in Uganda on account of difficulty in affordability of proper healthcare and education especially in the private sector. Refugees' motivation and interest in benefiting from the health and education services of Uganda are in line with the integration framework whereby education and health are important indicators for successful integration of refugees in the domain of means and markers (Ager and Strang, 2008: pp. 170, 172). The level of education of migrants and the existing opportunities to study in the settled country bolster social integration (Ager and Strang, 2008; Schmidt et al., 2020) and, conversely, the low level of education can be problematic for social integration especially the linguistic challenge, which also affects access to healthcare (Özmete et al., 2021: p. 115), which is equally an indicator of successful integration (Ager and Strang, 2008).

On the solution's end, stakeholders can address vulnerability of new arrivals by addressing issues of resources and competence through more stakeholder collaboration (Schuster et al., 2022: p. 33). In relations to analytical framework (Ager and Strang, 2008), stakeholder collaboration can be linked to the domain of social links, to connect the refugees to important services to facilitate integration. Ager and Strang (2008) underscore the interconnectedness of different aspects of integration framework, which relates to the broader view of sustainability, collaboration between health and other sectors to promote refugee sustainability in the host country (Waage et al., 2015), for instance, collaborating with stakeholders in the education sector to empower refugees to acquire skills that can help them seek employment in the host country, earn income, and seek better healthcare services even in the private sector that requires payment. In this case, NGOs have emerged as important partners to governmental organisations in facilitating social integration processes with refugees and migrants, where they play a principal role of providing humanitarian assistance (Mackreath and Sağniç, 2017, cited in Seyidov, 2021). It is therefore important that support to refugees by humanitarian organisations goes on until refugees gain economic independence. But, to evade possible resentment from vulnerable local communities feeling ignored while refugees are favoured, it is prudent to provide comprehensive assistance to both refugees and local communities (Fajth et al., 2019: p. 19). Ugandan Office of the Prime Minister recommends that 30% of all humanitarian assistance in the refugee hosting environments should be channelled to the host communities. This can potentially help to improve attitude of the local communities towards refugees because social integration is a two-way process involving the participation of refugees and the host communities (Akar and Erdogdu, 2019; Seyidov, 2021). Positive attitude towards the immigrants depends on

the nature of interactions between the two groups—positive contact between ethnicities (Laurence and Bentley, 2018) and positive attitude of the members of the host society enable integration of refugees (Özmete et al., 2021: p. 117). In Pagirinya Settlement, the leaders of the host communities mentioned that social services and infrastructures such as schools, health centres, boreholes, skill trainings, and cash grants were being provided by humanitarian organisations to both refugees and members of the host communities at either 50–50% or 70–30% refugee-host benefits, and were making host communities happy and improving relationships between the two groups and promoting integration generally.

On the theme of “family history”, some of our respondents had positive attitude and motivated to integrate in Uganda because they had relatives living in Uganda. Due to family connections, it was easier for them to acquire land for cultivation, make new friends in Uganda, and get economically and socially integrated. Similarly, there were refugees who had positive attitude and motivated to integrate in the social life of Uganda on account of success stories of earlier refugees who were successfully integrated and were relatively doing well economically and living harmoniously with the nationals in the host communities. These previous refugees were the ones helping the new arrivals to settle in and navigate the Ugandan society. Relatives of refugees living in Uganda and the previous refugees who were well integrated in the Ugandan host communities became the social networks of the new arrivals. Social networks are elements that shape refugee social integration (Bradley and Van, 2010, cited in Özmete et al., 2021). Unlike voluntary migrants, many refugees normally do not understand the language of the host country, possess limited economic resources and capital, have limited social networks and supports, and are more susceptible to psychological torture before arriving in the host country (Hynie, 2017; Li et al., 2016). Therefore, the proximate networks of families, children, and kins become vital facilitators of social integration (Bemak and Chung, 2017; Fitzgerald and Arar, 2018). On first arrival in the host country, refugees choose to live near the ethnic group if they have hope of gaining from its networks and later look for jobs in other places beyond their enclave economy (Martén et al., 2019: pp. 16,280–16,281). The Madi refugees at Pagirinya Settlement enjoyed this ethnic advantage because the settlement was located in the sub-region of Madi community of Uganda, so Madi refugees in Pagirinya Settlement shared the same language with their hosts, facilitating their social connection with the host community, unlike other refugees from other ethnicities who had a linguistic challenge. It is well known in the literature that common ethnic identity facilitates refugee integration (Özmete et al., 2021: p. 117). Furthermore, refugees at Pagirinya Settlement met and expanded their social networks at social places and events such as markets, sports, cultural gala, disco halls, and

other leisure places and some refugees met and created good relationship with citizens and were offered land freely to cultivate. Therefore, initiatives that leverage social activities, social avenues, and services and projects that congregate refugees and nationals for mutual benefits could help expand refugee networks, improve relationships between the two groups and harmonious coexistence, and ultimately augment refugee integration. Social network is in consonance with the integration framework (Ager and Strang, 2008) that includes the domain of social connection and, within it, a sub-domain of social bonds, referring to being part of families, ethnic groups, citizens, and religions and other similar groups in the host communities, leading to social links—having “connection between individuals and structures of the state, such as government services” (Ager and Strang, 2008: p. 181). However, social places such as disco halls require regulations by joint refugee-host leaderships to settle violence that occasionally arise.

## Conclusion

This research aimed to examine how socioeconomic situations in and around the refugee settlement affect refugees’ motivation and attitudes towards integration in the host communities—the phenomenon which is not clearly addressed in the literature. The article thus contributes to the current literature by examining factors that (de)motivate and affect refugees’ attitudes towards integration in less-resourced host countries such as Uganda. Using integration framework and content and thematic analysis, the themes of livelihood opportunities, social services, family history, and success stories of refugees who were successfully integrated were analysed as they emanated from the field interviews and FGD responses. The article potentially makes key contributions to the literature and forms key points for policy considerations, as summarised below.

Social networks such as family and ethnic ties positively motivate and affect refugees’ attitudes to integrate in the host society. Family history was a source of motivation for some refugees with family ties in Uganda. These refugees had relatives in Uganda, had made friends in Uganda, and were living harmoniously with the host communities. They were positive about being socially integrated and their children have acquired better standard of education and grew up in the country where security, order, and rule of law prevailed. Similarly, refugees from Madi ethnic community in South Sudan were already enjoying a relatively good relationship with the Madi community in Uganda—where the settlement was located: they spoke the same language, they intermarried, and they had relatives across the two groups. So, they were interacting and integrating well with the host community based on their shared language and social values.

Economically, available livelihood opportunities outside humanitarian aid motivate and make refugees have positive attitude towards integration in the host communities. In this research, some refugees had access to certain livelihood opportunities and had already acquired land in the host communities and were cultivating them to compliment the dwindled humanitarian aid in the settlement; some found opportunities in the service sector as bodaboda riders, some set up businesses in the settlement, some got employed as teachers, some got employed as casual labourers, and so on. On the other hand, there were refugees who have not had access to these livelihood opportunities and, therefore, were frustrated and developed a negative disposition about ever getting integrated in the Ugandan society, especially in terms of getting employment, acquiring land for cultivation, and earning income.

Availability of comparatively higher standard of social services in education and health which they were already enjoying was further a source of motivation to some refugees to live in Uganda. However, to some refugees, difficulty in accessing these education and health services in the private sector which required payment was a source of frustration, demotivation, and negative attitude in living in Uganda’s host communities.

The success of some refugees in earning a living outside of humanitarian assistance and affording essential services such as education and healthcare while others were unable to attests to the advantage and the need for such self-reliant approach of hosting refugees, but also exposes the difficulty in achieving such a highly advocated self-reliant strategy of Uganda’s nature. In agreement with other scholars (Bohnet and Schmitz-Pranghe, 2019), Uganda’s case illustrates that merely providing the right to work, freedom of movement, and a piece of land for refugees does not necessarily translates to the needed self-reliance or integration of refugees. Rather, governments and aid agencies must ensure that refugees enjoy their rights by making available the basic infrastructure so that refugees are able to move to the markets. Additionally, if allocating land to refugees, the government should make sure that the land is reasonably large to allow for the cultivation of sufficient quantities of crops, allocate at least fertile lands, and device means for providing water to water the crops. Additionally, land rights should be unambiguously defined to avoid tensions with the local communities. It should be acknowledged that all refugees are not farmers; therefore, alternative employment options should be provided so that refugees can find work and apply their pre-attained skills, for instance, in seasons of drought.

Our refugee respondents in Pagirinya Settlement suggested mechanisms to have them integrate in the socioeconomic system of Uganda, including empowerment in vocational skills, access to grants and loans, access to land for agriculture, and access to the labour market, among others. Additionally,

initiatives and projects that leverage and promote social activities, social avenues, and services and projects that congregate refugees and nationals for mutual benefits could help in improving the relationships between the two groups and harmonious coexistence, and ultimately improving refugee integration. This could be in the forms of building schools, health centres, markets, and promotions of social activities like sports, music, and cultural gala, among others.

Considering the suggested solutions, it is expensive to achieve the desired socioeconomic integration that can significantly and positively motivate and affect refugee attitudes to integrate in the host society. More cooperation is therefore necessary among different stakeholders such as policy makers, NGOs, international organisations, and governments, to pull out resources in order to meet the requirements for improvement of socioeconomic integration of refugees in the host communities.

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**Samuel Opono** is a Research Assistant at the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda. His research interests revolve around refugees, forced migration, drivers of conflict and post conflict reconstruction and development in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

**Frank Ahimbisibwe** is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda. He is also a visiting associate professor at the African Studies Centre, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan. His research focuses on refugees, forced migration and international relations in the Great Lakes region and Horn of Africa.