

RESEARCH NOTE

THE LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES OF SOUTH SUDANESE IN A REFUGEE SETTLEMENT IN UGANDA

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the livelihood strategies of South Sudanese refugees who fled to northern Uganda. Civil war broke out in December 2013 in South Sudan and there were 1.6 million internally displaced persons and 265,700 refugees as of October 2015. Nearly 184,000 refugees have fled to Uganda and many of them have been protected in refugee settlements in the Adjumani District of northwestern Uganda, a district that borders South Sudan. This research was conducted in December 2014, August 2015, and August 2016 in a refugee settlement in Adjumani. I primarily interviewed Dinkas, who represent the majority of refugees in the refugee settlement and were pastoral people in South Sudan. Few people could bring their livestock to Uganda. Most refugees seemed to have survived by relying on assistance, such as rations from international humanitarian organizations. However, they survived not only by maintaining a passive position but also by actively reconstructing their lives through livelihood strategies. I found that the South Sudanese refugees employed the following strategies: 1) cultivation of crops that complement the food supply, 2) restoration by breeding livestock, and 3) access to a market. These livelihood strategies can secure a minimum amount of food to survive.

Key Words: Livelihood strategies; Livestock; South Sudan; Uganda; Refugee settlement.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the livelihood strategies of South Sudanese refugees who fled to northern Uganda. This study defines livelihood strategies as the combination of activities that people choose to undertake in order to achieve their livelihood goals (Eldis, 2017). The strategies are embodied as the utilization of resources that include not only property that was brought from South Sudan and goods supplied by immediate humanitarian assistance, but also social relationships and surroundings. The purpose of these strategies is to expand the possibility of reconstructing their lives and making their life wealthier despite many restrictions. This research elucidates the types of livelihood strategies that exist and the types of actors that employ these strategies.

The Republic of South Sudan, which gained its independence from the Republic of Sudan in 2011, is undergoing a civil war. In December 2013, clashes in Juba, South Sudan's capital, ignited armed conflicts between President Salva Kiir's Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and former Deputy President Riek Machar's Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO).

The International Crisis Group (2014) and Murahashi (2015) explain the background of this civil war. Furthermore, the International Refugee Rights Initiative (2015) discusses the types of assistance provided to South Sudanese refugees in Adjumani District, Uganda. However, few studies examine the livelihood strategies of the refugees themselves.

OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH

This section outlines the research area and household subjects. I conducted the research in December 2014, August 2015, and August 2016 in the Nyumanzi Refugee Settlement in Adjumani District.

Of the South Sudan refugees who fled to Uganda, 184,000 have been protected in refugee settlements in the Adjumani District of Uganda (UNHCR, 2016a). This district is adjacent to South Sudan and lies on a low plateau in northern Uganda. The landscape is extensive savannah grasslands with scattered woodlands and thickets. Annual rainfall is medium, ranging between 750 mm and 1,250 mm. The dry season is longer than in other areas of the country. The main ethnic groups and languages of host residents are Madi, Lugbara, and Acholi (Fountain Publishers, 2011: 5–7). The population of local residents in Adjumani District is 232,813 (UBOS, 2014: 20). Among the residents, agriculture is largely subsistence farming. Even though there are large tracts of land, extensive commercial farming is not widely practiced.

Nyumanzi Refugee Settlement is generally situated on a flat plain and was roughly estimated at 3.4 km² as of August 2015. The number of refugees in this settlement is 42,521 (OPM, 2017). Nimule, the town on the border of South Sudan and Uganda, can be seen from the hill at the north end of this settlement. Refugees are able to receive mobile phone reception from South Sudan.

I conducted primarily semi-structured interviews with the Dinka people, who formed the majority ethnic group of refugee households in this settlement and who had formerly been pastoralists in South Sudan. The refugees that I interviewed fled from Bor, the capital of Jonglei State in South Sudan. The total number of households that I interviewed through 2015 was 14. Table 1 outlines these 14 households. I also interviewed an additional 11 households in subsequent research in 2016. Most householders were women. Their husbands typically had remained in South Sudan to maintain their livestock or to serve as government employees, especially as soldiers. Some were widows of government soldiers. I also interviewed local host residents in Adjumani, Ugandan authorities, and non-governmental organization (NGO) staff members in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

REFUGEE PROTECTION AND LIFE IN A REFUGEE SETTLEMENT IN ADJUMANI

This section explains the process of refugee protection and describes life in

Table 1. Outlines of 14 households in 2015 (All of their householders were women.)

Household	Householder's age	Size (Under 18 years old)	Husband	Livelihood
A	43	6 (5)	SPLA soldier died in this civil war	Cultivating a number of crops on its plot
B	32	6 (5)	Death in South Sudan	Cultivating a number of crops on its plot
C	30	5 (4)	Missing and feared dead in this civil war	Cultivating a number of crops on not only its plot but also on the plot of a local host resident as a holding
D	42	3 (2)	Breeding livestock in South Sudan	Cultivating only pumpkin on its plot
E	28	6 (5)	Breeding livestock in South Sudan	Cultivating a number of crops on its plot
F	28	6 (5)	SPLA soldier in South Sudan	Cultivating only pumpkin on its plot and doing embroidery on a one-piece suits and selling them at the market
G	23	5 (4)	SPLA soldier in South Sudan	Cultivating a number of crops on its plot and sometimes receiving charcoals from local host residents
H	24	4 (3)	Student in Juba, South Sudan	Cultivating a number of crops on its plot
I	Unknown	7 (6)	Missing and feared dead in this civil war	Cultivating a number of crops on its plot
J	30	6 (5)	Breeding livestock in South Sudan	Cultivating a number of crops on its plot
K	Unknown	9 (8)	Breeding livestock in South Sudan	Cultivating a number of crops on its plot and breeding four head of cattle
L	34	10 (9)	Missing and feared dead in this civil war	Cultivating a number of crops on its plot and breeding nine goats
M	60	1	Missing and feared dead in this civil war	Cultivating nothing but received a male goat from an NGO as a household needing special assistance
N	Unknown	16 (10)	Missing and feared dead in this civil war	Cultivating a number of crops on its plot and breeding 23 goats

the refugee settlements. Displaced persons who cross the border from Nimule, South Sudan to Elegu, the border town in Uganda, are registered temporarily as asylum-seekers by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the authority on refugee management in Uganda. Regardless of age, each person is given a ration of three packs of high-energy biscuits from the World Food Program (WFP).

Registered displaced persons are transported to the Nyumanzi Reception/Transfer (R/T) Center by trucks or buses. Nyumanzi R/T Center, which is roughly estimated at 0.13 km², opened in early 2014. Prior to that, the reception center was in Zaipi; however, Zaipi was too small for the rapidly increasing population of displaced persons.

After displaced persons are registered as refugees by the OPM and receive ration cards from the UNHCR at the Nyumanzi R/T Center, they are transferred to one of 21 settlements in Adjumani, Arua, Koboko, or Yumbe district (UNHCR, 2016b). Refugees are given plots to cultivate vegetables and are provided with food rations from the WFP. The OPM allocates to each refugee household a 25 m × 25 m plot of land for cultivating food (RWC, 2016).

They typically receive sorghum rations as a staple food. However, the sorghum is unpopular with refugees from South Sudan because they do not like the taste. Furthermore, the rationed sorghum is in grain form rather than flour; thus, refugees must pay Ugandans, who set up grinding mills, to produce sorghum flour if they cannot grind it themselves. In addition, some NGOs provide vegetable seeds and livestock for refugees. With the traffic of refugees between South Sudan and Uganda, goods and livestock are also transported. These goods and livestock are subject to trading not only among the settlement dwellers but also among local host residents.

As mentioned above, refugees survive by using and combining various methods related to host residents.

LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES IN A REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

I. Cultivation of Crops that Complement the Food Supply

This section first looks at what types of crops are cultivated by each household. The following discussion illustrates how some refugees secure food under the restrictions of the settlements, in addition to what is provided through distributions.

Table 2 shows the number of households by crops cultivated in 2015. For most of the crops listed below, seeds and seedlings were provided by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). Eleven households out of 14 grow maize and okra. Ten

Table 2. Number of households by crops cultivated in 2015 (n = 14)

Maize	Okra	Pumpkin	Sorghum	Chard	Onion	Sesame	Tomato	Peanut	Cabbage	Tobacco
11	11	10	5	5	4	2	2	1	1	2

households grow pumpkins. Household H received pumpkin seeds from a local host resident. These are foods that the refugees typically ate in South Sudan. Five households cultivate sorghum. They plant sorghum seeds distributed by the WFP as a ration. In addition, Households K, L, M, and N breed livestock and do not cultivate sorghum. With the exception of Household M, which does not cultivate any crops, Households K, L, and N are thought to secure food by breeding livestock so that they can have milk and meat. On the other hand, five households grow chard, including Household N, which also breeds goats, and four households grow onions. Two households grow sesame and tomatoes. One household cultivates peanuts and another household grows cabbage. Two households cultivate tobacco that they brought from South Sudan. They smoke the tobacco and sometimes sell the leaves to local host residents.

The crops cultivated by 13 households as of December 2015 were as follows: maize, okra, pumpkin, sorghum, chard, onion, sesame, tomato, peanut, and cabbage. The NRC and local host residents give seeds or young plants to the refugees. Local host residents provided pumpkin and chard. Many households chose to grow pumpkins because the leaves and stems are also edible. Chard was not cultivated by many of the refugees when they were living in South Sudan; however, they claimed they would take the crop back to South Sudan because they liked the taste. They added chard as a new food option and adjusted their food culture. This means that through forced movement to Uganda, a new food option has been added to their diet. Relationships with local host residents complemented the provisions of NGOs.⁽¹⁾

Household C was in the process of reclaiming a neighboring plot provided by local host residents in 2015. The householder made a promise to give the local host resident some of her crops as payment for the land. Many different crops were grown on the plot in 2016. When I interviewed the householder in 2016, she told me that she greets the local host resident but does not need to pay for the land.

As mentioned above, refugees select crops and cultivate them to maintain and complement their livelihoods. Furthermore, breeding livestock affects the selection of the crops they cultivate. Five households without livestock cultivate the additional sorghum that was distributed by the WFP as a staple food, even though they do not like the taste. This is in contrast to the households that breed livestock (Households K, L, and N). They do not cultivate sorghum but grow maize, okra, and pumpkin instead, similar to most of the other households. The reason for this is not certain.

II. Restoration by Breeding Livestock

Although breeding livestock affects livelihoods, not all households have access to livestock. Few refugees are able to bring their livestock from South Sudan to Uganda. However, livestock breeding can have a positive impact on their livelihoods. There are several other ways for refugees to obtain livestock.

There are certain NGOs that believe that a livestock supply will improve refugees' livelihoods. In particular, NGOs target households that find it difficult to

cultivate crops. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) will provide a goat to refugees who need special assistance such as the elderly, those who are widowed, or those who are disabled, such as in Household M (RWC, 2016). The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) also provides a pair of goats to refugees needing special assistance (RWC, 2016).⁽²⁾

On the other hand, there were three households that evacuated with their livestock from South Sudan. The first household succeeded in increasing the herd from 12 goats to 13 and the second had increased from three goats to nine goats by 2015. However, these households eventually moved and it was impossible to follow up in 2016. The third household bred three head of cattle in 2014 and brought another one from South Sudan in 2015. The household tied the cattle to stakes on their plot of land, and in 2016, they were placed in a 6.5 m² wooden enclosure on the neighboring plot. There were 13 head of cattle owned by several households in the enclosure. One of the cattle owners said:

I had 30 head of cattle and 20 goats in South Sudan. However, a rebel robbed me of them. I ran away with a little money, bought goats, and multiplied them here in Uganda. I traded them for cattle to a Nyankole in Oyam District, Uganda. I have four head of cattle now. Cattle improve my life more than goats.

This enclosure was made in July 2016. Until then, I had kept my cattle in my plot. In order for them not to be stolen, I brought them here. The owners here are not relatives. Owners will take charge of grazing all the cattle in turn.

Cattle were taken to graze in the western hinterland meadow of this settlement. Cattle and goats of other groups were also released there. Furthermore, near this hinterland, as was the case for this group, cattle were enclosed and managed by several households. There were approximately 100 head of cattle grazing nearby.

The livestock serves the same purpose as cash for the cattle owner. He exchanges goats for cattle and is increasing his wealth. This was his livelihood in South Sudan. He is attempting to carry on his livelihood in the refugee settlement. Many refugees are taking such action. It is thought that they established a joint enclosure due to their common interests. This was not the only such enclosure in the settlement; it was also implemented on a larger scale elsewhere.

As mentioned above, there were a few cases that the support by NGOs for refugees needing special assistance worked.

There are also studies that consider the difficulties of re-stocking as a form of assistance (Hogg, 1985; Heffernan and Rushton, 2000). Meanwhile, even in restricted refugee settlements, it is possible to restore pastoral livestock that is managed by several households without relying on external assistance. Restoration by breeding livestock can be said to help positively reconstruct the livelihoods of their past.

III. Access to a Market

As refugees cannot manage their livelihoods with rations and crops alone, they visit markets to obtain necessary supplies. This section outlines the market and presents case examples of how refugees utilize the market.

A market of over 370 m has formed on both sides of the main road in the northeastern end of the refugee settlement. This market appeared after the settlement was established in 2014. There were 120 stores on the main road as of August 2015. Basically, storekeepers on the west side of this road (the site of the refugee settlement) are refugees and on the east side (the land of local host residents), they are nationals. Some refugees brought enough money with them to open stores. Others might have been able to do so through earnings gained by promoting or constructing one of the relationships discussed above. Many of the stores are grocery stores. On the east side, there are some hardware stores such as a store that carries motorcycle parts for use in repairs. It is clear that the targets of these businesses are not only refugees but also local host residents.

It should be noted that the market is spreading toward the back of the east side. There, refugee women are selling the sorghum distributed by the WFP to local host residents. A cup of grain is sold for 1,000 shillings. Most refugees claim that the type of red sorghum distributed is less sweet than the South Sudanese white sorghum. Thus, many of the children do not like it and their mothers need to buy sugar to sweeten it. The sorghum in the rations was different from what the refugees ate in South Sudan, but when they cooked it and added sugar, they were able to adjust it to a taste that their children liked. Some households also buy mosquito nets, vegetables, or school uniforms for their children.

A market master noted that the OPM did not like refugees selling rations but there is no regulation against it. It is tacitly accepted that refugees sometimes sell their rations to acquire what they need at the market.

Householder F takes orders for embroidery work on one-piece suits, for which traders would pay 30,000–200,000 shillings (Fig. 1). Though she cultivates only pumpkins on her plot of land, she is able to purchase the necessary food and



Fig. 1. A woman doing embroidery on a one-piece suit

supplies with the income she receives from her embroidery at the market. As a result, she was able to buy goats in 2016.

As mentioned above, the distributed sorghum does not quite fit the refugees' taste; however, it functions as a valuable tool to acquire goods flexibly through the market.

CONCLUSION

The livelihood strategies of the South Sudanese in refugee settlements in Uganda have unique characteristics and multiple livelihood strategies are often combined. For example, Household F chooses to cultivate only pumpkins, although most households cultivate more than five types of crops including pumpkins. The householder sells embroidered one-piece suits and buys food and necessary supplies at the market. Subsequently, she was able to buy goats and expects to have milk and meat from her livestock.

As mentioned above, these livelihood strategies can be classified into three categories. The first is the cultivation of crops that complement the food supply. Refugees select crops and cultivate them to complement their livelihoods. NGOs and local host residents provide refugees with seeds or young plants. These are foods that refugees had routinely eaten when they lived South Sudan. On the other hand, new crops are also flexibly incorporated into the food culture. Furthermore, whether or not they breed livestock seems to affect the selection of the crops they cultivate. The second category is restoration by breeding livestock. The livestock operates as cash for refugees from South Sudan. Livestock is an important commodity to be exchanged. Restoration through breeding livestock reconstructs the refugees' past livelihoods. The last category is access to a market. Refugees use the market to obtain the necessary supplies and to support livelihoods similar to those they maintained in South Sudan. Although the distributed sorghum does not fit the taste of many of the refugees, it occupies a valuable position in the flexible acquisition of goods through the market.

Therefore, these livelihood strategies can basically secure a minimum amount of food to survive. They make daily life possible. At the same time, the livelihood strategies are practiced to reconstruct the lives these refugees were living prior to fleeing South Sudan. They include breeding livestock as well as securing food. Even if the livestock does not produce milk, refugees expect to multiply the livestock to increase their wealth. Refugees do not insist upon maintaining their usual food culture, which would include the white sorghum of South Sudan. However, they do not altogether abandon their culture either; they simply adjust to new foods such as the chard in Uganda. They flexibly attempt to reconstruct their livelihoods. The livelihood strategies do not only involve refugees; they also include interactions and relationships with local host residents, NGOs, and so on.

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NOTES

- (1) In 2016, the NRC provided the following seeds: beans, chard, okra, onion, tomato, carrot, pumpkin, sesame, peanut, etc. (RWC, 2016).
- (2) Unfortunately, however, a family I spoke with who was provided goats by the LWF said that the goats had not bred at all.

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