

**Have you ever been a migrant?**

**Have members of your family?**

**If so, why and where?**

**If not, why not?**

# Transforming a Broken Refugee System Through Empowering Refugees



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An Italian immigrant family on board a ferry from the docks to Ellis Island, New York. (Late 1800s)



## NO ITALIANS ALLOWED

On May 28, 1888, council passed a resolution to the effect that parties receiving the contract for paving E. Washington St. shall bind themselves not to employ any Italian labor.

**DON'T SPEAK THE  
ENEMY'S LANGUAGE!**



*The Four Freedoms Are Not In His Vocabulary*

**SPEAK AMERICAN!**

# 4 Research Streams:

- Bottom-Up Innovation
- Refugee Economies
- Humanitarian Governance
- Non-traditional actors in humanitarian assistance



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- **Bottom-Up Innovation**
- **Refugee Economies**
- Humanitarian Governance
- Non-traditional actors in humanitarian assistance

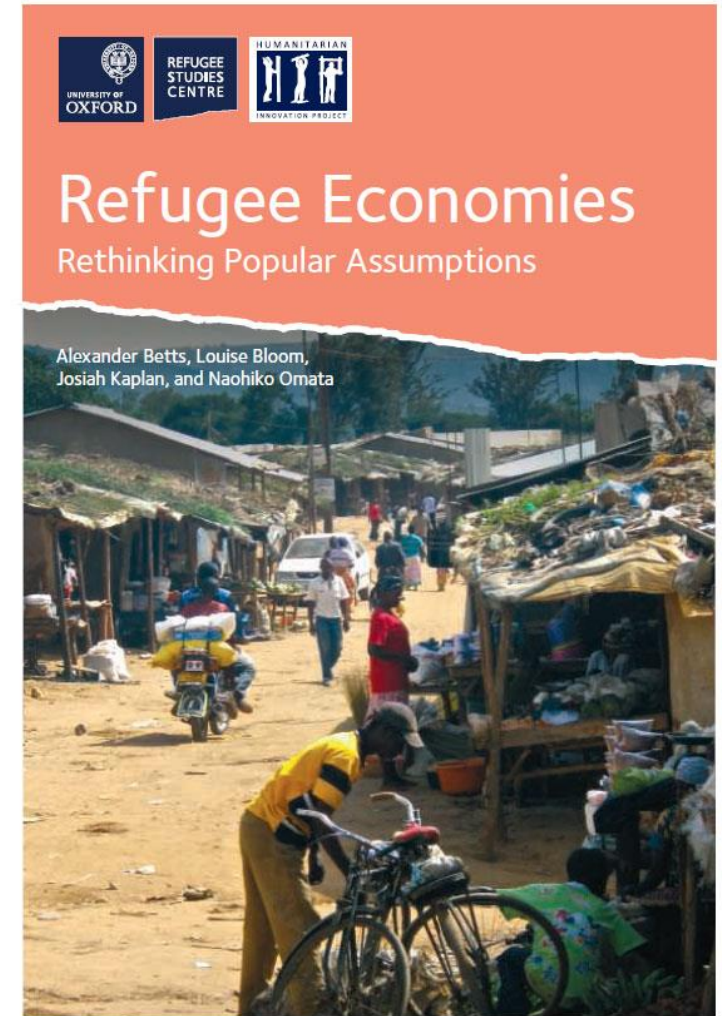




# Refugee Economies

## Five popular myths

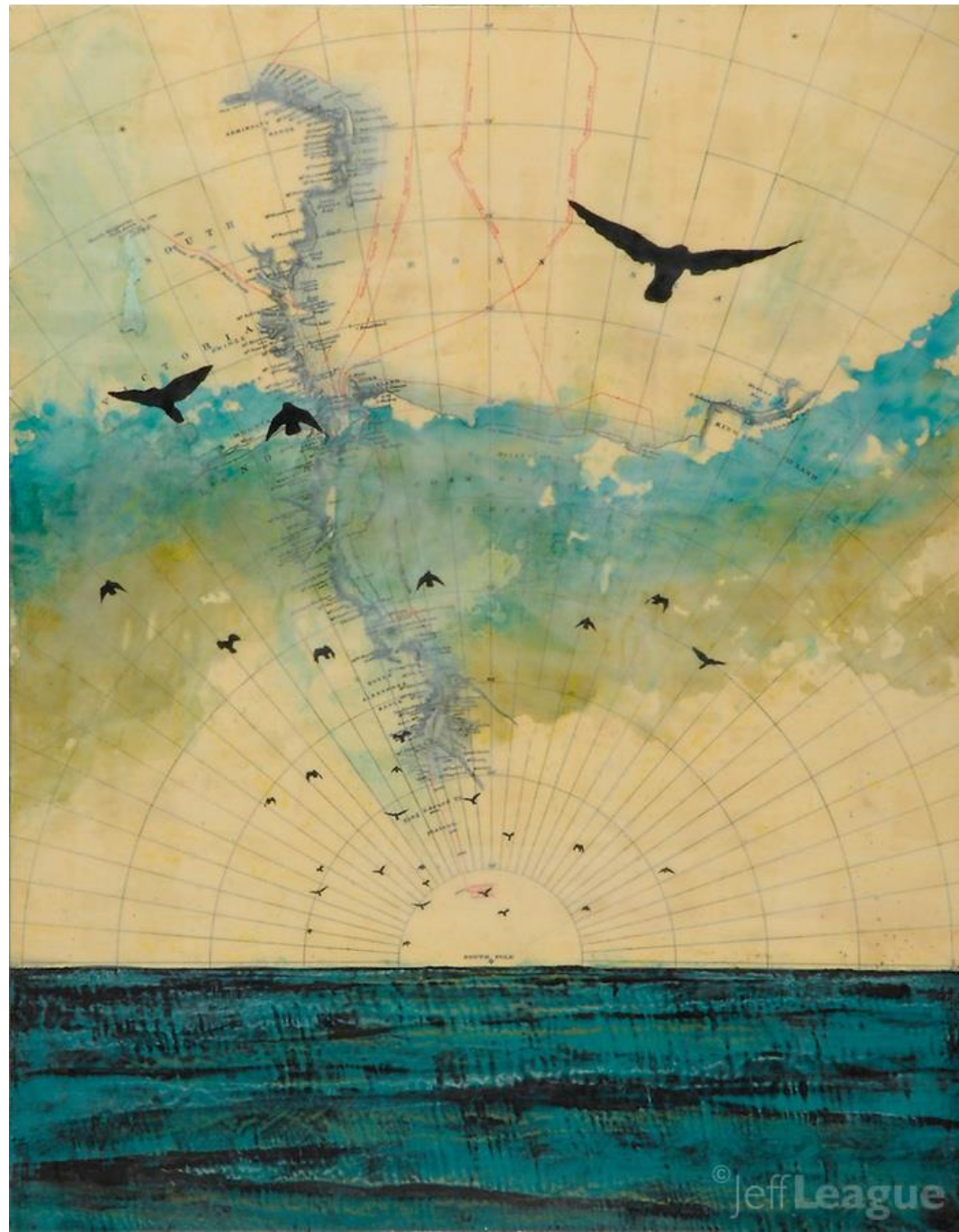
- 1) refugees are economically isolated,
- 2) they are a burden on host states,
- 3) they are economically homogenous,
- 4) they are technologically illiterate, and
- 5) they are dependent on humanitarian assistance.



# Aims of Presentation

- What are the challenges and opportunities of 'empowering' refugees in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- How are refugees assisting each other?
- How might we – as humanitarians, government officials, civil society actors – strengthen these efforts?

















TONY KARUMBA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES







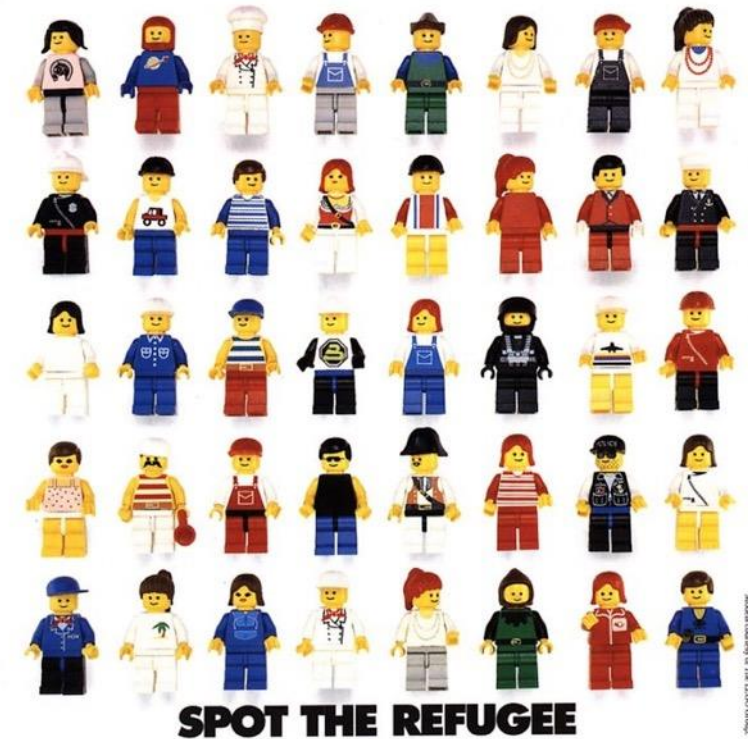
# Rising Number of Urban Refugees

- Over 50% of refugees now live in urban areas
- Refugees in urban areas are not provided basic necessities (food, shelter) by humanitarian Organisations
- 2009 UNHCR Urban Refugee Policy – recognises the right of refugees to live in urban areas instead of camps



# Challenges of Urban Refugee Assistance

- Where are the refugees?
- Majority of policies, practices and programmes for refugees are developed for rural areas
- New assistance environment for aid workers



There he is. Fourth row, second from the left. The one with the moustache. Obvious really. Maybe not. The unsavoury-looking character you're looking at is more likely to be your average neighbourhood slob with a grubby vest and a weekend's stubble on his chin. And the real refugee could just as easily be the clean-cut fellow on his left. You see, refugees are just like you and me. Except for one thing. Everything they once had has been left behind. Home, family,

possessions, all gone. They have nothing. And nothing is all they'll ever have unless we all extend a helping hand. We know you can't give them back the things that others have taken away. We're not even asking for

money (though every penny certainly helps). But we are asking that you keep an open mind. And a smile of welcome. It may not seem much. But to a refugee it can mean everything. UNHCR is a strictly humanitarian organization funded only by voluntary contributions. Currently it is responsible for more than 26 million people around the world.



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHCR Public Information  
P.O. Box 2500  
1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland



# Refugee Assistance

## REFUGEES IN CAMPS:

- Food
- Shelter
- Basic necessities



## REFUGEES IN CITIES:

- No food or shelter provided

Instead:

- Livelihoods training
- Focus on self-reliance



# UNHCR broadly defines self-reliance as:

“the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs in a sustainable manner and with dignity” (UNHCR 2005, 2014).

UNHCR *Handbook for Self-Reliance* (2005): self-reliance is “an integral and underpinning part of any durable solutions”, which should be promoted in all phases of refugee assistance.

**But...what does this actually mean?**





# Livelihoods

[Safe Value Chains](#)[Wage Employment](#)[Small and Micro Enterprises](#)[Graduation Approach](#)[Private Sector Engagement](#)

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**After fleeing war or persecution, the opportunity to work and earn a living is one of the most effective ways people can rebuild their lives in dignity and peace.**

We work to promote the right to work, the right to skills development and innovative ways of supporting economic self-reliance among those forced to flee their homes.

With your support, we strive to empower them to build strong social, economic and cultural ties with their host communities, and to strengthen their capacity to claim their rights.

[\*\*Support our work\*\*](#)



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# Refugee Self-Reliance in Kampala, Uganda:

‘The livelihoods training is to give us knowledge on how to becom[e] self-reliant. Knowledge on how to create an income generating activity.’

– Refugee Informant (Interview, 1/4/2015)

Goal of livelihoods trainings: ‘...[T]o let them [gain the skills to] compete fairly in the market.’

- UNHCR Protection Officer, Kampala  
(Interview, 27/3/2015)



Tailoring training at the Bondeko Centre, a refugee-led organisation in Kampala (Easton-Calabria, 2015)

# Is refugee self-reliance actually new?





# Ongoing practices to foster self-reliance:

- Agricultural settlement
- Micro-finance schemes
- Employment-matching
- Vocational training



Nansen Passport to finance revolving funds  
League of Nations, 1920s



Refugee micro-savings meeting  
Kampala, Uganda, 2016

# Refugee Self-Reliance Assistance

## What has changed:

- Terms
- Structure and implementation

## What hasn't:

- Main Practices
- Aims
- Challenges (since 1960s)



Refugee Teacher in Kampala, Uganda (2009)



# In the Rutumba Settlement in Tanzania:

‘Fishing...is tolerated only if it does not interfere with the agricultural projects. The use of coercion is considered normal, and **refugees are put into prison if they fail to provide expected labour requirements for projects** such as the establishment this year of 400 acres of block farms to grow more rice, beans and cassava.’

(Trappe 1971: 10)

# What needs innovating?

- 'Lack of early planning' (UNHCR 2010: 7)
- Lack of expertise



- Practical problems: failed micro-finance initiatives, lack of soil testing, destructive farming methods
- Lack of displaced community involvement and recognition of refugee economies and livelihood strategies

# Ongoing efforts...but very few successful cases

- Same practices for a century
- Very little knowledge of what went wrong in the past
- Why should anything change now?





What if the answer doesn't lie with UN, governments, or NGOs – but with refugees themselves?



# 3 Examples of Refugee-led Initiatives

- Refugee-led organisations in East Africa
- Refugee-led micro-finance initiatives in Kampala, Uganda
- Refugee paralegals in Nairobi, Kenya

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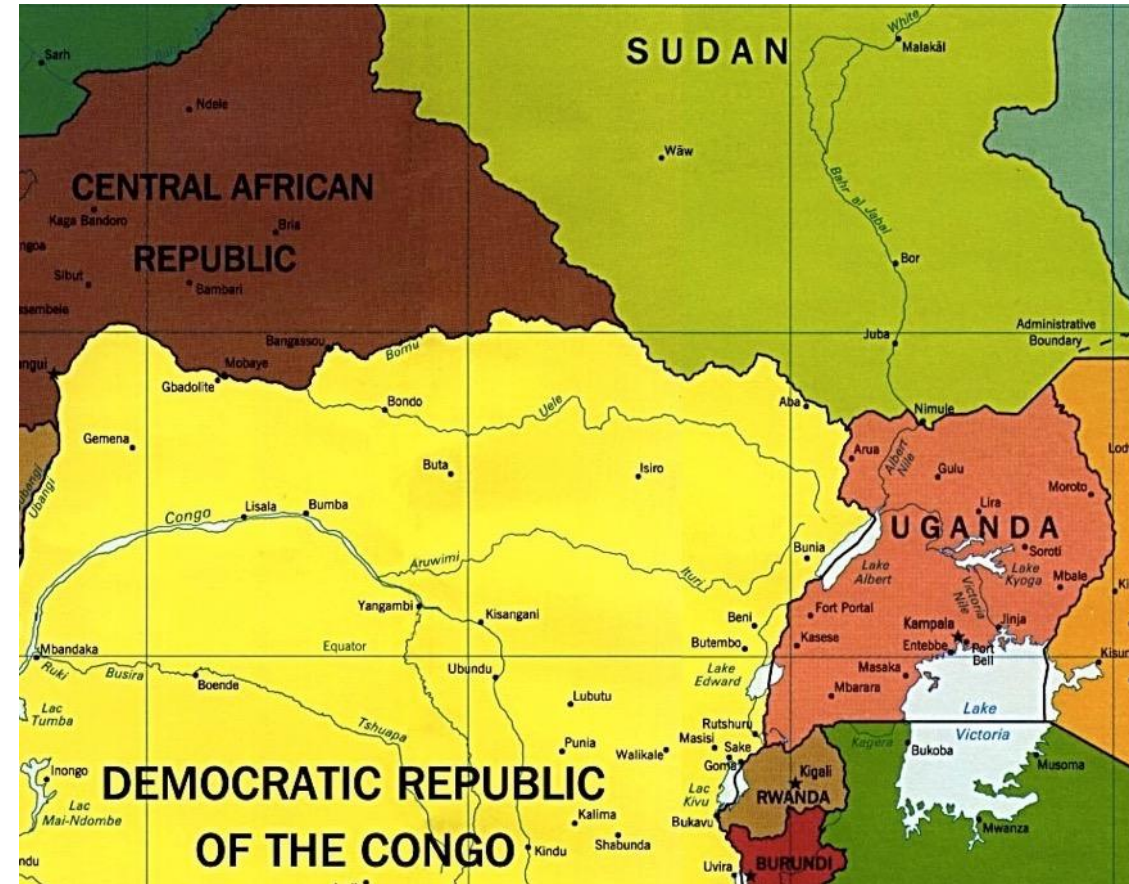
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# Uganda

- Hosts over 1.5 million refugees  
= 3<sup>rd</sup> largest refugee-hosting country  
in the world
- 900,000 South Sudanese (sudden  
influx)
- One of the most generous asylum  
policies in the world – Right to Work,  
Freedom of Movement









# Bondeko Refugee Centre







Small business training, Bondeko Refugee Centre, Kampala, Uganda











# Refugee-led Organisations

- Valuable community assistance model:
  - Reach refugees in slums who may not have funds to travel to UNHCR and INGOs
  - Often host trainings and group enterprises based on refugees' skills/demands
  - Central place for new arrivals who hear about organisations by word of mouth; supports refugees in becoming registered and linked to international organisations



# But...

- Lack funding to pay rent and implement activities (sustainability)
- Generally locked out of international funding due to size, language skills, strict auditing requirements
- Lack true partnerships with NGOs, UNHCR, and other implementing agencies (used for 'sensitisation' instead of implementation)

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HOPE FOR REFUGEE IN ACTION SAVING CREDIT AND COOPERATIVES  
(HRA SACCO)  
Membership Application Form



Applicant Details

Full Name ROBINSON  
Mobile No. 097 32267  
Date of birth (dd/mm/yy) 01/01/1995  
Marital Status Single  
Refuge ID/passport No. 1995

Section one: Employment

Employer N/A  
Position in employment

Salary ☒ Pension ☐

Section Two:

Business name Member Name:  
(Nom du Membre)

Nature of the

Business ID: FISTON ZAGABE  
(No d'identification du Membre)

Other ID: Passbook No: 42  
(No Carnet de Membre)

Pension Income

Proposed monthly contribution

Proposed mode of remittances - check off

• (dd/mm/yy) MONTHLY

Hope for Refugee in Action



HRA Savings Credit Cooperative  
(HRA SACCO)  
"Promoting Financial Self Efficiency"

MEMBER SHARE PASSBOOK  
(Carnet de Membre)





# Refugee-led micro-finance initiatives in Kampala

- Borne out of a need to access capital to start and run businesses
- Challenge: Banks and micro—finance institutions rarely lend to refugees
- Successful! Low rate of default...but lack capital to provide large loans



# Refugee-run micro-finance groups:

- An **assistance model** that works for refugees (community cohesion, repayment flexibility)
- **Reach vulnerable populations** (single mothers, unregistered refugees, the very poor)
- **Fill a gap** in refugee assistance (start-up capital)







# 3 Examples of Refugee-led Initiatives

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# Kenya

- Hosts over 600,000 refugees, who must live in the 'designated areas' of Kakuma or Dadaab refugee camps.
- However, in reality, at least 50,000 registered refugees are 'self-settled' in Nairobi (GoK 2014; UNHCR 2014)
- Regular police harassment (taking bribes, violence, arrest) to urban refugees





Christian (left) in a group discussion during the Regional Workshop on Enhancing Paralegalism to Respond to Migration and Health Concerns in Migration-Affected Communities in Kenya, South Africa and Zambia, held in Nairobi (IOM 2016).



‘Refugee work is dynamic, and I need to be able to go to where they need me...an office doesn’t allow that. I spend most of my days moving from place to place, whenever people call.’

(Musenga, Refugee Paralegal in Nairobi)

# Refugee Paralegals

- Aware of community needs (reliable access at all times of day/night)
- Able to educate refugees and negotiate with authorities
- Example of refugee advocacy for rights and fair treatment

**How might refugee-led organisations and initiatives be better supported by humanitarian organisations?**

**By governments? By other actors?**



**Do you know of migrant organisations in your home country?**

**What sort of work do they do?**

**Are they supported by other NGOs, the governments, or others?**

- What are the challenges and opportunities of ‘empowering’ refugees in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- How are refugees assisting each other?
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Hand-made shoes from a cobbler at Bondeko Refugee Centre





Waka Inongi, Bondeko Refugee Centre

