

Rwandan Refugees in Uganda: Livelihood, Security and Rights

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Abstract: - Rwanda has experienced a protracted conflict since 1959 due to a violent political crisis that originates from pre-colonial social inequalities, which were formalized by Germans and Belgian colonizers into estranged ethnic identities. The first exodus of mostly Batutsi refugees fled into the countries of the Great Lakes Region of East Africa in the late 1959. These refugees went mainly into Burundi, Tanzania, Zaire (current Democratic Republic of Congo) and Uganda. Those who entered Uganda were allocated refugee settlements, Nakivale being one of the biggest and oldest area where they settled. The cultural similarities between Batutsi and Bahima of Ankore region led to an easy integration and their fate was tied to that of Banyankore, whose Uganda National Resistance rebel movement recruited frustrated refugees and together, they took over power in 1986.

Becoming part of the new leadership in Uganda, some prominent Rwandan refugees started organizing their kin in the Rwandan Patriotic Front, a rebel movement that attacked in October 1990 and took over Rwanda in 1994, after ending the genocide. As mostly Batutsi refugees repatriated; majority Bahutu refugees fled Rwanda. This research focuses on urban and settlement Rwandan refugees, divided into the old case load that fled between 1959 up to the major repatriation of 1994; while the new caseload is the one that starts with the end of the genocide of 1994 up to 2018. Through Thematic analysis, our research found out that denial of naturalization, kidnappings, murders, loss of dignity, forced repatriation; porous borders and refugee manipulation for political capital are some of the threats to the security, rights and livelihood of Rwandan refugees. The implementation of all durable solutions to Rwandan refugees, genuine implementations of Uganda's refugee open policy and sustainability framework, in addition to open political space led by the rule of law in the home country would solve the persistent refugee phenomenon of Rwandans and pave way to sustainable peace in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa.

Frequent words: Refugee, Rights, Livelihood, Security, Peace.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rwanda has produced refugees since 1959, where a bloody revolt against Batutsi was carried out by Bahutu. An exodus composed of mainly the former group poured into the Great Lakes Region, many entering Uganda and settling both in refugee settlements like Nakivale while others were scattered around the country (Reed 1996: 48). In 1982, rwandan refugees were rooted, murdered and all their rights, livelihoods and security was violated, Rwandan refugees

could not repatriate because Habyarimana had declared the country too small to accommodate all Rwandans, so, the search for identity and belonging led them to associate themselves with a rebel movement in Uganda, the National Resistance Army, which took power in 1986 (Des Forges 1999: 42). Rwandan refugees livelihood improved, but their identity, dignity, rights and security were not assured, even when they were part of the leadership in Uganda. The refugees organized themselves in an armed rebellion, the Rwanda Patriotic Front, attacked Rwanda in October 1990 and took over the country. However, as the mostly Batutsi refugees were repatriating, Bahutu fled the country, into the Great Lakes region, creating a vicious cycle of ethnic based conflict (Prunier 1995: 192, 213). Protracted Refugee situations are situations where refugees have been in exile for 5 years or more after their initial displacement, without immediate prospects for implementation of durable solutions. (UNHCR 2009: Preamble). The study particularly focuses on the livelihood, rights and security of Rwandan refugees in Uganda, who have become a protracted phenomenon, for they have been in Uganda since 1959 and according to UNHCR, by 28th February 2019, there were 14, 974 registered Rwandan refugees in Uganda. Before independence, refugees were caused by liberation struggles, after the cold war, the international humanitarian support towards refugees reduced and in the context of the Rwandan refugee, outright violent forced repatriations have happened, not only in Uganda in 1982 and 2010 but also in Tanzania and Zaire in 1996 and 1997Emizet (2000). Rights, livelihood and security of refugees were violated to few if any objections from the international community (Oakley 1996)

II. FROM HUMANITARIANISM TO POLITICAL POWER

Humanitarianism has portrayed its non-human side starting with the end of the cold war, through the shift from the world of ethics to politics and power (Betts and Loescher 2011). The presence of a refugee from a given country indicates the failure of the home country to protect its citizens; it also represents lack of compromise between the state and its citizens (Haddad 2008). In the post genocide era, where the Rwandan government highlights its legitimacy through a managed image of stability, gender equality and development,

having refugees outside its borders negates the very foundation at which all the other pillars are built.

Considering that the current government in Rwanda is mainly made of former refugees, who took over the country, creates a permanent fear of the same scenario occurring. The invocation of Cessation Clause, which as a tool of the international refugee laws has been a focus of the post Genocide Rwandan government for more than ten years (AI 2004). The result was that, the United Nations High commissioner for Refugees announced the cessation of refugees' status for Rwandan refugees, who fled the country between 1959 and December 1998. The deadline for the invocation has been shifting since June 2013 (UNHCR 2011). There is reluctance to implement the recommendations originating from various factors, including the state of democracy and human rights in the home country.

The politics attached to Rwandan refugees led to diplomatic incidents and tension between states; especially the relationship between Rwanda and Uganda has been strained. For, the Rwandan government portrays refugees as genocidaires, dissidents and unwanted elements that are not willing to participate in the rebuilding of the country (Connor 2013: 28). These politics are the ones that have influenced the treatment of Rwandan refugees in Uganda and on the international scene

III. TAKING AWAY PLOTS OF LANDS

Agriculture is the main activity of refugees in the settlement and having a plot of land is a sure means of surviving pipe breaks and insufficient WFP supplies. Considering the open refugee policy of Uganda, where refugees are put in settlements with the aim of self-sustainability, taking away a plot of land from a refugee is a sure way of starving them. This has been done to Rwandan refugees in Nakivale settlement with the official reason being the long stay of Rwandans, it has been a serious drawback to their livelihood. In case this was the underlying reason as most refugees believe it was, it has victimized many. As the 25 years old man states *"these days they are taking plots of land away"* (Interview with NSM 25 Isangano 18/09/2018). For the financial status of Rwandans, they used to rely on their own strength to grow goods that they used to sell and get good money out of it, since they have no relatives that send dollars like it happens to Congolese, Burundias and Somalis. Their status was obtained through their harvest. *"My life really sucks. I used to cultivate and survive on the harvest, they have taken away my small plot of land from me. They feed me small amounts of food when I used to harvest sacks of maize, feed my large family and even sale some of it for other needs"* (Interview with NSF 40: Isangano 18/09/2018) These issues have particularly affected refugee women, and their livelihoods. Increased competition for land has meant

IV. IDENTITY SWITCH

Rwandan refugees in Uganda have been discriminated against due to the long stay in the host country, among other reasons. As means of survival, some of them have resorted to registering themselves as Congolese in order to obtain the services. I am not living well because they ignore us, this leads Rwandan refugees to acquire other nationality. They register as Congolese or Burundians. Intimated a 67 year old man (Interview with NKM67: Kigali 20/09/2018) apart from the incentive for food, Rwandan refugees who have been denied resettlement for many years, use the opportunity of calling themselves Congolese to be sent to America and Europe for resettlement like other refugees. When these refugees state that they are Rwandans, they are told that they should go back to their country, for it is said to be peaceful, thus, they are denied resettlement.

Civil servants from the office of the Office of the Prime Minister that relate to Rwandan refugees at the registration point, register Rwandan refugees as citizens of Congo, even with the knowledge that they are lying. The researcher was told, by one participant that they do this because they lack motivation and sometimes, these refugees offer incentives in terms of money. Thus, the officers expedite their files, adjust facts according to the dominant resettlement criteria and shorten the processes. The government staff stated *"I am paid to register the information that I am given, I am not paid to be an investigator. I write whatever the refugee tells me"* (Interview with KOF 37: Kampala-OPM Postal Building office 20/11/2018). This kind of attitude by the host country immigration and refugee service staff has put in danger numerous refugees. That is why there is rampant kidnappings, murders and forced repatriation, because the corruption in the system allows easy access by the spies, who are willing to pay hefty sums of money to access anyone they want in the system.

The other important discovery was that , the implementation of the the cessation clause will not be possible, for the registered Rwandan refugees are very few, compared to the real number in Uganda. The officer in the office of the prime minister for refugees, KOF 37 intimates, there is no feasibility of repatriation of Rwandan refugees in Uganda, where 80% registering currently (November 2018), as Congolese. *"Even when they are lying and they are shaking in front of you, with too much inconsistencies in the story line and glaring evidence like language and simple geographic knowledge, you register the nationality they have told you"*. This clearly shows the irrelevancy of the numbers provided both by the host country and its partners in relation to statistics of refugees and their nationality.

V. WITCHCRAFT AND POISON

As the policeman, a 48 years old Corporal, with three years' experience serving in the refugee settlement shared with us, there is witchcraft among the refugees and some people get physical disabilities and even death after being poisoned. The challenge with this kind of crime is that it is difficult to find the culprit for it only remains in rumors that a certain refugee was an enemy of the departed and it only remains a suspicion that he/she is the murderer (NRM 48: Rubondo 28/11/2018) He also intimated that the culprits are mostly Congolese, Burundians and some Rwandese, especially those who have ever been refugees in Tanzania and shifted to Uganda when they were chased from Tanzania.

VI. DRUG ABUSE AND PROSTITUTION

Due to lack of school fees of most Rwandan refugee school going youth, prostitution and drug abuse has become the escape route. Prostitution is rampant among refugees in Nakivale, according to the Rwandan Refugee Welfare Committee member in charge of women affairs; the red zones are Isangano, Gisura and Kigali. She states that Congolese women are the majority (NKF 61: Kigali 26/11/2018). The mostly abused drug, according to the 42 years old woman in charge of health at the Refugee Welfare Committee in Rubondo is Marijuana. The mostly abused alcohol is "waragi" that is sold in small cheap plastic wraps. There are other varieties of locally made alcohol types, from fermented bananas, wheat, cassava, etc. The Somalis have also introduced drugs that are a variety of chewable greens/grass. (Interview with NRF 42: Rubondo 28/11/2018). Unemployment, poverty, anxiety, depression, insecurity, lack of education, failure to fulfill their dreams were mentioned as causes of abuse of drugs and increased levels of prostitution. The youth are the majority in abusing drugs and becoming prostitutes. It has been discovered that there are prostitution rings that stretch from the settlements into the capital city, a specific building at Mawanda road in Kamwokya was highlighted as a venue where Rwandan refugee girls are prostituted to highly placed businessmen in the city. Due to the limited time and resources, the researcher was not able to confirm the validity of the statement. This can be a line of future research.

VII. CONSTANT PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE AND HELPLESSNESS

For most torture victims and survivors of Rwandan atrocities refugees, whenever they threaten to take them back, they re-live their nightmares and some of them have developed physical sicknesses due to constant anxiety. *"I have high blood pressure. I got it after my parents were killed and ever since, whenever they threaten to take us back to Rwanda, I get an attack and I fall ill"* (NNF55: Nyaruguru 18/09/2018) This constant threat of being "refouled" is also considered by

some participants as terror. As the 40 years old woman from Isangano said: *"there is no security because they terrorize us constantly. The Rwandan state wants to force us back home. When you are unjustly treated, you have no connection or powers to defend yourself"* (NSF40: Isangano 18/09/2018) the feeling of helplessness here comes through when she talks about lack of defense when unjustly treated. For the 49 years old gentleman in Isangano, he considers the constant threat of forced repatriation torture: *"we are not safe in Uganda. The Uganda authorities keep torturing us psychologically that they will forcefully repatriate all Rwandan refugees"* (NSM 49: Isangano 18/09/2018)

VIII. TRAUMA

For those refugees who fled from Rwanda after being tortured and imprisoned, fear has turned into paranoia. This fear has frozen the qualified refugees to look for good jobs, for going in the public and away from the comfort zones is a scare. The example of a 51 years old victim of torture, professional driver, who lives in hiding in Kampala, yet unable to acquire a driving job to feed his exiled starving family *"I used to be a driver, but because I am scared for my security, I hide myself. The other cause is because jobs are given to those who have connections and I know nobody in Uganda"* (KAM 51: ACTV). He said that he was not secure at all. That there has been several kidnappings and murders, while other refugees have been forced to repatriate. He blames this to the proximity with Rwanda and also, the fact that Rwandan spies use their Ugandan networks to access Uganda in all its corners. Thus, killing whoever they want wherever they are. The participant intimated that he is scared of people, especially the ones that look like Rwandans, in fact, he participated in the research through the ACTV nurse, for he refused to meet the researcher face to face.

IX. FORCED REPATRIATION

There have been day light forced repatriation in Nakivale and covert kidnappings that either end in murders or prisons back in Rwanda. As the 45 years old states *"The worst threat to my security is to be taken back to Rwanda by force. Those I fled from have access to me here in the refugee settlement. They connive with OPM and kidnap people here. I am scared that they will take me too"* (Interview with NSF45: Isangano 18/9/2018) for some refugees, families were split, as kidnappings happen. Like this woman of 37 years with five children. My husband was kidnapped and taken back to Rwanda. I never saw him again. My children are not studying, for I have no money to pay for them. I receive less aid yet am a widow now. Getting food to feed my children is really hard" (Interview with NSF 37 Isangano 18/9/18)

X. POROUS BORDERS

The porous borders have allowed unmonitored movement of people and goods in and out of Uganda. This is was confirmed

with the interviews with some participants, who intimated that spies come in and out of the country; in addition to this, in the interview with the OPM officer in charge of the north western region in 2016, we were told *“some refugees cross the border to join looting gangs in the DRC and when they come back, they dig to bury their guns and cross borders with their loots to sale in the settlement and beyond. They cannot cross back to Uganda with Guns though”* (Interview with WWO: Mbarara 06/07/2016)

The poorly paid border security agents are easily bribed by anyone who wants to cross into or out of Uganda. Thus, Uganda has become a refugee preferred destination; for there is that flexibility of keeping in touch with their families back home.

In relation to the border security, we learnt that there might a deliberate relaxation for the Public Relations Image of the government’s refugee open policy and hospitality rankings from the international community. (Interview with KOF 37: Kampala-OPM Postal Building 20/11/2018)

Internal systems in Uganda, according to the same Officer of the OPM, the civil servants in most of the government offices lack motivation, they accept any *“KituKidogo”* bribes as long as it feeds and pays fees for their children, they will close their eyes to any activity. This has allowed even the official border posts around the country to allow questionable movements to go on without accountability.

Another high ranking OPM officer, gave us an understanding about recyclers. *“They keep going to and from their country of origin. The Ugandan borders are very open; there is nothing the Office of the Prime Minister in Charge of refugees (OPM) can do to stop them. Some of them go back to their home country for gardening, come back to obtain refugee services (especially those who have applied for resettlement to Europe and America) and go back for harvesting. “When you are dealing with human beings, expect anything. They lie, they fake things.* (Interview with KOF39 Kampala-OPM -Sir ApoloKagwa 22/11/2018)

XI. CONCLUSION

Rwandan refugee phenomenon has become a protracted situation, despite the fact that Rwanda is said to be a peaceful country. In the post genocide era, where Batutsi are defined as victims and Bahutu as perpetrators, durable peace is what is said but the resulting refugee outflow creates a controversy, for there is constant fear among Rwandans, which leads to silence of flight Burnet (2012)

Rwandan Refugees in Uganda have been used and abused by different regimes since early 1980s. Politics and power and not humanitarian reasons dictate the refugee management practices in Uganda

Livelihood, Rights and Security of refugees in Uganda are at stake, for there is no permanent solution for naturalization of Rwandan refugees who were in Uganda before it gained its independence and thereafter. The citizenship issue has become a barrier to livelihoods and security of many refugees that their frustration, if not solved might erupt in another open conflict.

Services offered to refugees have become segregative in nature; the duration of stay of refugees should not be a reason to cut aid, but the sustainable improvement of an individual refugee.

Rwandan refugees in Uganda are going through hard time in the host country, not only should this be looked at on the particular case but also when looked at in a global context of refugee phenomenon, we find that since the end of the cold war, the dynamics of humanitarianism have changed towards state security than humanitarianism. The donor fatigue and regional politics have not been left out in influencing how refugees are received and treated in the second or third country.

One of the hardest challenges that the Rwandan refugees have faced in Uganda is naturalization, for there are Rwandans who have lived in Uganda since before independence and they are still treated as foreigners. The denial of citizenship is a thorn in the Uganda refugee policy that has otherwise won the hearts of the international community, yet, Ugandans themselves question the fuss with refugees inclusivity while they, themselves are not receiving the services they badly need. This is because some of the strategies on refugees are now said to suggest an inclusion of refugees to the Ugandan budget, which is already strained and thus, the sharing of the burden by the international community will no longer be an obligation, yet, refugees do not cease to increase in the country.

New Case Loads that live in urban areas like Kampala were found to be more security conscious and most of them have been persecuted and they live in fear of kidnapping, murder or forced repatriation more than those that live in the refugee settlements around the country. This is a group that is very sensitive, highly involved in politics and if there is need to monitor, this is the most likely group to steer and lead any likely refugee mobilization in the future. The old caseloads living in Nakaseke, Lyantonde and elsewhere have settled as Ugandans in a de-facto naturalization, which they enjoy until they need to get passports, then they and their children are told of their foreignness, this fact drains loyalty out of these members who have known nothing but Uganda as their country of birth.

The livelihood of refugees in Uganda is very poor and unpredictable, for most of them are living from hand to mouth, with irregular food ratios delivered within an uncertain

system that is influenced by donors and regional politics. In relation to Rwandan refugees, politics have taken precedence and humanitarianism has faded, without the option of naturalization and resettlement, the only option is repatriation, which in the past has been proved to be forced than voluntary, thus violating humanitarian laws; the silence that followed these violations was a sign that the international community is complicit in this whole “conspiracy” as refugees called it.

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