

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on The Livelihood of Urban Refugees in Arua City, Uganda



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ABSTRACT: This study focused on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihood of urban refugees in Arua City, Uganda. The research design adopted in this study was qualitative interview study, underpinned on the interpretivism philosophy. Data were sourced through 10 to 15 minutes face to face in-depth interviews consisting of 12 Urban refugee homesteads registered with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Arua branch. The Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an accessible and flexible approach to qualitative data analysis, which is based on coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Results have shown that urban refugees have been hit hard by the COVID-19 Pandemic and will continue to face tough and difficult times in the future.

Our findings should be interpreted in the context of the potential limitations of our study: Firstly, the qualitative approach provides depth to our understanding of this problem but may not be generalizable to all urban refugees in other cities. We only interviewed urban refugees in Arua city, a single metropolitan area. Further work should explore how these experiences vary across the urban refugee hosting countries. Secondly, in all qualitative studies, findings may be influenced by the perspectives of the investigators. Finally, participants provided retrospective accounts of their experiences about COVID-Pandemic, recall and social desirability bias cannot be excluded. UNHCR, Donors and the government of Uganda can use the findings of this study to develop appropriate strategies to support urban refugees in a bid to salvage their lives.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Pandemic, Impact, Urban refugees, Uganda

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Urban refugees are entitled to humane life just like any other human being in the world. Worldwide, refugees are increasingly settling in urban areas, with over half of the world's 11.7 million refugees living in cities (UNHCR, 2014). Unfortunately, living a humane life has remained a myth to the urban refugee community in Arua city in Uganda during the COVID-19 pandemic as proclaimed by one of the refugees living in Obolokofuku Cell, Central Division, Arua city. Urban refugee populations are comprised of predominantly the young, single males, women, children and older people (Monteith et al., 2012). They normally support themselves by engaging in informal income generating activities such as vendor business since they do not receive regular humanitarian assistance, as per urban refugee policy (UNHCR, 2020). According to the Uganda Refugee Act 2006, refugees have freedom of movement, right to work and/or do business, right to education, right to recognition before the law, right to good shelter, feeding, and access to national health care services. Notably, Uganda hosts the fourth-highest number of refugees in the world, surpassed only by Turkey, Colombia and Pakistan. Over 1.4 million refugees have settled in Uganda and more than 80,000 of them live in the urban areas. The displaced population arrived mostly from conflict-affected areas across the East Africa region. As of 31 December 2020, Uganda hosts 889,054 South Sudanese refugees, 421,563 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 49,728 Burundian refugees, 44,479 Somali refugees and 17,883 Rwandan refugees (GOU, 2020).

Regrettably, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have a devastating impact on the lives of the urban refugees and it is one of the greatest events in human history that will be remembered (Bulafara et al., 2021). COVID-19 first emerged on December 1, 2019 in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China (Huang et al, 2020). In Uganda, the first corona virus case was discovered on January 2020. By march 2020, the pandemic spread across the globe and the worst that has affected the global economy since the great economic depression (Erdem, 2011; IMF, 2020; WHO, 2020). The total number of confirmed cases across the globe was 209,876,613 as of August 20, 2021, with 4,400,284 deaths (WHO,2021). In a bid to control the spread of the pandemic, the Ugandan government has imposed repetitive lockdowns, closed markets, factories, places of worship, schools, social clubs, as well

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as restrictions of movement of people, goods and services. In addition, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) such as mandatory wearing of face masks, regular handwashing or sanitizing, and social distancing from one another have become the new normal (GOU, 2021). This has echoed its effect on the lives of the urban refugees, many of whom were struggling to get by in the informal economy before the pandemic.

According to Mainey Karemere, a Congolese refugee who makes and sells handbags in Arua city, her customers were the daily commuters, now absent from the once bustling markets shut down following a government lockdown aimed at slowing the spread of coronavirus. Another weeping remark comes from a Rwandese female refugee who said that for the last 10 years, her daily work was moving along the streets selling necklaces. Since the time of lockdown that started in March 2020, she was not able to pursue this work as she cannot access the materials necessary, and her children are showing signs of malnutrition due to hunger.

In a related development, a survey commissioned by the World Food Program in July 2021 reported that about half of a sampled population of 212 refugees in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, 159 (75%) lost household income. The proportion of households without an income earner increased from 31% before the pandemic to 72%. In response, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency in Uganda is supposed to provide cash assistance to all registered urban refugees and asylum seekers in Uganda on an exceptional basis to contribute towards rent and basic household needs including soap and masks. However, according to Joel Boutroue, UNHCR's Representative in Uganda, UNHCR is seeking an additional \$5.1 million to fund this planned assistance to meet the urgent needs of urban refugees. He further laments that "We are faced with an extraordinary situation where a health emergency is rapidly turning into a global humanitarian crisis like no other," (WFP report, 2021).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Refugees living in urban areas face a myriad of livelihood problems as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The different control measures imposed to curtail the spread of the disease seem to have negatively affected the livelihoods of the urban refugees in the whole country and Arua city in particular as declared by Mainey Karemere, a 44-year-old single mother of three who now survives on food handouts from a community church because she cannot make and sell handbags due to the absence of her clients whom she used to meet in the streets of Arua city. "She lamented in desperation that right now, the biggest worry for urban refugees is hunger. If we go out, we risk contracting coronavirus, if we stay home, hunger will kill us. Our children eat once a day and are not going to school. This situation is worse than a war".

Furthermore, although UNHCR has planned to provide cash assistance to all registered urban refugees and asylum seekers without an income, whose proportion has increased from 31% to 72% due to the pandemic on an exceptional basis, the UN agency has a deficit of \$5.1 million to fund this planned assistance (WFP, 2021) thus, depriving the target beneficiaries of the assistance. This urban refugee livelihood status is worrying and cannot be tolerated, otherwise many can be tempted to steal, rob or even go back to their countries that they left because of hostility, hence risking their lives. Thus, the need to understand the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of urban refugees so as to devise workable means to turn things round is vital and necessary.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihood of urban refugees in Arua city, Uganda. The specific objectives are to:

1. Establish how COVID-19 pandemic has affected the livelihood of urban refugees in Arua city.
2. Determine the impact of the pandemic on the livelihood of the urban refugees in Arua city.
3. Explore avenues to manage the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihood of the urban refugees in Arua city.

1.3 Research Questions

1. In what ways has COVID-19 pandemic affected the livelihood of urban refugees in Arua city?
2. What will be the impact of the pandemic on the livelihood of urban refugees in Arua city?
3. What are the different avenues that can help urban refugees sustain and recover from the troubles brought by the COVID-19 pandemic?

The drive of this phenomenological study therefore is to fully understand the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of urban refugees in Arua city, in Uganda. This study has both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, scholars and academicians will find this study an invaluable source of reference material for future studies and subsequent discussions in the area. Practically, this study will be helpful to the government of Uganda, UNHCR and her sister organizations, who can use the findings of the study to better plan and improve livelihoods of urban refugees in the face of global pandemics such as coronavirus.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical underpinning

This qualitative study is underpinned by the following theories: Systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1951; Boulding, 1956); that centers on the assumption that ‘the whole is more than the sum of its parts’. The social ecological theory (Bookchin, 1960) provides an understanding of behavioral reactions from individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and public policy regarding the formation of behavior within the surrounding social environment.

Systems theory of Bertalanffy of 1951, increasingly elaborates across a continuum that encompasses the person-in-environment (Anderson, 1995). The idea that system theory centers on that ‘the whole is more than the sum of its parts’ (Bertalanffy, 1951) is fundamental to the approaches of biologists Ludwig (1968) and Uri Bronfen Brenner (1979); and sociologists are Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Talcott Parsons (1902–1979). These ‘parts’, in Durkheim’s view function to integrate the society and to maintain social solidarity (Otite, 1994). Durkheim further explained that individuals perform different types of roles that lead to specialization and segmentation, which ultimately lead to mutual interdependence between units. No unit can exist in isolation of others (Durkheim, 1984). Generally, there are three familiar demarcations of social systems; Micro System-small size, social system such as individuals and couples; Mezzo System-intermediate size system such as groups, extended families; and Macro System-large systems such as communities and organizations.

However, each level is a unit of wholeness with a distinct property or structural limitation that delineates from other systems (Friedman et al., 2011). This is termed system’s boundary by Bertalanffy. Herein, COVID-19 pandemic is interpreted as an element that breaks the boundaries of well-being, and social systems, which are normatively defined. In addition, many societies to date value communal culture and interaction within families, groups, organizations, and communities, these societies also experience significantly weak health structures and low health outcomes. Thus, the spread of a deadly virus such as corona is positively inclined. The relevance of systems theory in this study is that individuals and communities can adopt a number of strategies (i.e., loosen or tighten) conditions in either responding to or challenging the environment. Therefore, urban refugees need to adopt to monumental shocks that may rock the society in event of disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, systems theory views individuals and environment as concrete items which is not the case, and has failed to explicitly define the shocks of global pandemics.

Another important theory is the social ecological theory of Murray Bookchin 1960. The theory focuses on the understanding of behavioral reactions from individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and public policy regarding the formation of behavior within the surrounding social environment. The social ecological theory helps to understand factors affecting behavior and also provides guidance for developing successful programs through social environments. Social ecological models emphasize multiple levels of influence (such as individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and public policy) and the idea that behaviors both shape and are shaped by the social environment. The principles of social ecological models are consistent with social cognitive theory concepts which suggest that creating an environment conducive to change is important to making it easier to adopt healthy behaviors.

Given the emergence of coronavirus pandemic that is desolating Uganda and other countries, more attention should be geared towards shaping and adopting healthy behaviors such as sanitization, social distancing, restricted movement, ban on congressional prayers, testing suspects, isolation, quarantining and business closures. The relevance of social ecological theory in this study is the insight in understanding the reasons as to why we behave the way we do. Therefore, urban refugees that are able to change their ways of doing things during and after the COVID -19 pandemic will survive and live a good life. However, critics of the theory contend that social ecological theory does not give insight into the magnitude of effect of change in behavior on other aspects of life. Additionally, changing lifestyles can be extremely difficult over a short period of time.

Table 1: Summary of Theories on which the study is anchored

Theory	Author	Year	Gist of the theory	Relevancy	Limitation
ST	Bertalanffy	1951	‘The whole is more than the sum of its parts’.	Develop the whole and the parts get better. Develop the parts, the whole gets better.	Neglected differential individual capabilities. Ignored disruptions in life such as pandemics

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SET	Bookchin	1960	Behavioral reactions/change.	Understanding the reasons as to why we behave the way we do.	Neglecting the effect of change in behavior and difficulty in changing lifestyles.
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ST - Systems Theory

SET - Social Ecological Theory

2.2 Conceptual review

Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by SARS-CoV-2, a novel coronavirus, emerged on December 1, 2019 in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China (Huang et al, 2020). It is highly infectious, and there is no effective treatment method to date. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 epidemic as an international public health emergency on January 30, 2020. By then, the overall confirmed cases in China had reached 78,959, by February 27, 2020, a total of 2,791 people had died of the disease. As of March 2020, the pandemic spread across the globe and the worst that had affected the global economy since the great depression (IMF, 2020; WHO, 2020). By August 20, 2021 the total number of confirmed cases across the globe was 209,876,613 with 4,400,284 deaths (WHO, 2021).

People infected with the virus experience respiratory disorder and do not require any treatment to recover. Mostly, the elderly and those with medical problems or underlying chronic medical and immunosuppressed conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory disease, and cancer are developing severe sickness. The major avenues through which individuals contract the virus are droplets of saliva/discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (Harapan et al., 2020). Therefore, it becomes necessary for people to adopt measures such as lockdown, social distancing, quarantine, and also, observation of simple hygiene which include; washing hands regularly, wearing facemasks, coughing into the flexed elbow, etc (Ohia et al., 2020).

Although COVID-19 vaccine programs continue to roll out globally, we are seeing the myths and misconceptions around the vaccines also increasing. For instance, many contend that COVID-19 vaccines are not safe because they were developed so quickly, Covid-19 vaccine can affect women’s fertility, getting the COVID-19 vaccine gives you COVID-19, the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are dangerous, and the COVID-19 vaccine enters your cells and changes your DNA (Lai, 2021). This has resulted into hesitancy in the uptake of Covid-19 vaccination. Consequently, more and more people risk contracting the virus, necessitating continued lock downs so as to prevent, reduce infections and mortality rates.

2.3 Empirical studies on the effect of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of urban refugees

In responding to the growing research interest in understanding the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on livelihoods of urban refugees, a few empirical studies have been conducted by researchers around the world since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Ram et al., (2020) explored the impact of COVID-19 on migration and livelihood of refugees in India, they concluded that there are many challenges refugees face during the COVID-19 pandemic such as in adequate food, basic amenities, poor health care, economic stress, in sufficient transportation facilities and lack of psychological support.

Another seminal work was done by Elçi et al., (2021) in Turkey. Using a survey of 1749 Syrian refugees living in Turkey, they examined the financial impacts of COVID-19 on the refugee communities in Turkey. Their findings indicate that the initial COVID-19 measures had a higher financial impact on Syrian refugees when controlled for employment, wealth, and education, among other variables.

In USA, Dempster et al., (2020) explored the impact of COVID-19 on Refugees’ economic inclusion. Using data from eight refugee hosting countries, results have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to widespread loss of livelihoods and an increase in poverty among refugee populations following looming economic recession, increasing unemployment, and rising xenophobia faced by the refugee hosting countries.

In Uganda, Lozet and Easton-Calabria (2020) studied counting on urban refugees during COVID-19 in Uganda. Their findings demonstrated that authorities cannot provide services and assistance that refugees need. In a related development, Bukuluki et al., (2020) examined socio-economic and psychosocial impact of COVID-19 pandemic on urban refugees in Uganda, results reveal that the lockdown has increased urban refugee income insecurity, sexual and gender-based violence and anxiety.

Much as the a few reviewed scholarly works above denote that COVID-19 pandemic has led to some socio-economic crisis on every individual and the refugee communities in the diaspora, still there is much more to be done in order to establish the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of urban refugees, more specifically urban refugees living in some parts of Uganda.

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Therefore, this study examines the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of urban refugees in Uganda, specifically in Arua city.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The researcher used qualitative research design, underpinned by interpretivism philosophy. Data were sourced through face-to-face interviews consisting of 15 Urban refuge homesteads registered with the Office of the prime Minister (OPM), Arua branch. The participants included family heads and family caretakers. Purposeful random sampling technique was used because we wanted individuals with the knowledge and experience about family livelihood matters. Participants were given a study information sheet and their informed consent was obtained by signing the informed consent letter. The interview guide was piloted on the first three participants. Interviews were conducted in-person at the participants' homestead. Interviews ranged from 15 to 20 minutes. Interview guide (see box 1).

The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an accessible and flexible approach to qualitative data analysis, which is based on coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding refers to categorizing data that is, labelling parts of text to a certain category (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Interviews were transcribed, coded, and categorized, and analyzed on an ongoing basis as a source for further questions, the emergence of themes was used as an eventual source for organizing patterns of response across categories and individuals in line with the aims of the study. Transcripts were coded and the coded data were investigated for relationships which linked them. The final thematic framework (box 2) was developed by the researcher.

Box 1: Interview guide

How was your way of life before COVID-19?
What has changed in your way of life during COVID-19?
In your view, what should the UNHCR and the sister organizations do now/urgently to help you withstand the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic?
What do you think will be the long-term impact (5-10yrs) of COVID-19 on your family?
What actions should be taken to enable your family recover from the impact of COVID-19 in the next 5 to 10 years?
In your opinion, what should UNHCR and the sister organizations do in order to guard against pandemics such as this in future?

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In total, twelve family heads and caretakers participated in the study as depicted in table 2 below. 67% of the participants are male, while 33% are female. Majority of the refugees (75%) have lived for over 4years in Arua city; hence, able to understand the pattern of their livelihood. Only 23% have lived for less than 4years in the city. The four main themes are presented with data from the interview transcripts (with the participant identifier) to reflect the main points of interest

Table 2: Participant characteristics

Identifier	Role	Gender	No. of family members	Location	No of years lived in the city
FH1	Familyhead1	Female	7	Awindiri ward	6
CT1	Caretaker1	Male	16	Tanganyika ward	4
FH2	Familyhead2	Male	12	Kenya ward	5
FH3	Familyhead3	Female	6	Awindiri ward	5
CT2	Caretaker2	Male	5	Tanganyika ward	6
FH4	Familyhead4	Female	10	Tanganyika ward	7
FH5	Familyhead5	Male	5	Tanganyika ward	6
CT3	Caretaker2	Male	16	Kenya ward	5

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FH6	Familyhead6	Male	12	Awindiri ward	3
FH7	Familyhead7	Female	15	Awindiri ward	4
FH8	Familyhead8	Male	5	Kenya ward	9
FH9	Familyhead9	Male	10	Kenya ward	8

* FH – Family Head

* CT – Care Taker

Thematic framework: The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on The Livelihood of Urban Refugees in Arua City.

Effect of COVID-19 pandemic

Challenges in receiving financial assistance from our relatives

Difficulty in accessing food from the settlement camp

Reduced food stuff ratio from UNHCR

Our children have stopped learning

Struggle to control unnecessary movement of these kids.

Accumulated house rent arrears.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

Economic recession

Loss of jobs and income

Illiterate generation

Possible short-term solutions

Negotiation with the government of Uganda

Establishment of food distribution Centre in the city

Urban refugees should return to settlement camps

UNHCR should increase the food ratio instead of reducing

Mass vaccination and opening up the economy.

Strategic long-term interventions

Lobbying for more resources from donors

Adoption of blended learning system

Invention of drugs to cure the coronavirus.

Theme 1: Effect of COVID-19 pandemic on livelihood

When asked about the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihood of the urban refugees, participants overwhelmingly reported problematic, difficult and challenging livelihood status. "The various restrictions to combat the pandemic denied us a lot of things". For me, I use to sell bread, cakes and snacks downtown to maintain the family, this is no more given the closure of all business activities" (FH1). "Due to movement restrictions, we have challenges in receiving financial assistance from our relatives who is working in the diaspora, let alone getting a transport means to access food stuffs from the camp (CT1). "The additional support in form of food from UNHCR has drastically reduced. The ratio has been reduced by half and is not supplied consistently and timely, causing feeding problems" (FH4). "Our children have stopped learning since all educational institutions have been closed. It is no easy task to stay with children, they don't want revise their books, insisting why they should read when the future is not clear" (FH2). "We struggle to control unnecessary movement of these kids. The children used to speak in English language in most times, but now days, you hardly hear them speak in English language. They have resorted to the mother tongue. My biggest fear is how they will cope up once schools reopen" (FH3).

"We have accumulated house rent arrears. I have not paid my landlord rent of eight months. The landlord is not willing to wave off the rent arrears despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has devastating economic consequences" (FH9). "Some families have been forced to vacate houses they live in. Others have been reported to the government local council chair persons for non-payment of house rent" (FH6). CT3 asserted that, "the issue of house rent is very disturbing, landlords don't want to hear the financial difficulties we are going through, all the need is the money. Many urban refugee families will be thrown out of the rental houses they live in. This is a complex situation, unless donors come to our rescue". These findings corroborate with Elçi et al.,

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(2021) in Turkey whose survey of 1749 Syrian refugees living in Turkey indicated that the initial COVID-19 measures had a higher financial impact on Syrian refugees when controlled for employment, wealth, and education, among other variables. Similarly, the findings are in agreement with Ram et al., (2020) who explored the impact of COVID-19 on migration and livelihood of refugees in India, and concluded that there are many challenges refugees face during the COVID-19 pandemic such as inadequate food, basic amenities, poor health care, economic stress, insufficient transportation facilities and lack of psychological support.

The results imply that the urban refugees have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic given the fact that before the pandemic, the urban refugees used to supplement their household income by engaging in informal businesses and receipt of financial assistance from relatives working in the diaspora, as further emphasized by Karemere, a 44-year-old single mother of three who now survives on food handouts from a community church that, right now the biggest worry for urban refugees is hunger, if we go out, we risk contracting coronavirus, if we stay home, hunger will kill us. Our children eat once a day and are not going to school. This situation is worse than a war.

Theme 2: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on urban refugee families

When asked as to what the impact of the pandemic will be on the livelihood of urban refugee families, “participants indicated that there will be economic recession. This will be associated with high cost of living, collapse of businesses, making it difficult to get back to normal”. (FH5, CT2, CT5, & FH8). Furthermore, “participants showed that many workers will lose their jobs, both in the host country and their own countries such as the South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Somalia. This will obviously affect household income status, complicate access to additional financial assistance from the working class, and hence increase poverty levels amongst the urban refugees, making meeting of ends difficult if not impossible”. (CT1, FH2 & FH9).

Illiterate generation. “Respondents also maintained that due to the closure of schools for all this long and the escalating economic hardships, we will witness increased school dropout rates, rampant teenage pregnancies, increased illiteracy levels, ensuing to an illiterate generation”. (FH2, FH3, FH6, FH7 & FH1). The results indicate a tough and difficult time and or future awaiting the urban refugee community, thus the future is unclear and it will be difficult if not impossible to get back to normal.

These findings are in agreement with study conducted by Olema (2020) who found out that many businesses are destined for failure as a result of coronavirus. And indeed, we are witnessing a myriad of businesses collapsing world over even after opening the economies, for instance, Orange Telcom Ltd closed operations in Uganda, Stanbic closed its branch in Koboko District, Afriland First Bank Ltd, an indigenous bank have also closed business. In the same vein, other businesses are rebranding themselves, for example the famous Buckley’s Bank in Uganda has changed its name to Access Bank Ltd, and Orient bank has become Investments and Mortgages Bank. Similarly, West Nile is witnessing rampant student strikes following the re-opening of schools by the government of Uganda. The widespread student strikes have negative upshots that include among others loss of lives, destruction of property, extraordinary payments by parents, and dismissal of students. (Daily Monitor, Wednesday March 16, 2022).

Theme 3: Possible short-term solutions

Possible remedies that were considered important by the participants included negotiation with the government of Uganda, establishment of food distribution Centre in the city, full support by UNHCR, increase food ratio, urban refugees should return to settlement camps, mass vaccination and open up the economy and sponsor brilliant refugee students. Respondents highlighted UNHCR’s collaboration with the government of Uganda as an important matter to turn around the challenging situation urban refugees are going through.

“FHs and CTs jointly echoed the need for UNHCR and the sister organizations to negotiate with the government of Republic of Uganda to use their powers to support the urban refugees in form of food supplies and pay accumulated rent arrears of the landlords”. These would reduce on the pressure mounted on the urban refugees to feed their families and other demands.

To solve the challenge of accessing supplementary food aid from the settlement camps, UNHCR should establish food distribution Centre in the city, and maintain or increase the food ratio per family instead of reducing the ratio in the names of resource scarcity. (FH6, FH9). According to FH7, “Urban refugees should go back to the settlement camps in order to avoid hurdles in the city like feeding, rent, transport to and from the camp. This would get rid of the issues of restricted movements, difficult and costly transportation”.

Mass vaccination and opening up the economy. “Respondents unanimously proposed that mass sensitization and vaccination of all eligible individuals would help in opening the entire economy, and schools in particular, so that children go back to school. Besides, strict standard operating procedures (SOPs) should be enforced in all the learning institutions in the country. In the same vein, donors should sponsor brilliant urban refugee children who can not afford to pay schools once schools open”. Opening the economy enables people to resume their routine activities of making ends meet, such as office work and informal business that

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improves and supplements propensity to save and consume. This would be a great relief for the urban refugees who are currently going difficult time.

Theme 4: Strategic long-term interventions to curb the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the livelihood of urban refugees.

In regard to strategic long-term interventions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the livelihood of urban refugees, respondents identified lobbying for more resources from donors, adoption of blended learning system and invention of drugs to cure the coronavirus as significant long term strategic interventions to halt the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the livelihood of urban refugees.

Lobbying for more resources from donors. "UNHCR, sister organizations and the government of republic of Uganda should lobby for more funds, goods and services from the donors like United States of America, Germany, Japan, European Union, Sweden, other governments, non-governmental organizations, individuals and the private sector. Once more resources are lobbied, UNHCR will be in position to increase her support to the refugees, instead of decreasing the little. This would help in solving the issue global recession and increasing cost of living and the associated outcomes" (FH1, FH2 & CT3).

Adoption of blended learning system. To me "sensitization of stakeholders in education and enforcement of the SOPs in all learning institutions are temporary measures to guarantee learning continuity in the country. The government of the republic of Uganda should instead invest in the information communication technology infrastructure in general, and electronic learning system in particular so that learning will always continue in the event of global pandemic such as the coronavirus connected with prolonged lockdowns befall the diaspora". (FH2).

Invention of drugs to cure the coronavirus. "Currently, COVID-19 vaccine programs continue to roll out globally in a bid to curtail the sporadic spread of the virus. The populace is being sensitized about the various COVID-19 vaccines like the Modena, AstraZeneca, Janssen, Faiza, Sinopharm, Covax, Novavax, Pfizer among others to increase acceptance and mass uptake. However, it must be noted with concern that mass vaccination is a momentary endeavor that may not be of help in the long run, but rather manufacture or invention of drugs for curation of the virus could provide a lasting solution to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic". (CTs and FHs).

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study sought to establish the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on The Livelihood of Urban Refugees in Arua City, Uganda. Results have demonstrated that urban refugees have been hit hard by the COVID-19 Pandemic and will continue to face tough and difficult times in the future. Specifically, the findings have shown that the pandemic has led to challenges in receiving financial assistance from relatives, difficulty in accessing food from the settlement camps, reduced food stuff ratio from UNHCR and accumulated house rent arrears in the short run, and economic recession, loss of jobs and income and emergence of illiterate generation in the long run. We therefore, recommend UNHCR, Donors and the government of Uganda to intervene and step up the support for the urban refugees.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The results from this study should be viewed as a contribution to the knowledge on the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on urban refugees. UNHCR, Donors and the government of Uganda can use the findings of this study to develop appropriate strategies to support urban refugees in a bid to salvage their lives. Finally, this article highlights the voice of both urban refugee family heads and caretakers on the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on urban refugees and this may aid in devising necessary remedies now and in the future.

7.0 LIMITATIONS

Our findings should be interpreted in the context of the potential limitations of our study. Firstly, the qualitative approach provides depth to our understanding of this problem but may not be generalizable to all urban refugees in other cities. We only interviewed urban refugees in Arua city, a single metropolitan area. Further work should explore how these experiences vary across the urban refugee hosting countries. Secondly, in all qualitative studies, findings may be influenced by the perspectives of the investigators. Finally, participants provided retrospective accounts of their experiences about COVID-Pandemic, recall and social desirability bias cannot be excluded.

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