



Women and girls Fact Sheet | Southwest Uganda | 2014

Women and girls in southwest Uganda

Among those who are displaced, refugee women often face some of the greatest challenges; challenges that are often distinct from those faced by their male counterparts. These frequently result in refugee women experiencing increased hardships and vulnerability. In conflict and post-conflict situations girls and young women are less likely than boys and men to access basic rights. Their education is often overlooked in favour of male children, and parents often depend on girls to work at home. In refugee settlements specifically there are a number of factors hindering the empowerment of women and girls including:



trafficking and sexual slavery.

- Traditionally responsible for children, the elderly, and domestic work, women are often overburdened and don't have time to fully engage in decision making processes. Girls are often pushed to drop out from schools and help with household chores.
- Young women face challenges related to traditional gender roles and unequal socially constructed relations, traditional harmful practices (early/forced marriage) and unequal access to, or control over, services and resources.
- Sexual Gender Based Violence and Sexual Reproductive Health related factors including rape, forced impregnation,

UNHCR is working to ensure men, women, boys and girls have equal access to all services and opportunities available and through **targeted actions to empower women and girls in civil, political and economic areas**. In 2001, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees adopted five commitments to refugee women and girls which became standard policies in UNHCR's work:

1. Meaningful participation
2. Individual registration and documentation
3. Food and non-food items management and distribution
4. Economic empowerment
5. Prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence.

Stats

- Southwest Uganda currently hosts 137,976 refugees and asylum seekers in refugee settlements with 53% of the total population being women and girls.
- 43% of refugees and asylum seekers in southwest Uganda are girls under 18 years.
- There are **more than 34,000** women and girls of reproductive age (15-49 years) living in refugee settlements in southwest Uganda.

Partners

UNHCR works with a number of partners in the area of women and girl's empowerment. These include Operational Partners (OPs) (who bring their own funds) and Implementing Partners (IPs) (who are funded directly by UNHCR for their activities).

Did you know?

10,474 refugees in southwest Uganda have been identified with special needs including disability and those living with illnesses. 65% of these are women and girls.



OPs: UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Save the Children, Finnish Refugee Council (FRC).

IPs: Windle Trust Uganda (WTU), American Refugee Committee (ARC), Humanitarian Initiative Just relief Aid (HIJRA), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Nsamizi, Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Medical Teams International (MTI) and African Humanitarian Action (AHA).

UNHCR'S RESPONSE

Participatory Assessment

The Participatory Assessment exercise through the **Age Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach**, allows all refugees and people of concern to participate in the decisions being made about their lives on an equal footing, regardless of age, sex or ethnicity. Every year refugees, asylum seeker and host communities in all settlements across Uganda are consulted in a number of different focus groups based around age, ethnicity and sex on the main challenges they face in the settlements. The exercise lasts around 7-14 days and the information collected



is used to develop UNHCR Uganda's priorities and budget for the coming years – based on the needs of the individual refugees. It also provides an opportunity to give a voice to the refugees, especially those groups traditionally marginalized such as women and girls.

In 2013 the main concerns raised by women and girls across refugee settlements in southwest Uganda were the high drop out rates from school due to long distances to walk, the small number of schools available, the communities ignorance of the value of education and the resulting issue of idleness among young women. They also mentioned the issue of teenage pregnancy and early/forced marriages. Women highlighted the high levels of domestic violence among the

refugee community, which came out of poor living conditions, lack of livelihoods opportunities that frustrate men and lead to alcoholism and traditional unequal gender roles as well as marital infidelity.

Meaningful participation

Women and girls are also encouraged to participate in leadership and the day to day running of the settlements. This is done through the active encouragement of women to run in elections for refugee leaders (similar to Ugandan local elections) and more generally to take on leadership roles in the number of different camp management structures established within the settlement such as Refugee Welfare Committees (RWC), Food Management committees (FMC), Water Management committees (WMC), School Management Committees (SMC) or Non Food Item Management Committees.

Work is also done to inform the wider refugee community on issues of gender equality, gender-based violence and Ugandan law on the rights of women and girls through regular and continuous information and sensitization sessions. Every year women and girls are celebrated across all settlements through the International Women Day on 8 March and the International Day of the Girl Child day on 11 October.

Despite all this, however, women's participation in leadership of the refugee community still remains low and further encouragement is still needed. For example, only 28 % of the members in the camp management committees are women and 41 % of refugee leaders are women.

Economic empowerment

Employment: Women are particularly vulnerable, and generally neglected, when it comes to employment opportunities in a refugee context. In southwest Uganda **41%** of households are headed by women, many of which do not have any form of viable income – instead taking on traditional gender roles of caring for children and maintaining the home. A large majority are vulnerable because of inadequate livelihood opportunities, illiteracy (**65%** are estimated to be illiterate), cultural gender discrimination and socially constructed gender roles. Only **21%** of female refugees (of working age) are employed or self-employed.

Livelihoods for women: There are a number of livelihoods initiatives targeting women and girls in an attempt to increase participation, self-sustainability and economic empowerment. These include material support to women's group, skills and literacy training for women (provided by FRC) and scholarships to attend a vocational training centre.

Education – getting girls into school: While girls gross enrollment in primary education is relatively high (around 71% across the southwest compared to 79 % of boys) the number drops dramatically when it comes to secondary education. This is due to a number of factors including the cost of school fees required for secondary education and the limited number of secondary education facilities in refugee settlements. Families are also marrying off their girls as a source of income due to general poverty, there remain high levels of unwanted and

underage pregnancies, many families keep girls at home to do household chores and there are a lack of role models for girls to look up to.



Elizabeth Lydia is 15 years old. She comes from Eastern DRC. She arrived in Nakivale refugee settlement in 2009. She lives with her mother, 2 sisters and 2 brothers. She was initially attending Nakivale Primary School in P5 grade for a year but dropped out after her father died in Kyaka II refugee settlement. Her mother pulled her out of school to look after her older sister's baby who was just 9 months old. However, after sensitization her mother was convinced to send her back to school in February 2013 where she is currently in P6 and is now thriving. She is even an active member of the 'Educate a Child' sponsored reading club.

- 12,536 girls are enrolled in primary schools across southwest Uganda (70.5% of the school going age girls); however, the figures drop to only 296 girls enrolled in secondary school (5% of the secondary school going age girls).

In an attempt to combat this and encourage more children back to school UNHCR has set up a tracking system through Village Education Committees (VECs) and children's school clubs in all settlements to get girls back into school.

"If a girl is not in school what is expected other than her getting somebody to marry?" – Congolese refugee man in Rwamwanja settlement

Prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence



Women and girls are disproportionately at risk of acts of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In a refugee context where women and girls are the majority of those fleeing, the number rises. In Uganda the main types of SGBV reported in south west are rape, domestic violence and early marriage.

In southwest Uganda 716 cases of SGBV were reported in 2013, of which, 85% were perpetrated against women/girls. Single young women, single young mothers or young women whose husbands are not living with them in the camp have been identified as being at most risk of sexual violence.

UNHCR, through its partners, works on prevention and response in addressing SGBV issues; tackling the root cases and providing assistance including legal assistance, psychosocial counseling, healthcare, community based solutions, empowering of girls and women and environmental preservation (**see SGBV factsheet**).

Reproductive health – working as 'One UN'

Together with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) UNHCR also works in providing maternal and reproductive health care to refugee women and girls. This includes organizing advocacy sessions on adolescent girls' vulnerability, maternal health care including supporting midwives and reproductive health equipment and medicines including reproductive health kits, post rape kits and 'dignity kits' which are given to new mothers and include items such as soap, underwear and a cloth wrap for new mothers.

In 2013 UNFPA distributed over 3,000 dignity kits to refugees in southwest Uganda. These dignity kits have encouraged pregnant women to deliver from health facilities and increasing the number of safe deliveries. UNFPA and UNHCR also carry out routine pregnancy mapping which helps identify at-risk mothers, promote antenatal care access and other referrals including family planning.

Refugees and Internally displaced people (IDPs) are among the most vulnerable people on earth.
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In 2013 across the 3 locations of Nyakabande transit centre, Bubukwanga transit centre and Rwamwanja settlement a total of 2,706 pregnant mothers were mapped by UNFPA. 1,451 accessed ante-natal care as a result of mapping and 1,215 delivered safely in a health centre.

Challenges continue in promoting family planning methods across settlements in the southwest with only 4% of women and girls of reproductive age use family planning.

Durable solutions – women at risk

For some refugee women and girls solutions cannot be found to address their specific cases within Uganda. One way to assist them and find them a more permanent solution is to resettle them to a third country. A refugee woman who faces threats to her safety and well-being that is unresolvable in her current location may be deemed to be a woman-at-risk requiring resettlement. For many women-at-risk, resettlement can provide the best opportunity to ensure their immediate protection and to realize long term success. One of UNHCR's key responsibilities is to make well-informed decisions about which refugee women-at-risk should be referred for resettlement, and determining which country to submit them to.

For resettlement purposes, the definition of being "at-risk" encompasses an array of situations where women's safety or well-being remains threatened on the basis of gender including:

- Threats to their personal security, such as risk of expulsion, refoulement.
- Sexual and gender-based violence, such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, abuse, torture, trafficking for purposes of sexual slavery.
- Exploitation or forced labour, and other forms of exploitation.

In 2013, following a systematic assessment of all potential women at risk within the settlements, UNHCR Uganda submitted 232 women-at-risk for resettlement, accounting for around 27% of total submissions.

Achievements

With the support of all the partners, UNHCR managed to improve most of the key indicators from 2012 to 2013:

- Participation of women leaders in the community increased from 38% to 41% in 2013.
- General school enrolment and retention of girls in all the schools has improved due to increased community mobilization and sensitization.
- In 2013, over 1,000 girls of upper primary school were followed up on and encouraged back into school.
- 100% of women of reproductive age received sanitary kits containing sanitary pads, underwear and soap.
- More women are using the maternal health care services than ever before and there has been a reduction in the number of maternal deaths.
- Women have more confidence in the SGBV response mechanisms and have reported more cases: 706 in 2013 compared to 302 in 2012. All reported cases received support from UNHCR and partners.
- Over 50% of the members of the livelihood groups supported in 2013 were women.
- UNHCR Uganda submitted 232 women at risk for resettlement, accounting for around 27% of total submissions.
- Over 1,700 women of all ages who were considered to have specific needs and were among the most vulnerable were supported with self-enabling items such as items to improve their shelters, clothes and counseling sessions.
- Youth friendly corners were created in 4 out of the 10 health centres in south west Uganda.



Challenges

- Limited access to livelihood opportunities such as skills training and income generating activities to empower women and girls.
- Limited access to employment opportunities for women.
- Traditional gender roles and unequal socially constructed relations continue in refugee societies, which hinder the meaningful participation of women in camp management committees.
- Traditional harmful practices (early/forced marriage) which affect girl's education.
- Unequal access to, and control over, household resources, which generates domestic violence in households headed by men.
- Limited access to secondary schools for girls (there is currently only 1 secondary school in each of the 4 settlements in south west Uganda).
- Inadequate access to maternal and reproductive health care due to the long distances to many of the health centres.
- Budget constraints which make it impossible to develop specific projects to empower women and girls.