Urban refugee education in Uganda: A solution from the non-formal education sector

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Introduction

Ten-year-old Landry Kalembo arrived in Uganda with his family, including eight siblings, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2008. They settled in Nsambya, a suburb of Kampala. Given their refugee status and large family, finances were tight and Landry’s educational opportunities were extremely restricted (Jesuit Refugee Services, 2011). He is just one example of thousands of refugee students who have escaped conflict and persecution in their home countries to resettle as an urban refugee in Uganda. Given the global trend of urbanization around the world, increasingly large numbers of refugees have chosen to settle in urban centers rather than refugee camps, even when this leaves them without access to UNHCR support (UNHCR, 2009a) (UNHCR, 2009b). Reports indicate that there were 10.5 million refugees around the world receiving assistance from UNHCR at the end of 2008, nearly half of whom were living in urban center as opposed to refugee camps (UNHCR, 2009). They face hardships similar to those living in refugee camps, as well as additional issues that arise from residing, often undocumented, in cities, including arrest and detention and increased exposure to disease such as HIV/AIDS (UNHCR, 2009). Thus far, urban refugees have received little attention from researchers and policy-makers, despite their acutely vulnerable status (Bernstein & Okello, 2007).

In particular, urban refugees suffer from limited access to education opportunities, as a result of financial costs, discrimination, documentation, and language barriers (Pavanello, Elhawary & Pantuliano, 2010) (UNHCR, 2009). Little has been done to address this issue, in spite of its broad implications for these students’ future economic productivity and the host countries’ social stability, because host countries have assumed that their refugee populations were only temporary. In reality, it appears that refugees’ stays in host countries have become
protracted to the length of several years as opposed to a few months months, indicating that it is more important than ever to address this large population of uneducated children. This policy report specifically focuses on children of primary school age in the urban refugee population Kampala, Uganda, which hosts a particularly large number of refugees (Lomo, Naggaga & Hovil, 2001). This paper begins by identifying the urban refugee population Kampala, particularly their home countries and the specific barriers they face in regards to accessing basic primary education. We then discuss each issue, identify specific programs, interventions, and policies from the literature that has been used to address this issue, and weigh the strengths and limitations of each program to create a proposed solution. Based on this information, we provide our rationale and justification for a non-formal language acquisition program to address educational access for urban refugees in Kampala. After investigating and analyzing various programs from other country contexts and for similarly marginalized populations such as the Roma in Europe, we outline a program and recommended implementation strategy for a two-pronged program that provides relevant and supportive accelerated language instruction to refugee students in both English and their mother tongue, as well as a para-formal curriculum that facilitates integration of refugee students into the formal school system and Ugandan society. The goal of the program would be to aid students’ eventual transition into the formal Ugandan education system.

**Urban refugees in Uganda**

Over the past 15 years Uganda has become host to a great number of refugees from across East Africa as a result of its proximity to conflict-affected countries (Bonfiglio, 2011). In October 2009, Uganda alone was home to 142,297 refugees. These refugees came from Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Burundi, Sudan, Rwanda, and
Kenya (UNHCR, 2009a) (Lomo et al., 2001). As early as 2001, Human Rights Watch estimated the number of urban refugees in Kampala to be close to 50,000 (Human Rights Watch, 2002). The largest population is the Congolese, with 15,500 refugees registered in Kampala. The second largest is Somali, at 8,500 refugees (Krause-Vilmar, 2011). Unfortunately, the literature available on the urban refugee population primarily focuses on those living in Kampala, and does not include the cities of Mbarara, Kyenjojo, and Arua, who also host urban refugees (Bernstein & Okello, 2007).

According to Krause-Vilmar (2011), Burundian urban refugees are the most vulnerable population in Kampala due to their limited language skills. Typically they only speak their native language of Rundi, and lack skills in English, which is the official national language of Uganda. The Congolese are known for their traditional bitenge fabric, which often provides a specialized employment market. However, they have weak social networks and are limited in their ability to advance in society. The Somali community is relatively less vulnerable than the other two because of their strong social networks. Urban refugees tend to survive by relying on one another for financial support (Krause-Vilmar, 2011). Refugees living in Kampala are generally self-settled, and according to the 2006 Ugandan Refugee Law, they relinquish their right to humanitarian assistance when they chose to live in the capital city. UNHCR’s revised 2009 urban refugee policy attempts to expand protection space to urban settings, but little is known regarding the exact number of urban refugees and their unique needs. While urban refugees are able to access low paying, informal work, they have limited access to basic public services such as healthcare and education. The lack of access to education is particularly pertinent to urban refugees, as adults tend to be more educated than those living in settlements and would want their children to have those same opportunities (Krause-Vilmar, 2011).
Education barriers and alternative courses of action

A 2009 report stated that 46.6% of urban refugees of primary school age were enrolled in school in Kampala, but these students had a literacy rate of only approximately 34% (UNHCR, 2009a). These statistics are reflective of persistent barriers to education. Three major impediments to access to education outlined in this section are: financial, discrimination, and language barriers (UNHCR, 2009a) (Pavanello et al., 2010) (UNHCR, 2010). The first three sections provide a brief description of the problem followed by alternatives policies that have been, or could be, implemented to expand access to education for urban refugees in Uganda. The concluding section examines the option of maintaining the status quo.

Financial barriers

The first barriers urban refugees in Kampala face are financial. While Uganda is praised for implementing universal primary education (UPE), government schools in Kampala still charge fees to cover basic schooling costs and there have also been instances where schools charged refugee students additional fees. While registered refugees should, in theory, have access to free schooling, these additional costs often present a great difficulty. Additionally, students must pay for uniforms, school supplies, PTA funds, textbooks, transportation and meals, on top of the high cost of living in Kampala (UNHCR, 2009a). These costs make it particularly difficult for urban refugee families to send their primary school aged children to school, as they often do not have an adequate income and there is a general lack of humanitarian assistance (Krause-Vilmar, 2011) (UNHCR, 2009a). Secondary schooling is even more expensive than primary, explaining why so few refugee children are able to continue their education past the primary level (Pavanello et al., 2010).
In terms of the financial barriers to education, as mentioned, Uganda has already taken some efforts to address this through UPE. In 1997, UPE was introduced in Uganda and exempted four children per family from primary school fees (Dryden-Peterson, 2006). From 1996 to 1999, enrollment rates increased from 2.5 million to 6.5 million, a net enrollment rate increase of 85 per cent (Dryden-Peterson, 2006). However, unlike their rural counterparts, students in Kampala are still required to pay a nominal school fee, which still prevents some students from attending school. 42% of primary school-aged urban refugees were not in school in 2006 (Dryden-Peterson, 2006).

Another alternative for improving access to education for urban refugees is implementing scholarship programs that target the most disadvantaged refugees. For example, one initiative that is working to promote refugee education is the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI). This program is funded by the German government and offers tertiary scholarships to refugees in an effort to encourage refugees to continue studying through secondary school. The scholarship also encourages refugee children to return to their home countries to promote peace and contribute to human capital development. In 2010, Uganda had 138 DAFI students, 74 male and 64 female, and the average scholarship was $2,576 (UNHCR, 2010). In addition to DAFI, there is also the ninemillion.org campaign, sponsored by UNHCR, which is an online fundraising campaign that provides limited scholarships for education and sports programs to secondary school learners. This campaign, which specifically targets refugee students, has also supported male and female students in upper primary school, enhanced teacher training, encouraged community participation in education through PTAs, and helped train school managers. Currently, some of biggest challenges for DAFI and the ninemillion.org campaign are the transfer of rural successes to urban settings, where the gap between primary
and secondary school is particularly difficult to bridge (UNHCR, 2009a). A limitation of these scholarships is that they primarily focus on secondary and tertiary students when there is also a need for primary student support.

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) are another way to combat financial issues that trigger student withdrawal from school. Overall, they are relatively advantageous, as they tend to produce results at a low cost (UNESCO, 2011). For example, in a randomized yearlong evaluation study in Malawi, dropout rates for girls who received CCTs were 6.3% compared to 10.8% for girls who did not receive money (UNESCO, 2011). Studies from Brazil, Mexico, and Nicaragua also suggest that school attendance, as well as overall health and nutrition, improves with CCTs. This method has been proven particularly useful in countries with large gender disparities and has been used for incentivizing girls to enter and remain in school (UNESCO, 2011). However, a limitation of cash transfers is that they do not ensure actual learning for students once they are in the formal education system, especially if other barriers such as discrimination and language are left unaddressed.

*Discrimination barriers*

Urban refugee children are often victims of discrimination, which affects their access to education. There are certain discriminatory policies in Uganda designed to exclude refugees (UNHCR, 2009a). One of the most dangerous forms of discrimination is through the police services. Living in urban slums, refugees are often victims of crime and are not aided by the Ugandan police. This encourages families to keep their children at home, rather than sending them to work or to attend school. Although refugees are legally allowed in Uganda, the general opinion of them is negative. Many perceive refugees as drains on the economy and potential conspirators with the former government. In terms of school admissions, urban refugees are
excluded in admissions processes, particularly when there are a limited amount of seats available, so that nationals are usually selected over students with refugee status (Krause-Vilmar, 2011).

One potential way to address the problem of school administrators and teachers who discourage refugee children from participating in schools is teacher training. One of UNHCR’s current education policy commitments is to promote education quality through teacher training and developing quality teaching and learning materials (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Presently, the most common training for refugee situations is in-service training organized by NGOs, and typically focuses on pedagogy and content. There has recently been an increased push for training now that research has show there is widespread learning failure in schools, especially those catering to refugees (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Teacher training could encompass refugee sensitivity and also encourage teachers to protect refugee children in the school system.

Limitations to this solution include the lack of provisions for teachers who may not be receptive to training that encourages them to focus on refugee students’ needs. Additionally, although this is an important aspect to consider for long-term reform, it is unlikely that increasing teacher quality will immediately increase school enrollment among urban refugee populations, since there may be a lag between implementation and change in teacher perceptions and actions.

The lack of proper documentation is another factor that leads to discrimination and can prohibit Ugandan urban refugee children from accessing local public education. In Uganda prior to 2006, the Control of the Aliens Refugee Act (CARA) was the most pertinent legislation that prohibited refugees from leaving settlements without the explicit permission of the Settlement Commandant (Bernstein & Okello, 2007). In May 2006, the Refugees Act was passed and this legislation gave refugees more freedom, with the primary goal to “promote self reliance among
refugees and sustainable development in the affected areas” (The Refugees Act, 2006). Even bigger legal strides were made in 2009 when the UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas was adopted by the Ugandan government. The main objectives of this UNHCR policy included improving registration and data collection as well as ensuring that refugees are documented and have access to services (UNHCR, 2009). This policy resulted in immediate changes in the country as primary school participation among urban refugees rose by 15% from 2008 to 2009 (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Despite some remaining challenges, Uganda has made significant strides in the area of refugee documentation. However, while enrollment increased after new documentation policies were affected, the overall enrollment of refugee children in primary school remains low.

**Language barriers**

The most important problem to focus on in terms of access to education is language barriers. Urban refugees in Kampala are diverse, and they have different linguistic abilities. According to Lucia (2012), taking English courses is the first step towards integration in Ugandan society. Learning Uganda’s primary language, English, helps refugees to communicate with nationals in their new country and can also increase their self-esteem, ability to participate in formal schooling and develop their eventual employability. Learning a language can help ease identity problems, allowing refugees to make friends and alleviating societal isolation (Bonfiglio, 2010). Urban refugees face serious problems of integration into society and often rely on other refugees, who also may not have the best English language skills (Bonfiglio, 2010). While English classes are available, financial and discriminatory problems restrict urban refugees’ accesses to these services as well (Lucia, 2012). In addition to entering an unfamiliar, new
education system that may not acknowledge refugee children’s past education, students often also have to adjust to learning in a new language (Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

There are some NGO, government, and refugee-led initiatives that provide language classes in Uganda, but they do not all have equal resources. Government and NGO classes usually employ trained teachers with adequate materials, but discrimination and costs can be barriers that prevent refugees from accessing them (Bonfiglio, 2010) (Lucia, 2012). Refugee-led classes tend to have fewer resources and are typically taught by untrained teachers. A specific example in Kampala is how the Refugee Law Project (RLP) has encouraged Kampala’s civil society to provide language courses and degree certification for urban refugees. The RLP believes this would make it easier for refugees to apply for work, enroll children in school, and become a part of society (Advocacy Project, 2005). Currently, UNHCR promotes formal refugee schools to teach in their native languages to encourage and prepare refugees to return to their home countries. Given that many refugee populations may not return to their home countries for years, this can be problematic for children who do enter the formal system.

Status quo

Lastly, in addition to the different policies and programs available to address costs, discrimination, and language, there is the alternative of leaving the situation in Uganda at the status quo. Given the current circumstances, this would result in over 50% of urban refugee children in Kampala alone receiving no basic primary education while continuing to reside in the country (UNHCR, 2009a). Since many refugees in Uganda will likely continue to live in a protracted state of limbo and will be unable to return to their home countries, increasingly more refugees living in urban areas may poorly educated and illiterate, limiting their ability to maintain an acceptable living for their own families and potentially draining government and
NGO resources. Thus, it appears evident that the status quo is not an economically sustainable or just option for the Ugandan government regarding urban refugees in Kampala.

**Urban refugee education in other contexts**

Upon evaluating the pressing issues that prevent refugee access to education in Kampala, the language piece appears to be an immediate area of concern that affects learning and feeds discrimination. There are many examples of language programs that are have been implemented for resettled refugees and displaced populations around the world. For example, there are language-acquisition programs, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in the United States. However, in Australia, studies have found that English acquisition alone does not mitigate discrimination or exclusion in schools. They found that refugee communities there felt that while English was a valuable skill in their host country and some form of acceptance was important, they also sought communities where they could speak their native tongue (Pittaway, Muli, & Shteir, 2009). This points to the importance of programming that addresses both the immediate need of language acquisition for displaced communities, as well as the more long-term solution of helping them adjust and integrate into their new community.

**Roma in Central Eastern European countries**

The Roma in Central Eastern European (CEE) countries offer an example of the variety of language programs targeted towards a displaced/minority population. Historically, the Roma have been marginalized and excluded by their countries of residence. In the 1990’s, several CEE countries incorporated the Romani language and culture into the curriculum at certain schools. The intention was to draw attention and legitimization to the contributions of the Roma community, as well as to facilitate greater integration of Roma children into society, since discrimination and language barriers frequently deterred Roma children from attending school.
The limitations of this policy, however, were that many teachers and schools did not support the curriculum change, and as a result, many Roma children ended up attending segregated, Roma-only schools. Studies indicate that the failure of these bilingual programs lay in governments’ approach, because they sought to teach Romani in the national language, rather than using the opportunity to facilitate bilingual education (Kyuchukov, 2000). Kyuchukov (2000) advocates for increased efforts to hire bilingual Roma and mother tongue teachers, to provide non-Roma teachers with anti-bias training, and for community-based measures to address dropout as some ways to approach bilingual education in CEE countries. Given the similar barriers in access to public schooling that they face, these principles, especially Kyuchukov’s insights on curriculum design and integration, can also be applied to programs urban refugees in Kampala who face language barriers in the Ugandan school system. Finally, other studies have found that programs that incorporate and acknowledge the value of a refugee’s home language and culture may be more effective in increasing participation in schooling and fostering integration (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011) (Knipscheer & Kleber, 2006).

*Government policy in South Africa*

Another example of work to eliminate discrimination comes from South Africa, where it is a prevalent problem. After the end of apartheid in 1994, the education system remained extremely divided along racial lines. In order to combat this, the government enacted the South African Schools Act of 1997, which gave children the right to choose their school and prohibited the consideration of race in education. Curriculum 2005 was also a part of this, teaching new values of inclusion, equality and respect for diversity (UNESCO, 2006). The new curriculum had three vital facets: the introduction of eight core subjects with values of non-racism, non-sexism and democracy; outcomes-based education; and a general commitment to providing a
foundational education up until Grade 9 (De Waal, 2004). To introduce this new curriculum, the South African Constitution committed the government to a variety of diversity issues, including class, race, gender, language and age, through National Curriculum Statements (NCS). NCS also acknowledged the importance of indigenous beliefs and thought systems. Curriculum 2005 has generally been viewed as successful in addressing the major forms of exclusion in education, as well as raising awareness on racism. However, there have been challenges in implementing indigenous knowledge systems and teaching in mother tongues. Since education had been so based in the apartheid system previously, the radical shift away from it was difficult to implement (De Waal, 2004). It has also been proven to be more effective in privileged schools, which is another limitation (UNESCO, 2006).

Projected outcomes

There are models of international programs that target refugees and provide additional support, through language training and other support. Two examples useful to project future outcomes of a new policy regarding language acquisition for urban refugees in Uganda are the Swedish government’s language policy for refugee children and the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Youth Education Pack in Burundi that offers an accelerated non-formal education program for refugees.

Bilingual education in Sweden

Sweden is a country where bilingual education is a reality for refugee children and examining their country policy is useful to project potential outcomes for a similar program in Uganda. In Sweden, the Compulsory School Ordinance states that refugee and asylum seeking children are entitled to bilingual instruction in their mother tongue as well as in Swedish. Municipalities are obligated to offer pupils classes in their native language and the subject
‘Swedish as a Second Language’ has its own unique syllabus (Bourgonje, 2010). As a result of mother-tongue instruction, there are many Swedish as a second language classes for groups larger than individual mother tongue students. As of 2010, almost a fifth of compulsory school students in Sweden had a foreign background, meaning that they were born overseas or born in Sweden to foreign parents. Approximately 90% of these children were participating in the mandatory school system (Bourgonje, 2010). As evidenced in this example, bilingual education is an important mechanism for social integration and personal development, as well as for empowering refugee children to gain better control over their futures (Kyrklund, 2009).

The basic concept of bilingual education in Sweden provides an interesting case study for urban refugee students in Kampala, Uganda. While there are clear differences between these country and population contexts, the accomplishment of the bilingual program in the Sweden offers a model for bilingual education for non-English speaking refugee children. Sweden has much higher enrollment rates of refugee and asylum seeking children than Uganda, and we hypothesize that enrollment rates would rise for urban refugees in Uganda with an analogous program that makes education more applicable through tailored mother tongue supplemental classes. In addition to increased relevance, educational studies have suggested that the awareness and experience of using one language may be strengthened by knowledge of another language (Kyrklund, 2009). In the Swedish program, however, second-language teachers do not always feel included as part of the regular staff and worry that they are lower in status in comparison to standard teachers. In addition to this, stakeholders have claimed that there is a need for better specialized language teachers. These problems are compounded by insufficient funding, and are examples of some of the challenges faced by this program (Bourgonje, 2010). Key lessons to draw from this case study include the need for sustainable funding and
importance of culturally relevance in programming.

Youth Education Pack (Norwegian Refugee Council) in Burundi

Youth Education Pack (YEP) in Burundi offers an example of a refugee education program with promising outcomes. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) created the YEP in Burundi to equip youth for sustainable livelihoods (Ketel, 2008). The YEP is a one-year full time program that targets conflict-affected children with three main components: literacy/numeracy, life skills and vocational training. NRC is the leading NGO in the education sector in Burundi and has established an operating partnership between NRC/YEP, the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research in Burundi, and local NGOs such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC). It is important to note that the government does not pay YEP teachers; they are funded through NRC and its donors (Ketel, 2008).

An external evaluation conducted by Ketel in 2008 is valuable. Some of the issues Kettle (2008) spotted at the YEP in Burundi were low quality coordination, a limited quantity of start-up tools and equipment, a weak monitoring and follow-up system by the project, and to a smaller degree insecurity and fraud. With those caveats, the evaluator, Ketel, gave the overall impact score of the YEP project on individual’s social and economic progress gave scores of 1.7 and 1.6, out of a 2.0 scale, in two main locations. These scores are relatively high and indicate that the project makes strives toward positive change for its participants. The evaluation recommended a stronger sustainability plan and an improved partnership with technical government services, local authorities and local communities (Ketel, 2008). YEP targets children aged 14-18, which is a limitation to the transferability of the program to all Ugandan youth, similar successful outcomes would occur. NRC has expanded YEP programs into other countries such Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Their model could continue to be
expanded to other developing countries. The success and limitations of this program could be used to inform the design of a policy and program targeted towards urban refugee students in Kampala, Uganda.

**Rationale for non-formal language education programs**

Uganda has a rich history and framework for non-formal education, as demonstrated by its wide array of programs that target and serve groups as diverse as nomadic populations, out of school children, and health workers (Hoppers, 2008) (Bbuye, 2000). For example, Complementary Opportunities for Primary Education (COPE) is an example of a government-recognized and co-operated program, along with UNICEF-Kampala, that provides a complementary opportunity for primary education to older children living in some of the greatest high-needs regions in the country (UNICEF, 2010). Cost-evaluations of this program have found that if improvements are made to address dropouts, it could be equal or even less in cost per student to formal schools (Dewees, 2000). Additionally, high dropout rates in these high-needs regions are not entirely the fault of the program, as this may be an attribute that is largely outside of the program’s control (Ilon & Kyeyune, 2002). This indicates that for Uganda, in particular, non-formal programs could be a feasible, effective, and low-cost way to provide important educational opportunities to high-needs populations. Additionally, as previously established, educational programming for refugees usually comes from the non-formal sector through various NGO’s.

Urban refugees, as previously discussed, represent a population that is marginalized and suffers from additional barriers to the formal education in the form of documentation policies and language (UNHCR, 2009). Non-formal education could be a cost-effective and efficient way to bridge the language policy issue for urban refugee children of primary school age. Since
schools in Uganda teach in English, rather than refugee children’s language of origin, they effectively exclude entire populations of children who struggle to learn basic concepts in a language that is not their native tongue (Bamgbose, 2000). Programs should address the language barrier issue by supplementing their accelerated English classes with mother tongue instruction and support, allowing them to learn English transitionally.

This problem, which exists in various forms in many different country and cultural contexts, is already recognized as a major barrier to sustainable development around the world (Trudell, 2009). Thus, learning in a language that is not a child’s native language both hinders their learning outcomes by disadvantaging them in school and creates a barrier that students have to overcome when deciding to invest in education. In Cairo, for instance, both Sudanese and Iraqi refugees have to consider language in their choice of schools. As a result, Sudanese tend to study at refugee schools, some of which have incorporated the Sudanese curriculum, so that students can take the Sudanese entrance exams. Although this may be a viable option for Sudanese refugees in Cairo, this is not ideal for other refugee populations, such as Ethiopians and Somalis, who also attend Sudanese schools. The lack of quality schooling that incorporates the official Egyptian curriculum is problematic for their long-term prospects in their host country (Goździak & Walter, 2012). These substantial issues with language indicate that is important to address, especially since it could be exacerbated in the case of refugees.

While there is a strong case for bilingual education programs, especially in areas where there is a fear of local languages becoming extinct and given the success of bilingual programs around the world (Menken & Garcia, 2010), they may not be feasible or cost-effective given the unique position of urban refugees, who already suffer marginalization, and the limited budget of host country. In Kampala, which hosts urban refugees from many different neighboring
countries, it is unlikely that there will be sufficient support or justification for individualized bilingual programs (UNHCR, 2009a). In other words, for this particular population, there may be too many indigenous languages represented to warrant bilingual education programs in both the formal and non-formal system. The best solution would be to provide a program which gradually bridges refugees to the formal system with some aspects of bilingualism, such as in Sweden, with the ultimate goal of helping students transition to the formal English language education system.

This type of language program that focus on English education could be a feasible, effective, and cost-efficient way to address the issue of language that prevents urban refugees from benefiting from Uganda’s formal education system. Given that refugee policies were originally based on the assumption that they would be eventually repatriated and that now, it is likely that their settlement in host countries could be protracted (Bonfiglio, 2010) (UNHCR, 2004), integration into the formal system would be one of the best options for preparing urban refugee children to succeed in their host country’s economy. These could be considered a type of bridging program in that their final goal is to help transition students from this non-formal program into formal primary schools. It is imperative that organizations such as UNICEF and UNHCR promote a policy that encourages language-bridging programs that seek to help refugee children succeed in attaining basic primary education and facilitates research into these types of programs in order to determine ‘best practices’ in this area. In addition to serving refugee populations in Uganda, this type of non-formal program could be translated and implemented in other urban refugee contexts as well. Programs in Kampala, however, should be targeted at urban refugee children of primary school age, provide relevant, appropriate and child-friendly English-language education, and designed to acclimate students to the education environment in Uganda.
These programs may also help to decrease discrimination, aiding in another one of the barriers that urban refugee children face in accessing formal school.

Because urban refugees face discrimination both outside and inside the classroom, the solution needs to consider how to remedy this problem through its curriculum. One way to do this is through intercultural education, which strives to raise cultural awareness and introduce children to different beliefs and values. It helps them learn to take action against discrimination and develop respect for others. Intercultural education should encompass all core academic subjects, have real-world implications and should be broad enough to include a diverse group of students (Tormey, 2006). Intercultural education should be included in the solution to the education problems for urban refugees.

It is evident that non-formal education is widely supported in Uganda, and there are examples of particularly successful programs that have the support and recognition of the government and Ministry of Education and Sports. Additionally, the projected length of stay in host countries is now much longer, and while completely bilingual programs are inappropriate considering the diverse backgrounds of refugees in Kampala, non-formal language-education programs provided by NGO’s with a para-formal curriculum in the formal system offer a feasible, efficient, and cost-effective way to support educational opportunities for this high-needs population.

**Tradeoffs**

Consideration of tradeoffs is crucial in the selection of an effective future policy that would improve education access for refugee children in Uganda. The financial solutions explored were UPE, scholarships, and cash transfers. The Ugandan government already
theoretically provides UPE and externally funded secondary and tertiary scholarship programs are already established for urban refugees in Uganda (e.g. DAFI and ninemillinon.org). There is potential for existing scholarships to expand, although these programs only serve a select portion of the population. Another potential solution suggested was to encourage greater participation in the formal school system for refugees through the expanded provision of conditional cash-transfers. There are currently NGOs delivering CCTs, but even if the government were to adopt this on a larger scale, the use of cash transfers would not eliminate students’ language barriers, nor counter discrimination.

The primary discrimination policy alternatives were teacher training and refugee documentation. Teacher training is vital to creating an appropriate environment and needs to be incorporated into all policies involving students. The government of Uganda has made recent strides in improving access to education for urban refugees through the adopting the UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas in 2009. Improved documentation procedures have helped refugee children in urban areas enter school, however, they do not address language needs once children are enrolled.

Language comprehension is central to student learning and none of the financial or discrimination policy alternatives include language training. After considering tradeoffs, the government of Uganda should make specialized language instruction a priority for marginalized refugee children. Providing specialized language instruction would be an efficient way to improve retention and meet students’ needs, as long as instruction remains affordable and accessible to avoid financial and discriminatory problems. While it would require funds that could directed towards other projects, the language barrier is currently one of the most pressing and least addressed issues for urban refugee students.
Policy recommendation

Upon examining existing programs targeting refugees, the bilingual programs for Roma in CEE countries, South Africa’s education policy post-apartheid, the Swedish Compulsory School Ordinance, and the Youth Education Pack in Burundi, we recommend that the Ugandan government adopt a supportive and clear policy in regards to refugee education efforts and to work with NGO’s to provide an alternative language program that incorporates key lessons and aspects from these programs that have made them successful. While NGO’s would be implementing the program, government support is crucial to its success and sustainability. This program should have two aspects. The first is a two-year non-formal accelerated learning program for the out-of-school refugee population in Kampala that is of primary school age, with the goal of facilitating their English language acquisition so that they can be quickly introduced into the formal system. The second is the creation of a new para-formal intercultural curriculum for both the non-formal and formal system with the intention of increasing mutual understanding between refugees and Ugandan nationals. This curriculum would be included in the NFE program in English, and in the formal system, it would be available to any student who is interested in participating after school. The after-school component would provide refugee students and nationals a chance to interact in a setting outside of the traditional classroom setting. The goal of this second piece is to mitigate the potential detrimental effects of discrimination on language acquisition, by helping students find common ground.

The first part of this policy has the government and NGO’s implementing a two-year non-formal accelerated learning program for out of school urban refugees. While the YEP program was successful in one year, it was meant for conflict afflicted children within their own country (Ketel, 2008), so in the case of Uganda, it should be adapted for the additional difficulty
of being a refugee in a foreign country. This non-formal education program would be focused on English language acquisition to negate the problem of inaccessibility due to language. Most classes will be taught in English, but given the successes in bilingual education for refugees in Sweden and lessons learned from bilingual programs for the Roma in Europe, the importance of students’ language of origin should not be discounted. To the degree that it is possible, English support and tutoring in students’ national languages should be provided, and bilingual teachers should be prioritized in the hiring process. While this may seem labor-intensive, the literature indicates that this initial investment could greatly enhance language instruction and integration for Kampala’s refugee population of primary school age.

Rose (2007) highlights the value of focusing on skills such as basic literacy and numeracy during the language instruction process and the importance of user-friendly learning and teaching strategies, both of which are crucial to the implementation of a successful program. In this case, the focus would be on basic literacy and numeracy in the English language, but with consideration for the other linguistic needs of refugee students so that they may feel more comfortable in their learning environment.

The second portion of the recommended policy is a para-formal intercultural curriculum that is incorporated into the non-formal program but could also be adopted by the formal schooling system, perhaps as an extracurricular program. It would be partially based on Ugandan culture, history and politics and partially based on the region as a whole. This curriculum would ideally be designed by the Ministry of Education and Sports of Uganda, as part of their efforts to facilitate refugee integration in Kampala. The goal of this para-formal curriculum is to encourage students’ understanding of Uganda and the general region’s interconnected history and culture. By delivering it in the accelerated learning program as well
as in the formal system, all children involved should have the same understanding, despite the
difference in delivery. This should help promote equivalency between the formal system and the
non-formal program. This should also support the process of promoting understanding between
nationals and refugee students in the formal system, as well as prepare them to receive greater
influxes of refugee students after they have finished the non-formal program. Adding this to the
formal system would not require any added infrastructure and would have minimal extra costs.

Program cost

In general, the costs for the two-year accelerated learning program would include per
student costs and per center costs. The program would be free to refugees. A cost analysis
report done by USAID in 2002 serves as a suitable estimate for the program costs. This report
looked at low cost options, upgraded standards and UPE standards for urban poor communities.
Looking at the upgraded standard to factor in for inflation and improvements in materials since
2002 would likely provide the most accurate cost estimate. The per-student costs for the NFE
would be about $11 a month to include textbooks and teacher salaries. The recurrent per-center
costs, including supervision and monitoring, continuous community development, and on-going
teacher training would be approximately $625 a month. The start-up costs, including
construction, land, and furniture as well as initial training would be around $7500 per center
(Ilon, 2002). We recommend that the Ugandan government incorporate a sustainable funding
plan for this program into a new policy on urban refugees. Funding could be obtained from a
combination or selection of various NGO’s, national foreign aid programs, the U.N., and the
Ugandan government.¹

¹These costs are based off of conversions between the US dollar and the Ugandan Shilling. At the time this paper
was written, the exchange rate was 2660 Ugandan shillings to the dollar.
Program implementation

In order to evaluate this program’s effectiveness prior to official implementation, an abridged pilot program with a built in evaluation would be necessary. Using an existing community center, we would run an abridged ten-month accelerated learning program for a selection of 50 primary school aged refugee children from different home countries. This pilot program would offer one year of instruction as opposed to the recommended two years in order to obtain outcomes data sooner. However, classes would continue to be offered to new students throughout the first initial three years and the program would expand. The program would be reevaluated at the end of three years based on the results of the impact evaluation. The program would first recruit and train four teachers, two of whom speak French and two of whom speak Arabic in addition to English. These languages were because most children in Kampala who do not speak English as their native language are from French or Arabic-speaking countries. Students would be tested upon entrance for language skills, as well as perceptions of Uganda, their community, and the refugee experienced. They would start their English classes, while also having smaller instruction sessions in mother tongue classes. The para-formal curriculum would be taught after language classes have concluded for the day. Approximately 10 Ugandan national students from the community would be included for this purpose. These students would also be surveyed for their perceptions of refugees. After 10 months, the original fifty students would be transitioned in the formal system. They would be resurveyed and tested upon exit. Upon completion of a year in the formal system, they would be assessed again. When the evaluation is completed, the results should be used to inform and improve the program before larger-scale implementation. Based on the USAID cost estimates, this pilot program has an estimated cost of $15,000, which does not include the salaries of project administrators.
Conclusion

Urban refugee students represent a particularly vulnerable population in Kampala, Uganda. They lack access to important public services, such as education, a result of the financial limitations, discrimination, and language barriers they face as refugees. While many programs and policies addressing these issues have been implemented in Kampala and other refugee contexts, educational access and opportunities for urban refugee children of primary age remains low. By evaluating existing programs, we determined that addressing language barriers, coupled with the issue of discrimination, may be an effective and immediate way to increase urban refugees’ successful participation in schools. Given that they are likely to remain for longer than previously expected, their educational outcomes are increasingly relevant for Uganda as their host country. Drawing from examples of successful language programs and policies in Central and Eastern Europe, Sweden, South Africa, and Burundi, we proposed a policy that includes an English language program incorporating aspects of bilingual education and intercultural education. This program may offer a cost effective way to address the barriers to education for primary aged urban refugees in Kampala. It would provide English instruction, incorporating sessions in students’ mother tongue, as well as cultural education to help students transition into life in Kampala. The addition of intercultural education may help ease the discrimination seen amongst children, helping refugee children find relevance in the formal system. In Uganda, once English is mastered, refugee children have the potential to succeed. After completing his English language classes, Landry was sponsored to enter in a Ugandan primary school. After just one term, he became the third in his class. Landry continued to set ambitious goals for himself, and by the end of the school year, had become the number one student in his class (Jesuit Refugee Services, 2011). With access to education, Landry is likely
better equipped to find work upon graduation and be better able to provide for his family. In addition, if he remains to work in Uganda, he would also provide valuable service to the Uganda economy. Landry offers just one example of how refugees residing in urban Uganda could benefit from better and more accessible educational opportunities.

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