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SOCIAL NETWORKS AND INCOME GENERATION AMONG SELF-SETTLED SUDANESE REFUGEES IN KOBOKO

Abstract

This study, carried out in January 2007, examines the impact of social networks on income generation among self-settled Sudanese refugees living in Koboko, in North-West Uganda. A snowballing sampling technique has been used to identify respondents and in-depth interviews were used to collect data. The study aims to answer the research questions; what are the sources of income for refugees? What is the role of (or are the roles) of social networks in finding jobs? Are strong or weak links more important in this process? The study explores why refugees opt to move to Koboko instead of the refugee camps or why they later leave refugee camps, and examines how the now self-settled refugees generate income and what role social networks play in this process.

The study covers literature on the following themes; migration and displacement among refugees, social networks/social capital, social networks and income generation, livelihoods, and urban refugees' livelihoods.

The study reveals that refugees leave settlements because of security, jobs and education. Refugees generate income in various ways; paid employment, small businesses and through remittances. Of the 20 interviewees, majority attest to making money through social networks- mainly kin ties. A minority believe that social networks play an insignificant role in how they make money and emphasised that they got formal employment on merit. The research was carried out a year after the 2005 Comprehensive

Peace Agreement between the Sudanese People's Liberation Army and the government of Sudan. As a result, relative peace has returned to South Sudan and there is a need for skilled manpower, a point the respondents use when arguing that their qualifications and not social ties were responsible for their current jobs.

In conclusion, this study revealed that refugees pulled on their strong ties a lot more than on their weak ties to settle in and gain access to income generation, thus validating the hypothesis in this study that; the weaker the social ties, the less beneficial to income generation among refugees. The stronger the social ties the more beneficial to income generation among refugees.