

**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FOOD SECURITY AMONG REFUGEE COMMUNITIES IN  
UGANDA; A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH WESTERN UGANDA**

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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN  
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## Declaration

I, AMBAYO John Gray hereby declare that the Final Research Project titled,

**“THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FOOD SECURITY AMONG REFUGEE  
COMMUNITIES IN UGANDA; A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH WESTERN UGANDA”**

is my original work and has not been submitted to any other University or Institution for  
award of a degree or any other qualification.

Signature:  **AMBAYO John Gray**

**Date:** April 29, 2024

## Approval

I certify that this Field Research Project titled, “THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FOOD SECURITY AMONG REFUGEE COMMUNITIES IN UGANDA; A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH WESTERN UGANDA” has been under my supervision and is now ready for submission to the school of postgraduate for examination.



**Joseph Jakisa Owor, PhD**

(Supervisor)

May 2, 2024

## **Dedication**

I sincerely dedicate this work to my lovely family (Prossy, Saviour and Patricia) who stood by me during this interesting and challenging career journey without forgetting my dear parents (Gabriel and Anjelina) who nurtured and disciplined me to always pray and trust God in life. In a special way I dedicate this work to adult learners who remain resolute to walk the path God has prepared for them. **Philippians 3:14**

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

COVID-19	Novel Coronavirus Disease
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CSA	Climate Smart Agriculture
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IDP	Internally Displaced People (Persons)
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IPC	The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
LMIC	Low- and Medium-Income Countries
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
RWC	Refugee Welfare Council
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme

## Abstract

Every human created in the image of God desires to live a better life in a flourishing world purposed by God. This is not the case with more than 1.5 million refugees who have been forced out of their countries mainly due to armed conflicts and ethnic violence. Uganda by 2024 is hosting the largest refugee population in Africa and the third largest in the world after Turkey and Pakistan. Majority of the refugees have fled from South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Somalia and Rwanda.

One of the main challenges facing refugees has been food insecurity which the government of Uganda with support from humanitarian organizations led by World Food Program (WFP) and Refugee Agency (UNHCR) have been addressing. However, the advent of COVID-19 introduced a complex layer and exacerbated food insecurity mainly in low- and medium-income countries and refugees among the vulnerable groups have been worst hit by the pandemic.

This study sought to examine the impact of COVID-19 on food security among the refugees with focus in South Western Uganda where majority of refugees have spent more than 5 years mainly depending on humanitarian food assistance for survival. The ultimate goal of the study is to provide both scholarly and practical solutions, based on experiences of refugees that would empower them to become resilient and self-reliant in terms of food security. Accordingly, the study was conducted in the renown refugee settlements of Kyangwali, Kyaka and Nakivale where 113 respondents that included 87 refugees, 23 humanitarian workers and 03 Government staff from the Office of Prime Minister (OPM) participated. A mixed research approach was used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data using survey, interview and focus group discussions (FGD).

The research findings show substantial deterioration of food security caused by the pandemic among the refugees mainly during lockdown periods. There were various challenges faced by refugees particularly vulnerable groups such as the elderly, women, children, pregnant and lactating mothers in accessing food due to COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, reduction of food assistance by WFP and loss of employment and income by some refugees. The inadequate food coupled with reduction in food rations compelled some refugees to resort to unhealthy coping strategies such as reduced meals, stealing, survival sex and family neglect. Despite these challenges, some refugees have to a small extent demonstrated resilience and creativity through backyard gardening, livestock rearing, use of compost manure, formation of farm group and engagement in small scale businesses to supplement on the little food ration.

For refugees to become self-reliant, holistic approach that involves women empowerment, continuous donor support, programme integration, promotion of local solutions and innovations by refugees, collaboration with key partners among others is recommended. Further research on food security in other settlements will add more value to the plight of refugees in transforming their lives.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Situation description

Uganda is a country in East Africa that hosts the largest refugee population on the African continent and the third highest worldwide after Turkey and Pakistan ((UNHCR, 2018)). Uganda's experience with refugees started during the Second World War when Europeans displaced by the war were settled on its territory (Gingyera-Pinycwa, 1998). These refugees included 7,000 prisoners of war mainly from Poland but also from Germany, Romania and Austria among others. They were settled at Nyabyeya in the present-day Masindi district and Kojja (Mpunge) in Mukono district.

Over time Uganda has hosted several refugees from neighboring countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan (Ahimbisibwe, 2017). The driving force for refugees has mainly been ethnic and armed conflicts that have plagued these countries. With a series of protracted conflicts in East Africa, the flow of refugees into Uganda has been endless resulting in protracted refugee situations, (UNHCR, 2004). The presence of refugees comes with challenges related to basic survival needs like food, shelter, health, social and environmental changes, security, political and diplomatic relations that influence the decisions and policies on refugees.

Available data on the Refugee Response Portal managed by Office of Prime Minister (OPM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) shows that by January 2024, Uganda has a total of 1,584,489 registered refugees. About 60% of these are from South Sudan while those from DRC constitute about 30%. At least 91% of the refugees are settled in 13 refugee settlements found in South Western Uganda, West Nile and Northern Uganda while 9% of refugees live in urban areas in Uganda. South Western Uganda hosts nearly half of the country's refugee population, living in the settlements of Nakivale, Oruchinga (Isingiro district), Kyaka (Kyegegwa district), Rwamwanja (Kamwenge district) and Kyangwali (Kikuube district). Some of the settlements such as Nakivale (established 1958), Rwamwanja (1964) and Kyangwali (1960) have been homes for refugees for decades.

Uganda has been praised for having progressive refugee policies. The refugees are given plots of land to grow some food, integrate into the host communities, they can seek employment, operate businesses and move freely in the country (Betts et al., 2017). The adoption of self-reliance strategy that metamorphosed into the Comprehensive Refugee

Response Framework – CRRF (2017) has been lauded as a progressive model and most generous in the world in addressing the needs of refugees. The CRRF is a multi-stakeholder coordination model on refugee matters focusing on humanitarian and development needs of both refugees and host communities. It embraces open borders, non-camp policies, free integration of refugees, equal access to government-provided social services, a chance to work and land allocation for farming and shelter (UNDP, 2018)

Despite Uganda's open-door policy for refugees, food security remains a major concern in various regions of Uganda, due to factors such as climate change, crop diseases and limited access to agricultural resources. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2014), food security exists when all people at all times have access to safe and nutritious food appropriate for culture and lifestyle. On the other hand, "food insecurity" refers to when people do not always have access to enough nutritious, safe food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life while also considering their food preferences. Food security must be examined across four pillars: availability of food (supply), accessibility/affordability (economic access to food), food utilization (food quality and safety), and stability over time.

Previous national food insecurity analysis reveals that 30% of Uganda's total population is facing some level of chronic food insecurity and that refugee households are much more vulnerable to food insecurity than host communities despite the country's progressive self-reliance initiatives for refugees (Development Pathways, 2020). A survey conducted in January 2020 just before the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic spread to Africa, reveals that 60% of the refugees in Uganda were facing moderate and acute food insecurity while 16% were severely food insecure at the time of the survey (Development Pathways, 2020). Refugee households have been highly dependent on food assistance mainly provided by United Nations World Food Programme – WFP (FAO, 2018)

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 and its subsequent global spread has introduced an unparalleled layer of complexity to the already precarious food situation experienced by refugees in Uganda. The pandemic, driven by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, has not only posed a direct health and socio-economic threat but has also disrupted virtually every facet of life within refugee settlements, with particularly acute repercussions for food security. (Bosak, 2021) in the study among refugees in Bidibidi refugee settlement in Yumbe district and urban refugees in Kampala, found food security deteriorated significantly

during the COVID-19 pandemic. Food availability was severely affected when WFP introduced food/cash ration cuts due to funding shortfalls.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, WFP was compelled to reduce the basic food assistance for all refugees in South Western Uganda by 40% while those in other settlements remained at 70% owing to funding shortfalls. This inadequate funding has caused devastating consequences for refugees in settlements (WFP Uganda, 2021). The WFP former Country Director-Uganda El-Khidir DALOUM in a report published by Michael Buchsbaum on December 22, 2020 made the following remark in relation to funding shortfall. "COVID-19 must not be an excuse for the world to turn its back on refugees at this terrible time. We appreciate that donors fully funded our refugee operation in Uganda in 2019 but right now we are unable to keep up even basic food assistance and the poorest will suffer the most as we have to cut still further."

The justification for ration cuts then contained in an unpublished communique, given during a joint briefing to refugees and local government leaders by WFP, UNHCR and OPM (Oct, 2021) for the disparity in food ration reduction, was that in South Western Uganda; food was cheap, the region has fertile soils and receives adequate rain fall for 2 seasons that support agricultural production. The communique further stated that refugees in South Western Uganda have spent more years in settlement and therefore relatively food secure compared to those in West Nile and Northern Uganda.

Since 2020, food ration reduction has been recurring and latest ration cuts in 2023 have seen the most vulnerable refugees and new arrivals receive only 60 per cent food rations, while the moderately vulnerable receive 30 per cent rations. The least vulnerable perceived as self-reliant households have been deleted from monthly food assistance given by WFP. The way vulnerability of households was assessed to determine the percentages of general food assistance from WFP, has generated several forms of discontent among refugees (The Humanitarian, 2023)

The joint survey report by (UNHCR/World Bank, (2021); found out that despite COVID-19 pandemic affected all people including host communities, refugees in Uganda have been worse affected in dimensions of key welfare such as employment, food security and mental health. An alarming increase in number of suicides particularly among young women, reduction in frequency of meals per day and other negative coping mechanisms such as

survival sex and child marriage were reportedly attributed to lack of income and reduction of food assistance/food insecurity. In South Western, higher number of suicide incidents were found to be in Rwamwanja and Kyangwali settlements.

The issues of food insecurity and forced migration are both major development challenges. To achieve food security is a specific goal in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG 2- Zero Hunger), and the international community's commitment to support and protect refugees is affirmed in the Global Compact on Refugees.

It is imperative to note that food is a life-sustaining gift of God, intended for all people. It is prima of human survival ordained by God (Genesis 1:28–30, 2:15). The need for a secure, reliable source of food is a repeated theme throughout the Bible. Joseph's famine story in Genesis 41: 25-54; 47:13-27 demonstrates God's intent to have food security for humankind. In Leviticus 25:1-19, God is shown as caring intimately for the primary need of his people for food to survive. He instructs humanity to live in a relationship of harmony with creation to ensure there is enough food for all. The Gospels show how food was central to Jesus Christ's ministry, sharing food to build relationships with others. The imagery of bread is at the heart of the Christian faith, sustaining body and soul.

While several studies have been conducted on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, there is paucity of information on the impact of COVID-19 on food security particularly among refugees in South Western Uganda. Without authentic research finding, it would be an assumption to think refugees in South Western have better food security. In light of the complex challenges posed by COVID-19, this study sought to examine the impact of COVID-19 on various dimensions of food security. It was further aimed at identifying and assess the effectiveness of coping mechanisms adopted by refugees. Understanding the intricacies of the impact of this pandemic would form basis for food security policy formulation as well contribute to refugee-centered interventions that would empower refugees to become resilient and self-reliant in the face of future crises similar to COVID-19.

1. Action Question: What kind of refugee-centered interventions and policy recommendations can be adopted to improve food security among refugee communities that would make them resilient and self-reliant in managing impact of future crises?

2. Central Research Question: How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected food security in refugee settlements in South-Western Uganda?
3. Subsidiary insight questions
  - a) What are the specific ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected food security in refugee settlements in South Western Uganda?
  - b) What coping strategies have refugee communities in South Western Uganda employed in response to the pandemic-induced challenges to food security, and how effective have these strategies been in addressing their food and nutritional needs?
  - c) What role have humanitarian organizations, government of Uganda, and community-based initiatives played in addressing the food security challenges exacerbated by COVID-19 among refugees in South-Western Uganda?
  - d) Which strategies and refugee-centered interventions can WFP and stakeholders adopt to empower refugees to become self-reliant in terms of food security?

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Background of refugee situation in Uganda

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates indicate more than 80 million people worldwide were forcefully displaced by the end of 2020 as a result of civil conflict, persecution, violence, human rights violations, natural disasters among other factors. By the year 2019, over 84 percent of the refugees are hosted by low or middle-income nations (UNHCR, 2019b). Majority of the refugee population are women and children (82 percent), around 56 percent of refugees are below the age of 15, while 25 percent are younger than 5 years of age.

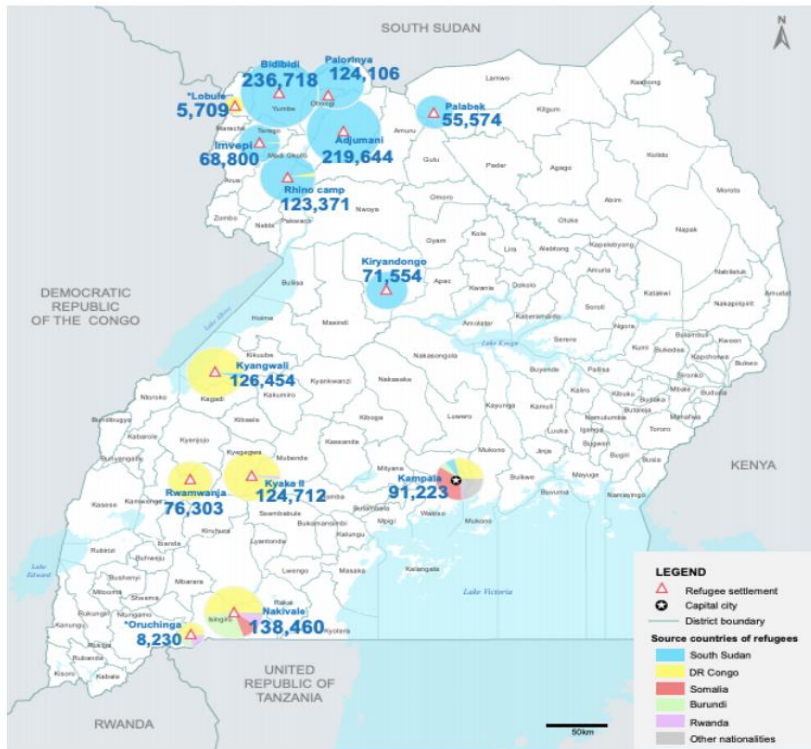
One of the major global challenges of humanity relates to food security that include refugees. In the 1990s, Heads of states of government or their representatives during the World Food Summit concluded that “Major refugee movements can cause food-security problems both among the refugees themselves and in the receiving areas” (UNHCR, quoted in (FAO, 1996). Several studies illustrate that the influx of refugees is associated with high levels of food insecurity in Liberia (WFP, 2011); in Burkina Faso, Chad, Liberia, and Niger (FAO, 2013).

According to UNHCR Annual Global Trends Report (UNHCR, 2018), Uganda is the third largest refugee hosting country in the world after Turkey and Pakistan and the largest in Africa. The updated data from the refugee response portal co-managed by the Office of Prime Minister (OPM)- Government of Uganda and UNHCR shows that Uganda by January 31, 2024 hosted a total of 1,584,489 refugees mainly coming from neighbouring countries and wider East African states of South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Somalia, Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea among others.

Uganda’s more than 70 years’ experience of hosting refugees dates back to her pre-independence period after Second World War, when Europeans displaced by the war were settled on its territory (Gingyera-Pinyewa, 1998). These refugees included 7,000 prisoners of war mainly from Poland but also from Germany, Romania and Austria among others. Uganda has since continued to receive several mass influxes of refugees following conflicts in neighboring countries including the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and the civil wars in DR Congo in 1996-1997 and 1998-2003 (Nabuguzi, 1993);(Murahashi, 2021). The largest influx

occurred between 2016-2017 where more than a million South Sudanese sought safety from the multi-sided civil war in South Sudan and fled to Uganda (UNHCR, 2017).

According to the World Bank (World Bank, 2016), “Uganda is faced with a large number of refugees caught in protracted situations, unable to return to their countries of origin, sometimes for decades”. It further argues that “most of the refugees in Uganda are in a situation of protracted displacement with limited prospects for a durable solution” (World Bank, (World Bank, 2016)). Examples of refugees trapped in a protracted refugee situation in Uganda mainly include Congolese, South Sudanese and Somalis. UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as “one in which refugees who have spent five or more years in a developing country, find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile. A refugee in this situation is often unable to break free from enforced reliance on external assistance” (UNHCR, 2004). These refugees have been mainly depending on humanitarian food assistance for basic food and nutritional needs, are hosted in 13 refugee settlements of Nakivale, Oruchinga, Rwamwanja, Kyaka, Kyangwali, Kiryandongo, Bidibidi, Lobule, Rhino Camp, Imvepi, Palorinya, Adjumani and Palabek.



*Figure 2.1: Map of Uganda showing the locations of refugee settlements*  
**Source:** Location and Population Distribution of Refugees in Uganda (UNHCR 2021).

Despite the protracted refugee situation and growing refugee population in Uganda, the government of Uganda has continued to pursue progressive policies under the self-reliance model to promote refugee integration and survival in the country (Betts et al., 2019). Uganda’s progressive approach started in 1951 when the Government of Uganda (GoU) signed the Refugee Convention as well as its 1967 protocol, committing to protect persons fleeing from persecution. The commitment was renewed in 1969 with the OAU Convention, granting *prima facie* refugee status to refugees fleeing from conflicts.

The enactment of the Uganda Refugee Act 2006 followed by its 2010 regulations; avails refugees opportunity to access social services like health, education, the freedom to move in the country, land allocated for agriculture and the right to work, making Uganda, the most lauded refugee-hosting country in the world (Betts et al., 2019). Uganda’s policies and programs for refugees facilitate the integration of refugees with host communities and increase self-sufficiency (Davis, 2019)

With the transition from the initial Self-Reliance Strategy for sustainability to Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework – CRRF launched in 2017, it is envisaged both humanitarian

and development needs of refugees and host communities would be adequately addressed. This CRRF approach progressively integrates refugees into shared social services, including public schools. There are no legal and policy restrictions and refugees can in principle enjoy social services at par with nationals. The CRRF is guided by a high-level policy making body called the Steering Group and has two refugee representatives. The Steering Group discusses matters relating to a comprehensive refugee response, while involving refugees in planning for activities as well as decision making (UNHCR, 2023).

Despite the hyped recognition of Uganda's progressive refugee model by the international community; the model has come under immense scrutiny and the achievements of the model could be lost, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and food insecurity among refugees in the country( Bosak, 2021). The researcher contends that, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused substantial deterioration of food security among refugees both in rural and urban areas. A considerable proportion of the refugees are acutely malnourished and immediate support is needed if the food security situation is not to deteriorate further. The major contributing factors to acute malnutrition in the refugee settlements include very poor food consumption both in quantity and quality. Lack of access to a diversified diet and poor meal frequency generally result from low food availability and access.

This study follows similar survey conducted in January 2020, just before the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic spread to Africa, which reveals that 60% of the refugees in Uganda were facing moderate acute food insecurity while 16% were severely food insecure at the time of the survey (Development Pathways, 2020) The ultimate objective of world food security should therefore be to ensure that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) in Uganda from June to August 2020, 32% of the refugees living in settlements were found to be in either crisis or emergency level of food insecurity (IPC, 2020)

## **2.2 The Four Pillars/Dimensions of Food Security**

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2014), food security exists when all people at all times have access to safe and nutritious food appropriate for culture and lifestyle. The term "food insecurity" refers to a situation in which people do not always have access to enough nutritious, safe food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy

life while also considering their food preferences. Food security must be examined across four pillars; physical availability of food, economic and physical access to food, food utilization, and stability over time. In order to understand and implement effective food system; the concept of food security should be used complementary with the concept of food environment which includes the five elements of proximity, convenience, availability, affordability and quality of food item.

Food availability refers to the supply side of food security, whether from households' own production or through trade, imports or food aid (Woller, et al; 2012) . It is defined by FAO as “the availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports (including food aid)” (FAO, 2006) Access to food depends on its physical existence, economic power (income or asset) required by a household or an individual to produce, exchange or purchase appropriate foods. Utilization is concerned with biological consumption as well as socio-economic dynamics of how people use food. Food utilization is concerned with an individual's dietary intake and his or her ability to absorb nutrients. Food stability, refers to the capacity of the household to cope with a shock (vulnerability) and to recover from it over time (resilience). There is food stability when food availability, access and utilization remain constant in the long term.

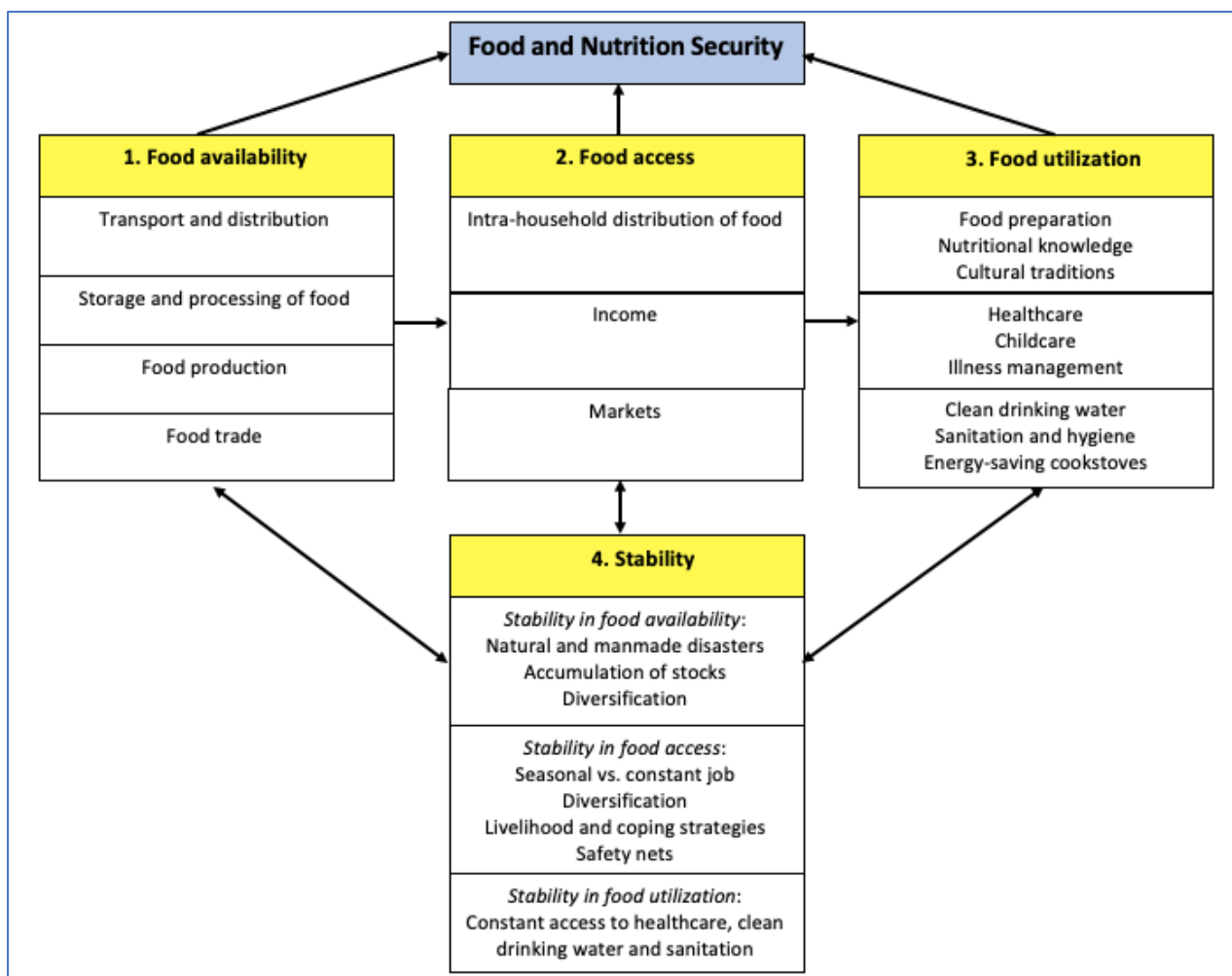


Figure 2.2: An illustration of the four pillars of food security

Source: The Four Dimensions of Food Security (Burchi et al. 2011:360).

### 2.3 Impact of COVID-19 on food security

The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), hereafter referred to as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), spread globally affecting people disproportionately. The corona virus strikes without considering the difference between rich and poor, black and white (race, ethnicity or nationality) and refugees were no exception. It has also provoked the global recession, the world economy's most severe crisis since the end of World War II (Smith & Wesselbaum, 2020). The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was declared a global pandemic on 11th March 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO). According to a study conducted by FAO (2022) on State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, the COVID-19 pandemic created major setbacks in registering any significant stride in realising Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 which targets ending hunger, and ensuring access to

adequate food for all (SDG Target 2.1), as well as eliminating all forms of malnutrition (SDG Target 2.2).

The COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching consequences globally, impacting various aspects of daily life, including food security, health, education and economies among others. The pandemic has exacerbated the food insecurity situation not only globally but regionally and national levels through several ways. For instance, transport restrictions imposed to slow the spread of COVID 19 hampered the movement of food and labour along supply chains, especially during the lock down period between March and June 2020 (Mugume & Muhumuza, 2021)

Due to uncertainty and global panic emanating from the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, many countries had to impose lockdowns. For the case of Uganda, this was implemented at varying levels of intensity. The first lockdown was one of the strictest implemented in the country. As a precautionary move, public gatherings for worship, weddings, rallies, and so on were suspended from the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020. Then all schools, universities, border crossings, all transportation and non-essential businesses were shut. This was done just as the first case of COVID-19 was officially confirmed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2020. From the 30<sup>th</sup>, a total nationwide curfew was further imposed from 7pm until 6:30am every day. By the end of March, a total of 44 covid-19 cases had been officially confirmed (Kansiime et al., 2021). The stringent lockdown disrupted livelihoods of both Ugandans and refugees including limiting access to food (Tumwesigye, et al; 2021)

Among the refugee community, the COVID-19 first known case was reported in Kyangwali refugee settlement on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020 when a male refugee aged 27 years from Maratatu zone succumbed to the virus on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2020 at Hoima Regional Referral Hospital. At least 18 contact persons were traced and admitted to Maratatu Health Center III after testing positive for the virus. During the first 6 months of the pandemic, Kyangwali refugee settlement in the western district of Kikuube was put under complete lockdown, after nearly 100 aid workers and refugees tested positive for COVID-19 (D'Orsi, 2020) Consequently, the restriction of movement and social interactions, has negatively impacted on food security for refugees in the settlement. Both internal and external small-scale food vendors were closed within the settlement limiting access to locally grown food usually sold in the open market.

Whereas these measures were necessary to mitigate the spread of the virus, non-compliance with the COVID-19 standard operating procedures (SOPs) initially was a big setback as many refugees and humanitarian workers did not have adequate knowledge about the virus. This created fear of contracting the disease and mistrust between humanitarian service providers and beneficiaries of General Food Assistance (GFA) provided by WFP. Some beneficiaries also failed to access their food or cash ration at the food distribution points during the lockdown for fear of exposure to the virus, while seeking food assistance at food distribution points. Most of those who had moved out of their settlement could not get back to collect their rations (Atamanov et al, 2021). Similarly, those who were quarantined due to COVID-19 or admitted to health facilities for other ailments and had no alternates could not access their ration. However, the research did not establish what happened to such non received ration and what mechanism would have helped such disadvantaged beneficiaries to access their ration later.

The COVID-19 induced food insecurity became evident when donors have been compelled to cut humanitarian fund for refugees. Due to insufficient funds, with a shortfall of \$137million, the World Food Program also announced a 30% reduction in food relief in April, 2020 (Okiror S, 2020). Funding shortfalls have inevitably forced reprioritization of activities including a reduction in food rations for the refugees. Refugees in Uganda had their food rations reduced from 12 Kgs per person in a household to 8Kgs per month. The result has been that some families have to go without food while others are forced into casual work to make ends meet.

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the refugees in Uganda were entitled to and given 100% food ration for each individual at household level. This was given either in-kind i.e. inform of food (e.g. maize, rice, beans, cooking oil, salt, sugar....) or cash. Many refugees were thus able to have basic food and save some cash. During the advent of COVID-19 in 2020, WFP has been forced to cut food assistance by 40% beginning with refugees in South Western Uganda (Babirye, 2021). The reporter contends that food ration cuts have caused significant decrease in food availability and access as most of the refugees have been dependent on humanitarian food support. This was worsened by introduction of double ration where refugees would get their ration once for every two months to minimize contact and transmission of the virus which later proved unsuccessful with time due to supply chain pipeline break mainly occasioned by inadequate funding.

Whereas WFP, UNHCR and Government (Office of Prime Minister-OPM) adopted food ration reduction based on the geographical prioritization as an interim measure, many local government leaders criticised the prioritization decision for not being realistic in addressing the food security and nutritional need of refugees. For instance, most district leaders of refugee hosting districts in South Western Uganda argued that; whereas the region receives adequate rainfall, refugees don't have enough land to cultivate to supplement their ration. This coupled with increasing food prices would lead to starvation (The Humanitarian, 2023).

Since 2020, food ration reduction has been recurring and latest ration cuts in 2023 have seen the most vulnerable refugees and new arrivals in the country receive only 60 per cent food rations, while the moderately vulnerable receive 30 per cent rations. The least vulnerable perceived as self-reliant households have been deleted from monthly food assistance given by WFP. In the new prioritisation policy, refugees are assigned different vulnerability levels – from Category 1 for the most vulnerable to Category 3 for those considered self-sufficient. The 4% of refugees in Category 3 now get nothing. The 82% deemed “moderately vulnerable” (Category 2) receive about 30% of WFP’s standard rations, and the 14% considered “highly vulnerable” receive 60% (The Humanitarian, 2024)

As food rations were cut, cash transfers were also reduced for refugees by WFP, initially from Uganda shillings 32,000 to 22,000 per person per month. For the large fraction of refugees engaged in the informal sector, surviving hand-to-mouth through activities such as Village Savings and Loans Associations, quarry work, taxi operation, motorcycle riding (Boda-Boda), hawking, pottery, digging other people’s gardens for day-by-day payment, etc. These cuts substantially impacted on food availability and access due to reduced purchasing power of refugees (RPL, 2020). Akin to income losses, the COVID-19 containment measures equally created employment shocks through the closure of various businesses and associated job losses (Mahmud & Riley, 2021)

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2023) highlighted the impact of underfunding on food security for refugees stating that 62% of refugees in South Western Uganda are food insecure. The Agency projects further ration cuts due to funding shortfalls which would result into 50% reduction for Maternal Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) leading to increased malnutrition among children. Given the recurring funding shortfall, further food ration

reduction could exacerbate food insecurity that would likely increase malnutrition among young children, school drop out of learners as well negatively affect the health of mothers among the negative effects.

Another recurrent issue highlighted by some researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic is that female-headed refugee households generally have been hit harder than male-headed refugee household by the loss of livelihoods. This has generally been attributed to gender gap in educational attainment which entails that women and particularly single mothers are more dependent on insecure informal employment opportunities than their male counterparts (World Bank, 2021) (NRC, 2020). During COVID-19 pandemic, most of those employed in the informal sector were either rendered jobless or their small businesses were closed resulting in loss of income and reduced ability to purchase food.

The report by NRC further postulates that, the effects of an unfunded humanitarian response, loss of livelihood, high inflation and food ration cuts can have long-term consequences for a country's development. Malnourished children, for example, may grow up with physical and cognitive impairments that limit their potential and productivity as adults. Meanwhile, poor living conditions may push the most vulnerable families and individuals into negative coping mechanisms.

In general, COVID-19 lockdowns disrupted the African sense of community solidarity on food security and other social safety nets. Social isolation, financial insecurity due to joblessness, or reduced working hours led to stress, frustration, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, and depression. However, COVID-19 also brought families together to appreciate the gift of life amidst challenges. The researchers found that among African migrants in Australia and New South Wales, holding on to religion and faith was a key coping mechanism, followed by indulging in self-care practices such as good hand hygiene, exercise, Yoga, meditation, sleep, and limited interaction with social media. (Atamanov, 2021)

In relation to food security, available literature reveals that COVID-19 has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and challenges faced by refugees in relation to food security making it harder for them to access adequate and nutritious food. With continued food ration reduction due to funding shortfalls, women, pregnant and lactating mothers, the elderly and children have by and large suffered from food insecurity induced by the pandemic. To overcome

COVID-19 induced food insecurity, refugees resorted to various initiatives and strategies as shown in some of the literature below.

#### **2.4 The coping strategies adopted by refugees in response to food insecurity induced by COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled many people including refugees to crises level of survival, who have since resorted to desperate means to meet their basic food and nutritional needs. While some refugees adopted positive coping strategies which are socially acceptable, several other coping mechanisms have been described as negative and undignified sources of livelihoods for humankind by researchers and humanitarian workers. The following literature provides insights into some of the coping approaches and initiatives adopted by refugees.

Coping strategies are series of strategic acts based on a conscious assessment of alternative plans of action. Within the limited options people sometimes have, households in a poor socioeconomic position choose the plans of action that are proportionately the most useful to them. This does not necessarily mean these plans of action always serve the purpose they were intended to serve (Snel and Staring, 2001). Coping mechanisms are therefore actions performed by individuals and households to solve any issue that they perceive as problematic.

In a joint survey conducted by UNHCR and World Bank (2021), COVID-19 was identified as an exacerbator of food and nutrition insecurity. Some refugees in Uganda as a consequence of ration reduction, resorted to negative coping strategies that included but not limited to reducing the number of daily meals, survival sex, child marriage, domestic violence, theft of food crops from host community. The finding correlates with the evidence adduced by World Economic Forum (2018) that; refugee women and children are particularly at risk of violence, sexual exploitation, and abuse as individuals and families are forced to seek help from others who take advantage based on their vulnerability. This kind of condition undermines food security as a fundamental human right for everyone.

The survey also found the total number of attempted and completed suicides among refugees in 2020 increased by 129 per cent compared to 2019, with a total of 347 suicide incidents in 2020. Data on suicides from the first quarter of 2021 are equally worrying – with 76 recorded incidents, compared to 68 in the same period of 2020. Most cases concern young women affected by gender-based violence. These incidents were mainly attributed to lack of income

and food insecurity. The report recommends alternative sources of livelihood and social protection to be explored to mitigate food insecurity.

Relatedly, the Refugee Law Project-Uganda (RLP, 2020) reported that through interaction with group leaders across refugee settlements, increased alcohol consumption was reportedly employed as a coping mechanism during the pandemic mainly by men. According to some leaders, this was further contributed to domestic violence and gender-based violence as the little resources reserved to push households through the lockdown was diverted into alcohol consumption. The group leaders also noted with concern, corresponding rise in the number of child marriages and other forms of child abuse in and around refugee settlements. For instance, some refugee families in Kiryandongo settlement were forced to ‘trade’ their daughters for food items and money or send them to men and boys who could provide food for them.

The most cited coping strategy among refugees is dietary change by reducing meal sizes, eating less diverse diets and skipping meals (Kansiime et al., 2021) In a study from Kiryandongo Settlement, it is for instance reported that 43% of the adults in the surveyed refugee households were having one or more days in each week without eating any food. This situation is not different from refugees in Lebanon who resorted to eating cheaper foods or going days without eating as a coping mechanism (ACF, 2020) This predicament not only increased their vulnerability to diseases, it further reduced their productivity and resilience to cope with the pandemic.

Similarly, (Zhang et al, 2022) in a case study of impact of COVID-19 on food security in Ethiopia contend that, the pandemic has disrupted the food value chain through factor market, production, transportation, and buying behaviors, further influencing food prices and availability negatively. Households already vulnerable such as refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are among those at high risk of food insecurity and worst affected by COVID-19. Eating less frequently and avoiding the purchase of expensive but nutritious foods were reported as coping methods by IDPs and refugees. While staples such as white flour were the highest in their diets; eggs, meat, and dairy products were reduced or completely avoided by these households due to high prices. The researcher recommends that examining causes of food insecurity require cognizance of other factors as COVID-19 only worsened the food security situation.

Another significant coping approach adopted by some refugees has been reliance on social networks and safety nets. They borrowed money from family members in the diaspora (remittances), neighbours, saving groups or loan associations. According to survey done by (World Bank, 2020) about 50 percent of refugee households in Uganda had to borrow money to face the COVID-19 emergency and acquaintances such as neighbours and friends were the main sources. The survey found that about 66 percent of refugee households borrowed money in the South Western region compared to 53 percent in Kampala and 38 percent in the West Nile region. The main purpose for borrowing money was to buy food though others also spent on health and other basic needs. However, the borrowing came with some challenges that included the lockdown where movements were restricted, fear of contracting the virus and some creditors couldn't trust their clients on pay-back period for loans.

According to report by Refugee Law Project in Uganda (2020), the COVID-19 lockdown and its associated curfew interrupted agricultural production and related services and refugees were not spared. For refugees, the 30X30m plots of land allocated by the government to refugees is insufficient to complement the relief food provided by the World Food Programme (WFP). As a coping mechanism, some refugees partnered with friendly host communities for additional land to support farming activities. However, this involved traveling some distance, and given the complexity of the curfew, this activity was only manageable by a few refugees.

The report of the Refugee Law Project is in consonance with the reporting by (Ahaibwe, and Ntale, 2018). According to the duo "Land size per refugee household has already been reduced from 50 × 50 m to about 30 × 30 m in order to accommodate new arrivals." This situation gets worse with the continuous influx of refugees fleeing conflicts in neighbouring countries. Reducing the size of land given to refugees will negatively affect the self-reliance strategy where refugees are required to grow their own food and supplement the rations distributed by humanitarian agencies.

Beyond the binary 'negative and positive' coping strategies, refugees have used their experience with crises and social networks to survive the pandemic amidst meagre resources and support from humanitarian organizations and the government. While the research findings demonstrate some initiatives by refugees and resilience in the face of food

insecurity, it is worth examining how refugees in South Western Uganda adapted to meeting their basic food and nutritional needs during the pandemic.

## **2.5 The role played by Governments, Humanitarian Organizations and Community-Based Organizations in response to food insecurity induced by COVID-19**

The onset and advance of COVID-19 pandemic in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) was characterized by, trade-offs between containing the spread of the virus and avoiding catastrophic economic and food security issues that disproportionately affected the world's poor and hungry. During crises of such overwhelming magnitude, the role of leaders is critical in meeting the basic needs as well as providing direction to their followers (constituents). Thus, in refugee response framework, the government, humanitarian organizations and community are mandated to provide leadership to refugees and ensure food security. Relatedly, many governments across the globe embarked on safety and health measures by developing regulatory framework to safeguard their respective citizens and people living within the respective countries. Many countries and states closed their borders and restricted movement both internally and externally (Moyo et al., 2021)

Amidst the devastating pace of COVID-19, the former Executive Director of United Nations World Food Program (WFP) David Beasley in a brief entitled “Protection of civilians from conflict-induced hunger” to the UN Security Council in April 2020, had warned of the “hunger pandemic” that would afflict the globe. Those at elevated risk of starvation are vulnerable group that include women, children, the elderly in LMICs (Khorsandi, 2020). One of the principles of refugee protection is burden sharing by states. According to Amnesty International, “In line with international human rights and refugee law, states have obligations to provide support to each other to host refugees. This is known as the principle of responsibility sharing” (Amnesty International, 2017). This principle makes it possible to ease the burden of hosting refugees, especially in developing countries.

Widespread food insecurity has emerged as a global humanitarian crisis during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In response, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies have mobilized to address the food

security needs among different populations (Dodd et al., 2023). As early as April 2020, many governments and various development and relief agencies began rolling out and augmenting relief support to households. This took the form of cash transfers, in-kind transfers (food support and school feeding), loans and credit schemes, public work programmes, and utility waivers mainly for electricity and water (Gentilini, Almenfi, Orton, 2021). Across LMICs, food security challenges are disproportionately felt by vulnerable populations, such as children, women, older adults, informal workers, and migrants and refugees, who may not have the financial or social capital to buffer against the shocks created by the pandemic (Crush & Batters, 2016)

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Uganda (GoU) has acted swiftly to halt the spread of the virus within its borders. This has resulted in significant restrictions to movement on citizens and residents, which has resulted in food price hikes, reduced income, and growing food insecurity. With several measures and televised Presidential directives, the #StayHome mantra impacted lives in various ways and refugees have not been spared. While other governments like South Africa provided relief food for refugees and migrants, Uganda's philanthropic role was more evident in relaxing border restrictions and partial lifting of lockdown to allow free movement of people including refugees. However, implementation of COVID-19 Presidential directives were marred by corruptions scandals (Were, 2020)

Similarly, Anguyo (2020) lends more credence to Were's assertion that the fight against COVID-19 exposed the danger of corruption. Anguyo contends that a supplementary budget of UGX 923bn allocated to fight COVID-19 was misappropriated by government officials including some Members of Parliament (MPs) who pocketed UGX 20 million each in the guise of creating awareness among the populace. Even then the planned relief food meant for the 1.5 million urban poor in Kampala was fraught with corruption scandal that involved irregular award of relief supply tenders, procurement of poor-quality maize and beans and distribution of food to 'non-deserving beneficiaries' by the Office of Prime Minister (OPM). There seems to be no evidence of any refugee having benefited from this arrangement by the government. Anguyo further postulates that, the 'politics of relief food' coincided with the electioneering period of 2021 in Uganda, where government directed any charitable support to the vulnerable people must be channeled through OPM in an effort to curtail the influence of opposition political parties.

In Uganda, civil society's role in refugee affairs continues to grow. For example, NGOs like Hunger Fighters Uganda (HFU), Alliance Forum for Development (AFOD) have interventions, programmes and projects in refugee settlements. A number of NGOs are implementing partners of WFP and UNHCR in the refugee settlements where they assist in providing assistance and services to the refugees (Ahimbisibwe, 2018)

Non-state actors, such as international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and UN agencies, play a key role in meeting the needs of vulnerable populations during humanitarian crises (Heyse et al., 2021). To respond to the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, non-state actors have enhanced their response to the ongoing and emerging needs of vulnerable populations, including through interventions aimed at food production and consumption. The role of the humanitarian sector in distributing food, productive agricultural inputs, and cash transfers, as well as providing technical assistance was highlighted in the UN's plan as crucial to sustaining food production and maintaining the purchasing power of vulnerable groups that include refugees throughout the pandemic.

The distribution of food aid was the most frequently implemented type of intervention and involved the distribution of dry food rations, hot meals for fleeing migrants, basic food baskets, and fruits and vegetables. Overall WFP the UN organization that never closed its operations throughout the world unlike other UN agencies and INGOs, implemented the most food assistance interventions (Dodd et al., 2021). Nutrition interventions were also, more common among UN agencies with the largest proportion of nutrition programs implemented by UNICEF.

Although most interventions focused on providing immediate humanitarian aid and addressing acute food insecurity, both NGOs and UN agencies also implemented programs focused on addressing broader food system issues, such as supporting local food production and the food supply chain. Interventions were frequently delivered in combination with other forms of aid, such as hygiene supplies, medication, personal protective equipment (PPE), and educational materials. In South Africa, for example, UNHCR provided refugees and asylum-seekers with

food parcels, cash assistance, legal assistance, and support for students to continue their education during the pandemic (UNHCR, 2020).

Technology was also used to meet the changing needs of populations as well as emerging public health guidelines. Adaptations to existing interventions included the introduction of different forms of technology aimed at reducing in-person contact with beneficiaries, such as online or mobile delivery of cash transfers, telephone monitoring, and online communications. Cash transfers were found to have improved food insecurity and dietary diversity in Liberia and Malawi where households that received cash transfers performed better on all metrics of food security (Aggarwal et al., 2022)

In the context of humanitarian crises, religious leaders are uniquely positioned to provide multiple forms of support such as physical resources, psychosocial and spiritual support in their communities as well as vulnerable groups like refugees. Indeed, previous research has pointed to how the geographic and social location of religious leaders in many communities, including remote areas, can create effective distribution systems for humanitarian aid (Gianisa, 2016).

Further, religious leaders are often regarded as trusted and influential members of communities, which can facilitate humanitarian aid responses, especially during times of uncertainty or when there is mistrust of government institutions. Historically, humanitarian intervention can be traced back to the period before 19<sup>th</sup> Century where the primary response during famine, drought and other natural disasters were based on religious belief (Rysaback-Smith, 2015). The charitable act of supporting the needy is not only practiced by Christians but also Muslims who term it as *Zakat*. The Bible teaches us the importance of sharing with those in need (Luke 3:10-11, Mathew 25:44-45, Isaiah 58:10, Galatians 6:10, Hebrew 13:16....). *Proverbs 22:9; "The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor"*.

In Philippines, religious leaders were instrumental in supporting communities during COVID-19. As part of the The Rapid Emergencies and Disasters Intervention (REDI), they worked in partnership with the International Care Ministries (ICM) to assess community needs and deliver food aid to over 5.3 million households. About 15,000 religious leaders actively engaged in monitoring, reporting, and addressing local emergency food insecurity

(Dodd et al., 2023). The study concludes that Disaster-response organizations (e.g., NGOs, governments) would benefit from regularly considering religious leaders as effective actors in community-based response efforts.

In Uganda, the churches are one of the actors with potential to assist refugees. For example, it was reported in the New Vision of 6th March 2018 that the Seventh Day Adventist Church was fundraising for Congolese refugees in Uganda (Mubiru A, 2018). The Catholic and Anglicans churches have also mobilized support for refugees. Caritas and Catholic relief services are both organizations of the Catholic Church that have provided humanitarian assistance to refugees in Uganda. The churches have also urged their followers to welcome refugees especially in the refugee hosting areas and live harmoniously with them as children of God.

The Bible underscores the important role-played by governments, humanitarian agencies and community-based organizations as good shepherds. In the context of food security, a good shepherd plays three (3) key roles namely; feeding the flock on nutritious food (both physical and spiritual food), securing the flock against adversaries (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic) and providing guidance and direction to the flock (capacity building/empowerment) (John 10:11-18). However, well-being is more than food alone and involves transformational development. *One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God* (Matthew 4:4).

## **2.6 Strategies and refugee-centered interventions that empower refugees to become self-reliant in terms of food security**

There are several strategies, policies and refugees centered interventions, if well designed and implemented can promote self-reliance in terms of food security among refugees. The below literature exemplifies some of these approaches and initiatives.

### **2.7 Local solutions to improve food security**

The refugee community despite the humanitarian assistance given by donors are capable, enterprising and industrious, adapting survival strategies and adjusting to changing circumstances in order to maximize opportunities available to them in exile (Dick, 2002) Dick who provides evidence to refute what (Gaim, 1985) has called ‘the myth of

dependency' among refugees, argues that humanitarian aid is necessary as a start-up but should not be used to breed dependency syndrome.

This myth is based on the assumption that living on handouts fosters a lack of motivation and willingness to work and take initiatives in order to earn an income and become self-sufficient. The researcher asserts that refugees can be part of the solution to their problems through knowledge sharing, commitment, entrepreneurship and teamwork. This was evident when Dick affirms that Liberian refugees in Ghana became self-reliant through local initiative and economic empowerment between the years 1990-2000.

In relation to food security, an integrated programme of food security and livelihoods conducted in three districts of Kayonza, Kirehe and Burera in Rwanda provides evidence of local solutions in improving food security. The intervention involved self-help groups of 15-20 participants who were among other areas trained in the use of compost and fertilizer, pest and disease control to improve crop yield, livestock rearing, savings and financial management. With one-time capital investment including agricultural inputs support, assistance with small livestock projects, provision of microloans and nutrition education, great improvement was made in food security. In a period of one-year, severe food insecurity among the 554 households decreased from 78% to 49% while food consumption score (FCS) increased from 48% to 64% (Nsabuwera et al, 2015)

Self-reliance model as a panacea to the protracted refugee food insecurity have yielded remarkable results in countries such as Angola, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Liberia amidst some shortcomings (Kuhlman, 2002). Many researchers including (Helen et al, 2002) agree that refugees are dynamic and responsive actors that are able to pursue food security and livelihoods through a multitude of pathways. Self-reliance is therefore believed to be a practical solution to protracted refugee situations. According to (Crisp, 2006), local solutions give the refugees the ability "to stand on their own and build their self-esteem". Through self-reliance strategy, refugees gain skills and knowledge that they will take back to their countries when they return and also leave behind sustainable structures at the host country (Dryden-Peterson & Hovel, 2004)

However, adopting local solution approach comes with challenges associated with attitudinal/mindset change, inadequate land size, lack of start-up capital, inadequate skills,

socio-cultural integration among others. In a study on refugee food self-reliance in Kyangwali refugee settlement in Uganda, ( Ayine. Tumwine & Kabumbuli, 2017) point out the afore mentioned distinct challenges associated with achieving food self-reliance among the refugees. Among the recommendations, the study calls on the authorities to allocate more land to refugees for diversified crop production levels to be attained. They further recommend the implementation of a vertical equity policy that will link food ration distributed to the refugee households' realistic food production levels.

A vital strategy to improve food security should also promote peaceful co-existence between refugees and host communities. Host countries need to provide refugees with documentation to allow them the same rights as other citizens so they can access basic necessities like education, healthcare, and employment. Such approaches improve self-reliance, mental health and provide training opportunities for refugees to build the gap between market demand and refugee skills, considering gender and other social and cultural contexts (UNHCR, 2019a)

For long, refugees have been looked at as a burden to host countries and source of insecurity to host communities. In Uganda, hostilities have been reported in some refugee hosting districts where refugees and host communities engaged in violent clashes that undermine local integration and harmonious co-existence. For instance, the World Bank notes that “in Nakivale and Rwamwanja refugee settlements, hostilities arose due to suspicion that refugees were being favoured by the government of Uganda at the expense of its citizens. In 2013, a settlement commandant was killed by members of the host population in Rwamwanja while reclaiming land from them to settle Congolese refugees” (World Bank, 2016). Refugees and host populations have also accused each other of grazing on others' land and destruction of crops by animals (World Bank, 2016)

Furthermore, refugees have an impact on the environment in the host areas. Refugees depend on the environment for firewood, construction poles, cultivation and fishing in lakes, rivers and swamps. This leads to environmental degradation especially where refugee numbers outnumber the available resources (Whitaker, 2002). One of the impacts of refugees in settlements is the cutting down of trees (Ahimbisibwe, 2015: 301). This can be observed in Nakivale, Oruchinga and Rwamwanja settlements in South Western Uganda. Environment degradation is one of causes of food insecurity that undermines effort towards food security.

Unlike the negative perception about refugees, (Jacobsen, 2002) contents that “refugees themselves bring human capital in the form of labour, skills and entrepreneurship and they are conduits of remittance flows”. This is similar to what (Whitaker, 2002) found in Tanzania, saying that “refugees are source of cheap labour for Tanzanian villages. Local farmers generally hired refugees to do agricultural work, but also tend to livestock. According to (Betts et al., 2017), evidence in the refugee settlements suggests that refugees are innovative and enterprising. They have skills, talents and aspirations and also contribute to build Uganda’s economy by exercising their purchasing power. Betts et al; argue that host countries need to tap into the talents, skills and resources of refugees by seeing them as opportunity rather than liability or burden.

## **2.8 Critical factors to consider in the design and implementation of food security**

Particular consideration in addressing food security should focus on the most vulnerable groups, households or individuals that include women, children, the elderly and those with disability. Refugee women and children are particularly at risk of violence, sexual exploitation, and abuse as individuals and families are forced to seek help from others who take advantage of them. Similarly, the elderly and persons with disabilities face barriers when it comes to accessing resources to meet their basic needs (World Economic Forum, 2018)).

The World Food Programme (WFP) in 2018 undertook food assistance intervention code named *Bamba Chakula* (Swahili for ‘get your food’) in the refugee camps of Kakuma, Kalobeyei and Dadaab in Kenya. This was aimed at scaling up cash-based transfer (CBT) in response to decrease in dietary diversity and reselling of in-kind food. Whereas the CBT coverage increased, the intervention registered negative impact such as the sorghum being disliked and sold by refugees, traders increased prices of other items due to cash given to refugees and mostly female households became indebted to traders. This intervention could have fallen short of the consideration for cultural diversity and the at-risk population in the food assistance modality.

Relatedly, (Matheson & McIntyre, 2014) postulate that gender roles are important in terms of household finances and food security. All over the world, women have a slightly higher prevalence of food insecurity compared to men. Yet generally, women are likely to prioritize food needs of spouses and children while compromising their own. Gender sensitive

programming in food security is therefore fundamental in addressing food insecurity at household level.

In relation to malnutrition, the 2020 Global Nutrition Report indicates that 149 million children less than five years of age are stunted, 50 million are wasted, and 40 million are overweight. The UN Refugee Agency (2020) in report on Nutrition and Food Security agrees that malnutrition is very common among refugee children. This finding correlates with the aspect of cultural consideration in food security interventions observed by (Haddad et al., 1996) who stated that lack of culturally available foods can destabilize cultural identity, affecting both physical and mental health.

Essentially, the role of partnership has been emphasized by researchers. Collaboration should be encouraged among partner organizations (Bohnet & Schmitz-Pranghe, 2019). Collaboration and partnership between governments, humanitarian organizations and community initiatives are essential in addressing the multifaceted challenges of food insecurity among refugees. To assess intervention efficacy, food security should be measured with a consistent tool. With the number of refugees in the world continuing to rise, further efforts are required to transition from acute aid such as food assistance to sustainability through diversified livelihood strategies.

## **2.9 Innovations to improve food security and nutrition**

Various innovations have been undertaken to improve food security particularly in developing countries. For instance, the irrigation schemes in Chidzadza, Burirano ward 4 and Chipinge in Zimbabwe have significantly increased food production, income and nutrition. Whereas the technologies come with costs, proper maintenance, attitudinal/mind set change, commitment by skilled farmers guarantee continuous food availability, income and nutrition of households (Jamba, 2021).

In Tanzania, (Mutabazi, 2014) stated that conservation agricultural methods if adopted can greatly improve food security. The use of cover crops, minimum tillage, compost/manure, terracing among others minimize soil degradation. He further says participatory approach ensures farmers form groups, establish experimental plots for practical learning, farmer exchange visits, finance literacy and training of trainers help build critical mass that empowers communities to fight food insecurity and malnutrition.

Sustainability of resources and safety in the food production line is a major issue globally. By 2050, it is expected that the global population will reach the 9.8 billion people, 2.4 billion people more that need to be fed (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015). Many agricultural researchers are now advocating for a shift from traditional farming to modern farming methods that take care of the environment, adaptive to climate change and friendly with limited arable land. Methods such as vertical farming which require small space with limited soil, hydroponic, greenhouse are being explored. These innovations though promising cannot be afforded by low income earners like refugees.

### **2.10 Key findings, recommendations and gaps from literature review**

From the above literature, it is apparent that the refugees face various challenges of food insecurity caused by inadequate food, cultural barriers, climate change, lack of income and limited access to land among others. Consequently, some people resorted to risky behaviours that continue to expose them to undignified lifestyle, diseases and imprisonment. Tackling food insecurity requires multi-faceted approach that include mind set change of beneficiaries, capacity building, availability of land, technological innovations, nature conservation and collaboration among key actors. However, the literature falls short of providing solutions to global challenges such as COVID-19 that paralyzes economies to the point of donors withdrawing humanitarian support for vulnerable people like the refugees.

In the context of Uganda in general and South Western Uganda in particular, there is limited evidence from the available literature on sustainable food security and livelihood diversifications that could effectively absorb the shocks such as COVID-19 and enhance resilience of households. Despite some level of interventions by government, humanitarian organizations and communities, the ultra-poor remain vulnerable to potential shocks. This formed the basis of this study that not only provide insight on impact of COVID-19 among refugees for scholars but can be a blue print for program design and implementation framework for food security.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The case study used a mixed research approach (qualitative and quantitative) to collect, analyse and present data. Both quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection were found crucial to provide an in-depth understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on food security, taking into account both associated challenges and potential solutions in refugee settlements. The approaches also helped in identifying limitations or gaps within the existing food security interventions which call for creative ways to tackle them. These methods further enabled the study to tease out the critical factors that influence the design and implementation of food security interventions as well as strategies and approaches that can be adopted to empower refugees to become self-reliant and sustaining in terms of food security.

### **3.2 Scope of the study**

The research was conducted in the three refugee settlements of Nakivale, Kyaka and Kyangwali located in South Western Uganda. These settlements were chosen because they have refugees of nearly all the ethnic groups hosted by Uganda and were beneficiaries of the lowest food ration reduction of 40% during the advent of COVID-19. Secondly, several media reports had persistently highlighted the plight of refugees facing food insecurity despite ongoing humanitarian interventions. Last but not least, each of these settlements has high refugee population of more than 100,000 people, some of who have lived more than 5 years in these settlements. Despite the reported land shortage, the settlements continue to receive more refugees (new arrivals) from the neighbouring countries.

A total of 113 respondents took part in the study. They included staff of Office of Prime Minister (OPM) the government entity responsible for all administrative and oversight responsibility of refugee operations in South West and Uganda in general. The refugees who are at the centre of this study were the majority (77%) because they have the practical experience that provided better insight into the impact of COVID-19 on food security. Various categories among them included the most vulnerable (women, youth, elderly and child headed household), community leaders and refugees involved in both on-farm and off-farm businesses and none-farm livelihood activities.

Staff of WFP, particularly the programme associates and assistants (PA), supply chain (SC), monitoring assistant (MA) and business support assistants (BSA) involved in verification of

beneficiaries and community engagement were selected as they had essential information in regards to programme design and implementation from WFP field level perspective. Relatedly, staff from UNHCR, Implementing Partners (Cooperating Partners - CPs) for general food assistance (GFA) and nutrition participated in the study as their respective experience and perspective in food security and other livelihood opportunities was instrumental.

### **3.3 Data collection methods**

The study employed survey, interview and focus group discussion as methods to get multiple but related data. Due to the low literacy level among the refugees, oral structured survey questionnaire was administered with support of two (2) research assistants for each settlement. The refugee leaders who included Refugee Welfare Councils (RWCs) and other group leaders were engaged through semi-structured interview. For staff from WFP, UNHCR and Implementing Partners, self-administered questionnaires were used. While face-face interview was used for OPM staff.

These methods were chosen not only because of low literacy levels among refugees, they offered opportunity for the respondents to freely share their experiences and express their ideas, opinion, attitude and values within limited time and cost. For instance, food security issues sometimes could bring out sensitive information related to negative coping mechanism such as survival sex which required confidentiality and anonymity of victim; hence survey was an appropriate tool for such information.

The interviews provided opportunity for respondents to express their views in their own words and it was also easy to clarify any ambiguity that would arise during the interaction. It offered a platform for the researcher to probe and gain further information through open-ended questions. Interviews further provided an opportunity of confidence building and trust between the researcher and the respondents in order to obtain authentic data from the respondents. Besides part of the data required to answer the research questions was subjective in nature, which made it ideal for interview method to be used offering comfort for respondents to share their experience and thoughts about COVID-19 in relation to food security. To further enrich the data, focus group discussions (FGD) were held with purposively selected individuals during food/ cash distribution at the final distribution point as well as local groups involved in self-help agricultural projects.

### **3.4 Sampling strategies**

To ensure quality and authentic data was collected, the study used purposive sampling method as well as simple random sampling. With support from OPM, humanitarian workers, refugee welfare council (RWC) and research assistants, a sample of 120 respondents was targeted to take part in the study. However, the actual number of those who participated were 113 with non-response of 7 participants. The participants include three staff of OPM who serve as Assistant Settlement Commandants, 10 WFP staff, 04 UNHCR staff, 09 implementing partner staff and 87 refugees. The 30 refugee respondents (10 for each settlement) for oral survey were selected using simple random sampling with support from community engagement staff of WFP and Implementing Partners using their manifest as they came to collect their rations at the distribution points. A total of 15 refugees mainly leaders were sampled for interview (5 participants per settlement). A total of 42 refugees were selected using purposive sampling with support from refugee welfare council (RWC) and social protection workers for focus group discussions. Each settlement was allotted 15 slots of 5 participants per zone for the focus group discussion. The WFP, UNHCR and Implementing Partner staff were purposively selected with support from their respective team leaders.

*Table 3.1: Summary of categories of respondents*

S/No.	Method of Data Collection	Category of Respondents	Kyangwali Settlement	Kyaka Settlement	Nakivale Settlement	Target Sample size	Actual Number of respondents	Non-Response
1	Semi-structured Interview	Office of Prime Minister (OPM)- Government Leaders of refugee settlements	1	1	1	3	3	0
2	Self-Administered questionnaire	WFP staff (Programme Associates/ Assistants, Monitoring Assistants, Business Support Assistants – Asset Creation and Livelihoods (ACL/AMS), Business Support Assistant(BSA) - Beneficiary verification and community engagement	4	3	3	12	10	2
3	Self-Administered questionnaire	UNHCR Staff (Livelihood, Social protection and litigation)	2	1	1	6	4	2
4	Self-Administered questionnaire	Implementing/Cooperating Partners (General Food Assistance -GFA, Nutrition and Livelihood support).	3	3	3	9	9	0
5	Guided oral structured interview	Refugees (General)	10	10	10	30	30	0
6	Semi-structured Interview	Refugee leaders (Refugee Welfare Council - RWCs, Women Group Leaders and Youth Leaders	5	5	5	15	15	0
7	Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	Refugees (including pregnant and lactating women, elderly, child-headed families .....) - Each group of 5 refugees from 3 zones in each settlement	15	14	13	45	42	3
	<b>Total</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>7</b>

*Source: Primary research data (Sections A-E)*

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

To conduct this study, an introduction letter was obtained from Uganda Christian University (UCU) where the researcher has been a student and presented to the Commissioner Refugees at the Office of Prime Minister (OPM). The Commissioner acknowledged receipt and formally informed the respective Refugee Desk Officers (RDOs) and Settlement Commandants. To access respondents in the target settlements the authorization letter from the Commissioner Refugees was presented to the respective settlement commandants and Team Leaders of humanitarian workers who gave permission to the researcher and his team. At the beginning of the data collection process, the researcher sought informed consent from the respondents and made clear statement on the purpose of the research with assurance of confidentiality and anonymity where absolutely necessary. This created an atmosphere of

trust between the researcher and respondents. The researcher also treated all respondents with utmost dignity in order not to cause reputational damage. Adequate time was devoted to gain insight and familiarize with the “do no harm” principle of humanitarian work. Additionally, due diligence was taken to ensure all respondents including those in focus group discussion had respect for individual opinion and views.

### **3.6 Minimizing research bias**

Frist and foremost, two (2) research assistants for each refugee settlement were identified, inducted and facilitated in the raw data collection using the oral survey and interview of refugees. The researcher with support from multilingual interpreters fluent in Kiswahili, Kinyabwisha and Lingala languages, commonly spoken in the three refugee settlements conducted interviews and focus group discussions with the respondents. To further minimize bias, the researcher developed clear set of questions to ask and gave ample time for respondents to answer. One day was dedicated to explain the purpose of the study, role of research assistants, ethical issues, and the procedures to be followed. This was followed by one-week field work for data collection. During the data analysis and report writing, the researcher regularly consulted the Research Supervisor Dr. Joseph Owor whose professional guidance ensured research integrity and kept the research on the right track.

### **3.7 Pre-testing/piloting of questionnaires and interview questions**

This was done to ensure credible information is obtained from respondents. Prior to data collection, a pre-test was carried out to identify and clarify on errors in the questionnaires and possible ambiguities in the data collection process. A sample of 20 refugees and 09 humanitarian workers who did not take part in the final data collection were used in the pretest. The pretest also helped the team to agree on convenient timeframe and how to deal with emerging issues during data collection period. Some of the research assistants could not easily translate some concepts such as food security, prioritization in the local dialect, which had to be explained in simple terms and how to paraphrase some questions to ease comprehension by respondents. This played an important role in ensuring data collected remained reliable and valid.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Personal experience during data collection

The data collection process mainly involved face-face interaction with the respondents through surveys, interviews and focus group discussions that lasted for a week. This was necessary to obtain first-hand information direct from the participants. A total of 120 respondents were targeted but 113 were able to participate in the study. Out of the 113 respondents, 87 (77%) were refugees composed of community leaders, vulnerable groups that included women, elderly and disabled as well as those involved in small scale businesses.

The majority of the respondents among refugees were heads of households whose practical experience provided better insight into the impact of COVID-19 on food security. The researcher wanted to capture a wide view of the problem by listening to the perspective and experiences of the refugees during this period, how they are coping with inadequate food and come up with ideas on how to develop refugee-centred strategies to improve food security for the refugees. To ensure integrity of the process, the researcher remained overall supervisor of the entire data collection process with routine calls to check on other team members and responded to areas for clarification.

The researcher experienced delay in data collection which according to the research plan was meant to be done in February 2024 during the food and cash distribution cycle. This was due to humanitarian duty call that required him to be in Karamoja (North Eastern Uganda) where access to internet was limited. There was also minor delay experienced in securing approval from the Commissioner Refugees at OPM during data collection phase. However, this was sorted in April 2024 and data was collected, analysed and report compiled. I have learnt that research is an iterative process that require continuous reflection, commitment, revision, critical thinking and constructive feedback. It involves effective communication, paying attention to details and being ethical in contributing to advancement of knowledge and betterment of society.

Overall, it was both an insightful and empathetic experience to listen to both success stories and harrowing experiences of what refugees go through. The researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data from the respondents. During coding, a data set was

developed aligned to the subsidiary insight questions and responses were entered into excel spread sheet. For qualitative data; major themes were identified from the responses, categories were created based on the information provided and later assigned code before aligning to the respective subsidiary insight questions in the spread sheet. Data was later tallied, summarized and presented using tables, charts and graphs for easy interpretation.

*Table 4.1: Demographic characteristics of refugee respondents*

<b>Guided oral structured interview</b>				
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Refugee Settlement</b>			<b>Total</b>
	Kyangwali	Kyaka	Nakivale	
Female	6	5	6	<b>17</b>
Male	4	5	4	<b>13</b>
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Semi-structured interview</b>				
Female	2	3	4	<b>9</b>
Male	3	2	1	<b>6</b>
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Focus Group Discussion (FGD)</b>				
Female	9	7	8	<b>24</b>
Male	6	7	5	<b>18</b>
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Total number of refugee respondents</b>				
Female	17	15	18	<b>50</b>
Male	13	14	10	<b>37</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	15	19	15	<b>49</b>
Divorced	1	2	1	<b>4</b>
Separated	4	1	0	<b>5</b>
Cohabiting	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Widowed	5	4	5	<b>14</b>
Single (unmarried)	5	3	6	<b>14</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>87</b>

<b>Household/Family size</b>				
F1	3	2	4	<b>9</b>
F2	2	1	3	<b>6</b>
F3	5	4	3	<b>12</b>
F4	7	6	7	<b>20</b>
F5 and above	13	16	11	<b>40</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Category of Prioritization (Need Based Assistance)</b>				
Cat 1	6	8	5	<b>19</b>
Cat 2	19	15	16	<b>50</b>
Cat 3	5	6	4	<b>15</b>
New Arrival	0	0	3	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Duration (year) in the settlement</b>				
Less than 1 Year	0	0	3	<b>3</b>
1-2 years	5	2	4	<b>11</b>
3-4 years	8	5	9	<b>22</b>
5 years and above	17	22	12	<b>51</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Zones covered during FGD</b>				
1	Zone A - Kasonga	Mukondo	Rubondo	
2	Zone D - Nyamiganda & Rwenyawawa	Buliti	Base Camp	
3	Zone E- Maratatu	Kakoni	Juru	

**Source: Primary data (Survey, Interview and Focus Group Discussion), n=87**

A total of 87 (77%) refugees participated in the study. The number of female participants (50) were slightly higher than male (37). The study intended to establish indeed if female refugees are highly vulnerable and disproportionately affected by food insecurity compared to male yet they contribute significantly to improve household nutrition. This would further lend credence to the findings of Matheson and McIntyre (2014) who postulate that gender role is an important consideration in household finance and food security where women are more

likely to prioritize food needs of spouses and children while compromising their own. Therefore, gender-sensitive programming in food security is encouraged as premised on research finding. Majority of the respondents (49) were married while significant number were those widowed (14) and unmarried 14). In terms of family size, more respondents have 5 or more family members (46%) in their households and have stayed for 5 or more years (58%) in their respective settlements. Essential majority of the respondents are in a protracted state of refugees as defined by UNHCR (2004).

#### 4.2 Insight into Food Security situation among refugees before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic

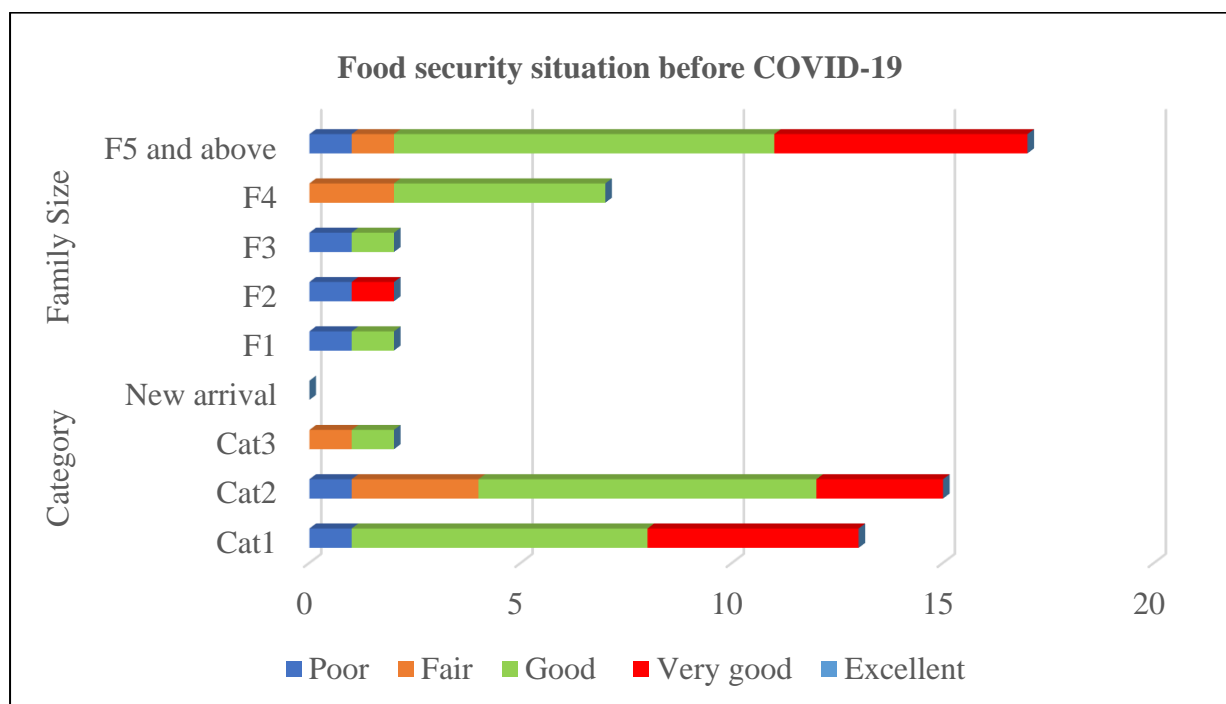


Figure 4.1. The rating of food security situation by refugee respondents before COVID-19  
 Source: Primary data (Section (A)SQ 2, n=30, nr = 0)

The majority of refugees sampled rated the food security situation before the COVID-19 pandemic as good while a few others who said it was very good. Whereas food insecurity existed before the pandemic, refugees were relatively better as they were receiving 100% food assistance and were able to supplement it with other livelihood sources. During FGD sessions, the respondents corroborated this when they said, they had freedom to tend to their gardens, small businesses and food/cash rations was better before the advent of the pandemic.

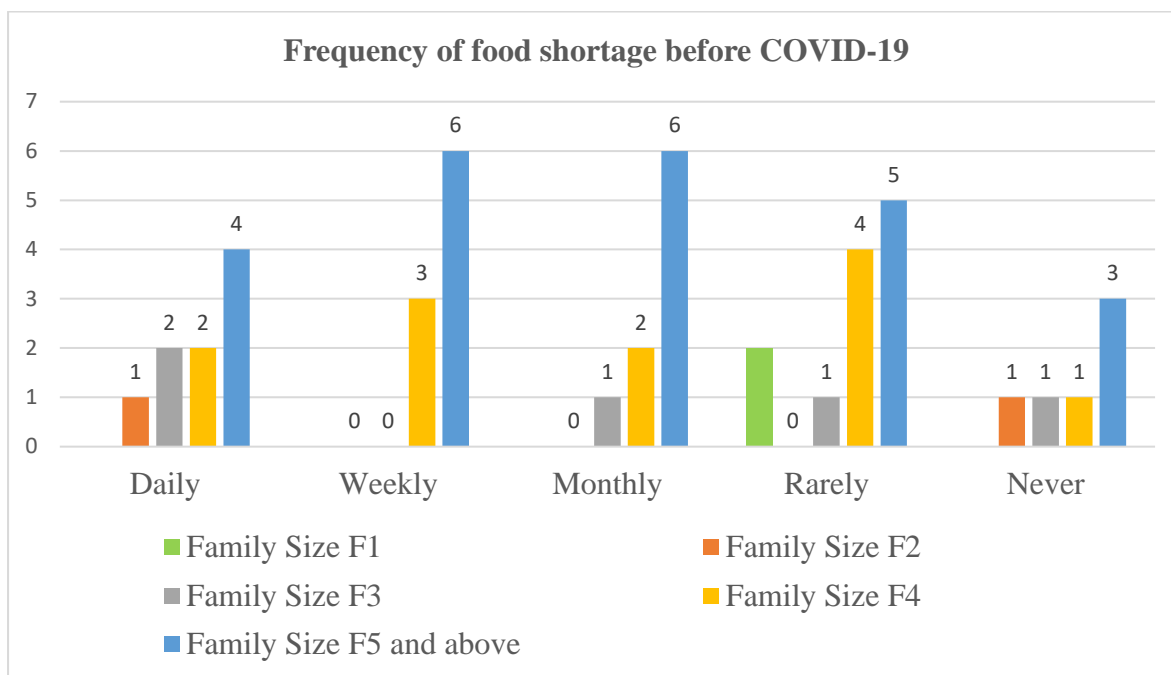


Figure 4.2. The frequency of food shortage/insufficiency experienced by refugees before COVID-19

Source: Primary data (Section (A) SQ3, Section (B) IQ3, n =45, nr =0)

There has been food shortage among refugees even before the pandemic though the frequency varied from household to household. Most food shortage affected families with more members in the household (Family sizes categories 4 and 5). The demand for food is normally relative to the size of the family. The bigger the family size, the more the food consumed, hence refugees with larger families and without food stock or stable income are vulnerable to food insecurity. Rare food shortage before COVID-19 was also reported by nearly all family sizes with exception of Family size 2 (F2).

Table 4.2. Availability and access to food variety by refugees before COVID-19

(i) Response	Refugee Settlement		
	Kyangwali	Kyaka	Nakivale
Yes	9	6	7
No	1	4	3
Non-Response (nr)	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>Source: Section (A) SQ4, n=30</b>		

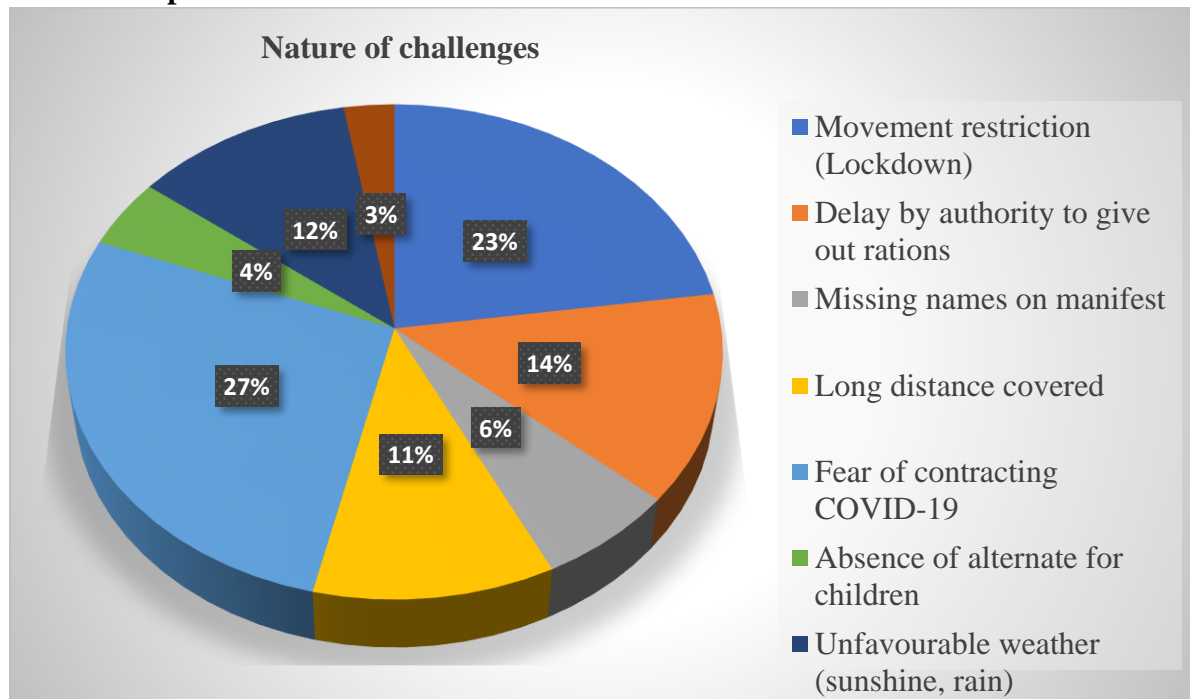
<b>(ii) Food variety</b>			
<b>Common food consumed</b>	<b>Common source</b>		
	<b>Own garden or household</b>	<b>market</b>	<b>Borrowed from Neighbour</b>
Cereals (e.g. Maize/posho, millet, rice, sorghum...)	8	6	1
Pulses (e.g. Bean, peas, groundnuts ....)	10	2	3
Tubers (e.g. sweet potatoes, cassava, Irish potatoes, yams....)	7	5	3
Fruits and Vegetables (e.g. Mangoes, avocados, banana, pineapples, tomatoes, cabbages, onions, eggplants, carrots....)	5	8	2
Animal Products (meat, milk, ghee, eggs, chicken, .....	3	9	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>12</b>

*Source: Primary data (Section (B): IQ 2, n=15)*

When asked if refugees had access to variety of food before the pandemic, majority of the respondents (22 out of 30) acknowledged having had access to variety of food while (8) participants said no. During interview, it was found that most of the food with exception of animal products was grown by the refugees. However, like animal products, more fruits and vegetables were bought from the markets. The respondents confirmed that there was limited variety of fruits locally grown by refugees and vegetable is scarce especially during dry season.

Those who did not grow their own food at least had purchasing power to buy from the markets. Overall, less food was borrowed from neighbors. This was attributed to the agrarian lifestyle of most refugees where every household was cultured to grow own food rather depend on others.

### 4.3 Main challenges faced by refugees in accessing food or cash rations during the COVID-19 pandemic



*Source: Primary data (Section (A) SQ5, Section (B) IQ4, Section (C) IQ2, Section (D) IQ2, n=110 (multiple answers allowed)*

Figure 4.3. *The common challenges faced in accessing food or cash rations*

During the study, respondents shared many challenges experienced by refugees during the COVID-19 that hindered their ability to access food or cash rations. Notably, majority (27%) of the responses indicated they feared to contract COVID-19 hence could not move to the food distribution points (FDP) to collect their rations. A female respondent who is a single parent with five children during FGD in Kyaka refugee settlement had this to say about the COVID -19 virus “We were told that the disease is deadly, as a single parent I feared to go for the first month for my ration. I imagined how I could die and leave my children to suffer. I decided to rely on my food stock until it ran dry before the next ration distribution cycle.”

Similar to the findings of Atamanov et al; (2021), movement restrictions (lockdown) limited refugees from accessing their rations amidst the rigorous enforcement of Presidential directives by the security agencies. Another male respondent from Kyaka during FGD said; “I recall in September 2020, we were arrested and detained by the police on our way to Rwamwanja settlement to get our rations. It was the following day when the Commandant Kyaka settlement ordered for our release and escort back to Kyaka without receiving our

rations. We survived on borrowed food from neighbors”. Other common challenges included harsh weather, long distance covered and more hours spent while receiving their rations. These conditions did not particularly favour pregnant and lactating women, those physically challenged and the elderly.

#### 4.4 Specific Impact of COVID-19 on food security among refugees

*Table 4.3 Decrease in Household Income*

Value	Gender		Total
	female	male	
Significant decrease	11	3	14
Moderate decrease	5	8	13
Less decrease	1	2	3
No Change	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>30</b>

*Source: Section (A) SQ6, n=30*

*Table 4.4. Increase in food prices and impact on affordability of food among refugees*

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Much less affordable	37	82%
Somewhat less affordable	8	18%
More affordable	0	0
No change	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: Section (A) SQ7, Section (B) IQ5, n= 45*

As summed up in Table 4.3 above, the loss of income affected both female and male refugees. While majority of the respondents sampled agreed there was decrease in income, female refugees experienced significant decrease in income compared to the male, most of who experienced moderate decrease. Most of the respondents during interview attributed the loss of income to the prolonged lockdown during the pandemic where businesses were closed and those earning through casual work had no work. This was made worse with ration reduction by WFP. A teary female respondent from Kyangwali settlement who had a small restaurant that earned her UGX 80,000-100,000 daily lost the business due to the pandemic.

While giving her testimony during interview she said “The day one refugee tested positive for COVID-19 was the worst day for me in the settlement. I had bought food stuff and was preparing lunch when rumors started circulating about a man who tested positive and that Commandant was planning to close the settlement. Nobody turned to eat from my restaurant that day and I had to pour the cooked food. That was the end of my business since I didn’t have capital to continue.”

Similar predicaments were shared by many respondents alluding to the fact that most of those earning some income were predominantly on the margins of informal sector and therefore living hand-mouth lifestyle. This finding correlates with that of Mahmud and Riley (2021) who stated that; the COVID-19 containment measures created employment shocks through the closure of various businesses and associated job losses resulting into loss of income. Many refugees lacked sustainable sources of livelihood and were exposed to food insecurity during the pandemic.

Related to loss of income is increase in food prices. Majority of the respondents (82%) acknowledged increase in prices for food stuff during the pandemic which made food less affordable by refugees in South Western Uganda. During interview with respondents, it was reported that OPM and humanitarian organizations like WFP and UNHCR established markets in all settlements in South Western Uganda. These markets are mainly operated by food vendors aimed at enhancing access to food and providing income to households. Whereas this was seen as a good initiative during the pandemic, many of the respondents said they didn’t have adequate money to buy food from the vendors. Consequently, some of these vendors closed business due to lack of effective demand as the little purchasing power of refugees waned during the pandemic.

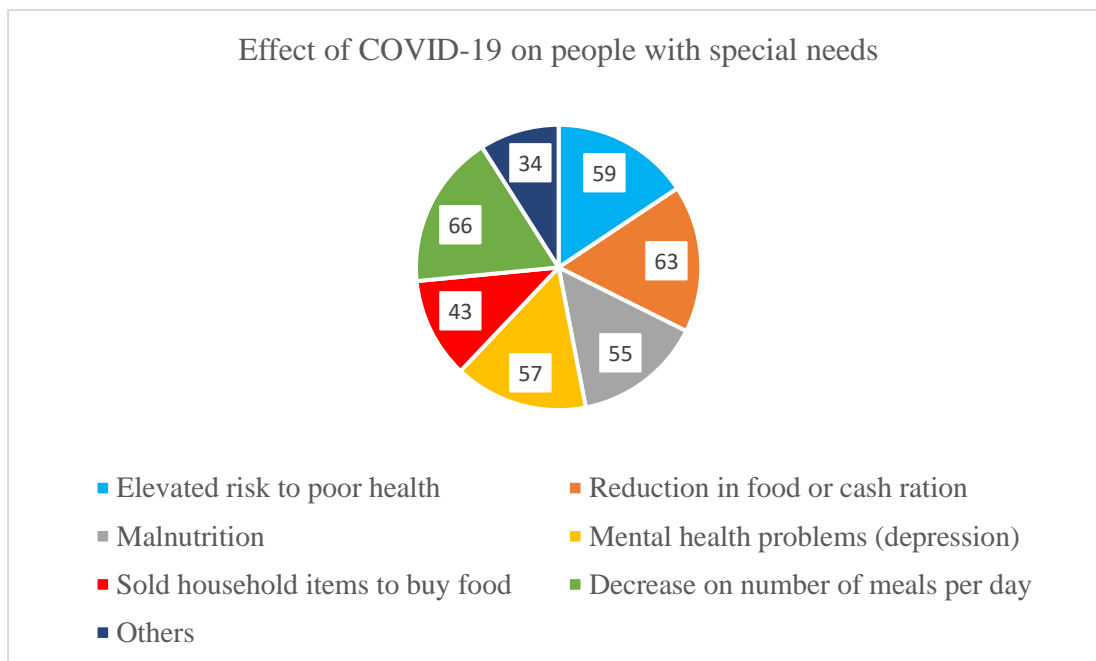
*Table 4.5. Decision making process in the use of cash/food ration among refugees*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Women	11	24%
Men	8	18%
Women and men decide together	21	47%
Women, men and children decide together	5	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: Primary data (Section (A) SQ8, Section (B) IQ6, n= 45)*

The study found significant participation of both men and women in decision making in the use of cash/food ration, something worth appreciating. According to the majority of respondents (47%), the decision on how to use the food or cash ration at household level is jointly made by women and men. There are also instances where either women or men solely made decisions on the use of ration. It is probably that some of these are households headed by single parents.

Decision on use of money at household level has been contentious issue among the poor people sometimes resulting into domestic violence. It is imperative to note that many research findings including by Ellis (2022), Iyanda, et al... (2019) partly attribute domestic violence to gender disparity where men often use their patriarchal power to muzzle or isolate women in decision making in families. It has also been observed that children are less involved in the decision making. No wonder the general belief in African society is that, opinion of children is inconsequential in affairs of managing families, yet they are the most vulnerable to malnutrition.



**Fig 4.4. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups (people with special needs - PSN)**  
**Source: Primary data (Section (B) IQ15, Section (c) FGD Q6, Section (D) IQ4, n=80)**  
**(Multiple answers allowed)**

As shown in fig 4.4, the vulnerable refugees such as people with disability, pregnant and lactating mothers, those with underlying health conditions, children and the elderly were significantly affected by the pandemic. Due to inability to access and afford adequate and

nutritious food, majority resorted to decreasing their daily intake of food. Many of them who largely depended on humanitarian food assistance were equally affected by the ration reduction and exposed to the risk of poor health with associated mental health problems. Notwithstanding ration reduction, some of the vulnerable households were compelled to sell some of their household items to buy food. As highlighted by UNHCR (2023), during COVID-19, the vulnerable individuals and groups were exposed to elevated risk of food insecurity which increased their susceptibility to various related health issues including malnutrition among children.

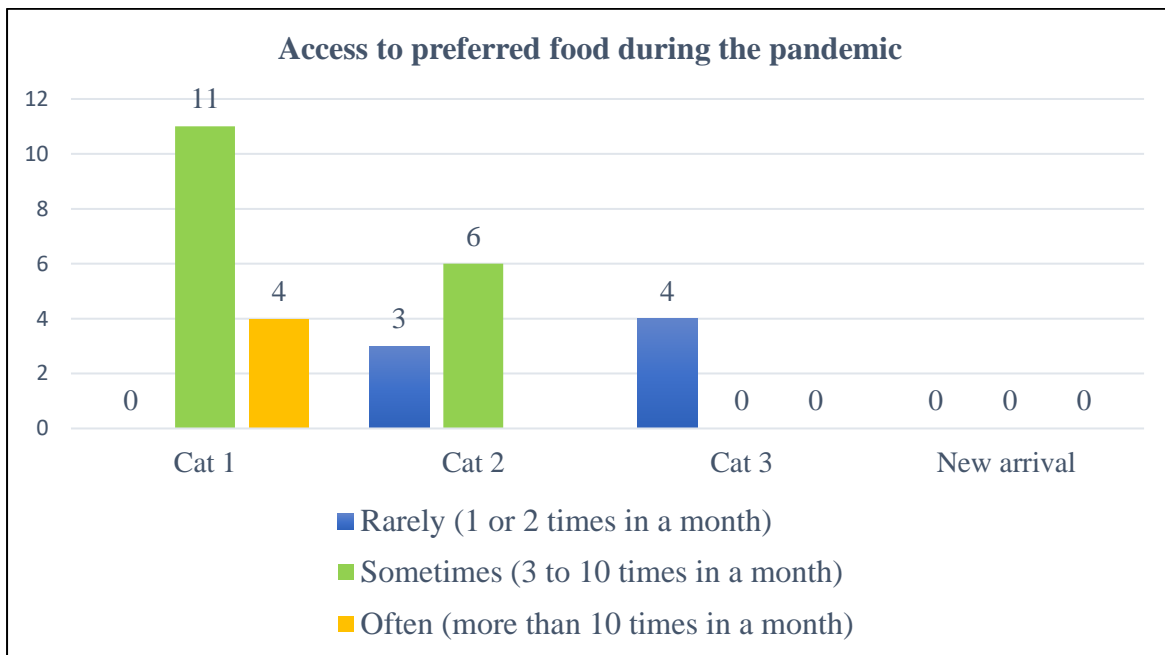


Figure 4.5. Inability by refugees to access preferred food due to lack of resources during the pandemic

Source: Primary data (Section (A) SQ10, n =30, Yes =28, No=2)

During the pandemic, the ability to access food of choice by refugees was limited due to lack of resources. Most of those affected are category 1 (most vulnerable) and category 2 (moderately vulnerable). While category 3 households who are perceived to be least vulnerable, rarely miss to have their preferred food. Whereas there has been food insecurity before the pandemic, access to variety of food deteriorated during the pandemic disproportionately affecting the refugees. This is akin to many researchers including Bosak (2021) who found out that food insecurity among refugees increased mainly due to reduced income opportunities during the lockdown and food assistance ration reduction.

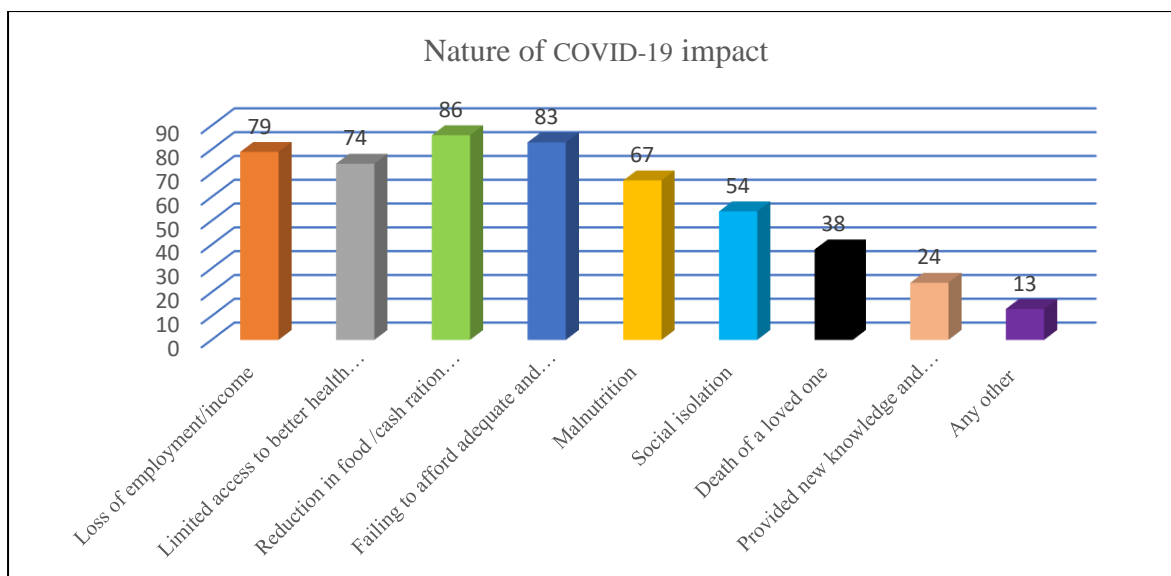


Figure 4.6. Common impact of COVID-19 on refugee life

**Source:** Section (A) SQ9, Section (B) IQ7, Section (c) FGD Q4, n=87 (Multiple answers allowed)

Among the common impact of COVID-19 in general, majority of the respondents said food assistance reduction was a major blow to them. This subsequently affected and made food availability as well as affordability challenging. Compounded by loss of employment/income and limited access to health services, many of the refugees failed to have access to adequate and nutritious food. Cases of malnutrition and social isolation became common and some household lost their loved ones due to the pandemic. The African cultural value of solidarity (“*Ubuntu*”) of sharing resources including during crisis was put to test by the pandemic as many families became selfish and adopted social distance norm to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. However, some of the refugees said COVID-19 to some extent provided opportunity for surviving in crises. People have to devise new means of meeting their food and basic needs in the ‘new normal’ culture created by the pandemic.

#### 4.5 Coping strategies employed in response to COVID-19 induced food insecurity

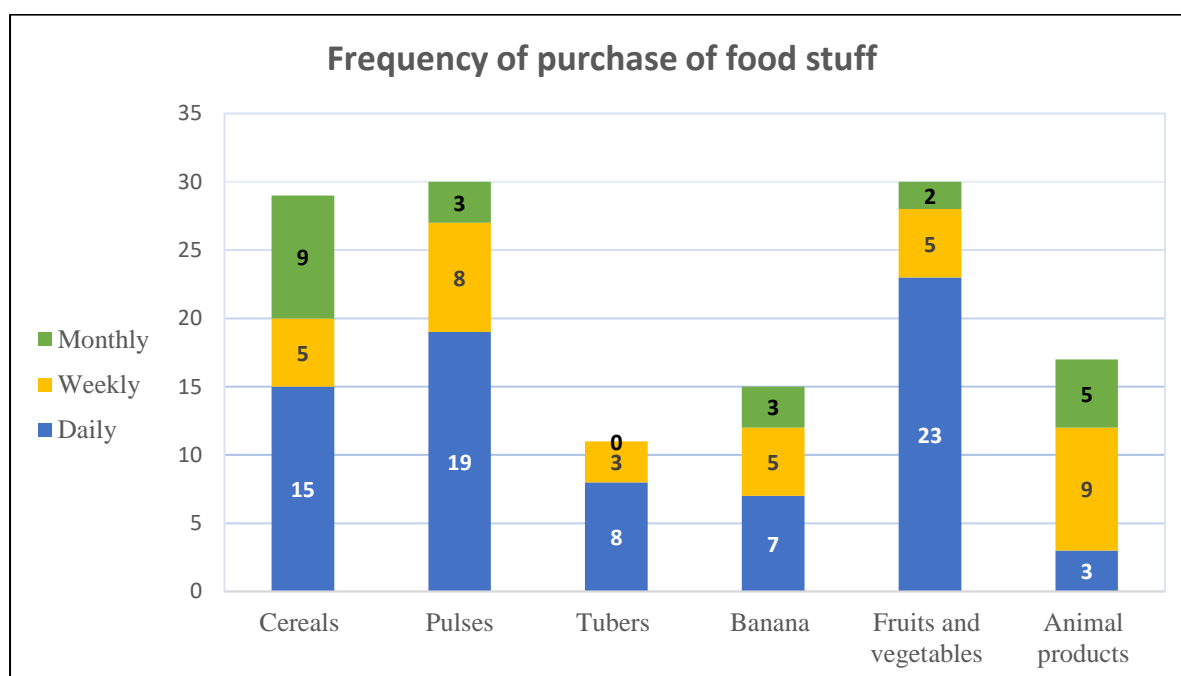
Table 4.6. Common coping mechanisms (initiatives) by refugees

Coping mechanism	Frequency
Reduced the number of meals eaten per day	63
Relied on less preferred, less expensive food	59
Reduced the portion size of meals for children	38
Borrowed food or money from friends, relatives or savings group	47

Reduced the quantity consumed by pregnant and or lactating mother	31
Sold household items to raise money for food	40
Casual work in host community	54
Hired land for cultivation from host community	36
Others (e.g. Crossing borders in search of food- Kakuma in Kenya)	17

**Source: Primary data (Section (A) SQ 11, Section (B) IQ8, Section (D) IQ5, n=68 (Multiple answers allowed)**

Among the various coping mechanisms, reduction of number of meals per day and reliance on less preferred, less expensive food were reportedly the most common in all refugee settlements in South Western Uganda. In a shocking narrative of coping mechanism, one of the respondents revealed how they trekked and used commuter taxis to travel from Kyaka settlement in Uganda to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. This follows further food ration reduction in Uganda while Kakuma refugee camp maintained relatively higher percentage of food ration for refugees. Unfortunately, they were not registered as new refugees in Kenya because their details were found to be on Uganda refugee register. He was among the over 1,000 refugees who were repatriated back to Uganda in 2023 after crossing to Kakuma in search of food. The distance between Kyaka and Kakuma is over 900km signifying the level of vulnerability and risk taken by refugees as a result of the pandemic.



*Figure 4.7. Reliance on markets for food stuff by refugees*

**Source: Primary data (Section (A) SQ 12, n=30 (multiple answers allowed)**

According to Fig 4.7, refugees buy various food stuff ranging from cereals (e.g. maize/posho, rice, millet, sorghum), pulses (e.g. beans, peas, ground nuts), tubers (e.g. sweet potatoes, cassava, Irish potatoes, yams), banana (e.g. matooke, bogoya, gonza), animal products (e.g. meat, milk, ghee, fish, chicken, eggs), fruits and vegetables which are essential for balanced diet. Majority of the respondents indicated that after lockdown was lifted, those who can afford buy these items mainly on daily and weekly basis. However, the study found that less food is bought on monthly basis indicating that most of the refugees live “hand-to-mouth” lifestyle without any sustainable stock of food.

This research could not easily ascertain if the quantity of food bought is adequate to feed the households. Going by the fact that refugees acknowledged reducing meals and relying on less expensive food, one can conclude that the quantity bought could have been insufficient for families. The less purchase of animal products by refugees in South Western Uganda correlates with the finding of Zhang et al; (2022) who found that nutritious animal products like meat, fish, eggs and dairy products were reduced or completely avoided by refugee households in Ethiopia due to high prices.

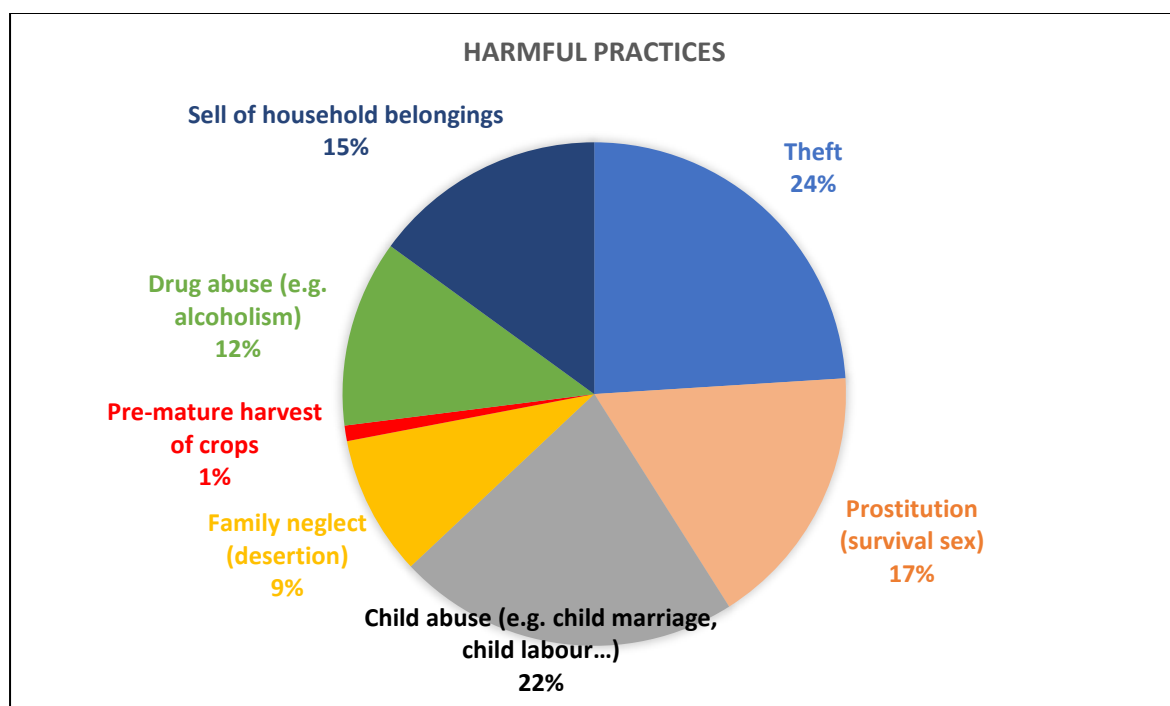


Fig 4.8. Culturally unacceptable behaviours or practices used by refugees to cope with COVID-19 induced food insecurity

Source: Primary data (Section (B) IQ10, Section (D) IQ5, n=38)

During the pandemic period, some refugees resorted to harmful practices that do not align with their cultural values. For instance, theft was reported to be common in all settlements

mainly perpetrated by the youth. Items stolen include food stuff from gardens of host community, merchandise, household items and food from the stores of humanitarian organizations such as WFP. Child abuse in form of child marriage and child labor were said to have increased as school going children were locked at home during the lockdown. Some women and young girls resorted to survival sex though many respondents were hesitant to discuss the manner in which this occurred. This could be due to the sensitivity and cultural norms that prohibit discussing sexual related information publicly.

However, one of the Refugee Welfare Council (RWC) leader was bold enough to report having handled complaints where some women were accused by their spouses of sleeping with other men. For the case of underage girls, they usually refer the matter to police. A joint report by World Bank and UNHCR (2021) alluded to the fact that child marriage and survival sex were some of the negative coping mechanisms adopted by some refugees mainly attributed to food assistance reduction and loss of income during the pandemic.

#### **4.6 Interventions by Government, Humanitarian organizations and community in addressing food insecurity since outbreak of COVID-19**

*Table 4.7. Role played by the Government and Humanitarian organizations in response to COVID-19 induced food insecurity*

<b>Type of intervention</b>	<b>Frequency of response</b>
Development of regulatory framework to prevent and mitigate spread of COVID-19	48
Coordination of livelihood interventions e.g. food assistance	23
Allocation of resources e.g. land to new arrivals	19
Food and cash distribution to refugees	55
Nutritional support (supplementary feeding and sensitization)	37
Capacity building of refugees in food productions, nutrition and income generation	29
Advocacy for donor support to refugees	21
Prioritization (Need Based Assistance)	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>

*Source: Primary data (Section (A) SQ13, Section (D) IQ6, Section (E) IQ 4, n=56)*

The government of Uganda through the Office of Prime Minister (OPM) and humanitarian organizations and NGOs played fundamental role during the pandemic. While the government mainly focused on protection of refugees and allocation of land to new arrivals, humanitarian agencies and NGOs devoted their efforts to ensure refugees have some food to survive on. Many respondents acknowledged the role played by WFP and UNHCR with their respective implementing partners who maintained their operations throughout the lockdown while other humanitarian agencies temporarily closed their offices in the settlements. Food and cash distribution, nutritional support by WFP was the main lifesaving activity while UNHCR provided educational materials, personal protective equipment (PPE) and continued to advocate for donor support to refugees.

#### 4.7 Insight in local solutions to improve food security

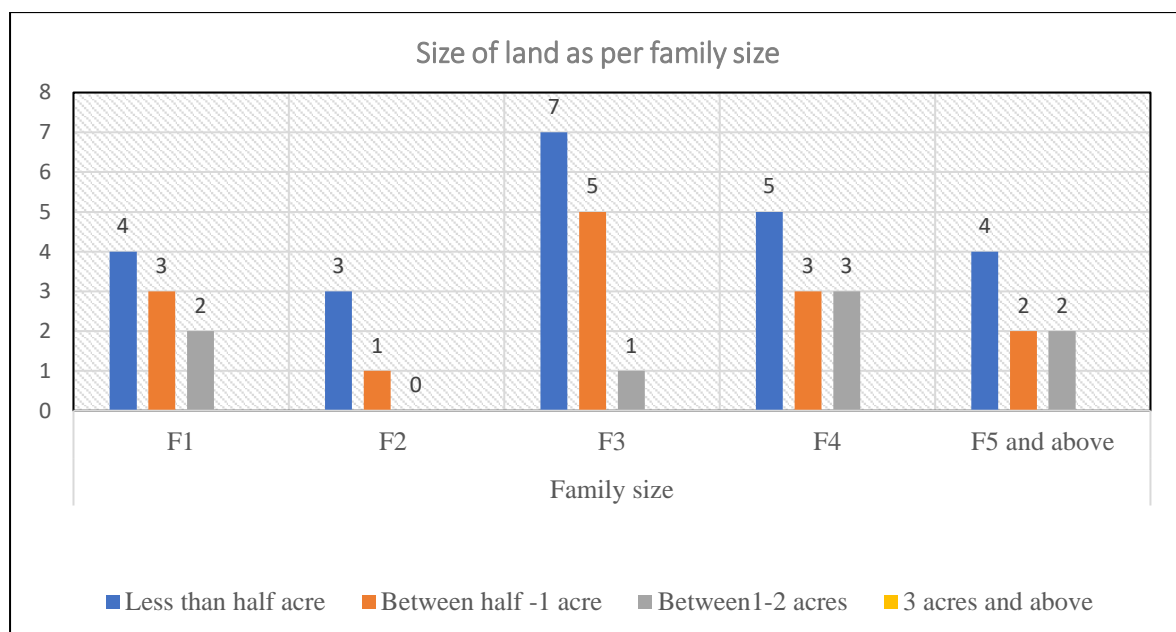


Figure 4.9. Access to agricultural land by refugees

Source: Primary data (Section (A) SQ14, Section (B) IQ 12, n=45)

In South Western Uganda, the refugee settlement land is owned by the government and superintended by OPM. Land being a primary factor of production is fundamental in achieving food security and Uganda's refugee response model has been globally applauded partly for availing land for shelter and cultivation to refugees. Improvement of food security requires access to arable land for food production and livestock rearing. The majority of the respondents (23) have less than half-acre piece of land that was allocated to them by Office of Prime Minister (OPM). The actual piece of land allocated to each household is 30 meters by

30 meters (30X30m) for both shelter and cultivation which is very small to produce sustainable food without agricultural and technology innovations.

None of the family sizes has 3 acres or more of land. During the interview with refugees, a female respondent in Nakivale refugee settlement who cultivates vegetables made this comment in relation to inadequate land for cultivation; “We would not be bothering WFP with the little food ration if we have enough land for cultivation. We are capable of producing enough food both for home consumption and for sale but land is not there”. Inadequate access to arable land has often been cited by researchers like Ayine, et al (2016), civil society and humanitarian organizations as one of the leading causes of food insecurity.

Based on this study, the responses from refugees paint a different picture of the situation on ground as regards the real meaning of availability of land for refugees in relation to self-reliance model. One of the Assistant Settlement Commandants responsible for security and allocation of land acknowledged the inadequate land for cultivation but added that land being inelastic could not match with the needs of increasing population of refugees in the settlements. “With continued influx of refugees, we cannot increase the size of land for households. Let us think of other ways to support and improve the livelihood of refugees” he said.

*Table 4.8. Common constraints (barriers) for refugees who engage in agriculture*

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lack of agricultural knowledge and skills	57	21%
Inadequate agricultural inputs (e.g. quality seed, tools, fertilizer....)	49	18%
Inadequate land for cultivation	65	24%
Poor post-harvest handling of food	36	13%
Climatic shocks (drought/low rainfall, flood.....)	33	12%
Negative attitude towards agriculture	21	8%
Others	11	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: Primary data (Section (A) SQ15, Section (B) IQ 13, Section (D) IQ 7, n=68 (Multiple answers allowed)*

Table 4.8 above provide insight into the common challenges faced by refugees who engage in agriculture. Majority of the respondents cited inadequate land as the key challenge (24%) faced by farmers. With limited agricultural knowledge and inadequate agricultural input, they are further confronted by climatic shocks that negatively affect their food production process.

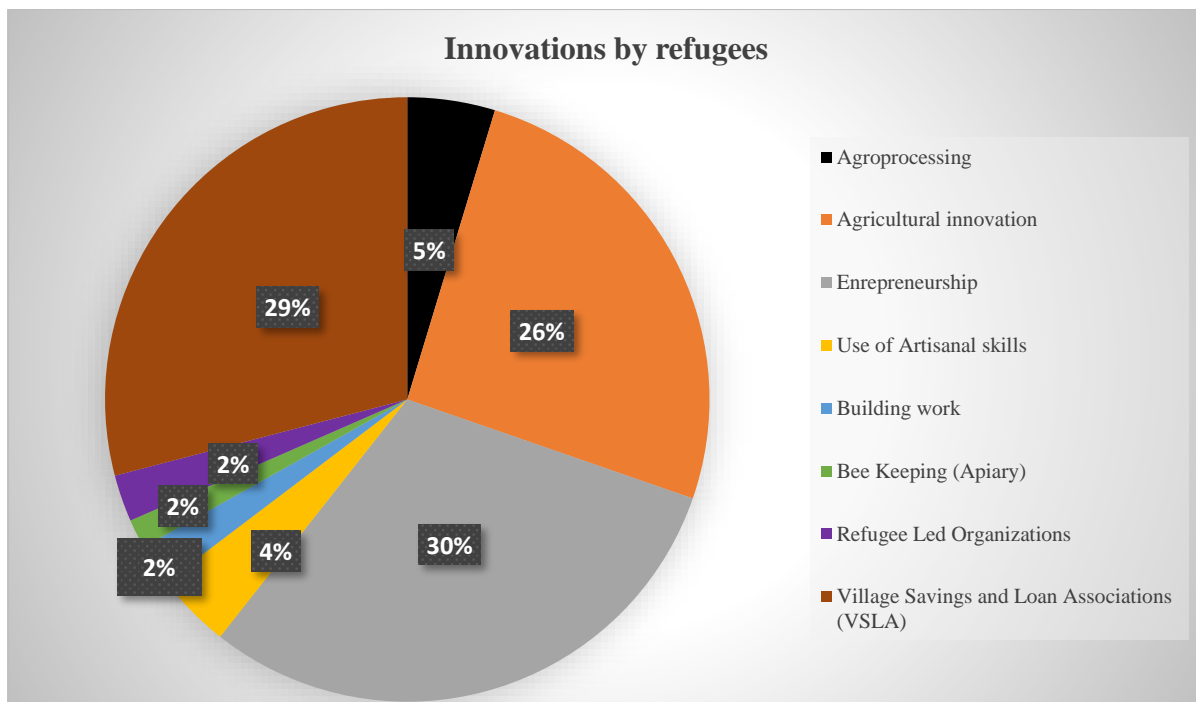


Figure 4.10. Innovations (initiatives) by refugee community in response to food insecurity exacerbated by COVID-19

Source: Primary data (Section (A) SQ 16, Section (B) IQ 9 and 14, Section (C) FGD 5 and 7, Section (D) IQ 8, n=110 (Multiple answers allowed)

The refugees have made several efforts in groups and as individuals towards improving food security despite the pandemic. Many of them are involved in both off-farm small scale businesses such as saloons, restaurants, retail shop, mobile money agents, tailoring, transport while others engage in on-farm activities like growing maize, beans, Irish potatoes, ground nuts and rearing goats, chicken, pigs, rabbits among others.

Backyard gardening has been adopted by many refugees as part of agricultural innovation to supplement domestic consumption. Compared to long maturing crops like cassava, maize, sorghum, or rice which require large piece of land for more yield; backyard gardens are mainly used for horticulture where quick maturing crops like vegetables are grown on relatively small piece of land. A farmer can harvest up to 3 planting seasons in a year, unlike cereals or tubers that can be grown once or utmost twice a year.

One of the agricultural innovations is the compost manure used to improve soil health. Many of the refugees in the study who have used compost manure acknowledged improvement in crop yields. One farmer in Nakivale settlement stated that he makes manure for both his crops and for sale using chaff, peelings and weeds. A truck load of compost manure fetches up to

Uganda Shillings two hundred fifty thousand shillings (UGX 250,000). He has been able to buy enough food for his family of 5 children and looks forward to a better technology that would boost his venture.

Some of the refugees in Kyaka settlement like Hodari Farm Group and Upendo Farmers in Kyangwali are growing mushroom for sale. Hodari is a Refugee-led organization (RLO) involved in mushroom production and value addition. Some of their products from mushroom include wine, smearing jelly and powder made out of mushroom. They employ mostly refugees leading to income generation for households as well as knowledge acquisition.

These creative ideas of diversification combined with entrepreneurial skills and finance literacy among others would greatly contribute to improving food security. One example of progressive farming groups mentioned in the study is in Rugaaga sub-county in Nakivale settlement established in 2020 during COVID-19 pandemic and has now installed solar powered irrigation system enabling them to produce food crops throughout the year. Part of the harvest is shared among members for family consumption while some would be sold and money saved in the group saving account. The group initially composed of 63 reportedly kept saving money from sales and individual contributions totalling to 18 million Uganda shillings (UGX 18,000,000) by end of the year 2021. By 2023, the group reportedly earned UGX 32,000,000 from the irrigation project supported by WFP.

From the findings, the adoption of local solutions to improve food security seems evident. The use of compost manure, backyard gardens, formation of farming groups and scaling up to solar irrigation among others show the creativity and capability refugees have to fend for themselves. However, inadequate land apparently waters down these progressive efforts of refugees. This finding somewhat correlates with the findings by Nsabuwera et al, (2015) where self-help agriculture project improved food security for local community in Rwanda.

#### **4.8 Refugee-centered Strategies and interventions to empower refugee to become self-reliant**

*Table 4.9. Strategies and initiatives to empower refugees to become food secure*

<b>Strategies and interventions</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Training on agricultural land use	17
Project co-design and implementation involving refugees	14

Environmental conservation	8
Introduction of livelihood and self-reliance topics in refugee schools	4
Post harvest handling	10
Agri-business	9
Adoption of climate smart techniques of food production	7
Evidence based programming	5
Access to financial and credit facilities	11
Partnership	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>

*Source: Primary data (Section (D) IQ 10, Section (E) IQ 5, n = 26)*

Training on agricultural land use, involvement of refugees in project design and implementation and partnership have been mentioned as key strategic components for self-reliance by the respondents. Lack of training or knowledge on best agricultural practices can be a stumbling block in empowerment of refugees. The respondents also agreed that refugee-centred interventions should have refugees involved in decision making process and implementation of food security projects. Collaboration with other partners would be a better approach as each partner has a niche that can be tapped into supporting the refugees become food secure. Besides an effective strategy should incorporate financial needs, post-harvest losses incurred by refugees and help them earn income by engaging in agri-business. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Mutabazi et al (2014) who asserts that training on land conservation and better agricultural practices significantly improved food security in Tanzania.

*Table 4.10. The critical factors to consider in the design and implementation of food security interventions*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Qualified and knowledgeable workforce of food security	51
Availability of land	63
Cultural aspect (Needs and attitude of beneficiaries)	23
Gender consideration	58
Agricultural inputs	47
Market forces (demand and supply) in price determination	19
Climatic conditions/weather patterns	22
Access to Credit facilities	35
Security	20
Technology and innovations	17
Emergency and disaster preparedness	12

*Source: Primary data (Section (B) IQ 15b, Section (C) FGD Q8, Section (D) IQ9, Section (E) IQ 6, n = 83)*

Whereas there are several factors to be considered during design and implementation of food security intervention, the critical factors from the respondents has been summed up into eleven (11) categories. The outstanding factors according to respondents is availability of land, gender consideration and the need to have qualified and knowledgeable facilitators and beneficiaries of food security. According to the respondents, empowering women is critical for sustainable agricultural production and entire food value chain since they are involved right from the farm/garden to the table.

Besides, design and implementation of interventions should significantly involve access to agricultural inputs as well as address the cultural aspect of food security and dietary needs. Needs assessment to determine level of vulnerability, attitude of beneficiaries towards the intervention, security and ability to understand weather patterns are equally important to consider for ownership and effective participation. Essentially, all the above socio-economic, environmental factors and technological inputs become critical in the design and implementation of refugee-centred food security intervention.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study sought to examine “how the COVID-19 pandemic affected food security among refugee in the settlements in South-Western Uganda”. It specifically focused on refugee settlements of Kyangwali, Kyaka and Nakivale and examined the coping mechanisms adopted by refugees during the pandemic and the effectiveness of these coping strategies in response to COVID-19 induced food insecurity. Of significance was the leadership role played by the government, humanitarian organizations and community initiatives to address food insecurity among refugees. Ultimately, the study was aimed at coming up with recommendations on refugee-centred and inclusive food security interventions geared towards self-reliance of refugees in terms of food security.

In all the refugee settlements surveyed, food security situation deteriorated substantially particularly during the lockdown periods (March 2020 - Jan 2022) when movements were restricted and businesses and other income sources were closed. Food availability and access to adequate nutritious food was worsened by humanitarian food assistance reduction (ration cuts) by WFP in all settlements irrespective of level of vulnerability. The most vulnerable such as the elderly, sick, women, children, pregnant and lactating mothers severely suffered the wrath of the pandemic. For instance, out of fear to contract the deadly virus; some refugees did not turn up to collect their rations, those who were sick or admitted to various health facilities without alternates to receive their rations missed their rations. Those who could not turn up for three consecutive months were deactivated from the system and therefore did not access their rations.

To cope with the COVID-19 induced food insecurity and reduced food/cash ration, some of the refugees resorted to reduction of meals per day or consuming less preferred /easily affordable food without prioritizing the nutritional values. The low intake of food, unbalanced diet increased the risk of malnutrition among people especially children, pregnant and lactating mothers subsequently increasing susceptibility to diseases. For young children this would potentially negatively impact on their cognitive and physical development in future.

The purchasing power of the refugees has been crippled by the continued ration reduction where the little cash given buys little quantity of food amidst the ever-increasing commodity

prices after lifting of COVID-19 lockdown. This predicament potentially drove some refugees to resort to negative coping mechanisms that include but not limited to stealing, survival sex, child abuse, drug and substance abuse and family desertion.

While the government, humanitarian organizations and community initiatives have played significant role in ensure refugees have access to food, most of the interventions are largely based on life saving humanitarian assistance (relief assistance) rather than development oriented that would ensure graduation into self -reliance. The food security interventions have been haphazard and bogged down by failure to integrate critical factors in the design and implementation of such programmes. For instance, small percentage of refugees are involved in decision making process during the design and implementation of food security and related livelihood projects.

Overall refugees have demonstrated some degree of resilience to COVID-19 induced food insecurity during the pandemic and subsequent period after lockdown. However, the food security situation remains unstable as the capability of refugees to withstand shocks have by and large not been buttressed. While the ongoing strategies and innovations in food systems are progressively encouraging, they are confined to a few individuals and groups with little multiplier effect on the entire refugee population across all settlements. Besides the various food security interventions by humanitarian agencies have limited programmatic linkages to cause qualitative transformation among refugees. A more holistic approach that is tailored to the needs of refugees, encourages more participation of beneficiaries would build critical mass needed to empower the majority of refugees to graduate from dependency on humanitarian assistance to self-sustenance. This would call for review of the existing refugee response policy framework, development of more coherent and consistent strategies, a pragmatic shift that clearly defines the boundaries and nexus between humanitarian and development assistance for refugees.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The study provides significant insight into the impact of COVID-19 on food security among refugees, the coping mechanisms in response to the pandemic with more emphasis on refugee-centred food security interventions that would empower refugees to become self-reliant. Whereas this study is not exhaustive, it provides blueprints that can alongside other measures significantly improve the food security in the post COVID-19 era and empower

refugees in to adequately meeting their food and nutritional needs. The following recommendations are hereby fronted to strengthen the resilience and ongoing food security related interventions to empower refugees toward achieving self-reliance in food security.

1. The baseline for effective food security interventions require regular food security and nutritional needs assessment (FSNA) of refugees as well as reprofiling of individuals and households to comprehensive understand their level of vulnerability to food insecurity and related shocks. This forms the foundation of evidence-based programming where data is readily available for planning need based general food and cash assistance to refugees. WFP and implementing partners should consider adopting more flexible food assistance delivery approaches by enhancing agent banking, introduction of mobile money, finance literacy, nutrition cash (Nutricash) for pregnant and lactating mothers. This would greatly support persons with special needs (PSNs) and extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs) to easily access their rations.
2. Empowering women to unleash their potentials for sustainable agricultural production. Women in the settlements form the backbone of smallholder farming and family maintenance hence play significant role in food production system. Equipping them with the relevant agricultural skills, finance literacy as well as supporting them access critical resources like land, capital, and technological materials among others are fundamental in their contribution to household food security. Integration of gender transformative programming and women empowerment are essential in achieving food security. Women should therefore be involved in decision-making process during the design and subsequent implementation of foods security interventions. It should be noted that women empowerment, gender equality and food security are inextricably linked.
3. Promoting an integrated approach to food system. The food system/value chain that mainly involves production, processing, transportation and consumption should be strengthened to have forward and backward linkages. For instance, those who produce food can have the surplus stored or processed to add value, transported where there is short supply for final delivery and consumption. By adopting regenerative agricultural practices, the refugee farmers after crop harvest can use the wastes to produce manure that can be used to improve crop yield. Similarly, the droppings of livestock can be used as manure to improve soil health and crop yield while livestock could be eaten to improve

human healthy or sold to earn income that can be invested in business. This practice helps to support refugees with small sizes of land who engage in agriculture.

4. Relatedly, the integration should equally focus on promoting nature positive production and mitigation of the effects of climate change. Deliberate effort is needed in programme linkage from the design stage that incorporates aspects of local solutions where communities can participate in environmental protection and Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) such as solar powered irrigation system. This will protect and restore the degraded natural resources in the settlements. Strategic partnering including academia will be key for promoting and scaling up of Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) solutions and support community in contextualizing it. During this, aspects of extension services, early warning, accurate weather forecasts, sustainable land use, watershed management and technologies among vulnerable communities will be addressed.
5. Strengthening linkages between food systems and nutrition-sensitive programming. WFP needs to adopt and promote linkages in food security, nutrition and resilience building through promotion of nutrient rich production, value addition, market linkages and consumption of diversified foods blended with animal-source foods. This is to address malnutrition in all its forms by ensuring access to healthy diets. For instance, such linkage will promote production and consumption of micro nutrient rich foods like iron rich beans, biofortified orange flesh sweet potatoes and adoption of appropriate postharvest technologies, value addition/agro-processing to reduce losses. Improving nutrition and maintaining food quality and safety are equally crucial for food security.
6. Enhance strategic partnerships in food security. The World Food Programme as a lead agency on food security should undertake stakeholder mapping with a view to identify and collaborate with more partners who have expertise and niche in improving food production and accessibility which are primary in food security. The focus should be to build the capacity of refugees through refugee led organizations (RLOs) or groups who will form critical mass and promote local solutions to boost food security. This becomes feasible if a given percentage of donor fund (e.g. 20%) is channelled to progressive RLOs engaged in food security interventions. Essentially, this minimize duplication of services by humanitarian agencies and reduce on huge expenditures that mainly addresses capacity gaps within respective humanitarian agencies rather than refugees (beneficiaries).

7. To address the inadequate land for agriculture, humanitarian organizations and OPM can explore possibility of hiring land from host communities whose land remain idle for use by refugees. The members of host community would provide land while humanitarian agencies such as WFP and UNHCR would provide agricultural inputs, capacity strengthening and OPM provides oversight role and coordinates with district local government authorities. The refugees and host community would jointly participate and have a shared responsibility in food production. This not only ensures adequate food supply; it also promotes harmonious co-existence between refugees and host community.
8. The Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) should be at the forefront in supporting refugees build resilience and have secure food system. It is a Biblical and fundamental requirement for Christians and other religious groups to contribute to the wellbeing of the vulnerable people in community including refugees.

Through diversification of livelihoods, social behaviour change, women and youth empowerment the shocks of food security can be absorbed. The social behaviour change approach will enable refugees discover barriers associated with negative food consumptions practices and come up with solutions in collaboration with humanitarian support agencies. A more sustainable approach calls for linkage between food security and other livelihood programmes. Additionally, durable political and spiritual solutions to refugee crisis should aggressively be pursued by all peace-loving leaders and people to minimize human-made conflicts and natural disasters that displace communities out of their cradle land. God's desire is to have a united, loving and peaceful humankind in His Kingdom.

### **5.3 Area for further research**

Comparative studies on food security among countries where Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) is piloted such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Rwanda are recommended to provide more insight into how refugees have coped with COVID-19 as well as how self-reliance model works.

Besides research that aims at finding durable solutions to protracted refugee situation would help provide guidance for policy framework and lessons for Uganda that has hosted refugees for over 70 years but still largely provides humanitarian assistance rather development support to refugees. Practical initiatives that are cheap and easily adopted by refugees would alleviate the perpetual hunger and food insecurity they face.

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## 7.0 APPENDICES

### 7.1 Appendix – Survey questionnaire for Refugees The field questions for survey questionnaire (SQ),

#### Section A: *(To be answered by Refugees/Persons of Concern)*

Dear esteemed respondent, I am a student of Uganda Christian University (UCU) pursuing a Master's degree in Organizational Leadership and Management and conducting research on; **The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security among Refugee Communities in Uganda; A Case Study of South Western Uganda.** I request for your voluntary participation and honest response to the questions below. Please take note that your name will not be recorded for this survey and the information you provide is confidential, but will be analyzed with information provided in the same way by others participating in this survey. Your views are important to this research and therefore your participation is highly appreciated. *(Researcher/Assistant Guided)*

- 1 a. In which refugee settlement do you reside? *(Please tick the appropriate answer that applies to you)*
  - (i) Nakivale
  - (ii) Kyaka
  - (iii) Kyangwali
- b. What is your gender
  - (i) Female (F)
  - (ii) Male (M)
- c. What is your Marital status?
  - (i) Married
  - (ii) Divorced
  - (iii) Separated
  - (iv) Cohabiting
  - (v) Widowed
  - (vi) Single
- d. How many people are in your household (Family size)?
  - (i) 1
  - (ii) 2
  - (iii) 3
  - (iv) 4
  - (v) 5 and above
- e. Which category of prioritization (Need Based Assistance) are you?
  - (i) Category 1
  - (ii) Category 2
  - (iii) Category 3
  - (iv) New arrival
- f. How long have you stayed in this settlement?
  - (i) Less than 1 year
  - (ii) 1-2 year(s)

(iii)3-4 Years

(iv)5 years and above

2. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "poor" and 5 being "excellent," how would you rate the overall food security situation in your household (family) before the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of food availability and affordability? *(please tick one that best applies to you)*

- a. Poor (1)
- b. Fair (2)
- c. Good (3)
- d. Very good (4)
- e. Excellent (5)

3. How often did your household experience food shortages or insufficient food quantities before the pandemic? *(please tick one that best applies to you)*

- a. Daily
- b. Weekly
- c. Monthly
- d. Rarely
- e. Never

4. Did your household have access to a variety of food items from different food groups before the pandemic?

- a. Yes       b. No

5. Based either on your personal experience or observation, which of the following have been the main challenges faced by refugees in accessing their food/cash ration during COVID-19 pandemic? *(please tick all that you know)*

- a. Delay by concerned authorities to give out the ration
- b. Missing names on the manifest
- c. Long distance covered to access the food or cash.
- d. Fear to contract COVID-19
- e. Long hours spent at the collection point.
- f. Absence of alternates for children
- g. Any other (specify)

.....

6. Has there been a decrease in your household income as a result of COVID-19 Pandemic? *(Please tick one that best applies to you)*

- a. Significant decrease
- b. Moderate decrease
- c. No Change
- d. Less decrease

7. Will you agree that during COVID-19 pandemic, there has been increase in food prices in the local markets within the settlement and nearby host communities?

- a. Yes       b. No

If yes, which of the following best describes how increase in food prices affected affordability of food by refugees? *(please tick one that best applies to you)*

- i. Much less affordable
- ii. Somewhat less affordable
- iii. More affordable
- iv. No change

8. Who in the household (family) decides what to do with the cash or food given through WFP and other humanitarian agencies?

- a. Women
- b. Men
- c. Women and men decide together
- d. Women, men and children

9. What do you consider to be the four-common impact of COVID-19 pandemic on your life? *(please tick all that apply to you)*

- a. Loss of employment/income
- b. Failure to have access to education
- c. Inability to access better health services
- d. Reduction in food /cash ration (Humanitarian assistance)
- e. Failing to have adequate and nutritious food for my family
- f. Death of a loved one
- g. Provided new knowledge and opportunity of surviving in crises
- h. Any other (Specify).....

10. During COVID-19 lockdown period, were you or any of your household members unable to eat the kinds of food preferred because of a lack of resources?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, how often did this happen? *(please tick one that best applies to you)*

- i. Rarely (1 or 2 times in a month)
- ii. Sometimes (3 to 10 times in a month)
- iii. Often (more than 10 times in a month)

11. Which of the following survival methods did you or neighbors use during the COVID-19 pandemic? *(Please tick all that apply to you)*

- a. Reduced the number of meals eaten per day
- b. Relied on less preferred, less expensive food
- c. Reduced the portion size of meals for children
- d. Borrowed food or money from friends, relatives or savings group
- e. Reduced the quantity consumed by pregnant and or lactating mother
- f. None of the above

12. How often do you buy the following food stuff for consumption at your home? *(Please tick all that apply to you)*

Statement	Daily	weekly	Monthly
Cereals (e.g. maize/posho, rice, millet, sorghum)			
Pulses (e.g. beans, peas, ground nuts)			
Tubers (e.g. sweet potatoes, cassava, Irish)			

potatoes, yams)			
Banana (e.g. Matooke, Bogoya, gonza)			
Fruits and vegetables			
Animal products (e.g. meat, milk, ghee, fish, chicken, eggs)			

13. In addition to food assistance by WFP, are you aware of any program or intervention by government of Uganda, humanitarian organization (NGO) or community initiative aimed at addressing food security in this settlement during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- a. Yes  b. No

If yes, name one intervention and explain how this has improved food security situation of refugees during the Pandemic?

.....  
 .....

14. Do you have access to agricultural land (arable land for cultivation)?

- a. Yes  b. No

If yes, what is the size of land you use for agriculture? (*please tick one that best applies to you*)

- (i) Less than half acre
- (ii) Between half acre -1 acre
- (iii) Between 1-2 acres
- (iv) 3 acres and above

15. What do you consider to be the three common constraints for refugees who participate in agriculture to adequately produce their own food? (*please tick all that apply to you*)

- a. Lack of agricultural knowledge and skills
- b. Inadequate agricultural inputs (e.g. quality seed, tools, fertilizer....)
- c. Inadequate land for cultivation
- d. Poor post-harvest handling of food
- e. Climatic shocks (drought/low rainfall, flood.....)
- f. Negative attitude towards agriculture
- g. Any other (specify).....

16. Do you agree with the statement made by some people that refugees are innovative and enterprising. They have skills, talents, aspirations that they can use to produce adequate food or earn income to become food secure and self-reliant if given appropriate support?

- a. Yes  b. No

If yes, please give two (2) areas and explain how some refugees have demonstrated their innovativeness in fighting food insecurity?

.....  
**Thank you very much for responding to these questions.**

7.2 Appendix – B: The Interview questions for Refugees (IQ),  
**The Interview questions for Refugees (IQ),**

**Section B: (To be answered by Refugees/Persons of Concern)**

Dear brother/sister, it is a pleasure meeting you. My name is John Gray AMBAYO a student of Uganda Christian University (UCU) pursuing a Master’s degree in Organizational Leadership and Management and conducting research on; **The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security among Refugee Communities in Uganda; A Case Study of South Western Uganda**. I request for at least 20 minutes to interact with you and seek your response to a few questions. Please take note that your name will not be recorded for this study and the information you provide is confidential, but will be analyzed with information provided in the same way by others participating in this study. I will be grateful if you can share your views as an important and resourceful person in this settlement.

*Please let me know if this is fine with you and we can start.*

- 1 a. In which refugee settlement do you reside?  
.....
  - b. What is your gender?  
.....
  - c. What is your Marital status?  
.....
  - d. How many people are in your household (Family size)?  
.....
  - e. In which category of prioritization do you belong?  
.....
  - f. How many years have you stayed in this settlement?  
.....
2. Can you describe the varieties and sources of food that were commonly consumed by refugees in this settlement before the COVID-19 pandemic?  
.....
3. How often within a month did your household experience food shortages or insufficient food quantities before the pandemic?  
.....
4. Based either on your personal experience or observation, what have been the main challenges faced by refugees in accessing their ration during COVID-19 pandemic?  
.....
5. Have there been any changes in food prices during the pandemic? If so, describe how the changes in price affected food affordability within the refugee community during the pandemic.  
.....
6. Who in the household (family) decides what to do with the cash or food given through WFP and other humanitarian agencies?

.....  
7. What do you consider to be the four-common impact of COVID-19 pandemic on your life?

.....  
8. What strategies or initiatives have refugees used to ensure that they have what to eat during COVID-19 crisis?

.....  
9. Can you describe any refugee-driven initiatives or mutual support networks that have emerged within the settlement to address food security concerns during the pandemic?

.....  
10. What are some of the culturally and socially unacceptable practices that some refugees resorted to during the COVID-19 pandemic to afford food?

.....  
11. How would you describe the food security situation among refugees today and why?

.....  
12. In regards to access to land for agriculture, what size of land is available to you?

.....  
13. What do you consider to be the **three common constraints** for refugees who participate in agriculture to adequately produce their own food?

.....  
14. Some people have asserted that refugees are innovative and enterprising. They have skills, talents, aspirations that they can use to produce adequate food or earn income to become food secure and self-reliant if given appropriate support. If you agree with this assertion, please give two (2) reasons and explain how some refugees have demonstrated their innovativeness in fighting food insecurity?

.....  
15. Some people have described as unfair, the prioritization (need based) approach where WFP food assistance to all refugees in South West has been reduced that has worst affected mostly the vulnerable persons of concern (PoCs) such as women, child headed families, elderly, people with disability.

(a) How has the food ration reduction affected the vulnerable families?

.....  
(b) What can the government of Uganda, humanitarian organizations and community do to empower refugees to improve on food security and become self-reliant?

.....  
***Thank you very much for responding to these questions.***

7.3 Appendix – C: Questions for Focus Group discussion (FGD)

**Questions for Focus Group discussion (FGD)**

**Section C: (To be answered by Refugees/Persons of Concern)**

Dear brothers and sisters, it is a pleasure meeting you. My name is John Gray AMBAYO a student of Uganda Christian University (UCU) pursuing a Master’s degree in Organizational Leadership and Management and conducting research on; **The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security among Refugee Communities in Uganda; A Case Study of South Western Uganda**. I request for at least 30 minutes to interact with you and seek your response to a few questions. Please take note that your name will not be recorded for this study and the information you provide is confidential, but will be analyzed with information provided in the same way by others participating in this study. I will be grateful if you can share your views as an important administrator in this settlement.

I request we respect each other’s views, opinion or idea as there is no wrong answer to any of the questions. Please feel free to raise up your hand if you do not understand the question, have a question or would like to respond to any of the questions. *Let us start by each of you giving me your response to question 1 about yourself.*

1. a. In which refugee settlement do you reside?  
.....
  - b. What is your gender?  
.....
  - c. What is your Marital status?  
.....
  - d. Is the head of household (family) a woman or a man?  
.....
  - e. How many people are in your household (Family size)?  
.....
  - f. In which category of prioritization do you belong?  
.....
  - g. How many years have you stayed in this settlement?
2. The COVID-19 pandemic could have affected us differently. As refugees in this settlement, can you describe any specific challenges your household has faced in accessing food or cash ration during the COVID-19 pandemic?
  3. How do to compare the food security situation among refugees in this settlement before, during and after COVID-19 pandemic?
  4. Can you share any personal experiences or observations of how COVID-19 affected your life and others in relation to food and nutritional status since the pandemic begun?
  5. In addition to the general food assistance given through WFP, what have refugees done to supplement on the reduced food/cash ration?

6. How have vulnerable populations, such as children, the elderly, and individuals with health conditions, been affected by food shortages during the pandemic, and what measures have been taken to protect them?
7. Some people assert that refugees are innovative and enterprising. They have skills, talents, aspirations that they can use to produce adequate food or earn income to become food secure and self-reliant if given appropriate support. In reference to your situation here, do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
8. What will be your recommendations to the government (OPM), Humanitarian organizations and community based-organizations to ensure refugees are empowered to have enough food for their own consumption and earn income rather than relying on the humanitarian food assistance?

***Thank you very much for responding to these questions.***

7.4 Appendix – D: Questions for Humanitarian organizations and Implementing Partners (IQ)  
**Questions for Humanitarian organizations and Implementing Partners (IQ)**

**Section D: (To be answered by staff of WFP, UNHCR and Cooperating partners)**

Dear esteemed respondent, I am a student of Uganda Christian University (UCU) pursuing a Master’s degree in Organizational Leadership and Management and conducting research on; **The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security among Refugee Communities in Uganda; A Case Study of South Western Uganda**. I request for your voluntary participation and honest response to the questions below. Please take note that your name will not be recorded for this survey and the information you provide is confidential, but will be analyzed with information provided in the same way by others participating in this survey. Your views are important to this research and therefore your participation is highly appreciated. *(Self-Administered)*

1. a. Name of your organization .....  
b. Kindly fill in your title (designation) in the space provided  
.....  
c. How long have you worked with refugees in this settlement?  
.....
2. The COVID-19 pandemic affected people differently including refugees. Based on your experience and observation, what are the specific challenges faced by refugees in accessing food or cash rations since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic? ***Mention at least 4 challenges you know***  
.....
3. How much food assistance were the refugee households receiving before the compared to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis?  
.....
4. How have vulnerable populations, such as children, the elderly, and individuals with health conditions, been affected by food shortages during the pandemic, and what measures have been taken to protect them?  
.....
5. What are some of the ways refugees have adopted to cope with the reduced humanitarian food assistance and food insecurity generally?  
.....
6. What roles have the government, humanitarian organizations and community played to improve food security among refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic?  
.....
7. What have been the main challenges hindering effectiveness of food security interventions provided by humanitarian organizations and government agencies in the settlement? ***List at least 3 main challenges***  
.....
8. Some people assert that refugees are innovative and enterprising. They have skills, talents, aspirations that they can use to produce adequate food or earn income to

become food secure and self-reliant if given appropriate support. If you agree, briefly explain with example(s) how refugees have demonstrated their capabilities?

.....

9. What do you consider to be the critical factors in the design and implementation of effective and efficient food security interventions or programs for refugees?

.....

10. Which refugee-centered strategies would you recommend for humanitarian organizations and cooperating partners to adopt in empowering the refugees to become self-sustaining in terms of food security?

.....

*Thank you very much for responding to these questions.*

7.5 Appendix – E **Interview questions for staff of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) –(IQ)**

**Section E: Interview questions for staff of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) –(IQ)**

Sir/madam, it is a pleasure meeting you. My name is John Gray AMBAYO a student of Uganda Christian University (UCU) pursuing a Master’s degree in Organizational Leadership and Management and conducting research on; **The Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security among Refugee Communities in Uganda; A Case Study of South Western Uganda**. I request for at least 15 minutes to interact with you and seek your response to a few questions. Please take note that your name will not be recorded for this study and the information you provide is confidential, but will be analyzed with information provided in the same way by others participating in this study. I will be grateful if you can share your views as an important administrator in this settlement.

*Please let me know if this is fine with you and we can start.*

1. a. Name of settlement .....
- b. Please, may I know your title?  
    .....
- c. . How long have you served in this settlement?  
    .....
- d. What is the current approximate number of refugees in this settlement?  
    .....
2. The Uganda refugee response model has been praised globally, among others for allocating land for both settlement and cultivation for refugees as well as fulfilment of the self-reliant strategy.
  - a. What size of land is allocated to each refugee household?  
    .....
  - b. How adequate is this land allocation for refugees to produce enough food for self-sustenance?  
    .....
3. Based on your experience, what have been the main challenges faced by refugees in having adequate and nutritious food during COVID-19 pandemic?  
    .....  
    ..
4. In addition to land allocation, which other areas of food security has OPM or government in general contributed to in fighting food insecurity among refugees?  
    .....
5. What recommendations would you suggest that will see refugees empowered to become self-reliant in terms of food security and livelihoods?  
    .....
6. Some people within host communities perceive refugees as source of insecurity and competitors for scarce resources. What has OPM done to promote peaceful co-existence among refugees and host community?  
    .....

***Thank you very much for responding to these questions.***

## 7.6 Appendix F: Student Research and Project Work

Appendix - F



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN  
UNIVERSITY**

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

September 8, 2023

To Whom It May Concern;

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: STUDENT RESEARCH AND PROJECT WORK**

NAME: **AMBAYO John Gray**

REGISTRATION NUMBER: **RS20M02/003**

The above named is a student of Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership and Management at Uganda Christian University.

Besides attendance of theory lectures the student is required to demonstrate abilities in applying the acquired knowledge by conducting research and writing a project paper on a Leadership problem/situation in Uganda.

The research topic: **“The Impact of Covid-19 on Food Security Among Refugee Communities in Uganda; A Case Study of South Western Uganda.”**

By this letter we are requesting you to assist the student herewith and avail the information requested or participate in surveys.

Thank you so much for your cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joseph Owor'.

Joseph Jakisa Owor, PhD

**SENIOR TEACHING FELLOW, FACULTY OF BUSINESS**

0776-770811/0752-770811

## 7.7 Appendix G: Permission Letter

Appendix - G

  
THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

  
Uganda  
Vision 2040

**OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER**

PLOT 9-11 APOLLO KAGGWA ROAD, P.O. BOX 341, KAMPALA, UGANDA  
TELEPHONES: General Line 0417 770500, Web: www.opm.go.ug, E-mail: ps@opm.go.ug

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In any correspondence on this subject, please quote No: OPM/R/163

4<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Joseph Jakisa Owor (PhD),  
Senior Teaching Fellow,  
Faculty of Business,  
Uganda Christian University.

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN KYAKA II, KYANGWALI  
AND NAKIVALE REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS**

Office of the Prime Minister is in receipt of your letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> September 2023, in regard to the above subject matter.

Permission is hereby granted to Mr. Ambayo John Gray to carry out research on "*The Impact of COVID 19 on Food Security Among Refugee Communities in Uganda; A Case Study of South Western Uganda,*" from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

He is requested to observe the rules and regulations governing the settlements.

Office of the Prime Minister Authorities in the Settlements are hereby requested to accord him the necessary support.

  
Douglas Asimwe  
**FOR: PERMANENT SECRETARY.**

  
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
DEPARTMENT OF REFUGEE AFFAIRS  
DWA

c.c.: The Refugee Desk Officer, Hoima  
c.c.: The Refugee Desk Officer, Mbarara  
c.c.: The Settlement Commandant, Kyangwali  
c.c.: The Settlement Commandant, Kyaka II  
c.c.: The Settlement Commandant, Nakivale

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OPM Vision: A Public Sector that is responsive and accountable in steering Uganda towards rapid economic growth and development.

Figure 1 Permission Letter