REFUGEE SELF-RELIANCE INITIATIVE

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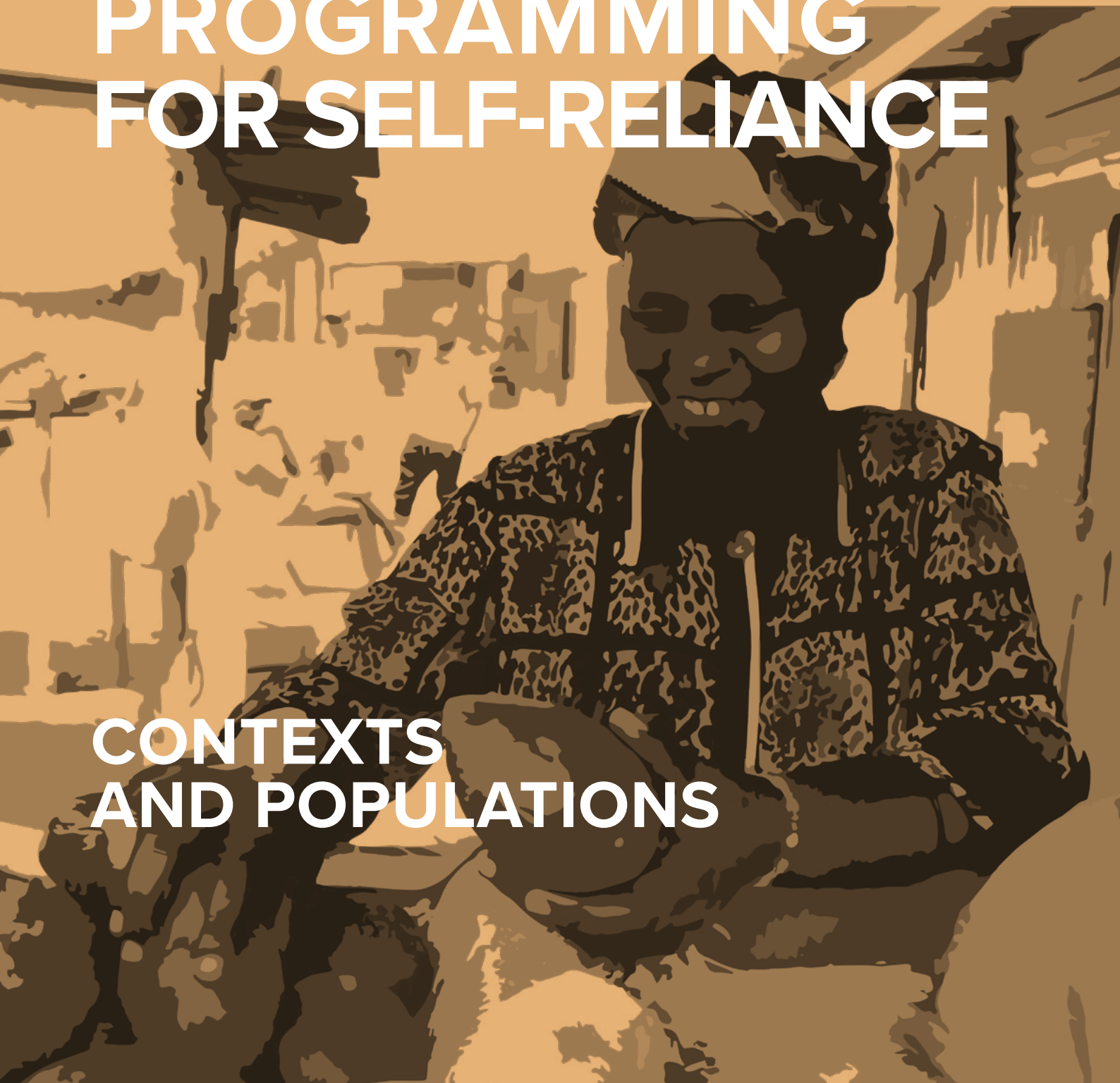
REFUGE POINT

SELF-RELIANCE
EVIDENCE REVIEW

PROGRAMMING FOR SELF-RELIANCE



CONTEXTS AND POPULATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Self-Reliance Evidence Review (SRER) is a knowledge-mapping and assessment of publicly available research and evidence relating to self-reliance for refugees.

This study was undertaken jointly by RefugePoint and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), both members of the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI). The SRER contributes to the RSRI Learning Agenda, which outlines core questions to be answered to create an evidence base of effective practices to improve refugee self-reliance. The SRER is also intended to identify gaps in the evidence base on self-reliance, which can inform future research priorities on this topic. The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of any of these organizations.

The Self-Reliance Evidence Review and related outputs are available at:
https://www.refugeeselfreliance.org/evidence-review

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Cover Image: Claudine, a client in RefugePoint's Urban Refugee Protection Program, sells vegetables and snacks at a market in Nairobi, Kenya. Photo by Alexis Felder.

PROGRAMMING FOR SELF-RELIANCE: CONTEXTS AND POPULATIONS

WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOES NOT?

In this evidence brief, we present the findings from our review of the available literature on refugee self-reliance: what types of programming work best to facilitate self-reliance in specific contexts and for specific populations?

KEY FINDINGS

Achieving self-reliance doesn't look the same across all contexts or for all populations. Consequently, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to self-reliance programming. The literature emphasizes that contextualized and tailored designs are paramount to quality programming. Yet, there is relatively little research about self-reliance programming that is specifically segmented by differences in context and population. In addition, most of the existing literature focuses on documenting barriers and opportunities, rather than good programming practices. This makes it challenging to draw conclusions about whether effective program models can be applied to other contexts or populations that share similar characteristics.

Nevertheless, the literature does identify several key considerations by context and population group that practitioners can use to inform self-reliance program design:

- **Camp settings:** Noting that camps are often located in resource-scarce areas with limited potential for self-reliance for both displaced populations and their hosts, programming approaches that benefit all such as promoting local economic development and social cohesion are vital.
- **Rural settings:** In addition to supporting agricultural-based livelihoods in rural settings, it is critical to focus on diversifying livelihoods opportunities, including through investing in value chain development. Beyond livelihoods, facilitating access to enablers of holistic self-reliance that are often less prevalent in rural areas, such social and financial services, is also important.
- **Urban settings:** Programming should account for, and when possible, address structural issues in urban markets, including through systems-level interventions that can increase the number and quality of wage employment opportunities for refugees. In addition, designing interventions that support refugees to navigate the complexity of urban systems to access services, is crucial.

- **Informal markets:** Recognizing that informal markets are often easier for refugees to access but may present poorer working conditions and a lack of security, an important element of self-reliance programming is promoting decent jobs and livelihoods, such as through the promotion of workers' rights and access to social protection.
- **Developed economies:** In contexts with more developed and regulated economies, a central element of self-reliance programming is making the social protection and financial systems more inclusive of and accessible to refugees.
- **Gender:** It is imperative that program design accounts for traditional social and cultural norms around gender roles as well as considers how displacement may have shifted these roles in a household. In addition, ownership (or lack of) over household assets affects the potential of becoming self-reliant and must be considered in program design.
- **Youth:** Recognizing that refugee youth often spend their formative years in displacement, key components of programming should focus on continuity of education and opportunities to build social networks and develop critical skills.
- **Highly vulnerable and refugees with disabilities:** Program design should include approaches that ensure accessibility of services and promote participation in activities for highly vulnerable refugees as well as refugees with disabilities, including through the involvement of a social worker or case manager.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Practitioners should systematically consider the specificities of displacement contexts, e.g. location/geography (in camp and out-of-camp, rural and urban), socio-economic (low-, middle- and high-income settings) and political (restrictive versus enabling refugee policies) when designing and implementing self-reliance programs for refugees.

Recommendation 2: Practitioners should design self-reliance programs that take AGD-inclusive approaches and develop program models that are tailored to the needs of populations with specific age, gender and diversity characteristics.

Recommendation 3: Practitioners and researchers should focus on designing, implementing and testing systems-based approaches that have the potential to expand the reach of programming efforts and have large scale impact.

Recommendation 4: All stakeholders should prioritize generating robust evidence to fill evidence gaps on what works to help refugees become and stay self-reliant in specific contexts and for specific groups.

In this brief we discuss types of self-reliance programming for (1) different contexts; and (2) different populations. In our review of the literature, we have not found any attempts at providing a systematic overview of best practices for adapting the various components of self-reliance programming to specific characteristics of the implementation context and/or to the target populations. As such, the specificity of the examples discussed across various pieces in the literature makes it difficult to isolate which learnings can be scaled up or reproduced in different settings [38; 125; 81]. Similarly, the multitude of elements that vary from program to program makes it challenging to attribute the cause of a program success or failure either to the adequacy of the program model in general or to its appropriateness in a specific context. Part of these challenges stem from differing conceptions of what successful self-reliance outcomes look like, as well as from the lack of a common evaluation framework to compare different self-reliance programs across contexts. Another limitation is that the current evidence base on self-reliance focuses on a few specific contexts and target populations, which in turn influences which program approaches and objectives are most-commonly discussed and accepted as best practices.

Nevertheless, we can still learn from experiences about what works in different contexts and with different population groups. In order to do so, in this brief, we segmented the variation in context and population along specific characteristics and identified findings and good practices that are noted for each in the literature. Considering each of these contexts separately helps to identify specific characteristics, which in turn can inform how program components and approaches can be adapted more broadly. Rather than focusing on specific examples, this brief strives to extract good practices that are highlighted in the literature for a given context or a given population, using the holistic approaches identified in *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Components & Approaches)* as a reference.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

The literature covers examples of self-reliance programming in different contexts: displacement contexts (in-camp and out-of-camp, rural and urban), socio-economic contexts (low-income hosting countries and middle-income hosting countries), and political contexts (enabling and restrictive legal and policy environments). Across the contexts considered, there are two elements that vary: (1) the local potential for self-reliance, which affects the level of self-reliance of both refugees and the host population; and (2) the specific challenges and opportunities that the context presents for refugees to improve their self-reliance [59; 54]. This section outlines both elements for each type of context, and emphasizes the associated best practices for improving self-reliance either for refugees specifically or for both refugees and the host population within the parameters of the local economic environment.

It is important to note that the findings highlighted below should be considered with nuance. While context characteristics are presented and discussed in a segmented manner for the sake of clarity, we acknowledge that in practice each context of implementation will correspond to a certain overlap of these various displacement, socio-economic and political aspects. This document aims to help practitioners identify which elements in their context analysis should guide their design of self-reliance programs. In addition, the good practices highlighted are not exhaustive and reflect the learnings that were emphasized across multiple sources in the literature.

Displacement contexts

Refugees in camps and settlements

Much of the literature focuses on camp settings and discusses the differences between encampment conditions across countries in terms of mobility and the host country's broader legal and policy framework. This section looks at the main characteristics that distinguish the context for refugees residing within and outside camp settings.

Unless camps completely restrict outside movement, populations in camps and settlements often have access to formal and informal markets in surrounding areas, where they have opportunities to interact with host populations and the local economy. However, these markets are often relatively thin compared to the markets that out-of-camp refugees are able to access [73]. With limited opportunities available, refugees can be forced to compete for jobs inside camps, many of which are low-skilled and low-paying [42]. The literature highlights that there are high levels of variation among refugee households living in camps in terms of their access to (internal and external) social networks and social capital [18]. There is, however, a gap in the literature regarding how these differences in social empowerment can be addressed and / or leveraged through social inclusion program components.

Most camps are established in resource-scarce environments, typically in remote, rural areas [3, 65]. As a result, the general potential for self-reliance of the entire area – for both refugees and host populations - is also typically lower than where many refugees would likely choose to settle if they were not living in a camp [98]. As a result, economic competition with host communities is also more common, in particular around the governance and management of already scarce natural resources as well as in terms of accessing limited available jobs in labor markets [13]. Furthermore, refugees that live in camps are more likely to be targeted and stigmatized by the local populations than refugees living out-of-camps because they are more concentrated, more visible, and because they benefit from a range of social services, often for free, that locals may not be able to access [42, 73]. Additionally, a critical difference between programming for refugees in camp settings compared to out-of-camp settings is that within camps there are multiple organizations involved in service provision, usually as part of a visible and highly coordinated structure.

By contrast, the main characteristic of out-of-camp settings for refugees is enhanced freedom of movement [108; 105]. The ability to move freely is highly relevant in terms of adapting the design of self-reliance programs, both in terms of outreach, but also in terms of market access and the capacity to promote different types of livelihoods activities [98]. Compared to refugees in camps, refugees residing outside of camps have access to more robust markets (often in cities and semi-urban areas) [77]. This is in fact one of the main reasons that refugees migrate out-of-camps, and in particular to cities [42]. At the same time, those who leave camp settings typically incur additional costs, such as rent, food and other basic needs [77].

Author's note

Experience has demonstrated that despite the constraints inherent to camp environments, there exist many opportunities to strengthen camp economies in support of self-reliance, e.g. relief substitution - that is, production of aid products, previously imported from outside camps, by the refugees themselves; designing projects aimed at growing and diversifying the in-camp

economy; skills development interventions for refugee incentive workers for advancement as NGO, UN or local government staff. Increasingly, economic inclusion programs are also adapted to movement restrictions considering online opportunities, remote marketing and delivery, etc.

Beyond the camps themselves, and given that encampment areas tend to be economically underdeveloped, a good practice is to design interventions that foster local economic development more broadly. We discuss investments in refugee-hosting areas in more detail in *Evidence Brief - Programming for Self-Reliance (Components & Approaches).* Moreover, including a percentage of host community members in refugee-focused humanitarian programs and services is essential in building acceptance, social cohesion, reducing discrimination and xenophobia and positively supporting win-win partnerships across community groups.

Self-reliance programming increasingly includes a consumption support component that is instrumental in supporting refugees who do not have access to free social services (either because they live out-of-camps or because the services provided in camps are insufficient) and struggle to meet their basic needs, let alone invest in livelihoods development. Consumption support can be provided directly by humanitarian practitioners - in cash, voucher or in-kind, depending on feasibility and appropriateness - but implementing agencies can also play a role in linking with host government social protection mechanisms (e.g. via advocacy for inclusive social protection policies).

Refugees in rural settings

Historically, refugee response programming has been most often implemented in rural or semi-urban contexts where refugee camps and settlements were established. Yet, the recent literature on self-reliance discusses rural settings (especially out-of-camp) significantly less than other settings. This may be due in part to the fact that the literature on refugee self-reliance from the 1960s to the 1990s mostly focused on rural settings, while this evidence review includes resources published after January 1, 2005, which increasingly focus on other contexts. Nevertheless, there are a number of important lessons that have been learned over time from refugee self-reliance programming in rural settings.

Self-reliance programming in rural contexts most significantly differs from non-rural contexts in the area of livelihoods. Jobs in rural areas tend to be limited to a few sectors (agriculture, construction, factory work or civil service, etc.) [39]. Although agricultural livelihoods such as crop, livestock, forests, and fisheries are critical in rural areas, it is good practice to expand economic inclusion efforts beyond these industries [4; 33; 39]. Diversifying opportunities by also promoting non-agricultural livelihoods (such as manufacturing, processing, repairing of manufacturing goods, trading, transportation, construction and all other service activities done on a commercial basis in the rural economy) helps build the resilience of refugee populations [42]. This includes focusing on adding value to the frontline producers' products (e.g. processing or milling the crop seed locally, growing higher-grade crops - including crops that have potential for exports) and investing in value chain development, considering the myriad of support services and inputs agricultural and livestock interventions require (e.g. veterinarians, crop extension workers, livestock feed supply sources, transportation networks, processing facilitating, marketing techniques etc.) [115]. When designing programs promoting resilient agricultural livelihoods, another good practice is to consider

subsistence farming approaches, alongside a commercial approach that links crop production to real market opportunities [4].

Because the interdependence of community members – be they refugees or hosts – is generally high in rural and remote settings (as there may not be as many 'outside' options to trade or source essential goods and services), social capital is typically expected to be strong on average in rural areas [18, 36, 39]. In terms of programming that builds social capital, and in particular insofar as it is related to economic inclusion, this translates into good practices for agricultural value chain development such as (1) reinforcing local potential for economic inclusion through stronger social cohesion with the development or strengthening of existing horizontal linkages (such as increasing the market power of local producers by helping them organize into cooperatives or other business associations) [45], or (2) building vertical linkages with market actors outside of the immediate local community (such as connecting local producers to urban retailers or exporters for their products). A critical issue for refugee self-reliance in rural and semi-urban contexts is the degree to which refugees have access to land and other natural resources. The development of rural livelihoods such as agriculture and pastoralism directly depends on the availability of and access to suitable land and other natural resources [39, 65]. When the land available is insufficient, many refugees engage in unsustainable farming practices, such as encroaching on land that they have no right to use or over-intensive grazing and cultivation [39, 14]. These types of activities can take a toll on the environment by causing deforestation, water pollution, and overuse of arable and grazing land [39, 14]. Limited land availability and environmental degradation can lead to a diminishing income from land cultivation, and to tensions among refugees and between refugees and the local population [39, 14].

Finally, in rural areas, it is more likely that there will be fewer agencies providing services to a given community [34; 36; 40]. The level of service provision is also generally lower and less varied in rural settings, with education, health and other social services more scarce and less easily accessible [33]. As a result, a critical consideration for self-reliance programs is to ensure comprehensiveness of the intervention design through the adoption of holistic approaches, or through building robust referral mechanisms [39]. Not only social services and social protection, but also formal financial services (e.g. banks, microfinance institutions, mobile money, etc.) are likely to be more scarce in rural areas. Financial inclusion, and in particular needs for savings and small investments, are thus often addressed through community-based informal mechanisms [4; 33; 144].

Author's note

While in recent years refugees have increasingly been seeking refuge in urban settings, there remains a significant number of refugees that stay in rural - often remote - areas for years. These areas are often characterized by limited livelihood options (most often agriculture-based), scarce productive resources and poor service delivery. In these circumstances, making the most of the limited offer is instrumental in supporting progress towards self-reliance.

Refugee-hosting rural areas tend to be already vulnerable before being affected by displacement, which makes it imperative for refugee interventions to target based on needs rather than status. Any self-reliance programming in such settings should at minimum assess the pre-conditions in the host community (e.g. what services hosts have access to, what stresses and shocks affect their lives and livelihoods), and if possible include vulnerable host community

members in targeting. Support targeted at refugee populations in particular should ideally and systematically build in system-level programming that has potential to benefit the broader community, e.g. via increased access to services and resources, improved road network, etc.

With the acceleration of climate change, and environmental degradation more broadly, access to and use of productive resources has become a major pain point in displacement contexts where natural resources are central to livelihoods. As highlighted in the *Self-Reliance Evidence Review Methodology*, we found very little evidence focused on the connections between self-reliance and climate change, but we expect these will increasingly be documented in the years to come. Experience has already shown that interventions such as climate-resilient agriculture techniques (e.g. permaculture), community-led natural resource management, or advocacy for refugees' access to and ownership of land can play an important role in mitigating the risk that self-reliance programming contributes to tensions between the refugees and their hosts.

Refugees in urban settings

In recent years, with over 60% of the world refugee population living in urban areas, an increasing number of publications focus on programming for refugees in urban settings [77; 78; 107]. Urban areas often present opportunities for self-reliance that do not exist in camp or rural contexts [77]. In terms of livelihoods, job opportunities in urban areas tend to correspond to more contemporary livelihoods and range widely both in terms of the diversity of skill sets and the level of qualifications needed [131]. The maturity of urban market economies makes them more resilient to shocks overall, however refugees often work in informal sectors where they are subject to exploitation and unprotected by formal crisis-response policies and safety nets [53; 77]. Therefore, programming that includes legal assistance to support refugees' access to services and their right to work, via securing work permits, business registrations, recognition of diplomas and certifications or access to financial services, is important in these contexts [64; 31].

Urban areas also typically present a number of challenges to achieving decent and sustainable livelihoods. In spite of the diversity of potential employers and income-earning opportunities, cities often consistently have higher levels of structural and frictional unemployment than rural areas [1; 151; 56]. Nevertheless, unemployed populations, including displaced persons from rural areas often migrate to cities in the hope that they will be more easily able to retrain and have better job prospects [77]. At the onset of a crisis – often with a large influx of displaced populations to urban areas because of perceived access to increased opportunities compared to rural areas – will often increase already steep competition for jobs and exacerbate existing social tensions [28]. In these situations, displaced populations and the urban poor risk facing additional exploitation, marginalization, and mistreatment [57].

It is important therefore that self-reliance programming accounts for, and when possible, addresses the structural issues in urban markets. For example, a focus on building contemporary and transferable skills (e.g. service industry, IT skills) helps broaden the opportunities available to refugees [52]. Similarly, systems-level interventions focusing on employers and job creation can increase the number and quality of wage employment opportunities for refugees [77].

The social empowerment component of self-reliance programming in urban settings can be quite

different from that in rural settings, both in terms of building social cohesion and social capital. Urban refugees in need of support are likely to be more scattered across cities, rather than concentrated in a single area, and they are often embedded in poorer neighborhoods alongside local populations [77]. This results in an overall higher level of daily interaction of refugees with local populations, and higher dependency on these relationships being cooperative [81]. To some extent, urban refugees can benefit from their relative 'invisibility' in terms of developing support and solidarity systems with local populations [68]. However, this makes targeting considerations for self-reliance programs generally more complex and outreach more resource-intensive in urban settings [70, 39]. Programming in urban settings often includes interventions aimed at supporting refugees in navigating the complexity of urban systems, e.g. service mapping, referral pathways, coordination mechanisms [25]. In particular, the likely exclusion of marginalized groups (e.g. women, minority groups) can be addressed by complementing the self-selection approach standard in urban outreach practices with outreach through community centers, ideally operated by established community-based or refugee-led organizations, or through refugee focal points who can proactively make connections with refugees in need [48; 117]. More broadly, local actors play a critical role in ensuring informed and effective community outreach and targeting approaches, which consider the holistic and diversified needs amongst refugees and hosts in a given area [117].

Urban areas also provide a greater depth and breadth of international, national, and local actors (including government, civil society organizations (CSOs), the academic community, and the private sector) with whom humanitarians and development practitioners might develop partnerships. This is especially true for the private sector, which often has a much more robust presence in urban areas [77;76]. All of these actors also have a deep understanding of how the city operates and provides services, as well as how legal and social frameworks affect the lives of urban residents. This also means that in terms of social protection and financial inclusion, many services to support access to formal banking, labor market access as well as care and support social services more generally are likely to be available in cities and have the potential to be made accessible to refugees [78].

Urban environments also pose a number of specific risks and opportunities for the self-reliance of specific minority and/or vulnerable groups that can be less visible and harder to reach [81]. For example, there are often more employment opportunities for women in urban areas and women may be less likely to face gender discrimination [151]. On the other hand, women are often more at-risk for violence and harassment if they have to travel to their place of work and, although they may have more employment opportunities, these opportunities may not be aligned with the standards of 'decent work' [151].

Socio-economic contexts

There are also significant differences in self-reliance programming by socio-economic context, in particular between programming in low- and middle-income countries. In *Evidence Brief – Research Gaps*, we address the lack of examples from high-income countries in the available literature. In addition to Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, low- and middle-income countries typically differ in the density of their private sector and in the health and maturity of existing market systems. The literature also highlights differences between the two contexts in terms of how regulated labor markets are, and how much of job markets are composed of formal versus informal labor [54].

In low-income countries, whether in urban or rural contexts, there is often a high reliance on informal work [54; 1]. Formal labor market systems also tend to be less regulated, and opportunities for

decent work are generally thinner [17]. This means that the amount, diversity, and quality of market actors and systems, and of supporting infrastructure available to work with is likely to be lower [38]. Market deficiencies typically affect the support functions that are common to many labor market systems, such as telecom, transportation and energy infrastructures [64]. This has direct consequences in terms of what it means to promote decent and sustainable livelihoods [17].

When working on self-reliance programming in contexts with mostly informal labor markets, there is typically less focus on shifting refugees to the formal sector [38]. Instead, the focus is on promoting decent livelihoods and to ensure that programs lead to the upgrading of jobs [17]. Good practices involve the use of approaches that are comprehensive and complementary with informal livelihoods activities, such as the promotion of workers' rights through support to the constitution of workers' associations, social protection in the form of private or community-based work micro-insurance, and social dialogue between workers and employers [152]. See *Evidence Brief - Defining Self-Reliance* for discussion about quality standards in self-reliance programming and *Evidence Brief - Programming for Self-Reliance (Components & Approaches)* for more details on how decent, sustainable, and diversified jobs are criteria for economic inclusion interventions leading to self-reliance.

In middle-income countries, social protection and financial systems are typically more developed and better resourced [44;57]. Programming often focuses on how to make those systems more inclusive of refugees or how to increase the benefits of those systems for refugees [44; 57]. In general, the overall potential for refugees to become self-reliant is higher, and the focus of programming can be seen as closing the gap in self-reliance between refugees and host communities more than raising the local potential for self-reliance [49]. There are more opportunities for refugees to meet their essential needs through markets in more developed economies, and there are typically more jobs in well-established labor markets [49].

Yet, the literature is divided over whether the conditions for self-reliance are more conducive in lower or middle-income contexts, because while there are generally more opportunities available in more developed economies, the economic environment often tends to be more regulated which may restrict access to refugees [6; 157]. Using the example of Jordan as a middle-income context, on the one hand it can be more difficult for refugees to access legal income generating activities because work opportunities in the formal economy are subjected to more quality standards and regulations (including the fact that employers have to pay for a work permit) [57]. On the other hand, and for the same reason, there are more opportunities for refugees to engage in decent, sustainable livelihoods in Jordan [84]. In other words, there may be more and easily-accessible job opportunities for refugees in low-income countries because of expansive informal labor markets than in middle- and high-income countries, where the labor market is formalized and protected. However, there may also be increased opportunities for self-reliance (in terms of diversity and quality of jobs) in middle-income countries because they have a more robust economy.

Political contexts

Having It is important to also examine the variation in refugee policy by contexts, namely whether and/or how restricted refugees are in terms of movement and in terms of legal access to formal or informal work, what rights and protections do they have access to, and whether or not there is an encampment policy [128; 57; 68]. There is agreement in the literature that variation in the political

context along each of these aspects greatly impacts the potential for self-reliance [98; 99; 100; 23]. There are several pieces in the literature that study specific variation in political contexts, insofar as it affects the design, the implementation and the outcomes of self-reliance programming. In particular, the contexts of three countries in East Africa have been often compared in this regard: Uganda (which is considered as a model of liberalism in terms of refugee policies), Kenya (which is often presented as a counterpoint to the former in terms of having more restrictive policies), and Ethiopia (which has started undergoing a change from more restrictive towards more liberal policies). Most variation in political context is studied across countries (at national level), yet some studies have attempted to control for other differences in context by comparing variation in refugee policy within the same country across different regions.

The policy environment (laws and regulations, policy commitments, etc.) of host states determines what kinds of interventions are feasible and what self-reliance looks like in that context (e.g. do refugees have the right to free movement, can they get work permits, etc.) [73; 84]. In host countries with restrictive refugee policies, programmatic interventions around social and economic inclusion of refugees, however well-designed, can only go so far [128]. In countries where access to documentation and legal frameworks are more restrictive, refugees will tend to work more in the informal economy, all other things equal, and they will be more prone to shocks [102]. The recent literature that examines the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis noted that, whether in rural or in urban markets, refugees tend to work in sectors that are more sensitive to crises [56]. This can be attributed to formal legal regulations that restrict the access of refugees to certain sectors of the economy, as well as to informal rules and norms that similarly favor the hiring of nationals in more decent and resilient jobs.

Restrictive laws in host states are barriers to self-reliance that are systematically highlighted in the literature [56; 151; 78]. There is agreement that self-reliance programming in the absence of rights and protections for refugees can yield important, but limited results, and that there is a need to simultaneously pursue policy influence with host governments [77]. Yet, the broad effectiveness of advocacy efforts to persuade host states to improve rights and protections for refugees is a matter of debate [34; 77]. Other avenues explored to influence policy frameworks include working with national and sub-national authorities to strengthen social protection systems and through capacity-building [127]. However, even here, there is little evidence regarding the effectiveness of these approaches in yielding more favorable policies towards refugees [33].

In practice, several countries have changed their policy frameworks to include progressive policies that are more inclusive of and permissive towards refugees [57]. Uganda, Ethiopia, Zambia, Ecuador, Costa Rica and Mexico are typically recognized as such ‘success stories’ and are often presented as counterpoints to more ‘closed’ and restricted policy environments for refugees (such as Jordan or Kenya) [93]. Yet, to date it remains difficult to measure the extent to which the specific favorable policies have resulted in positive outcomes for refugee self-reliance, especially in countries where the implementation of these policies is a challenge (e.g. for lack of human or financial resources).

Author’s note

In order to establish the replicability of a particular self-reliance program, it is important to distinguish which constraints on self-reliance programming stem from the socio-economic context and which are related to the political context. Yet, doing so is not straightforward as

there is often overlap between the two and more robust market systems often are in the same locations where there is a more restrictive political environment hindering refugee self-reliance [151; 38]. There is, however, a critical difference between contexts where refugee employment is limited because labor markets are saturated in general, like Kampala, and, on the other end of the spectrum, because refugees do not have the right to work, like in Nairobi and New Delhi [151; 38]. Understanding that difference is required to design appropriate self-reliance programming.

Practitioners should consider context segmentation when designing a self-reliance program as it will help determine which program components are most relevant and effective. A given context is going to be an overlay of displacement context, socio-economic context and political context. So it is helpful to understand which characteristic of each type of contexts yields which recommendation, so that one can decide how to appropriately adapt a program model.

Context segmentation should also be considered more systematically in research for evidence generation. In particular, this would help identify findings that may be linked to specific types of contexts and that can be generalized broadly across other contexts that share the same characteristics. It will also help identify research gaps on self-reliance and self-reliance programming, in terms of contexts and geographies. Finally, generating such evidence may support advocacy efforts demonstrating to host states the benefits of social and economic inclusion for refugees.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR DIFFERENT POPULATIONS

Considerations for self-reliance programming not only varies across contexts, but also within them. The level of self-reliance that can be achieved and the pathways through which self-reliance can be improved are not the same for every household and individual in a given location [77].

As with all humanitarian programming, it is important to recognize that some refugees may face specific protection concerns or barriers to becoming self-reliant on the basis of their age, gender, disability status and/or other factors. It is equally important for refugee response agencies to move towards operationalizing these specific considerations within programming to promote inclusion and increased access to all refugees [109].

We have found relatively few studies that focus on the self-reliance programming for particular population sub-groups, with one exception being a focus on the Graduation Approach for ultra-poor refugees [147]. However, the literature still provides broadly useful guidance about how program design can be tailored to meet the needs of specific populations [128]. In this section, we discuss how the needs of various displaced groups can impact which types of self-reliance program components are most relevant.

Who is the main target of self-reliance programming?

How do we decide which refugees to support with self-reliance programming? As many as possible? The most ‘vulnerable’? The most ‘viable’? There are different ways in which

this question can be answered and just as many ways to tailor program approaches.

Both the literature and practice suggest that components of effective self-reliance programming are different for refugees that are more vulnerable and for those that are more stable. In fact, some people facing extreme vulnerabilities, whether displaced or not, may never become fully self-reliant.

Appropriate targeting is a crucial step in self-reliance programming as groups with different needs and initial levels of self-reliance will require different types and combinations of social and economic interventions.

Internally Displaced Populations (IDPs)

While this project did not specifically review literature on internally displaced populations (IDPs), there were still surprisingly few resources that compare self-reliance program approaches for refugees and IDPs. In general, the literature on refugee self-reliance has limited discussion of other displacement-affected populations, despite the existence of several contexts – in particular urban contexts – in which different displaced populations overlap [77; 151; 152]. This gap in the literature may be related to the fact that the use of the terminology 'self-reliance' is less common in the literature on IDPs and other non-refugee displaced populations. However, comparing self-reliance for refugees and IDPs can help clarify which barriers to self-reliance are related to displacement itself, and which are related more specifically to the legal framework related to cross-border asylum. In turn, this can help inform self-reliance programming.

Gender

While a number of resources address gender considerations in self-reliance programming, few provide substantial evidence on how programming interacts with gender and/or gender identity and thus how it might lead to varying outcomes for people of different genders living in the same household. Notably, much of the literature equates explicit "gender" considerations with considerations for women and girls, implying that men and boys are the default target group. There was a noticeable gap in the literature pertaining to self-reliance programming for LGBTQIA+ refugees.
Existing gender norms may restrict refugee women's participation in certain self-reliance interventions [90]. At the same time, families experiencing displacement also often experience shifting gender roles and norms within the household [25; 90; 150; 39]. Understanding community norms around women's social and political participation—alongside their economic engagement—is a vital way to strengthen program effectiveness [24]. Interventions should consider women's household roles and responsibilities, their level of control over different household resources, and their access to safe and sustainable labor opportunities in a given context [24, 58].

Practitioners who use a "gender-responsive" approach partner with participant women to design programs that meet their expressed safety needs, while also fostering social and cultural norms that will improve women's economic opportunity during the time of household transition [148]. The literature also references a "gender-sensitive" approach, or a baseline awareness of how program policies and activities may positively or negatively impact women's participation and program effectiveness, as well as their vulnerability to household and public violence as a result of participation [42; 153]. Some examples of gender-sensitive program policies include providing childcare (or funding for external childcare) and

access to safe transportation [150; 42; 78]. Another aspect of gender-sensitive programming is ensuring that the outcomes of programming chosen for evaluation align with refugee women and girls' own conceptions of empowerment and self-reliance [82].

Several resources suggest that for programming that relates to livelihoods, financial inclusion, and social empowerment, it can be effective to design and implement initiatives focused on women and/or heads of household [25; 77]. Targeted support for working refugee women, and particularly those who are already the breadwinner in their household, can bolster their earnings and ability to support their families [39]. Group spaces that are single-gender can be an effective way to enable participation and social empowerment for women. For example, facilitated women's groups or collectives have been shown to generate income, foster knowledge and skill exchange, facilitate resource sharing, and build women's social capital—all important aspects for sustained self-reliance [39].

To ensure the sustainability of refugee women's empowerment within their broader environments, a good practice is situating targeted socioeconomic support for women and girls into broader community-centered programming [82]. For example, the evaluation of one mixed-gender cash grant and protection program in Palestine found that the community-based process bolstered women's' decision making, self-esteem, and bargaining power; at the end of the program, participants considered women the most trusted to receive and manage grant funds to improve overall community resilience [58]. Meanwhile, an evaluation of a cash transfer program designed to empower mixed-gender entrepreneurs living in refugee camps found that female-headed businesses had a statistically significantly higher probability of obtaining a business license than male participants, indicating women's potential success in such programs [124].

However, the literature also reveals the harmful gendered outcomes of self-reliance programs, and particularly those that withdraw support too soon post-training or focus on skills unaligned with the labor market [42]. Such missteps can quickly compound debt for refugee women, who in some contexts have more limited labor market options than men and may be exploited based on their legal situation in order to make household ends meet [42]. It is well documented that strengthening the socioeconomic position of women can also increase the risk of intra-household tensions or intimate partner violence [24; 153; 78; 82]. Even if women become the primary household earner through livelihoods interventions, that alone may not translate into changed household dynamics [24; 153]. In some cases, it may threaten long-held norms associated with masculinity, leading to increased control of women's movement [82]. In some humanitarian settings, women may prefer to receive alternative forms of compensation in programming to mitigate money-related tension in the household, for example vouchers, food, or other resources [150]. Self-reliance programs may lead to women's increased participation in the external labor market without lessening their domestic workload, leading to 'double employment' and increased distress [82; 150]. Thus, a relevant good practice in microfinance or other livelihood interventions is to anticipate gendered consequences at the household level and co-design gender-responsive—rather than gender-neutral—programming alongside women to promote their socio-economic empowerment [25; 150].
Finally, it is important to consider how gender impacts self-reliance differently within different intervention contexts. For example, in urban areas, women typically have more transferable skills, such as housekeeping, child-care, and cooking, which are in demand, whereas men often require more specialized skills to find work, especially those who come from rural areas [25]. However, women may face specific social and cultural barriers to labor market integration, especially in urban activities that are non-traditional among many rural refugee women, such as construction [42]. Further, many of the occupations women enter with transferable skills are unsafe, too far from home, poorly paid, and/or have limited potential for an upward career trajectory [25; 148; 42].

Youth

Due to the protracted nature of most recent displacement crises, youth are a critical demographic for self-reliance programming [118; 99; 63]. While in practice there is an increasing focus on self-reliance programming specifically for youth, there is not a lot of self-reliance literature that considers the specificities of youth as a target group. Refugee youth often grow up in displacement environments, which includes formative years in terms of education, socialization, and early employment [110]. As a result, youth are especially vulnerable to isolation and in some contexts, potentially radicalization. Overlooking youth in self-reliance programming has the potential to create a 'lost generation' of refugees that are not given the opportunity to develop critical skills. A good practice for self-reliance programming is to focus on building social networks, education, and skills development for refugee youth [68]. In particular, developing refugee youth's transferable skills builds their potential to pursue and benefit from durable solutions upon return, in their current context, or upon resettlement in another context [63, 152]. Overall, this is the demographic for which the 'investment' logic of self-reliance is the most salient and who have high potential to contribute to the local economy [152].

Best practices for self-reliance programming that foster social empowerment include designing interventions that include both refugee and local youth, as well as implementing mentorship programs where youth are matched with community members that have experience in their desired profession [152]. While noted as a best practice for all groups, focusing on contemporary livelihoods and building advanced technical skills is particularly important when designing programming for youth [152]. It is also effective to include program components on social empowerment and participation in civil society to combat likely marginalization [99]. Finally, it is important to have programs that support socialization and network building for youth, such as safe spaces [152].

Persons with disabilities

It is important to ensure that self-reliance programming is inclusive of and accessible to refugees with disabilities. The literature included references to the importance of designing appropriate programming for refugees with disabilities that are able to engage in income generating activities as well as for those who are not.

Some strategies to increase participation of refugees with disabilities in livelihoods activities include reorganizing work content, using audio and visual methods when promoting job opportunities, adjusting wages, and ensuring flexibility in timetables and program design [128]. Further, agencies providing livelihood training or education activities should ensure that their program location is accessible to adults and children with disabilities [73]. Some holistic, graduation approach models incorporate a social worker or case manager to ensure that refugees that would benefit from intensive support are able to access relevant services [146, 123].

For refugees that are not able to earn an income, there are still aspects of self-reliance programming that are relevant, particularly related to social protection and social empowerment. Those implementing urban self-reliance programming, for example, might consider providing long-term or permanent eligibility-based social cash transfers for refugee households that are headed by an elderly, chronically ill or person with a disability who is unable to work [77]. Additionally, formal programs should recognize and strengthen the informal mechanisms that communities and households already implement to care for their members with special needs, for example, fostering or sheltering unaccompanied children or

elders, sharing food harvests with disabled neighbors who are unable to work, or blending families into a single household [109]. Promoting opportunities to develop social capital and social networks among vulnerable refugee groups can be empowering and bolster self-reliance [151].

The literature also addresses considerations in the domain of education. One report on education programming among Syrian refugees and host community members in Jordan found that refugee students with disabilities or special learning needs experienced discrimination among educators [42]. In camp settings where aid agencies often provide education, teachers may not be well trained in how to adjust lessons for refugee students with disabilities [73].

When designing programs, practitioners should promote social inclusion by building awareness, fostering inter-agency partnerships, and amplifying the perspectives of refugees with special needs [128.5]. It is best practice for practitioners to be trained in how to recognize special needs in individuals and to understand their rights and available services [54]. Programs should work to balance the targeting of refugees with special needs to ensure their participation with socially integrating these groups into broader programming [128]. Finally, programs should provide periodic counseling and ongoing monitoring to populations with special needs to understand how their self-reliance needs are evolving over time [146].

Recognizing the intersections of displacement and disability should also include a broadened focus on how programming can sustain collective self-reliance (such as via universal access to education, food, housing, etc.), in addition to focusing on individual vulnerabilities [109].

Education and Skill-levels

Much of the literature emphasizes the need for program design to account for a diversity of education and skill-levels. This research emphasizes that many refugees have existing experience and expertise and, therefore, self-reliance programs should be more responsive to existing skills and preferences [151]. This would entail tailored career counseling and individual case management, as well as advocacy for recognition of existing diplomas, rather than only offering basic skills training [128].
In addition, the literature also mentioned the need to consider building pipelines of skilled talent and creating opportunities for refugees to acquire advanced skills in order to access other segments of the labor market [68]. Much of the literature focuses on creating opportunities for youth and young adults in particular to develop advanced skills, as well as promoting advocacy efforts to facilitate access to higher education [68]. This approach is especially relevant in middle- and high-income countries where an important challenge is moving refugees up the occupational ladder and building their careers, rather than settling for prolonged periods in low-paid, unfulfilling, and precarious employment situations [49]. Some program models focus on refugee populations that are most likely to achieve self-reliance without additional support beyond livelihoods programming [131]. For example, entrepreneurship-focused programs target ‘viable’ refugees or those deemed likely to succeed without additional support beyond start-up capital or business training [49, 123].

While valuable, this approach misses out on a large section of refugees who are not yet at that point, but with some tailored support could become viable as small business owners, entrepreneurs or workers. It is therefore also important to focus on interventions for refugees who need additional support in order to benefit from livelihoods programming [123].

Author's note

While there is agreement in both literature and among practitioners that self-reliance interventions must be tailored to the individual needs, skills, capacities and priorities of target populations, the fact that the effects of self-reliance programming tend to be assessed and documented at household level means that there is only limited evidence of what works at individual level for specific groups. For example, more evidence is needed to understand how gender influences both the targeting and outcomes of self-reliance programming, as well as the impacts for those with intersectional marginalization based on their ethnic group, race, nationality, sex assignment at birth, ability, sexual orientation, religion, education, and legal status, among other identity dimensions. As such, agencies should improve transparency around the types of tailored support services that they provide for refugees, and disaggregate evaluative findings by socioeconomic ability status to better understand and address these needs.

One important point that emerged in our review of the literature is that individual and household level approaches to self-reliance may at times be conflicting, and self-reliance interventions should strive to mitigate the potential negative impact of one approach over the other. As such, programming that combines both individual-level and household-level interventions, e.g. cash programming covering the food needs of the entire household, livelihoods interventions that target all adult members of the household recognizing that multiple income streams may be required to meet their needs, is likely to have more positive and durable impacts on the entire household.

Another important point to highlight is the need for self-reliance interventions to look at alternatives for individuals that will never be entirely self-sufficient due to specific needs (e.g. disability, age, etc.). For refugee populations, it will often mean putting strong emphasis on linking people with specific needs to national social protection systems to ensure their needs can be met sustainably.

CONCLUSION

There is no universally achievable standard for self-reliance. Instead, the ability to become self-reliant and the extent to which self-reliance is possible is highly dependent on the individual refugee and the context in which they live. The needs of different refugee population groups are different, which in turn determines which programming components are most relevant and effective. Therefore, any programming that universalizes the path to self-reliance will likely not address the needs and challenges of each population group.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the needs for self-reliance programming far outpace the reach of current efforts. There is an existing tension between the broad extent of needs for self-reliance programming and the relatively limited reach of existing self-reliance programming efforts [66]. There are tailored programs that reach a smaller target group with intensive programming (e.g. consumption support, mentoring, career counseling, case management) and also broader programs (e.g. employment policy reform, access to social protection systems) that have greater reach but cater less deeply to individual needs. A self-reliance program may reach hundreds of individual refugee households in a context; however, many programs are not designed to address the structural changes

needed to achieve community-level or population-level self-reliance sustained across generations [65]. As a result, the question of scalability is critical to the future of self-reliance. However, it is also complex because there is a fundamental difference between determining what works for large groups and what works for specific target groups.

The literature also emphasizes that attempts to undertake self-reliance programming at scale may undermine the high heterogeneity in the skills, capacities and aspirations of refugee populations [157]. This then suggests, contrary to the need for larger-scale programs, that we should employ a tailored approach to self-reliance programming focused on specific populations [123]. Tailored approaches have high success rates, where success is defined by the proportion of the target groups that actually becomes self-reliant [123]. There is further research needed on using tailored approaches in tandem with systems-level approaches.

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