

Can Zambia's Local Integration Strategy be a Model for Durable Solutions to Refugee Crises in Africa?

By Lweendo Kambela

Abstract: This paper argues that local integration of refugees is the most viable and sustainable durable solution for refugee crises in Africa. This viewpoint is premised on the fact that other forms of durable solutions – repatriation and resettlement, are shifting into being unrealistic due to long-standing conflicts in countries of origin and diminishing appetite to resettle refugees by resettlement countries respectively. The paper describes the applicability and potential of local integration to end the plight of refugees by critically drawing on the Zambia's local integration strategy being implemented for former refugees. By the 1951 UN Convention definition, a refugee is someone who has been forced to leave his or her country or habitual residence because of persecution, violence or grave human rights abuses directed to them by virtue of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership to a particular social group.

For many years now, Zambia has hosted refugees from other countries within and outside Africa and continues to implement traditional durable solutions as proposed by the UN Refugee Agency. More recently, the country intensified repatriation of refugees. However, some refugees could not return to their countries of origin and opted to be locally integrated into the Zambian community. This was particularly for former Angolan and Rwandan refugees whose refugee status ceased in 2012 and 2013 respectively. The country therefore, designed a local integration initiative to integrate 10,000 former Angolan refugees in the first step, and 4,000 former Rwandan refugees in the second step. Overall, this paper argues that local integration remains the most viable and sustainable solution that can facilitate rebuilding of lives of refugees after flight. It also provides justification for the sustainability of local integration in relation to other UNHCR's proposed solutions.

Keywords: Local integration, refugees, durable solutions, sustainability

Introduction

The current number of people forced to flee persecution, violent conflict and other human rights violations across the globe has reached alarming levels. At the end of 2017, the United Nations (UN) refugee agency (UNHCR) reported that approximately 68.5 million people were forced to flee their homes or habitual residences for safety elsewhere (UNHCR, 2018). This is the largest number recorded in the history of forced migration studies with over half of them being women and children. Statistically, over 68% of all refugees globally originate from just five countries as illustrated in Table 1.

Country source	Figure
Syrian Arab Republic	6.3 million
Afghanistan	2.6 million
South Sudan	2.4 million
Myanmar	1.2 million
Somalia	986,400

Table 1: Top refugee producing countries, adapted from 2018 UNHCR's Global Refugee Trends.

At continental level, Africa, refugee crisis remain escalated following decades of political instability and armed conflicts in many of its countries (Kasozi, 2017; Verwimp and Maystadt, 2015). The continent has, in the last few decades, seen major and recurring conflicts in Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan (Acheampong, 2015). Consequently, the continent has suffered serious refugee movements mostly within its boundaries, making it both the producer and host to millions of refugees who have fled their countries of origin in search for protection elsewhere (Chelule, 2014). Currently, the continent hosts more than 18 million people of concern to UNHCR (UNHCR, 2018a).

The protracted nature of conflicts in Africa have resulted into a long-standing refugee crisis, thereby having spill-over effects on other regions of Africa, for example southern Africa which continues to be the host to many refugees in the continent (Milner and Loesche, 2011). One of the Southern African countries with a long reputation of hosting thousands of people faced with life threatening situations is Zambia. Since its independence in 1964, this country has hosted many refugees fleeing wars, conflict and instability from other African countries mostly - Angola, Burundi, DRC, Rwanda and Somalia. The country has shown its

commitment to international burden sharing by its open door policy to refugees and by intensifying the implementation of durable solutions (Nyamazana, *et al*, 2017).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has continued to propose three historical durable solutions that enable refugees to rebuild their lives after a conflict. These are voluntary repatriation, resettlement to another third country and local integration in the country of asylum (UNHCR, 2018b). However, this paper argues that among the three solutions, local integration of refugees is the only viable and the most sustainable solution that can facilitate the end to protracted refugee crisis in Africa. This view is in tandem with the argument of Dryden-Peterson (2004) who argues that, out of the three durable solutions, local integration is the only remaining hope because repatriation and resettlement to third countries have been undermined by protracted nature of conflicts and by lack of willingness by resettlement countries to receive refugees respectively (Dryden-Peterson, 2004). This paper will therefore discuss local integration of refugees as the most viable and sustainable durable solution for refugee crisis by drawing on Zambia's local integration strategy which is being implemented for former Angolan and Rwandan refugees.

Durable Solution through Local Integration

There is no legally accepted definition of the concept 'durable solutions' to the refugee crisis in the African continent (Bessa, 2009). However, some scholars have attempted to define it. For example, (Pressé and Thomson, 2008), define durable solution as a concept in which a refugee attains or rebuilds his or her life sustainably through voluntary repatriation, local integration in the host community and resettlement to another third country (Pressé and Thomson, 2008). Voluntary repatriation entails refugees' return to their country of origin after their country of origin has attained some level of stability that can guarantee minimum safety when they return. Resettlement means refugees are transferred to another third country on realizing that repatriation and local integration are not options for them (Pillay, 2011). Local integration on the other hand is the process which allows refugees to permanently settle and rebuild their lives in the first country of asylum (Pillay, 2011; Verduijn, 2018). Since the main subject of this paper is local integration, the paper will endeavor to define it in greater detail. But, it is important to first have a full understanding of the meaning of the term integration in the context of refugees.

Integration in the context of refugees is equal participation of refugees in the social, economic and cultural facets of life available in the country of asylum (Gebre-selassie, 2008). Ager and Strang (2008) also explain that integration of refugees can be achieved through a dynamic process of interactions between the host society and refugees in a wide range of spheres (Ager and Strang, 2008). However, at policy level, the process requires an ongoing commitment and support to both the refugees and host community without superseding the other in order to enhance social cohesion between these two communities (Gebre-selassie, 2008).

In the same line Harrell-Bond (2000) provides a simple definition of the term integration which is suitable in this discussion. She claims that the term integration in the context of refugees is a situation in which the two categories of societies – receiving society and refugee society co-exist to the extent that they share the same economic and social resources available (Harrell-Bond, 2000). To realize sustainable integration, Harrell-Bond further asserts that the coming of refugee community should not present or bring about new tensions which are more than those which existed in the receiving community before (Harrell-Bond, 2000). Korac (2003) also holds a similar position and argues that integration is about functional aspects and social participation of refugees in a new community in which two different groups of cultures are to co-exist (Korac, 2003).

Kuhlman (1991) as cited in Peterson and Hovil (2003) explicitly outlines indices that can be used to measure the degree of refugee integration into the receiving community. The first index is that the socio-cultural integration allows them to still maintain their original identity by simply adjusting to their new environment; the second index is that friction between receiving society and refugees is not worse than which existed in the receiving society. Third index is that refugee community is not discriminated in accessing services available in the host community (Peterson and Hovil, 2003).

Having discussed integration, the next step is to discuss local integration in the host community. As a concept, local integration of refugees involves integration of refugees in the host society through the three inter-related channels: legal, economic and socio-cultural (Fielden, 2008; UNHCR, 2018b). Legal integration entails refugees' attainment of rights in the host country that are proportional to those rights enjoyed by local community (Crisp, 2004). Economic integration entail refugees' ability to engage in economic activities that lead to their self-reliance (UNHCR, 2006). Socio-cultural integration entails refugees' ability to adapt in the new environment in a number of ways including language, new cultures and social connections within the host country (Dryden-Peterson and Hovil, 2004). Figure 1, summarizes the concept of local integration.

Conceptualization of Local Integration

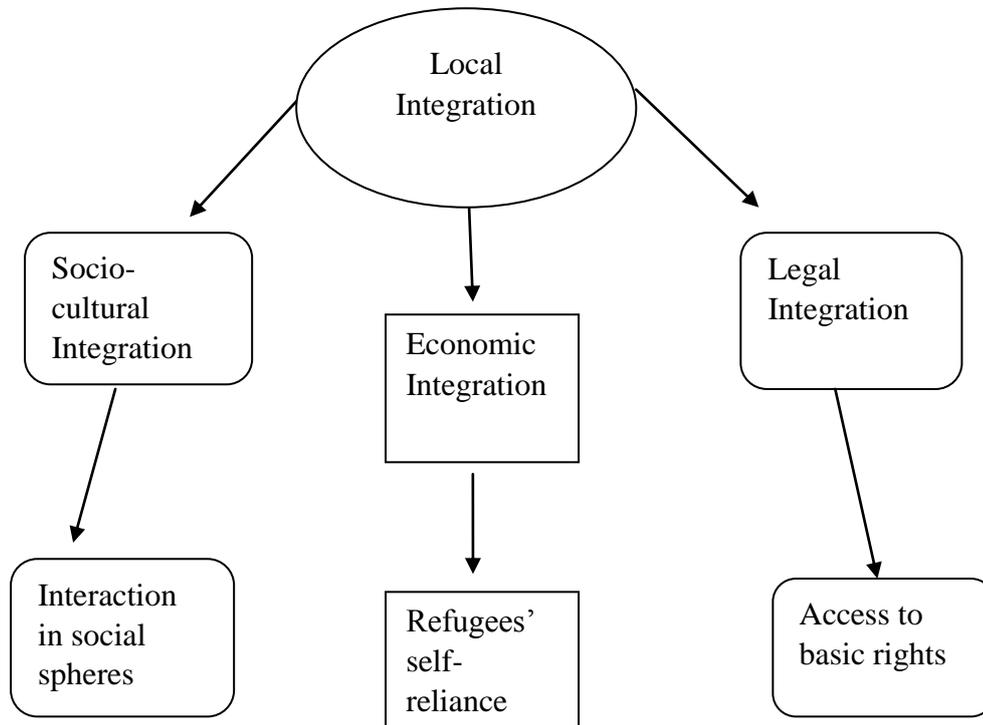


Figure 1: Conceptualizing local integration

Viability of Local Integration

The viability of local integration is premised on a number of reasons. To start with, local integration is an available option for refugees who do not foresee the possibility of returning to their country of origin due to the protracted nature of conflict. In this regard local integration offers refugees a meaningful solution to their situation by finding permanent residence in the host country. Some writers agree with this viewpoint and stress that local integration is an approach which enables refugees attain a habitable and permanent solution for their crisis by acquiring a stay in receiving society (Alencar, 2018). The permanency of this solution is based on the fact that refugees are granted residence rights which leads to acquisition of citizenship in the country of asylum.

The approval of permanent residence and eventual acquisition of citizenship status in the receiving country brings about the second feature of local integration that makes it the most sustainable solution for refugee crisis. This feature is refugees' enjoyment of numerous rights in the country of asylum. The fact that local integration offers permanent residence in the country of asylum, refugees in turn acquire the protection of the host government which ultimately lead to enjoyment of a range of rights: economic, social and civil rights that comes along with the acquisition of permanent legal residence (UNHCR, 2018c; Acheampong, 2015). To realize successful refugees' local integration process, the 1951 UN Refugee Convention emphasize on the need for host countries to take appropriate and comprehensive approaches aimed at restoring refugees' ability to enjoy human rights that would lead to their enhanced livelihood in the new society. This Convention guarantees that refugees are assured of safety, right to work, freedom of movement, owning property, access to basic services and engaging in the available income-generating activities in the host country (UN, 1951).

Another element that makes local integration a viable and sustainable durable solution to refugee crisis is that it promotes refugees' self-reliance in the host country by enabling refugees have access to land, markets and employment opportunities. A study by the United States Department on local integration of refugees in the three countries namely Cameroon, Tanzania and Zambia revealed that local integration promotes refugees' self-reliance in the host country (Development and Training Services, 2014). The study indicated that refugees attained self-reliance through access to land for agricultural related activities and access to employment including other forms of livelihoods such as engaging in income generating activities of their choice in these three countries.

Another study by Meyer (2006) reveals that self-reliance that results from flexible host country policies neutralizes the view that that refugees are 'burdens' to host countries. As a result, refugees begin to be viewed as

promoters of host community economy and also as conduits for development of host countries (Meyer, 2006; Zetter, 2012). Furthermore, a study by Easton-Calabria (2016) also indicates that local integration promotes space to maneuver for refugees including those living in urban centres which ultimately rebuilds their lives in host community (Easton-Calabria, 2016).

Another feature that supports the notion of local integration as a most viable and sustainable solution for refugee crisis is that it has the potential to accommodate the largest number of refugees in comparison to the number of refugees who can benefit from resettlement to a third country. Dryden-Peterson and Hovil (2004) argues that due to contemporary security concerns, there has been a decrease in the number of countries willing to receive and accommodate refugees on resettlement basis (Dryden-Peterson and Hovil, 2004). On the other hand, refugee repatriation to their country of origin is almost impossible due to unending conflict situations in their countries of origin (Dryden-Peterson and Hovil, 2004). These authors emphasize on exploring local integration of refugees to achieve lasting solution to refugee crisis (Dryden-Peterson and Hovil, 2004).

Cementing on this argument by Dryden-Peterson and Hovil (2004), Thomson (2017) argue that receiving refugees on resettlement basis is a critical element of international responsibility sharing but it does not correspond to its meaning in practical terms. This author questions the practicability of resettlement to other third countries on the basis that resettlement countries are slowly pulling out owing to security concerns presented by transferring people from war-torn countries to countries in the global north (Thomson, 2017).

Local Integration in Practice: Zambia's Strategy

Zambia has generously hosted refugees from different countries amid its declining economy (Nyamazana, *et al*, 2017). Since its independence to date, the number of caseloads has been fluctuating. Currently, Zambia is host to approximately 80,000 persons of concern to UNHCR of which the majority originates from DRC (CRRF Global Digital Portal, 2018). Due to changes in the Zambia's refugee policy, the country shifted from the encampment policy to a more flexible policy known as settlement which facilitates refugees' self-reliance in the host country (Hunter, 2009; Hansen, 2018). During this policy transition, refugee camps were closed and many of the refugees now live in the three officially designated refugee settlements: Mayukwayukwa, Meheba and the newly established Mantapala.

As part of providing durable solutions to many of the refugees, Zambia has shown commitment in the implementation of local integration of refugees in its territory under an initiative framed in a document referred to as the *Strategic Framework for Local Integration of Former Refugees in Zambia (SFLI)*. This Framework was designed in 2014 as a blueprint to actualize Zambian Government's pledge of offering durable solutions for former refugees who sought to locally integrate in Zambia after the application of cessation clause. Angolan and Rwandan refugees who have sought asylum in Zambia for many years lost their refugee status in 2012 and 2013 respectively. The first roll out of the pledge was to integrate 10,000 former Angolan refugees and the second part was to integrate approximately 4,000 former Rwandan refugees (UNHCR, 2014). This strategic Framework outlined three fundamental objectives that aimed at facilitating a second home to former refugees by supporting their legal status, economic, social and cultural prospects within Zambian society (UNHCR, 2014).

The first objective envisaged facilitation of legal integration of former refugees by issuing them permanent residence status and ultimately citizenship; the second objective was to guarantee that former refugees and the receiving population in the resettlement areas have access to basic services on equal basis; thirdly, the strategy pictured advocacy for additional international assistance to refugee affected areas in support of their priority local development such as rehabilitation of critical infrastructure, schools, health facilities including small business centres where business minded refugees would trade from (UNHCR, 2014). Based on these fundamental objectives, the following areas of intervention were identified: *Alternative legal status; integrated resettlement program and refugee affected areas* (UNHCR, 2014). Refer to figure 2 for a detailed framework.

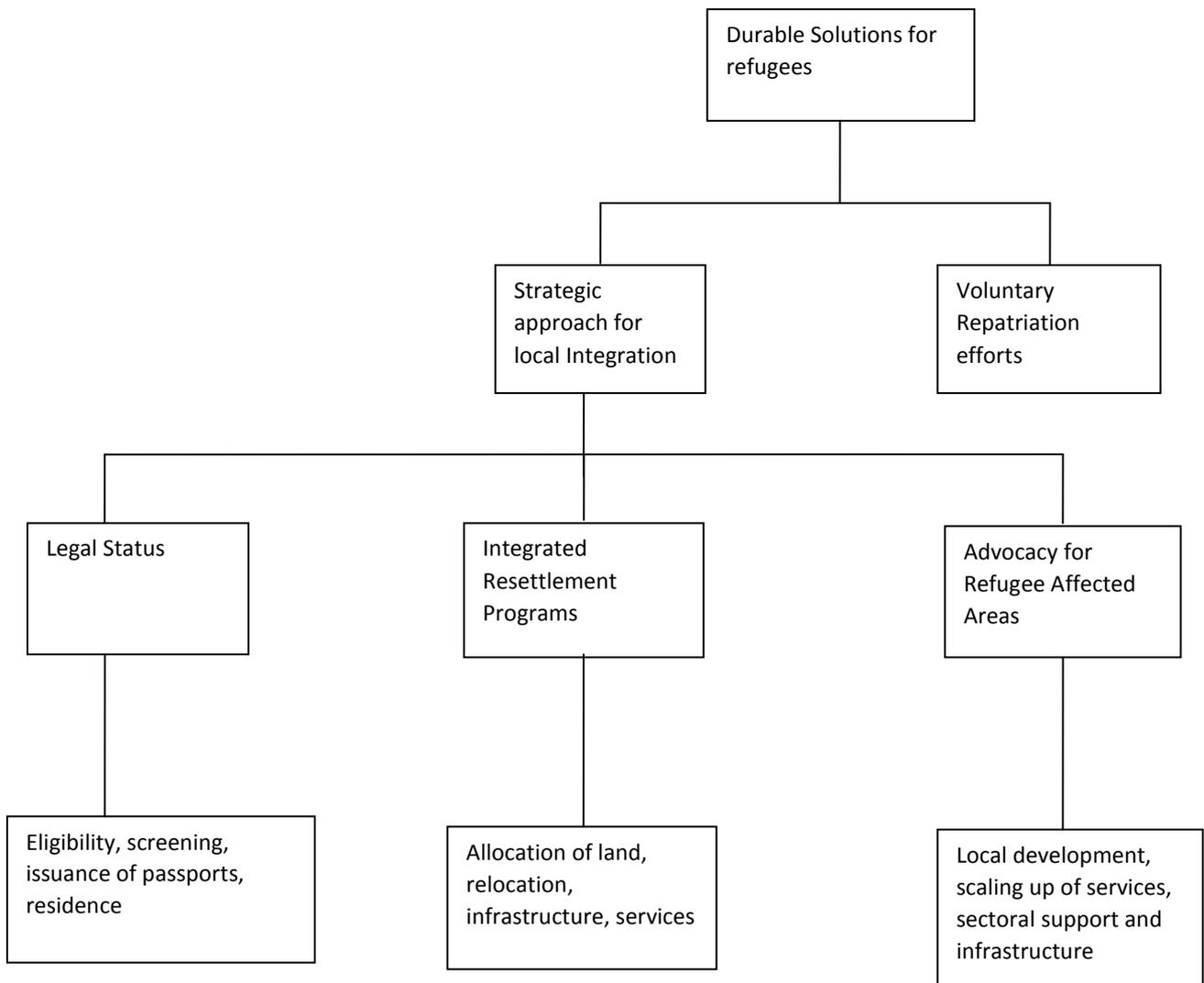


Figure 2: Strategic Framework for Local Integration of Refugees: adapted from UNHCR (2014)

Current Situation of the Local Integration Initiative

The initial activities under the *Integrated Resettlement Program* constituted large land acquisition from traditional ownership, demarcation, numbering of plots and allocation. In total the government de-gazetted approximately 320km² of arable land in Meheba refugee settlement and 150km² of arable land in Mayukwayukwa refugee settlement for the local integration program. After the demarcation of plots, the plots were given permanent plot numbers and then allocated to both former refugees and Zambians to settle on side by side (UNHCR, 2014).

During the initial roll out stage (mid - 2016) of the local integration program under the *Alternative Legal Status*, approximately 6,431 Angolans were screened and found eligible to be locally integrated and out of this number some 1,485 residence permits were issued (UNHCR, 2018c). In 2015, the Zambia Government also approved the local integration of former Rwandan refugees who were affected by cessation clause in 2013. According to UNHCR and Government of Zambia joint press statement (2018), out of the screened former refugees, a total of 1,508 former Rwandan refugees were offered residence permits that would lead to their local integration in Meheba Refugee Settlement (UNHCR and Government of Zambia joint press statement, 2018).

Currently, more than 3,000 former refugees and locals have moved to the allocated plots in the two resettlement areas in Meheba and Mayukwayukwa Refugee Settlements. Each family who qualified for the program was given five hectares of land. Basic structures of shelter were raised and provided to the most

vulnerable beneficiaries of the local integration initiative, women and the aged. In addition to this, the vulnerable families were provided with free farming inputs and tools (UNHCR, 2018c).

With regards to the final component of the framework: *Advocacy for Refugee Affected Areas*, there are a number of works which has continued to be undertaken, for examples renovation and building of both health posts and schools in Mayukwayukwa Refugee Settlement including installation of water tanks. Similarly, Maheba Refugee Settlement has equally seen construction of schools and health facilities as part of development in the refugee affected areas (UNHCR, 2018c). Furthermore, UNHCR in partnership with the Government of Zambia continues to promote self-reliance initiatives for the locally integrated former refugees and locals in the two settlements. The key initiatives include provision of training in fish farming, bee keeping, crop farming and livestock, as well as business and entrepreneurship skills training (UNHCR, 2018c).

Additionally, UNHCR and International Labour Organization (ILO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other International non-Governmental Organizations (INGO) are helping in scaling up livelihoods of former refugees and locals by addressing issues of savings and former refugees' access to finance, trainings in sustainable farming methods, environmental protection and promoting community cohesion strategies including water and sanitation within the settlement (UNHCR, 2018c). Overall, there has been progress in the implementation of the local integration initiative; however, due to political instability in the neighboring DRC, Zambia has continued to receive new influx of refugees which has challenged the local integration program. The country has shifted its attention towards protecting these new refugees from DRC by establishing a new Mantapala Refugee Settlement to host the Congolese refugees. However, Zambia still remains committed to providing protection and assistance through local integration especially after the country voluntarily signed up to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

Conclusion

There are evident efforts and commitments for providing durable solutions for refugee crisis being facilitated by various stakeholders and partners under the lead of UNHCR. However, the practical part of these efforts does not correspond to the number of refugees in need of durable solutions in Africa. This has been compounded by the protracted number of events of political instability in some countries of Africa, notably, DRC, Central African Republic, Somalia and the Africa's youngest country, South Sudan. This paper argued that, among the existing durable solutions for refugee crisis in Africa, local integration in the receiving country remains the most viable and sustainable durable solution to end the plight of refugees in Africa. This viewpoint is premised on the fact that voluntary repatriation has been undermined by the protracted nature of political instabilities in the countries of origin. On the other hand, resettlement to a third country has been undermined by serious security and other factors on the part of resettlement countries in the north.

Backing up this argument, the paper discussed local integration process as a concept and then showcased the Zambia's local integration strategy for former Angolan and Rwandan refugees who opted to remain in Zambia after cessation clause was invoked on them. This initiative was outlined in a framework known as *Strategic Framework for the Local Integration of Former Refugees* designed by the Zambian government and UNHCR in 2014. In the initial stage, Zambia pledged to locally integrate 10,000 and 4,000 former Angolan and Rwandan refugees respectively. Currently, out of the number of former Angolan and Rwandan refugees who applied and underwent the screening process, more than 3000 have been issued with residence permits to settle in the two refugee settlements: Mayukwayukwa and Meheba. This process has been ongoing in the two designated refugee settlements; however, the coming of new influx of refugees from DRC has undermined the local integration program as there is a shift of attention to towards protecting refugees from DRC and the eventual establishment of a new refugee settlement known as Mantapala.

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