

Bridging Humanitarian Response and Development Cooperation*

– Lessons from Uganda’s Refugee Integration Model –

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국문초록

이 논문은 국제개발협력(IDC)이 우간다의 개발지향적 난민·이주 거버넌스를 어떻게 형성하는지 분석하기 위해, 글로벌 규범—난민에 관한 글로벌 콤팩트(GCR), 이주에 관한 글로벌 콤팩트(GCM), 지속가능개발목표(SDGs), 그리고 인도

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주의-개발-평화(HDP) 넥서스—가 국가 및 지방 차원의 정책 시스템으로 어떻게 번역되는지를 검토한다. 본 연구는 정책 및 제도 문서에 대한 주제분석을 바탕으로 난민과 더 넓은 이주 개념을 명확히 구분하며, 남수단과 콩고민주공화국 출신이 다수를 차지하고 높은 부양비와 취약한 가구구조를 보이는 우간다의 난민 인구 특성을 핵심 분석 요소로 설정한다. 다층적 분석 틀을 활용하여 글로벌 규범 입력 → IDC 기여 → 국가 제도 → 지방 실행으로 이어지는 분석 과정을 데이터-코드-주제-결과의 선명한 흐름으로 제시한다.

분석 결과, 우간다는 난민법(2006), 국가개발계획 III(2021-2025), ReHoPE 전략, GCM 이행계획(NIP 2024-2028)에 난민·이주 이슈를 통합함으로써 높은 정책적 일관성을 확보하였다. IDA18 난민·수용지역 서브윈도우, EU·BMZ의 NIP 지원, UNDP·IOM의 지방역량 강화 프로그램 등 IDC는 이러한 성과를 견인하는 핵심 요소였다. 그러나 지역 간 이행 격차, 지방정부 역량 부족, 기후 스트레스, 난민의 낮은 자립성 등 구조적 제약이 여전히 존재한다. 특히 HDP 넥서스의 '평화(P)' 요소는 사회적 응집 프로그램에 머물러 있으며, 보다 구조적인 갈등요인에 대한 접근이 부족함이 드러났다. 논문은 IDC가 가장 변혁적 역할을 수행하는 조건은 국가 주도성, 재정 분권화, 지역사회 참여가 결합될 때임을 주장하며, 우간다 사례는 글로벌 콤팩트를 국가 개발 시스템 안에 내재화하려는 국제적 노력에 중요한 함의를 제공한다고 결론짓는다.

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1. Introduction

The world is experiencing unprecedented levels of forced displacement, with more than 120 million people displaced globally as of mid-2024, including 43 million refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2024). Contemporary displacement is driven by a convergence of factors—protracted armed conflicts in South Sudan, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), climate-induced crises in the Sahel and the Horn of

Africa, and chronic political and economic instability in fragile states. While humanitarian assistance has traditionally been the primary mechanism for addressing refugee crises, the scale, duration, and complexity of present-day displacement reveal the limitations of short-term emergency responses. Displacement is increasingly understood not as an isolated humanitarian incident but as a long-term developmental, governance, and peacebuilding challenge requiring coordinated, multi-actor engagement (Crawford et al. 2018; Betts & Collier 2017).

Against this backdrop, international development cooperation (IDC) has become a central pillar of global efforts to address displacement. Multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the EU, and UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR) now integrate displacement considerations into development financing, livelihood support, infrastructure investments, and governance reforms. Global frameworks—including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus—promote a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach that links humanitarian protection with development planning and peacebuilding priorities (OECD DAC 2025; UNGA 2018). However, despite these normative commitments, implementation gaps persist. Host states often maintain restrictive refugee regimes, and donor interventions frequently remain fragmented, short-term, or insufficiently aligned with national and local priorities (Milner 2009). Moreover, displacement-affected communities continue to experience disparities between policy design and lived realities, revealing the limitations of predominantly top-down approaches.

Uganda offers a particularly relevant site for examining these

dynamics. Hosting over 1.7 million refugees—primarily from South Sudan, DRC, and Somalia—Uganda is widely cited as one of the most progressive refugee-hosting countries in the world (UNHCR 2024). Its self-reliance and inclusion model grants refugees’ rights to work, freedom of movement, and access to national services, while embedding refugee needs into national development planning. These principles are operationalized through major IDC-supported instruments such as the World Bank’s IDA18 Refugee Sub-Window, UNDP’s ReHoPE Strategy, and extensive bilateral support from the EU, the United States, Japan, and others. Uganda’s leadership has further expanded into the broader migration-governance space with the National Implementation Plan for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (NIP 2024–2028), which aligns national migration policy with global compacts and promotes regular pathways, improved coordination, and data-driven governance (IOM Uganda 2024). Uganda thus represents a paradigmatic case of how humanitarian and development agendas are institutionally linked through IDC and national planning systems.

Despite these achievements, important questions remain about how IDC shapes Uganda’s refugee governance outcomes, how effectively global principles are translated into national and local systems, and where gaps persist, particularly concerning the underdeveloped peace (P) dimension of the HDP Nexus. While Uganda’s model is celebrated internationally, recent scholarship raises concerns about donor dependency, differentiated local experiences, settlement-level pressures, and the limited incorporation of conflict dynamics and local perspectives into program design.

This study addresses these issues through the following

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research questions:

1. How has IDC influenced Uganda's refugee governance structures, policies, and outcomes?
2. What are the strengths and limitations—across humanitarian, development, and peace dimensions—of Uganda's development-oriented approach to refugee hosting?
3. What lessons can other refugee-hosting countries and the broader international community draw from Uganda's model, particularly regarding the localization and sustainability of the HDP Nexus?

By examining these questions, the paper contributes to literature on the migration-development nexus, HDP operationalization, and multi-level governance in displacement contexts. The study advances a multi-level analytical approach that traces interactions between global compacts, international development actors, national policy frameworks, and local implementation systems. In doing so, it highlights both the transformative potential and the enduring challenges of aligning humanitarian and development agendas in protracted displacement settings, offering policy-relevant insights for building more coherent, durable, and inclusive systems of refugee governance.

2. Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

To avoid conceptual ambiguity, this study distinguishes clearly between refugees, forced migrants, and migrants. Under the Refugee Act (2006) and the 1951 Refugee Convention, refugees are people fleeing persecution, armed conflict, or generalized violence and are entitled to international

protection. Forced migrants refer more broadly to individuals displaced due to conflict, environmental shocks, or crises but not necessarily qualifying for refugee status under international law. The term migrant, in contrast, is used in Uganda's National Implementation Plan for the Global Compact for Migration (NIP 2024-2028) to denote persons moving for economic, social, or environmental reasons, including labor migrants and internal migrants.

This study therefore uses refugee when discussing Uganda's Refugee Act, CRRF, NDP III integration, and humanitarian-development linkages; and migrant only when addressing GCM-related governance structures under the NIP 2024-2028. This clarification ensures analytical precision in examining Uganda's dual systems for refugee protection and broader migration management.

2.1. The Migration-Development Nexus

The relationship between migration and development has long been central to both academic inquiry and policy debates, but much of the early work focused on voluntary economic migration, not forced displacement. Classic economic theories conceptualized migration as a response to developmental disparities, emphasizing "push-pull" dynamics shaped by poverty, unemployment, and wage differentials (Todaro 1969; Massey et al. 1993). Later perspectives reframed migration as a potential driver of development, highlighting the role of remittances, diasporic networks, and transnational skill transfers in promoting economic growth (de Haas 2010; Ratha 2013). These frameworks, however, assume a degree of voluntariness, mobility choice, and

integration into labor markets that is often absent in refugee situations.

In forced displacement contexts, the migration-development nexus must be reconceptualized. Refugees do not migrate to pursue economic opportunities but flee conflict, political persecution, and generalized violence. Their mobility is therefore constrained by legal regimes, border controls, and protection frameworks that differ substantially from those governing labor migration. Scholars argue that applying traditional migration-development theories to refugee contexts risks obscuring the political and coercive nature of displacement (Ali 2022; Bartram 2015). Moreover, refugees frequently face systemic barriers—restricted labor markets, limited rights, social exclusion, and lack of documentation—that inhibit their ability to participate fully in development processes (Betts 2013).

Recent scholarship stresses the need to examine forced migration through a development-oriented yet conflict-sensitive lens, recognizing both the potential and the limitations of refugee inclusion. On the one hand, integrating refugees into national systems can generate long-term development gains, such as increased labor supply, expanded markets, and infrastructure improvements that benefit both refugees and host communities (Jacobsen 2002; Crawford et al. 2018). On the other hand, development initiatives can unintentionally mask structural inequalities, reinforce dependency, or exacerbate tensions when they fail to address the political drivers of displacement or the uneven distribution of benefits among local populations (Eriksen et al. 2021; Turner 2015).

A growing body of literature therefore emphasizes the importance of bottom-up perspectives. Refugee-led organizations,

local governments, and host community actors play pivotal roles in shaping development outcomes but are often marginalized in policy design dominated by national authorities and international donors (Easton-Calabria & Pincock 2018). Studies show that refugee livelihoods, social cohesion, and self-reliance are deeply influenced by localized factors—land availability, market access, environmental stress, and local politics—that national or global frameworks often overlook.

Taken together, this literature suggests that the migration-development nexus in forced displacement contexts cannot be reduced to the optimistic assumption that refugees automatically contribute to development if given opportunities. Instead, it must be understood as a complex, multi-level process shaped by political, economic, and social structures, where development interventions must be aligned with the realities and capacities of both refugees and host communities. This more nuanced view provides a foundation for analyzing Uganda’s efforts to transform displacement into inclusive development through integrated humanitarian and development approaches.

2.2. The Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus

The HDP Nexus emerged as a response to growing recognition that protracted displacement and recurring crises cannot be effectively addressed by siloed interventions. Traditional humanitarian responses prioritize life-saving assistance and protection, while development actors focus on long-term socioeconomic change, and peacebuilding actors engage with conflict mitigation and governance reform. When these pillars operate independently, programming often becomes

fragmented, duplicative, and unable to address the underlying causes or long-term impacts of crises (OECD DAC 2025).

In displacement contexts, the HDP Nexus seeks to create strategic complementarity across these domains. It promotes early recovery, inclusive national systems, and self-reliance pathways while ensuring that refugees and host communities benefit from broader development planning (UNGA, 2018). The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) institutionalizes this approach through the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which calls for multi-actor, multi-year, and nationally owned responses.

However, translating the Nexus into practice has proven challenging. Several strands of critical scholarship argue that Nexus implementation often suffers from structural and institutional constraints. First, funding misalignments persist, humanitarian budgets are short-term and earmarked, whereas development financing is slow-moving and poorly adapted to fast-changing crises (Fanning & Fullwood-Thomas 2019). Second, institutional fragmentation remains entrenched, as organizations differ in mandates, operational cultures, and risk tolerances (Stamnes 2016). Third, the Nexus can reproduce top-down, donor-driven priorities, sidelining national ownership and local governance capacities.

While humanitarian and development actors have made significant progress toward integration, the peace component is often limited to broad notions of “social cohesion” rather than substantive conflict prevention or political settlement processes. Scholars argue that this narrowing of “peace” risks depoliticizing displacement by shifting attention away from root causes, such as political repression, regional conflicts,

cross-border insecurity, and state fragility (Mac Ginty 2010; Zaun & Nantermoz 2023). Development programming that does not address structural violence may inadvertently mask, reproduce, or intensify existing tensions, particularly in settings with resource scarcity or contested land governance-common dynamics in refugee-hosting areas.

Another challenge concerns local ownership and bottom-up perspectives. While the Nexus emphasizes inclusive governance, in practice displacement-affected communities often have limited voice in determining priorities, resource allocation, and program design. Local governments, frontline service providers, and refugee-led organizations are essential to sustainable outcomes but remain under-resourced and under-recognized in Nexus frameworks (Easton-Calabria & Pincock 2018). Consequently, the Nexus may overlook local political economies, intra-community tensions, and social hierarchies that shape daily realities and determine success or failure on the ground.

Despite these limitations, the HDP Nexus remains a useful analytical lens for understanding the multi-level governance of displacement. It highlights the need for coherent and nationally grounded strategies in which humanitarian, development, and peace actors work toward shared goals. For this study, the Nexus provides a framework for examining how IDC influences Uganda's refugee response and how global commitments-such as the GCR, SDGs, and NIP 2024-2028-are integrated into national and subnational systems. At the same time, a critical engagement with the Nexus acknowledges its gaps, particularly regarding the Peace dimension and the limited incorporation of refugee and host community perspectives. These tensions guide the analysis of Uganda's development-oriented refugee model

and inform the assessment of its strengths, limitations, and broader applicability.

2.3. Policy Coherence in IDC

Policy coherence has become a central concept in efforts to align development cooperation with migration and refugee governance. In principle, coherence refers to the harmonization of policies, funding mechanisms, and institutional roles across different actors and sectors to achieve mutually reinforcing objectives (OECD 2025). In displacement contexts, it implies a shift from parallel humanitarian and development systems toward coordinated interventions embedded within national development plans. Effective policy coherence generally encompasses three dimensions: Horizontal coherence across government ministries and sectors; Vertical coherence between national and local institutions; and External coherence between state priorities and international donor agendas.

In practice, however, achieving coherence is difficult. A growing body of critical scholarship highlights persistent power asymmetries between donors and host states. Donors often shape policy priorities through funding conditionalities, earmarked resources, and project-based modalities that may not fully align with national or local needs (Knoll & Sheriff 2017; Milner 2009). This dynamic can result in the “northern hegemony” of the global refugee regime, where policy directions are heavily influenced by external actors while host governments manage the political and social consequences on the ground. Such arrangements tend to reinforce a top-down, supply-driven approach, marginalizing the perspectives of

refugees, host communities, and frontline implementers (Betts 2006).

Another challenge relates to local ownership and vertical coherence. Even when national policies integrate refugee or migration concerns—as in Uganda’s NDP III or its NIP 2024–2028—the capacity of district governments, settlement authorities, and local service providers often remains limited. Local actors frequently lack the financial and human resources needed to operationalize integrated policies, resulting in uneven implementation and policy–practice gaps. These intra-state disparities are rarely accounted for in donor-driven coordination frameworks, which tend to focus on national-level planning rather than subnational realities. Consequently, coherent policies at the national level do not automatically translate into coherent outcomes at the community level.

The migration–development literature also warns that policy coherence initiatives can inadvertently blur important conceptual distinctions. Efforts to integrate displacement into development planning sometimes collapse refugees and migrants into a single governance category, obscuring differences in legal status, protection needs, and rights frameworks. Such conflation risks conceptual ambiguity and may lead to policies that inadequately address the distinct vulnerabilities of refugees compared to labor migrants or internal migrants.

Nonetheless, when implemented effectively, policy coherence can enhance the sustainability and equity of development-oriented refugee governance. Instruments such as the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa and the World Bank’s IDA18 Sub-Window for Refugees demonstrate how development financing can support national systems, strengthen public

services, and foster socio-economic inclusion. Uganda's ReHoPE Strategy and the integration of migration indicators into NDP III represent ambitious attempts to institutionalize coherence by aligning donor support with national priorities and coordinating across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors.

Yet a consensus is emerging that coherence must be understood not as a technical exercise of coordination but as a political process shaped by competing interests, unequal power relations, and varied institutional capacities. Coherence is therefore best assessed through a multi-level lens that considers global influences, donor dynamics, national policy frameworks, and local implementation realities. This study adopts such an approach in its analytical framework (Section 2.4), recognizing both the opportunities and the limitations of policy coherence in shaping Uganda's integrated refugee and migration governance system.

2.4. Analytical Framework for this Study

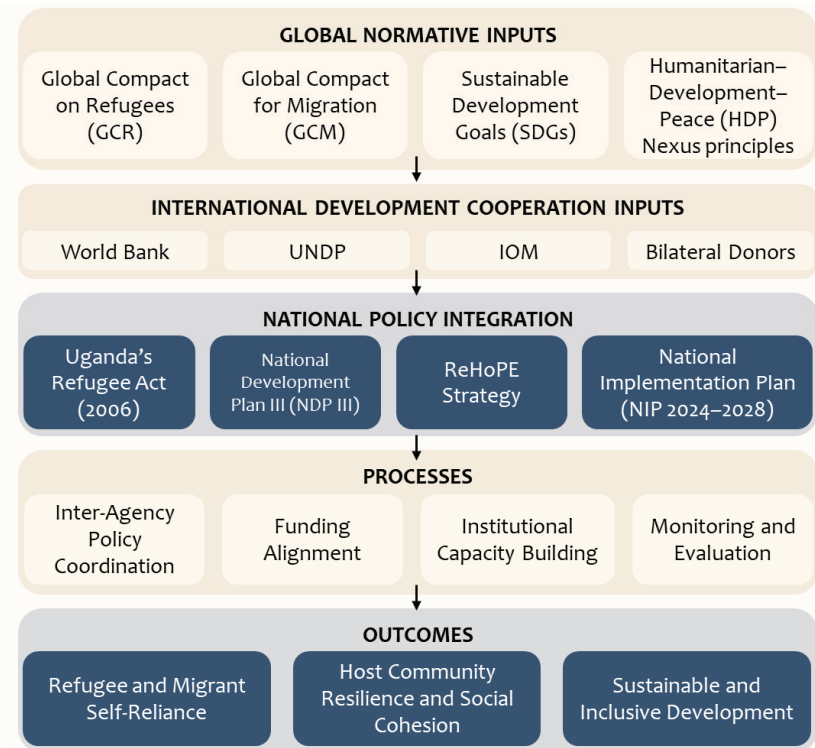
Building on the above literature, this study adopts the HDP Nexus as its analytical lens to examine the interaction between IDC and Uganda's refugee response. The framework conceptualizes:

Inputs: International development actors, funding mechanisms, and normative frameworks (GCR, SDGs).

Processes: Integration of refugee needs into national planning, coordination between humanitarian and development actors, and community-level implementation.

Outcomes: Enhanced refugee self-reliance, improved host community resilience, and progress toward durable solutions.

This framework enables a holistic analysis of how Uganda’s refugee policies are shaped by and contribute to global efforts to bridge humanitarian relief and development cooperation. The conceptual framework diagram (Figure 1) visually represents the multi-level interactions linking global policy frameworks, IDC, and national implementation processes within Uganda’s integrated refugee and migration governance system.



〈Figure 1〉 Multi-level conceptual framework diagram of Uganda’s development-oriented refugee and migration governance.
(compiled by author)

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, theory-informed case study design to examine how IDC shapes Uganda's integrated refugee and migration governance system. A case study approach is appropriate for analyzing complex, multi-level policy environments where outcomes are shaped by diverse actors, overlapping mandates, and dynamic political economies (Yin 2014). Uganda is treated as an embedded case, enabling analysis across global, national, and local governance levels. This design supports the study's aim of tracing how global frameworks and donor interventions are translated into national policy and local implementation, and how these processes influence outcomes for refugees, migrants, and host communities.

3.2. Case Selection Rationale

Uganda represents a critical and information-rich case for analyzing development-oriented displacement governance. Unlike many refugee-hosting countries, Uganda's legal and policy frameworks-the Refugee Act (2006) and Refugee Regulations (2010)-guarantee refugees the rights to work, freedom of movement, and access to national services. These rights-based foundations underpin its reputation as one of the world's most progressive refugee-hosting states.

At the same time, Uganda stands out for embedding refugee and migration issues in national planning via the National

Development Plan III (2021-2025) and the National Implementation Plan for the Global Compact for Migration (NIP 2024-2028). The NIP formalizes Uganda's effort to govern multiple forms of human mobility-refugee, labor, and internal migration-through a coherent, development-oriented approach aligned with the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Uganda's governance model is further shaped by substantial IDC engagement. Key initiatives include the World Bank's IDA18 Sub-Window for Refugees, UNDP's ReHoPE Strategy, IOM's Uganda Country Strategy (2024-2028), and bilateral support from the EU, United States, Japan, and Germany (BMZ). The convergence of these actors and frameworks offers a rich empirical setting for examining the operationalization, strengths, and limitations of the HDP Nexus.

Uganda is therefore selected not as a representative case, but as a model case whose policy innovations and challenges provide broader insights for global and regional debates on refugee and migration governance.

3.3. Data Sources

This study draws on a wide-ranging corpus of national policy documents, institutional reports, and scholarly literature selected to reflect the multi-level processes outlined in the analytical framework. At the national level, key documents include the Refugee Act (2006) and Refugee Regulations (2010), which form the legal foundation of Uganda's refugee regime; the National Development Plan III (2021-2025), which

integrates displacement into national planning; and the National Implementation Plan for the Global Compact for Migration (NIP 2024-2028), which operationalizes Uganda's GCM commitments through a whole-of-government approach. Additional national instruments, such as the ReHoPE Strategy and the IOM Uganda Country Strategy (2024-2028), provide insights into sectoral priorities and institutional coordination.

These documents are complemented by international development cooperation sources, including reports from the World Bank's IDA18 Sub-Window, program evaluations by the EU, UNDP, and UNHCR, and policy guidance from the OECD DAC and progress updates on both the GCR and GCM. To contextualize and critically assess these institutional perspectives, the study engages extensively with peer-reviewed and grey literature on migration-development linkages, protracted displacement, refugee self-reliance, Nexus implementation, and policy coherence (e.g., Betts 2013; de Haas 2010; Ali 2022; Jacobsen 2002; Stamnes 2016). Collectively, these data sources allow the research to capture global norms, international donor strategies, national policy design, and subnational implementation dynamics, thereby ensuring alignment with the study's conceptual framework and mitigating the risk of relying solely on top-down perspectives.

3.4. Analytical Approach

The study employs a thematic content analysis structured around the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus and the multi-level analytical framework introduced earlier. A combined deductive-inductive strategy guided the coding

process. Deductive codes were derived from the conceptual framework and established literature and included categories such as policy coherence and integration, funding alignment, institutional capacity and coordination, local governance, protection and self-reliance outcomes, and peace or social cohesion dimensions. Inductive themes emerged from iterative engagement with the documents and revealed cross-cutting issues such as donor dependency, climate vulnerability in settlement areas, disparities between national commitments and district-level implementation, and tensions between political ambition and resource constraints. These themes were generated through repeated pattern recognition across multiple sources: for example, references to integrated service delivery in ReHoPE (2017), NDP III, and IDA18 evaluations collectively formed a prominent theme, while repeated emphasis on multi-stakeholder coordination in the NIP 2024-2028 and UN Network on Migration reports reinforced the theme of institutional coherence.

To enhance analytical rigor, the study utilizes triangulation by systematically comparing national policy documents (e.g., Refugee Act, NDP III, NIP 2024-2028), multilateral assessments (World Bank UNDP UNHCR IOM), and independent academic scholarship (Betts & Collier, Milner, Easton-Calabria). For instance, discrepancies between government claims of land allocation progress and UNHCR field evidence of uneven regional implementation served to correct institutional bias and strengthen the validity of findings. Guided by the multi-level framework, the analytical process proceeds by examining global and IDC inputs, national processes of policy integration and coordination, and local-level outcomes related

to self-reliance, resilience, and human security. This structured sequencing creates a transparent and logical pathway from data to codes, from codes to themes, and from themes to the findings and conclusions presented in later sections.

3.5. Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations. First, it relies primarily on policy and institutional documents, which reflect top-down perspectives. These sources often overlook the lived experiences of refugees, host communities, and local frontline implementers. Second, while extensive triangulation reduces bias, the absence of primary interviews limits the depth of bottom-up insights, particularly regarding intra-community dynamics and local political economies. Third, data on peace and human security outcomes remain uneven across districts, which restricts analysis of conflict-sensitive programming. Recognizing these limitations, the study adopts a critical interpretive stance and recommends future research incorporating ethnographic, participatory, or community-based methods to better capture the perspectives of refugees, host communities, and district-level governance actors.

4. Uganda's Refugee Response in Context

Uganda hosts approximately 1.7 million refugees as of 2024, making it one of the largest refugee-hosting countries worldwide. The majority originate from South Sudan (around 57%) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (about 32%), with

smaller populations from Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, and Eritrea. Refugees are primarily settled in the West Nile region (Arua, Yumbe, Adjumani), South-Western districts (Isingiro, Kyegegwa), and parts of the Midwestern region.

The refugee population exhibits pronounced demographic vulnerabilities: an estimated 57% are children under 15, more than half of households are female-headed, and average dependency ratios among refugees (1.7) substantially exceed those of host communities (1.2). Settlement-based land allocation, a cornerstone of Uganda's self-reliance model, has come under increasing strain due to environmental degradation, rapid population growth, and climate-related stress. These dynamics shape refugees' and hosts' lived experiences and underline the importance-and difficulty-of pursuing inclusive, development-oriented, and conflict-sensitive governance.

4.1. National Policy Framework

Uganda is frequently cited as a global leader in progressive refugee governance, underpinned by a comparatively generous legal and policy framework. The Refugee Act (2006) and Refugee Regulations (2010) provide refugees with rights to work, freedom of movement, and access to public services such as education and health on terms broadly comparable to nationals (Government of Uganda 2006). Unlike encampment-based models in some neighboring countries, Uganda adopts a settlement approach, allocating plots of land to refugee households to promote agricultural livelihoods and self-reliance (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil 2003).

The Refugee Act (2006) forms the backbone of this regime,

explicitly guaranteeing refugees “the right to engage in gainful employment,” “freedom of movement,” and “access to public services on equal terms with nationals.” These provisions distinguish Uganda from more restrictive systems, although implementation remains uneven across districts and sectors.

Building on this legal foundation, Uganda has mainstreamed displacement into its national development planning. The National Development Plan III (NDP III, 2021-2025) explicitly commits to “integrating refugee and host community needs into national planning frameworks,” particularly under the Governance and Security and Human Capital Development programs. NDP III outlines three interrelated strategies: coordinating multi-sectoral responses for refugee protection and assistance; operationalizing the national refugee policy; and developing a comprehensive migration policy.

These efforts are implemented through collaboration between the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the Ministry of Local Government, district authorities, and development partners, reinforcing horizontal and vertical policy coherence. NDP III also highlights agri-led local economic development and cross-cutting issues such as gender, environment, and social protection, linking refugee inclusion to broader national resilience goals.

Uganda has also adopted the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which provides a platform for multi-stakeholder engagement between the government, UN agencies, donors, and NGOs. Sectoral initiatives such as the Settlement Transformative Agenda (STA) and the Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (2018-2021) further embed refugee needs into planning for

infrastructure, education, and service delivery.

Beyond refugee-specific policies, the National Implementation Plan for the Global Compact for Migration (NIP 2024-2028) extends Uganda's governance framework to encompass all forms of human mobility, including labor and internal migration (IOM Uganda 2024). The NIP operationalizes commitments under the GCM and aligns migration policy with the SDGs by: Strengthening institutional coordination across ministries and local authorities; Promoting regular and lawful migration pathways through bilateral labor agreements; Protecting the rights and welfare of migrants; Addressing root causes of displacement such as climate change, poverty, and insecurity; and Enhancing data-driven migration management in collaboration with the UN Network on Migration.

Developed under the National Coordination Mechanism on Migration (NCM) within the OPM and supported by the EU and BMZ, the NIP represents a shift from fragmented migration management toward a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. It reflects Uganda's effort to align its domestic governance architecture with both the GCR and GCM, while maintaining national ownership.

Complementing these frameworks, the IOM Uganda Country Strategy (2024-2028) articulates three strategic objectives-(1) saving lives and protecting people on the move; (2) addressing root causes of forced displacement; and (3) facilitating regular migration pathways-closely aligned with Uganda's national priorities and the HDP Nexus. Together, the Refugee Act, NDP III, ReHoPE, NIP, and IOM's strategy position Uganda as a regional reference point for integrated migration and refugee governance. At the same time, these instruments are

largely top-down, and their effectiveness ultimately depends on how they are implemented and experienced at district and community levels.

4.2. Role of IDC

IDC is central to sustaining and expanding Uganda's integrated approach. Uganda's ability to align humanitarian protection with development and—at least partially—with peacebuilding outcomes is closely tied to coordinated engagement by multilateral institutions, bilateral donors, and regional organizations.

At the multilateral level, the World Bank's IDA18 Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities has provided concessional financing for infrastructure, education, and livelihoods in refugee-hosting districts. This instrument marks a shift from viewing refugees as the exclusive responsibility of humanitarian actors toward recognizing them as participants in and beneficiaries of national development programs (World Bank 2020). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) leads the ReHoPE Strategy, which aims to integrate refugee and host community needs into local development plans, strengthen district capacities, and foster social cohesion (UNDP 2019).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), through its Uganda Country Strategy and support for the NIP 2024-2028, reinforces institutional capacity for migration governance by focusing on protection, regular pathways, and root causes (IOM Uganda 2024). In doing so, IOM helps institutionalize GCM principles within national systems and

supports data collection, evidence-based policymaking, and inter-ministerial coordination.

Bilateral donors—including the European Union, Germany (BMZ), the United States, and Japan—provide financial and technical support for the NIP, ReHoPE, and NDP III implementation. Their contributions fund capacity-building, policy development, and local development projects in refugee-hosting districts. However, as the literature note, this support also reflects asymmetrical power relations: donor priorities, funding modalities, and reporting requirements can shape Uganda’s policy agenda in ways that may not fully reflect local preferences or long-term sustainability concerns (Knoll & Sheriff 2017; Milner 2009).

Despite these tensions, IDC has enabled Uganda to (1) integrate displacement into national planning, (2) extend services and infrastructure in hosting areas, and (3) experiment with more development-oriented refugee policies. IDC in Uganda is therefore not merely a source of funding but a key structural driver of the HDP Nexus, influencing how global norms are translated into national frameworks and local interventions. Yet the model remains highly donor-dependent, raising questions about resilience should external financing diminish.

4.3. Institutional Coordination and Implementation Mechanisms

Uganda’s governance architecture illustrates how multi-level institutional coordination can facilitate integrated migration and refugee policies—while also exposing persistent gaps.

(1) National Coordination Mechanism on Migration (NCM)

The NCM, housed in the OPM, is the central platform for inter-ministerial coordination on migration and, indirectly, on displacement. It brings together key ministries and agencies, including Internal Affairs, Gender, Labour and Social Development, Foreign Affairs, and the Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control. The NCM led the formulation of the NIP 2024–2028, institutionalizing the GCM’s whole-of-government and whole-of-society ethos through regular consultations with civil society, academia, and development partners (IOM Uganda 2024).

(2) CRRF and Refugee-Specific Coordination

In parallel, the CRRF Steering Group, chaired by the OPM with UNHCR and UNDP, coordinates refugee-specific responses. It provides a forum for government, UN agencies, donors, and NGOs to align humanitarian and development programming in refugee-hosting areas. Sector-specific working groups (e.g. health, education, livelihoods) bridge humanitarian and national systems, supporting the integration of refugees into national service-delivery frameworks.

(3) Decentralized and Local Governance Structures

District Local Governments (DLGs) in major refugee-hosting regions (West Nile, Southwestern, Midwestern) are responsible for incorporating refugees into District Development Plans (DDPs) and overseeing service delivery. Under ReHoPE, IDA18, and NIP-supported initiatives, local governments receive technical and limited financial assistance to strengthen planning, budgeting, and data management (UNDP 2019; World Bank 2020). These structures are critical interfaces where national policies meet everyday realities.

Yet, capacity gaps remain pronounced. Many DLGs face staff shortages, weak fiscal bases, and limited infrastructure. This can produce implementation disparities, where progressive national policies are only partially realized at local level—an issue underscored by both the literature.

(4) Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

Under the NIP 2024-2028, Uganda is developing a Migration Data Management Framework to track migration flows, service access, and socioeconomic outcomes, feeding into GCM and SDG reporting (IOM Uganda 2024). Similar efforts under the CRRF and World Bank programs support data collection in refugee settlements. These systems aim to make governance more evidence-based and adaptive, though data remains uneven across sectors and districts.

(5) Peace and Conflict-Sensitivity

Institutional coordination increasingly references “social cohesion” and “peaceful coexistence,” but dedicated conflict-prevention mechanisms are less developed. While local peace committees and dialogue platforms exist in some districts, the P dimension often remains secondary to service delivery and livelihood programming. This raises questions about whether the HDP Nexus in Uganda adequately engages with the political and conflict-related drivers of displacement and local tensions, or whether peace is reduced to a narrow focus on community harmony.

4.4. Local Implementation and Community Outcomes

Local implementation is where Uganda’s integrated model becomes most tangible—and where its strengths and limitations

are most visible.

(1) Decentralized Governance and District Roles

Refugee-hosting DLGs plan and implement interventions that combine humanitarian assistance with local development. Through ReHoPE, IDA18, and related projects, districts have expanded access to shared health facilities, schools, water systems, and roads in areas such as Arua, Yumbe, Adjumani, and Isingiro. These investments benefit both refugees and hosts, promoting a whole-of-community approach intended to reduce competition over scarce resources.

(2) Service Delivery and Livelihoods

Survey data indicate that in some settlements, refugees' access to basic services—such as water and primary education—now approaches or sometimes exceeds that of host communities, reflecting substantial humanitarian and development investments. Aid dependency remains significant (over half of refugee households rely primarily on aid) but declines over time for those who have spent longer in Uganda, suggesting gradual, if uneven, economic adaptation. Refugees engage in agriculture, petty trade, and small-scale enterprises, often employing Ugandan nationals and contributing to local markets.

At the same time, livelihood opportunities are frequently informal and precarious, constrained by limited access to capital, land degradation, and weak labor demand. Host communities can perceive refugees as competitors for land, jobs, and services, particularly where investments are seen as disproportionately benefiting refugees. These tensions underscore the need for more conflict-sensitive and equity-minded programming.

(3) Education and Human Capital

The Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities has increased refugee school enrollment, especially at primary level, narrowing gaps between refugee and host learners. However, secondary and tertiary access remain limited, and overcrowding, teacher shortages, and language barriers persist. These challenges highlight structural constraints that cannot be fully resolved through project-based interventions alone.

(4) Community Engagement and Social Cohesion

Uganda's governance model incorporates community-level structures-such as refugee and host community leadership committees, participatory planning forums, and dialogue platforms-often supported by UNDP, IOM, and NGOs. These mechanisms aim to build social capital and manage tensions, consistent with the HDP Nexus emphasis on social cohesion as a foundation for peace. Yet participation is not always inclusive, and power imbalances can marginalize women, youth, and poorer households.

(5) Emerging Outcomes and Persistent Constraints

Uganda's localized implementation of the HDP Nexus has generated positive outcomes, including expanded access to services for refugees and hosts; improved opportunities for refugee self-reliance; strengthened district-level planning capacities; and partial reduction of tensions through shared infrastructure and joint programming.

However, persistent structural constraints-land scarcity, environmental degradation, high youth unemployment, donor dependency, and limited attention to deeper political and conflict drivers-temper these achievements. These factors

highlight the importance of examining not only Uganda's success narrative, but also the limits and risks of development-oriented refugee governance. Uganda's experience thus offers valuable lessons, as well as cautionary insights, for other refugee-hosting countries seeking to implement HDP-based, IDC-supported models.

5. Findings and Discussion

Uganda's integrated approach to refugee and migration governance illustrates both the possibilities and limits of using IDC to operationalize the HDP Nexus. Drawing on the multi-level framework outlined in Section 2.4 and the analytical strategy described in Section 3, the findings are organized around five interrelated themes. These themes trace the pathway from Inputs (global norms and IDC) through Processes (national and local governance mechanisms) to Outcomes for refugees, migrants, and host communities.

5.1. From Global Norms to National Policy Coherence

The first major finding concerns institutional coherence and policy integration at the national level. Uganda has made significant progress in aligning global frameworks—the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), and the SDGs—with domestic policy instruments.

The integration of refugee and migration issues into NDP III (2021-2025) and the adoption of the National Implementation Plan for the Global Compact for Migration (NIP 2024-2028) mark a clear shift toward a whole-of-government approach.

The Refugee Act (2006) and Refugee Regulations (2010) provide a strong protection-oriented legal basis for refugees, while NDP III and the NIP extend this foundation by embedding displacement and broader migration into national development planning.

The National Coordination Mechanism on Migration (NCM) plays a central role in this process, providing a platform through which multiple ministries (OPM, Internal Affairs, Gender, Labour and Social Development, Foreign Affairs, DCIC, etc.) coordinate migration-related policies and reporting. In parallel, the CRRF Steering Group aligns refugee-specific programming with development planning. Together, these mechanisms have reduced some of the fragmentation traditionally observed between humanitarian and development responses and have allowed Uganda to present a coherent national narrative to international partners.

At the same time, this coherence remains primarily top-down. Policy documents consistently articulate alignment with global norms and Nexus principles, but the extent to which this coherence is felt at district and community levels varies considerably—a tension that becomes more visible in later themes.

5.2. Localization of the HDP Nexus through Development Cooperation

The second key finding is that development cooperation has been a decisive enabler of Uganda's localization of the HDP Nexus. Multilateral and bilateral partners have supported the translation of global commitments into district-level planning,

financing, and programming.

Instruments such as the World Bank's IDA18 Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities and UNDP's ReHoPE Strategy have channeled concessional finance and technical support into refugee-hosting districts, funding shared infrastructure (schools, health facilities, water systems, roads) and livelihoods programmes. These initiatives concretize the Nexus by directly linking humanitarian presence to longer-term development investments.

The NIP 2024-2028 deepens localization by formally assigning roles to district local governments (DLGs) in data collection, planning, and monitoring of migration-related interventions, while IOM's Uganda Country Strategy reinforces this by supporting the NCM and local capacity-building. Thus, development cooperation has, first, incentivized the inclusion of refugees and migrants in District Development Plans, second, helped institutionalize joint planning between humanitarian and development actors, and third, encouraged the use of shared service delivery models benefiting both refugees and hosts. This localization is not entirely bottom-up-many priorities still reflect donor agendas-but it has created more systematic channels through which local authorities can shape and benefit from international support.

5.3. Outcomes for Refugees and Host Communities

The third theme focuses on observable outcomes for refugees and host communities, particularly in terms of access to services, livelihoods, and human capital development.

Household survey data and program evaluations indicate

that, in several refugee-hosting areas, refugees have relatively high access to basic services compared to both their situation in countries of origin and, in some cases, host communities: Access to water, basic health services, and primary education for refugees has improved significantly due to targeted humanitarian and development investments. Primary school enrollment among refugee children has risen markedly under the Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities, narrowing the gap with host-community learners. Refugees' ability to move freely and engage in economic activities has enabled some to establish small businesses, engage in agriculture, and participate in local markets.

These outcomes support the claim that Uganda's integrated model can facilitate self-reliance and shared benefits, especially where investments are directed to shared infrastructure and services. In several settlements, refugee enterprises also employ Ugandan nationals, indicating economic spillovers and emerging forms of interdependence.

However, the data also show that these gains are uneven and fragile. High levels of poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to secondary and tertiary education persist among refugees. For many households, aid remains the primary income source, and labor-market participation is often informal and precarious. These mixed results underscore that formal inclusion in policy frameworks does not automatically translate into substantive, equitable outcomes.

5.4. Persistent structural constraints and unequal outcomes

The fourth theme highlights persistent structural constraints

that limit the transformative potential of Uganda's model.

First, poverty and inequality remain stark. Survey data indicate that a large share of refugees live below the poverty line, at rates substantially higher than host populations. Refugee households are more likely to be female-headed, have higher dependency ratios, and rely on low-productivity livelihoods (rain-fed agriculture, informal trade) with limited access to formal employment, credit, or assets. Wage gaps between refugees and hosts persist even when education and occupation are similar, revealing discrimination and structural barriers.

Second, youth unemployment is severe, particularly among refugees, undermining efforts toward self-reliance and increasing the risk of onward or irregular migration. Even where bilateral labor agreements and NIP-related regular migration schemes exist, access remains limited and protection concerns significantly.

Third, environmental stress and land scarcity in refugee-hosting regions intensify pressures on both refugees and hosts. Deforestation, soil degradation, and competition over land and natural resources-especially in the West Nile and parts of Southwestern Uganda-contribute to localized tensions. While some programs include environmental rehabilitation components, they often lag behind the scale of need.

Fourth, the model is highly donor dependent. Fluctuating external funding and uncertain long-term commitments pose a risk to sustainability, particularly for service delivery and local infrastructure that require recurrent financing. Domestic fiscal space in Uganda's refugee-hosting regions remains limited,

raising questions about what will happen if international attention or funding declines.

Taken together, these constraints reveal a central paradox: Uganda's policies establish a strong normative and institutional framework for inclusion, but structural economic, environmental, and political factors limit the extent to which this inclusion leads to substantive socio-economic transformation for most refugees.

5.5. The Thin “Peace” Dimension in Uganda’s HDP Nexus

The fifth theme concerns the underdeveloped Peace (P) dimension of Uganda’s HDP Nexus implementation. Policy documents and programs frequently reference “social cohesion” and “peaceful coexistence,” and there are community-level initiatives such as dialogue forums, local peace committees, and joint projects for refugees and hosts. These efforts have helped to mitigate tensions in some areas and foster cooperation over shared infrastructure and services.

However, the study finds that the peace dimension is often narrowly defined and programmatically weak compared to humanitarian and development pillars: “Peace” is largely equated with interpersonal or community harmony, rather than with addressing structural drivers of conflict such as land disputes, regional insecurity, cross-border armed groups, or political exclusion. Conflict-sensitivity is referenced in donor and government documents but is not consistently mainstreamed into planning, monitoring, or evaluation frameworks. There is limited evidence that development programs systematically analyze or mitigate their potential to

exacerbate local grievances—for example, when hosts perceive that refugees receive more support, or when land allocation policies are seen as unfair.

As a result, Uganda’s model risks masking or managing symptoms of conflict, rather than engaging with deeper political and security dynamics behind forced displacement and local tensions. This finding does not negate the positive contributions of Uganda’s approach, but it underscores a structural limitation: without a more robust and explicit peace component, the HDP Nexus may only partially address the conditions that produce and sustain displacement.

5.6. Synthesis: Lessons and Broader Implications

Overall, the synthesis of findings demonstrates that Uganda’s experience illustrates the catalytic role IDC can play in advancing integrated, development-oriented refugee governance. Uganda’s progress has depended on the effective embedding of global norms—such as the GCR, GCM, and SDGs—into domestic legal and policy frameworks, the empowerment of institutional coordination mechanisms like the NCM and CRRF Steering Group, and the strategic alignment of development financing instruments, including IDA18, ReHoPE, and bilateral donor funds, with national development plans and shared service-delivery systems. The partial inclusion of district authorities in planning and implementation has further supported the localization of Nexus principles. However, the analysis cautions against treating Uganda’s approach as a universally replicable blueprint. National-level policy coherence does not automatically translate into equitable or

transformative outcomes on the ground, where structural constraints—ranging from poverty and labor-market informality to environmental stress and chronic donor dependency—continue to undermine both refugee self-reliance and host community resilience.

Moreover, the peace dimension of the HDP Nexus remains underdeveloped, with limited attention to political drivers of displacement or potential conflict dynamics within hosting areas. For other refugee-hosting states and the wider international community, Uganda’s model offers both inspiration and caution: it demonstrates the potential of linking humanitarian response to national development planning through IDC, yet also underscores the need to strengthen local institutional capacity, enhance fiscal autonomy in hosting regions, embed conflict-sensitive approaches across all programming, and ensure meaningful participation of refugees and host communities in decision-making processes. Ultimately, Uganda’s model should be understood not as a completed template but as an evolving governance experiment whose achievements and limitations offer important lessons for building more coherent, equitable, and peace-sensitive responses to protracted displacement worldwide.

6. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Uganda’s integrated approach to migration and refugee governance—anchored in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus and aligned with the Global Compact for

Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)-offers important insights for shaping future migration and development policy in Africa and globally. The evidence from this study demonstrates that when global norms are institutionalized through national frameworks and then localized through community-based governance structures, migration can become a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable development. At the same time, Uganda's experience also highlights structural and contextual limitations that must be acknowledged to avoid overgeneralizing its model. Drawing on these lessons, the following recommendations target host governments, development partners, and regional and global policy actors engaged in the governance of displacement and mobility.

6.1. Strengthen Institutional Coherence, Whole-of-Government Coordination and Local Ownership

Uganda's experience underscores the centrality of institutional coherence to integrated migration governance. Platforms such as the National Coordination Mechanism on Migration (NCM) and the CRRF Steering Group demonstrate that harmonizing policies across ministries and aligning humanitarian and development interventions can reduce fragmentation and enhance policy effectiveness. Other refugee-hosting states should consider establishing similar high-level inter-ministerial coordination bodies-preferably located within central planning or prime ministerial offices-to ensure that migration and displacement issues are embedded within national development strategies, budget processes, labor-market reforms, and sectoral plans. Strengthening vertical coordination between

national and district authorities is equally important. Without local ownership, Nexus-based frameworks risk remaining top-down policy statements rather than operational tools.

6.2. Deepen Localization and Empower Local Governments

Uganda's decentralized governance model shows that local governments play a decisive role in turning national commitments into concrete outcomes for refugees, migrants, and host populations. District Development Plans that incorporate mobility issues—supported by the ReHoPE Strategy and the NIP 2024–2028—illustrate how inclusion can be institutionalized at the local level. To build on this momentum, host governments and donors should channel a greater share of development financing directly to local authorities through predictable, area-based financing mechanisms. This should be accompanied by long-term investments in administrative capacity, data management, and participatory planning processes. Empowering local institutions increases transparency, accountability, and sustainability while ensuring that interventions reflect community-specific priorities.

6.3. Align IDC with National Ownership

One of the clearest lessons from Uganda is that donor alignment with national frameworks enhances both efficiency and legitimacy. Coherence among initiatives such as the World Bank's IDA18 Sub-Window, UNDP's ReHoPE, IOM's Country Strategy, and bilateral donor programs demonstrates the value of programmatic, multi-year approaches over

short-term projects. Donors should prioritize flexible and predictable funding that aligns with recipient government strategies such as NDP III and the NIP 2024-2028. Joint monitoring and evaluation systems-co-led with national institutions-can further strengthen accountability and ensure that progress toward HDP objectives is measured consistently. This model reduces duplication and helps maintain a balance between external priorities and national ownership.

6.4. Integrate Climate Adaptation into Migration and Refugee Policy

Climate-induced mobility and environmental degradation represent growing pressures in Uganda's refugee-hosting districts, yet current migration and refugee frameworks remain under-resourced in climate adaptation. To respond to these overlapping challenges, the HDP Nexus should evolve toward an expanded HDP-C Nexus, placing climate resilience at the center of displacement governance. Governments and development partners should invest in climate-resilient infrastructure, green livelihood programs, environmental restoration, and early-warning systems. Coordinating climate adaptation initiatives across humanitarian, development, and environmental sectors would not only strengthen human security but also reduce local tensions linked to natural resource scarcity.

6.5. Promote Regional and South-South Cooperation

Uganda's leadership within regional organizations such as

the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) illustrates the importance of regional frameworks for migration governance. Its active engagement in regional compacts and policy dialogues has facilitated knowledge-sharing, policy diffusion, and collective action. Other regional bodies should consider adopting Uganda's approach to integrating migration into development cooperation, creating peer-learning platforms focused on refugee inclusion, labor mobility, and cross-border resilience. Strengthening South-South cooperation-particularly among African states-can stimulate local innovation, reduce reliance on external donors, and support the emergence of regionally grounded governance models.

6.6. Cross-Cutting Implications

Across these recommendations, three cross-cutting lessons stand out. First, normative alignment matters: embedding global compacts (GCR, GCM, SDGs) into national planning instruments enhances policy coherence, accountability, and coordination. Second, development cooperation must be adaptive: long-term donor engagement, flexible instruments, and knowledge-sharing are essential to sustain integrated and locally relevant approaches. Third, inclusive participation is transformative: when refugees, migrants, and host communities co-design programs, outcomes tend to be more equitable, sustainable, and conducive to social cohesion.

Taken together, Uganda's model demonstrates how migration and displacement governance can transition from short-term crisis management to long-term development

planning when supported by coherent policies, robust partnerships, and national ownership. Yet the replication of this approach will depend on sustained donor commitment, stronger local government capacity, regional solidarity, and a more explicit integration of peace and climate dimensions into policy frameworks. Uganda's experience should therefore be viewed not as a static template but as an evolving governance experiment whose successes and constraints provide valuable lessons for constructing more coherent, equitable, and peace-sensitive responses to protracted displacement.

7. Conclusion

This study examined Uganda's development-oriented refugee and migration governance by systematically tracing how global norms, national policy frameworks, IDC, and local implementation processes interact to shape outcomes for refugees and host communities. By grounding the analysis in a structured coding process and a multi-level analytical framework, the study demonstrated a clear line from empirical evidence—including policy documents, international agency reports, and district-level socioeconomic data—to thematic findings and ultimately to broader conclusions about the possibilities and limits of integrated governance in displacement contexts.

The data revealed three major thematic patterns. First, Uganda has achieved a high degree of institutional coherence by embedding global compacts (GCR, GCM, SDGs) into domestic laws and national planning instruments such as the

Refugee Act (2006), NDP III, and the NIP 2024-2028. This coherence emerged consistently across coded evidence from multiple sources, including government documents and international agency reports. Second, localization of the HDP Nexus-supported by development cooperation-has shifted refugee governance from isolated humanitarian relief to integrated service delivery and district-level development planning. This was demonstrated through data on shared infrastructure investments, household survey results on service access, and district coordination mechanisms. Third, despite these gains, structural constraints-including high poverty levels among refugees, climate stress in hosting regions, overstretched services, labor-market informality, and heavy donor dependency-consistently appeared across all data categories, signaling limitations in achieving durable, equitable outcomes.

By synthesizing these themes, the analysis showed that Uganda's model represents one of the most advanced attempts globally to move from emergency relief to development-oriented refugee governance. IDC-through mechanisms such as the World Bank's IDA18 Sub-Window, UNDP's ReHoPE Strategy, and IOM's technical assistance-has served as a critical enabler. These instruments aligned resources with national priorities, facilitated institutional reform, and supported the operationalization of the HDP Nexus. The study's findings underscore that sustainable refugee governance is not simply about expanding humanitarian aid but about building long-term policy coherence, institutional capacities, and locally embedded systems.

However, the empirical evidence also makes clear that Uganda's achievements should not be idealized or treated as a

universal template. Quantitative data on poverty, education, and labor-market access reveal persistent socioeconomic disparities between refugees and hosts. Qualitative evidence from policy texts and evaluation reports point to the fragility of local implementation capacities, the risks of donor-driven programming, and the limited incorporation of peacebuilding and conflict resolution components within Nexus interventions. These challenges illustrate that while Uganda's policies create an enabling framework, structural inequalities and resource constraints continue to shape day-to-day realities in hosting districts.

The conclusion that emerges from this study is therefore twofold. First, Uganda demonstrates the transformative potential of integrating displacement into national development planning, backed by coherent international support. When global norms are localized through strong institutions and supported by flexible, multi-year development financing, refugee inclusion can generate tangible benefits for both displaced populations and host communities. Second, the sustainability of such models depends on addressing structural constraints—including environmental pressures, local governance capacity gaps, labor-market barriers, and the chronic volatility of external funding. Without confronting these underlying issues, development-oriented refugee policies risk reproducing existing vulnerabilities rather than alleviating them.

Ultimately, Uganda's model should be understood as an evolving governance experiment—one that offers valuable lessons but also exposes critical gaps for policymakers and practitioners. For the global refugee regime, Uganda's experience reinforces the importance of operationalizing the

GCR, aligning displacement governance with national development plans, and embedding migration into broader aid and financing architectures. For African and other developing countries, the case underscores the need to adapt integrated approaches to local contexts, strengthen local institutions, and link humanitarian action with long-term development and peacebuilding strategies.

As displacement grows in scale and complexity, the international community must move beyond short-term crisis response and embrace sustained, coherent, and nationally owned solutions. Uganda provides a compelling illustration of what is possible when development cooperation, national leadership, and community participation converge. The challenge ahead is to build on these insights to create durable, equitable, and development-centered responses to forced displacement—responses that recognize displaced people not as temporary recipients of aid but as agents within broader processes of social and economic transformation.

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| Abstract

Bridging Humanitarian Response and Development Cooperation - Lessons from Uganda's Refugee Integration Model -

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This paper examines how International Development Cooperation (IDC) shapes development-oriented refugee and migration governance in Uganda by tracing the translation of global norms—the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus—into national and subnational policy systems. Drawing on a thematic analysis of policy and institutional documents, the study distinguishes between refugees and broader migration categories and situates Uganda's refugee population—which is predominantly from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo and characterized by high dependency ratios and child-headed households—as a core analytical variable. Using a multi-level framework, the analysis follows a clear sequence from data to codes, themes, and findings across global inputs, IDC contributions, national frameworks, and local implementation. The findings show that Uganda has achieved significant policy coherence by integrating displacement into the Refugee Act (2006), National Development Plan III (2021-2025), the ReHoPE Strategy, and the National Implementation Plan for the GCM (2024-2028). IDC has been central to this progress, particularly through the IDA18 Sub-Window, EU and BMZ support for NIP implementation, and UNDP and IOM initiatives that strengthen district-level governance. However, the analysis also identifies persistent constraints, including donor dependency, uneven implementation across districts, limited local institutional capacity, climate-related stress, and

socioeconomic disparities that undermine refugee self-reliance. A key finding is the relative weakness of the “peace” dimension of the HDP Nexus, which is often substituted with narrower social-cohesion programming. The paper concludes that IDC is most transformative when it supports national ownership, fiscal decentralization, and community participation. Uganda’s experience thus provides nuanced lessons for other refugee-hosting countries, demonstrating both the potential and limitations of embedding global compacts within national development systems.

[Key words] Uganda, Forced displacement and migration governance, IDC, HDP Nexus, Global Compact for Migration (GCM) / Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)

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