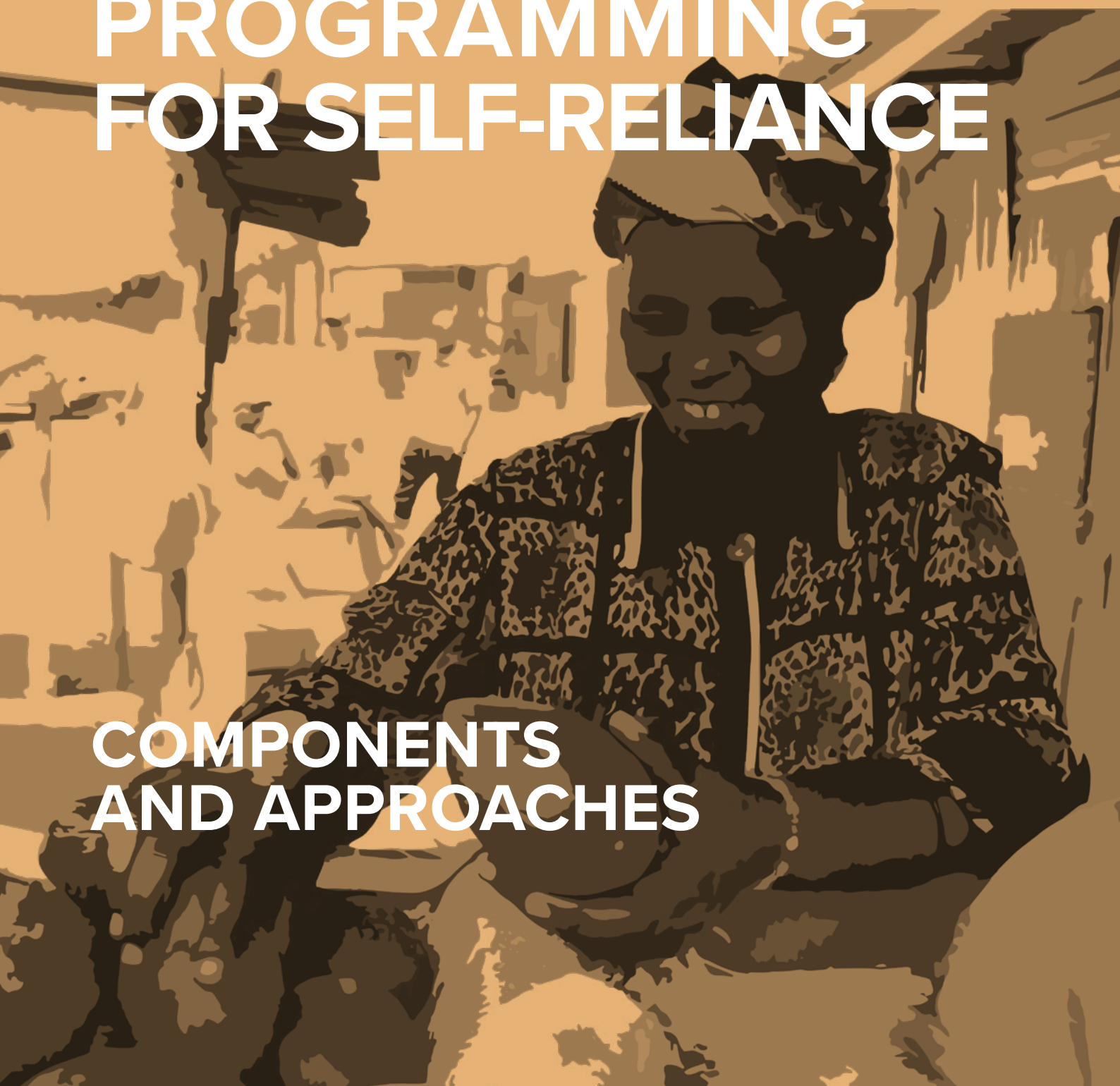SELF-RELIANCE
EVIDENCE REVIEW

PROGRAMMING FOR SELF-RELIANCE

COMPONENTS AND APPROACHES

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

PROGRAMMING FOR SELF-RELIANCE: COMPONENTS AND APPROACHES

WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOES NOT?

In this evidence brief, we present the findings from our review of the available literature on program components and approaches for refugee self-reliance: What types of programs exist to support self-reliance? What works best? What evidence is there around successes and failures to facilitate self-reliance for refugees?

KEY FINDINGS

Self-reliance programs typically include economic and/or social inclusion interventions. Legal inclusion is increasingly acknowledged as an enabler of refugee self-reliance.

- Livelihood interventions are widely considered to be a central and necessary component of economic inclusion programming in support of refugee self-reliance. However, not all livelihood interventions for refugees are necessarily conducive to self-reliance. Rather, interventions that are market-based and aim at providing decent, sustainable and diversified livelihoods are considered more effective in supporting self-reliance. Emerging in the literature is also the importance of providing consumption support and promoting financial inclusion, alongside livelihoods support.

- Social inclusion programming for refugee self-reliance comprises multiple components: social empowerment - comprising building social capital and improving social cohesion - and extending social protection. These components differ in their objectives and in the needs they respond to, but all contribute to fostering self-reliance.

- Legal inclusion is typically pursued via advocacy efforts to improve the policy framework for refugees in contexts where it is restrictive, and via programming support - in particular legal assistance - to support refugees to claim their rights.

Implementing agencies use different combinations of these components when designing self-reliance programs. While the literature primarily discusses program components (e.g. livelihoods interventions, social network development, etc.) in isolation, it also highlights the importance of considering the needs of refugees holistically in program design.

There is increasing recognition that the level of self-reliance that refugees can achieve in a given context is highly dependent on the policy environment and the macroeconomic environment.

Beyond individual and household-level interventions, identifying structural barriers impacting refugees and designing system-level interventions that contribute to the broader development of refugee-hosting areas are also critical elements of self-reliance programming.

Advancing self-reliance depends upon the engagement of multiple stakeholders in program design and implementation, including humanitarian actors, local authorities, the private sector, civil society and development actors.

- Local authorities have a central role both at the national and the sub-national level to influence and create a more inclusive and enabling policy environment (especially in terms of the right to work and freedom of movement) that can support refugees to become self-reliant.

- There is also a recognition of the role that development actors can play in fostering the local economic development of refugee-hosting areas, for example by ensuring that foreign aid flows to these regions and by working with local authorities to ensure that national development plans take the needs of these areas into account.

- Finally, there is increased emphasis in the literature on the ways in which the private sector and civil society can each support refugee self-reliance, and the need to engage and partner with them in refugee self-reliance programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Implementing agencies should focus on responding to the holistic needs of refugees and promote social and legal inclusion alongside economic inclusion to achieve self-reliance. When doing so it is useful to draw inspiration from holistic frameworks such as the Graduation Approach originally developed by BRAC, which outlines four pillars - livelihoods promotion, financial inclusion, social protection, and social empowerment - and promotes self-reliance programming that leaves no one behind.

Recommendation 2: Implementing agencies should consider designing programs that strengthen self-reliance at different levels, including:
Considering the complementary objectives of (1) how to bridge the gap in self-reliance between refugee populations and local populations, and (2) how to contribute to increasing the potential for self-reliance for all populations in a given refugee-hosting area.
Using systems approaches to ensure that self-reliance programming for refugees is market-based and that design of interventions is cognizant of broader systemic and structural issues in the policy and macroeconomic environment.

Recommendation 3: Implementing agencies should systematically design self-reliance programs through strategic partnerships and in coordination with the refugees and their hosts, the local authorities, the private sector, civil society, and development actors. In particular, there is space to learn more about and potentially leverage the role diaspora networks can play in supporting refugee self-reliance.

Recommendation 4: All stakeholders should invest in generating evidence (e.g. systematic evaluations) on effective self-reliance programming components and approaches. This also includes generating evidence on timing (when in the response should we start programming towards self-reliance) and type of funding mechanisms conducive to supporting self-reliance programming (e.g. flexible, multi-year, cross-sector).

Recommendation 5: All stakeholders should support host governments that have made progress with inclusive policy frameworks for refugees to (1) further support the implementation of the policy changes; (2) share their experience with other governments that currently have more restrictive policy and legal frameworks through peer-learning opportunities.

Recommendation 6: Development actors and host governments should support local economic development in support of refugee self-reliance by directing adequate resources to refugee-hosting areas.

In this brief we discuss (1) program components, and (2) programmatic approaches (i.e. how these components are combined together) that enable self-reliance, based on the findings from our review of the literature. Despite the humanitarian community having years of experience implementing self-reliance programming, we have found little structured discussion in the literature of what works or efforts to distill best practices relating to program typologies that support self-reliance. Most resources are limited to descriptions or evaluations of individual projects in specific locations. In particular, the Kalobeyei settlement in Kenya has been extensively studied and is discussed in multiple resources. While some comparative case studies examine the impact of different policy environments, there is limited systematic comparison of the impact of different types of programming on self-reliance outcomes. As a result, it remains difficult to establish the broader applicability of the findings and best practices highlighted in various evaluations, beyond their impact on a specific project in a specific context and at a specific point in time.

However, regardless of which best practices are documented, when designing program interventions, it is important that these components should be adapted and tailored to specific contexts, populations and their circumstances. We discuss considerations for adapting and tailoring self-reliance in more detail in a different brief, *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations).*

SELF-RELIANCE PROGRAMMING: COMPONENTS

The most-commonly cited definition of self-reliance is one coined by UNHCR, which highlights economic and social dimensions of the concept:

> *"Self-reliance is the social and economic ability of an individual, household or community to meet basic needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity."*

Both economic inclusion programming and social inclusion programming are central to improving refugee self-reliance [144; 128; 78]. Program components, lessons learned, and best practices for both are discussed in the sections below, insofar as the literature shows that they contribute to refugee self-reliance. That said, not all economic or social inclusion programming leads to self-reliance, and neither is usually sufficient on its own to enable self-reliance for most refugees [95; 81]. In addition, although not emphasized in existing definitions of self-reliance, the legal dimension of refugee self-reliance and the importance of programming towards legal inclusion for refugees to become self-reliant is repeatedly highlighted in the reviewed literature. See *Evidence Brief – Defining Self-Reliance* for a more in-depth look at the UNHCR definition and alternative definitions, as well as a broader discussion of what counts as self-reliance programming.

Economic inclusion

Economic inclusion programming is defined by the World Bank as "a bundle of coordinated, multidimensional interventions that support individuals, households, and communities in their efforts to increase their incomes and assets [4]." While there is increasing recognition of the other dimensions of self-reliance, and that there are needs that cannot be addressed with money, economic inclusion is seen as crucial for meeting economic needs, as well as some social needs (e.g. health, safety etc.). In fact, the pursuit of self-reliance for refugees has long been viewed primarily through an economic lens. See *Evidence Brief – Defining Self-Reliance* for a discussion of the evolving understanding of self-reliance.

There is general agreement that helping refugees pursue income-generating activities through livelihoods programming is central to any self-reliance strategy, and consequently supporting livelihoods has often been the main or even sole focus of self-reliance programming [101; 115; 38]. Yet, it is interesting to note that the economic dimension of self-reliance programming is increasingly being referred to in the literature as "economic inclusion", signaling a general agreement that the approach is broader than just livelihoods, and also includes complementary elements such as financial inclusion or consumption support [38; 13; 141].

Livelihoods programming

Several literature reviews have taken stock of lessons learned from livelihoods interventions implemented with refugee populations, including in relation to self-reliance programming [37; 90; 8]. In fact, access to livelihoods - be it through wage employment (employment in existing enterprises) or self-employment (entrepreneurship) - is the most studied aspect of self-reliance programming [121; 52; 120]. Various types and components of livelihoods interventions aimed at supporting refugee self-reliance are described at length in the literature [157; 124; 125]. In particular, there has historically been a strong focus on skills training and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs [68; 77]. Overall, livelihoods interventions are widely recognized as an essential component of self-reliance programming, to the point that self-reliance and livelihoods have sometimes been used interchangeably in the literature [38]. However, there is also increasing evidence that not all livelihoods programming is conducive to self-reliance, and on their own, livelihoods interventions are usually not sufficient to promote holistic self-reliance outcomes [78].

Key components of livelihoods programming

Within self-reliance programming, key livelihood interventions include employment support and business support at the individual-level. Employment support to job-seekers and business support to entrepreneurs looking to start up Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are the most-commonly discussed livelihood interventions in the literature [64; 120].

Employment and business support have somewhat similar program models, insofar as they seek to match individuals with work opportunities, whether that is wage employment or self-employment. They both involve considerations regarding targeting, selection, and outreach of beneficiaries that balance vulnerability (i.e. level of need) and ability (i.e. likelihood of success) [4]. They both also typically include a sizable skills development component, although focused on different sets of skills (technical skills and soft skills related to a specific vocation, and/or business and entrepreneurship skills) [3].

Building skills that are transferable and relevant across different labor markets, is one of the ways in which self-reliance programming could also serve as a preparatory step to eventual durable solutions, which might include repatriation or resettlement, and consequently the need to adapt to a different labor market [73, 128].

In the literature, the importance of including supporting or complementary components to skills development is emphasized, with a focus on financial services (see also below the section on financial inclusion), the development of networks and market linkages for self-employment interventions, and employability services and concrete job linkages for wage employment interventions [18; 81]. Another notable lesson learned for livelihoods interventions is the benefit of including a component of individualized career counseling or mentoring [147, 70]. Such support has positive outcomes for entrepreneurs and business owners to receive feedback on a start-up or scale-up business plan and for job-seekers looking for wage employment to receive information and feedback on possible and desirable vocational choices [47].

Beyond individual-level livelihoods interventions, system-level approches, which aim at building specific labor market systems, entire value chains, or the business environment at large are increasingly gathering interest, especially because they open the possibility of programming for self-reliance at a larger scale, and have the potential to benefit both hosts and refugees [19, 101].

Achieving self-reliance through market-based livelihoods

Importantly, there are key characteristics that make some livelihoods interventions more suitable for self-reliance than others. See *Evidence Brief – Defining Self-Reliance* for a discussion of the quality standards inherent to the concept of self-reliance.

The literature shows that programs that focus on linking refugees with market-based livelihoods opportunities, and that correspond to present and long-term economic opportunities, are considered more effective for improving self-reliance [148, 101]. A good practice identified to design sustainable livelihoods interventions is the systematic undertaking and use of a market systems analysis that maps market actors, accounts for their existing dynamics, as well as considers the broader market environment, including support services, infrastructure, rules and regulations [101, 70]. This enables the design of livelihoods programs to select sectors and markets based on identifiable gaps between demand and supply, and decide on appropriate program tracks (wage employment, or self-employment) based on an informed analysis of the selected markets for goods and services or selected local labor markets, and the legal environment [148].

While there is consensus in the literature about the importance and usefulness of leveraging refugees' own preferences and existing skills in the design of livelihoods interventions [70, 101], there are also indications that it is important to focus on informing those preferences and project design appropriately through market analyses [73]. Refugees often have a more nuanced knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of local markets than aid organizations. But they may also lack the macro-economic analysis of which sectors and markets offer sustainable employment opportunities. In response, the dissemination and sharing of market information with refugees has been identified as a good practice, in particular when linked to career counseling [101]. Doing so can inform program design by accounting for target populations' preferences in training design after they have been informed about real labor market opportunities [101].

Livelihoods interventions aimed at supporting refugee self-reliance are increasingly targeted at contemporary jobs and livelihoods. For wage employment, this can mean focusing on developing in-demand skills, including training to boost digital literacy. Where the regulatory environment and existing infrastructure permits, pursuing digital and IT service-related employment opportunities can be effective in improving self-reliance of refugees because of the possibility of being home-based/working remotely, the access to potential global labor markets, and the potential for good wages [70, 40]. For self-employment, this can mean focusing, where possible, on business models that have the potential to reach markets beyond immediate local markets – since these can easily become saturated. That includes looking into online marketing and remote delivery services to extend potential markets and increase the likelihood of success of home-based businesses.

Yet, one cannot match refugees to jobs if job opportunities do not exist in the first place. Therefore, it can be productive to work with the private sector to create opportunities for refugee employment. This can be undertaken locally or more broadly and at a larger scale through the use of system-level livelihoods program models. The literature highlights a number of relevant system-level interventions including targeting specific market systems and working with lead firms – for example Multinational Corporations – by developing strategic partnerships around job creation [84] and working along entire value chains and increasing the market power of small producers by organizing them into cooperatives and creating linkages with retailers, exporters, or distributors, etc. [101].

Quality standards for livelihoods programming

Decent work is a critical aspect of livelihoods that support self-reliance [57]. However, not all livelihoods opportunities accessible to refugees stem from decent work opportunities. Rather, some livelihoods can include exploitative and negative coping strategies [78]. To counter this, there is evidence that it is important to systematically work on the supply-side (with job-seekers and with entrepreneurs) but also the demand-side of labor markets (with employers and with existing businesses) [82]. Doing so can help ensure that existing employment opportunities or newly-created opportunities accessible to refugees abide by the ILO's decent work standards. Recognizing that many refugees work in the informal economy, a significant challenge is extending checks and implementing guidance on decent work in informal labor markets. See *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations)* for more detail on best practices for informal labor markets.

Diversification of income sources is also an important element of strategies to strengthen and support self-reliance [51, 4]. It is useful to consider income diversification in the design of self-reliance programming at two different levels. First, at the area level, the literature points to lessons learned in terms of saturation of labor markets due to livelihoods programs that train refugees in a single trade in a given location [70, 101]. A related good practice is to build on the heterogeneity in existing skills among refugee populations. Many refugees already have employable skills, and they can be leveraged and integrated in program designs provided that appropriate time is dedicated to mapping these existing skill sets and finding creative ways to effectively use them [157], even when refugees do not have a written proof (e.g. certificate) of their competencies. See more on best practices around specific population characteristics in *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations).*

At the individual or household level, the diversification of skills and income sources, particularly when taking into account age, gender, and other considerations, improves self-reliance by enabling more resilient livelihoods in case of subsequent or compounding shocks [78]. The literature highlights that income diversification is a livelihoods strategy that is sometimes applied by refugees themselves at the household level and should be supported through appropriate program interventions [39, 50].

Financial inclusion

Having access to financial products and services is increasingly recognized as essential to building refugees' ability to become self-reliant [141]. There is growing evidence that having the ability to receive, store, and spend money securely and flexibly significantly increases one's sense of security and well-being, as well as the capacity to appropriately plan for expenses over time [63]. Access to savings, loans, or credit can help smooth consumption if a shock occurs, and it can also serve to make small productive investments [58, 90]. As such, financial inclusion as part of self-reliance programming can also help increase refugees' resilience and the sustainability of their livelihoods strategies.

Yet, the literature highlights that a lack of knowledge, understanding, and trust in financial products and services is a barrier to its uptake at the individual-level [63, 90]. Financial literacy training for refugees helps address some of the fears about financial products and services [63].

Emerging best practices in financial inclusion include linking interventions that leverage both informal and formal financial mechanisms wherever feasible, relevant, and appropriate [4]. For example, an intervention could start with the set-up of informal financial services like Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) to build financial literacy, trust, and understanding. Successful participation in VSLAs can be increasingly leveraged to build credit history and linked to access to formal financial services like microfinance institutions, banking and loans.

At the system-level, many countries have policies that create impediments for refugees to hold formal bank accounts or access formal financial products and services, in particular with regards to the necessary identification and status documents to meet Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements. See the section on Legal Inclusion below, for a related discussion on programming to improve the policy environment of a host country.

Beyond the regulatory environment, financial inclusion of refugees in self-reliance programming will also depend upon the level of development of formal and informal financial systems locally, and on working with Financial Service Providers (FSPs) to ensure that appropriate financial services and products exist and are available and adapted to the needs of refugees. There are promising best practices around working with FSPs to increase their understanding of refugee populations and lower their product risk profiles, for example through a combination of credit guarantee facilities and screening of loan applicants that encourage lending to refugees while reducing risks of default [51].

Consumption Support

There is a growing recognition that many refugees are not immediately ready to pursue income generating activities and therefore, livelihoods interventions are not always a suitable first step in self-reliance programming. Often, introducing a consumption support component prior to or alongside introducing skills development or income generation opportunities can ensure that refugees are better prepared to engage in livelihoods interventions. Doing so helps avoid the use of negative coping strategies while more decent, sustainable, and diversified livelihoods are being built [149, 38]. Similarly, it can also help with kick-starting the savings component of financial inclusion [4, 38]. Consumption support can either be provided in-kind or in cash [88]. However, there is an increasing move towards the use of cash [88]. There is ample evidence from the last 15 years related to the use of temporary Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) to cover basic needs as the first step of transition towards self-reliant livelihoods [4, 70, 125]. The International Rescue Committee is currently testing different models of layered services (eg. Cash only / Cash + services / Cash + livelihoods) to improve self-reliance outcomes for refugees as part of the Re:Build project in East Africa.

Author's note

The existing literature is rich in examples of program components contributing to economic inclusion. While each component in isolation can contribute to effectively building productive assets, we found that economic inclusion programming leading to self-reliance is in essence multi-dimensional: it combines financial and non-financial services for improved impact. For entrepreneurs and business owners, including a component of financial support (grants in-cash or in-kind or loan facilitation) is often critical, but so are components of other, non-financial business services (such as horizontal and vertical market linkages, legal support for business registration, etc). For job-seekers, including services that support direct job linkages (either through work-based learning, internships, apprenticeships, or through job placement, job matching, job fairs, etc.) is essential, as well as other services aimed at increasing employability (e.g. (re-)certification, legal support to access civil documentation, etc.). In addition, programs that combine consumption support and livelihoods services have demonstrated that it is possible for people who initially appear to lack the capacity or readiness to benefit from livelihoods programming, to thrive with the proper support and intervention. See below on holistic approaches for additional discussion on this point.

We also found that taking a systems-based approach is critical for effective economic inclusion programming. In particular, the decision to focus on a specific market should balance considerations about economic viability and dynamism with considerations about specific constraints and opportunities related to context and to target population. Refugees should not be trained in specific trades (like tailoring or hairdressing) just because that is the type of training that the organization has typically previously carried out in that area, or even simply because that corresponds to refugees' initial preferences. Livelihoods programming should unlock real, market-based opportunities to engage in an economic activity over time. The use of systems-thinking encourages the consideration of both demand-side and supply-side interventions to support sustainable livelihoods. It enables the diversification of livelihoods opportunities (e.g. grant inputs and resources to successful SMEs to provide them with the capital to expand and thereby increase the number of employees hired). It fosters work with current and potential employers to ensure that the job opportunities that exist are accessible to refugees. This includes working with employers on refugee rights and decent work standards awareness and on unbiased hiring practices. Finally, systems-based approaches help identify entry points into financial market systems to increase financial inclusion.

Social inclusion

Although sometimes overlooked in the past, addressing social dimensions of refugee self-reliance and including components of social inclusion when designing programs is increasingly recognized as equally important to focusing on economic dimensions [106; 49]. Social inclusion is defined by the World Bank as "the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity." For the purpose of this study, social inclusion programming comprises the following components: social empowerment - comprising building social capital and improving social cohesion - and extending social protection. These aspects of social inclusion differ in their objectives and in the needs which they respond to, but all play a role in fostering self-reliance.

Forced displacement typically affects social relationships in three fundamental ways: (1) lost/reconfigured social capital (social networks, relationships, etc.); (2) lack of social cohesion, or tensions between refugee and local populations often related to competition for limited resources, and (3) weakened community resilience mechanisms and social protection/safety nets [18; 28; 38]. Each of these areas has the potential to pose a barrier to self-reliance for refugees, or if addressed, to strengthen and promote it [18; 28; 38]. In *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations),* we offer a more detailed discussion of how youth in particular are affected by the lack or loss of social inclusion.

Social Capital

Social capital, or access to social networks, membership in formal and informal groups, and/or relationships of trust, plays an important role in enabling self-reliance [18; 49; 48]. Social networks and connections are important sources of information and play a role in building trust and credibility, and as such they can be critical in finding a job or being able to effectively engage in trade [48]. Moreover, social networks can also provide access to informal safety nets that strengthen resilience to shocks (e.g. charity from local church groups etc.) [49]. Finally, with social inclusion and tighter, richer social networks also comes a sense of well-being, participation, and belonging to a community [48].

There are typically two ways in which the social capital of refugees can be built in refugee response programs: first, through interventions that focus on building one-on-one relationships (such as mentoring, coaching etc.), which has proven to be effective in increasing labor market integration, or second, through interventions that look at collective approaches and strengthening group relationships (such as working with existing civil society organizations, youth groups, etc.), which has shown promise in terms of community-building, participation, and social empowerment [70].

Despite a growing base of literature that highlights the role and importance of networks in supporting refugee self-reliance, there are not many examples of diverse program interventions that specifically seek to develop, support and/or leverage the multiple social networks available to refugees [48]. Leveraging local refugee networks is recognized as important, but with still little research on how informal solidarity and support systems exist and operate in different contexts [117, 18]. Examples of success in the literature show that network-strengthening programming can be especially effective for social empowerment and financial inclusion (e.g. through setting up VSLAs), but also to some extent for livelihoods development and social protection (e.g. through remittances from diaspora networks) [115].

Role of diaspora networks

Social capital in the form of remittances has been identified as a critical source of income for many refugees, and the literature highlights that support for refugees from diaspora communities can play a sustaining role in the face of shocks [18, 39]. At the same time, there is also ambivalence in the literature around whether remittances should be considered as an unstable, undesirable form of support (as it creates a dependency on external support) or whether it should rather be viewed as an informal social safety net (similar to reliance on other community-based mechanisms) [14, 103]. There are also some suggestions in the literature that the diaspora could be engaged in self-reliance programming through other channels for more sustainable outcomes, and in particular as private sector partners in livelihoods interventions to uplift refugee economies [64, 39]. But there is still little evidence or examples of such programming that are extensively discussed in the literature to date. It would be worthwhile investing in better understanding the role of diaspora networks in advancing refugee self-reliance, as beyond their role in providing a safety net (via remittances schemes), they lead advocacy campaigns, are a source of investment and serve as mentors.

Social Cohesion

There is broad recognition that relations with members of the host community can positively or negatively impact the ability of refugees to become and remain self-reliant [38; 128; 43]. Consequently, the literature emphasizes that self-reliance programming should also include components aimed at strengthening social cohesion between refugees and host populations [43].

The most common approach to social cohesion interventions in self-reliance programming is to include host communities as program participants alongside refugees [125; 106, 42]. The objectives of this approach are to strengthen relationships and understanding between both groups, and also to increase self-reliance outcomes for both groups, by taking an area-based approach to programming [144, 94]. The literature studying the success of such efforts on social cohesion, however, remains very thin. Beyond inclusive targeting, there is also mention of conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding techniques, particularly those that are community-led, incorporated into self-reliance programming [5, 58]. There is discussion of the effectiveness of such techniques in both conflict and non-conflict refugee settings to create inter-communal dialogue and mitigate tensions with the host community [42, 128]. However, the literature also highlights failures in attempts to build social cohesion between refugees and host populations, even where those were explicitly identified as key program components, such as in Kalobeyei [19; 20].

Author's note

Promoting social empowerment should systematically be considered in the design of self-reliance programming for refugees, as in many circumstances, it does not occur spontaneously. Considering how an individual or a household fits into a given community is paramount to fostering their self-reliance.

Though the literature does not extensively document the positive effects of building social capital, practice has since long demonstrated that it is a central component of an effective livelihoods approach (e.g. DFID's Sustainable Livelihood Framework). In particular, it is important to note that

some critical program components such as mental health and psycho-social support, that are recognized as good practice in building social capital at individual level, are not well-documented in the literature and as such have not been emphasized in this evidence review. Documenting the effectiveness of such interventions should be prioritized in future research and evaluations.

Likewise, it is essential to highlight that active participation in community networks has the potential to both build social capital and ensure social cohesion. Doing so requires understanding informal solidarity schemes (e.g. self-help groups, charity channels, etc.) and supporting them, before creating new ones. It is also crucial to amplify the recommendations of refugee-led organizations based on the needs they have identified within the communities in which they work and consider supporting and partnering with these organizations.

Self-reliance programming for refugees should take into account all of the different communities that refugees may be part of, including refugee networks but also the host community groups. It should actively cultivate networks with members of the host population, especially in terms of access to and management of productive resources. Conflict sensitivity should be built into self-reliance programming as there are likely to be specific conflict dynamics within refugee communities, and between host and refugee communities, especially in areas where productive resources are scarce. For more information on inter-community relations, also see *Evidence Brief - Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations)*.

Social Protection

In the literature, social protection is frequently highlighted as a key enabler of self-reliance, especially in recent years [18; 77]. While there are multiple definitions of social protection, it is seen as broadly encompassing three components: support and care social services and programs to access them, employment policies and safety nets and transfers.

Access to essential (public) social services, including health care and education, has long been seen as a critical component to meeting basic needs [42]. A lack of adequate financial resources can be a barrier to accessing these services [42]. However, in many contexts, the broader systems that provide social services may be weak, overloaded or non-existent [47]. In addition, in some host states, refugees may be excluded from accessing social services [108]. To address this, self-reliance programming can include strengthening local social services where they exist or contributing to developing them where they do not [77]. Additionally, self-reliance programming can focus on ensuring that available social services are inclusive and accessible to refugees and take into consideration protection concerns of persons with specific needs [77]. A typical example of this kind of programming is support to local health care centers to ensure availability and accessibility to quality, affordable basic health care services for refugees [35] and ensure refugees know what services they have the right to use. Several refugee-hosting countries (such as Kenya) have begun to expand health coverage for refugees, but it remains an area for further growth and development. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the debate about access of refugees to health services and health insurance coverage and has also presented an opportunity for advocacy to governments around more inclusive social protection systems [40].

When linked to self-reliance programming, social protection components also include specific interventions such as humanitarian cash transfers, as well as broader efforts to advocate for

expanding, extending, or diversifying coverage of existing social protection systems so that they are more inclusive of refugees [125; 77]. The increasing use of cash transfers in self-reliance programming has also sparked discussions about how to avoid establishing parallel and concurrent structures by linking these interventions to formal social protection systems, or using cash transfers to shadow informal social protection systems and possibly build systems where they do not exist [42, 125]. These discussions also aim at ensuring that cash transfers do no harm to formal and informal existing solidarity mechanisms [117].

Discussions of social protection components in self-reliance therefore also relate to debates about the respective roles of humanitarian and development actors in self-reliance programming [88], as well as to discussions about durable solutions for refugees and in particular local integration [37]. See *Evidence Brief – Defining Self-Reliance* for a more detailed discussion of self-reliance and durable solutions.

Author's note

In recent years there has been an increased recognition of the need to link refugees to social protection systems where feasible and relevant, with a view to promoting self-reliance, building resilience to shocks and protecting self-reliance gains.

The public health crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has made evident the risks of not having refugees enrolled in social protection systems, for host governments (increased public health risks), for stakeholders engaged in refugee response (increased humanitarian need), and most of all for refugees themselves, in terms of compounding shocks impacting their progression towards becoming self-reliant.

This makes for a strong and timely case for self-reliance programming for refugees to actively promote the increased inclusiveness of social protection systems. In this respect, different interventions can be considered, including technical assistance to and capacity building of service providers to cater for the specific needs of refugee populations, or information provision to the refugees themselves about their rights and obligations.

Legal inclusion

In addition to the economic and social dimensions of self-reliance, the literature refers to how the legal framework pertaining to refugees can act as an enabler or an inhibitor on their paths to self-reliance. Overall, the literature suggests that depending on how inclusive or restrictive the policy framework is for refugees in a given country, the legal dimension of self-reliance programming can be more advocacy-based or activity-based [34].

When the policy framework is restrictive and where the rights of refugees (to work, to move, to own property) are limited, it is important to work on policy influence and use advocacy and capacity exchange with duty bearers alongside direct programming to refugees [77, 90, 8]. Existing research on civil and legal regulations and how they impact refugees' ability to become self-reliant in specific contexts is instructive for programming [113]. For example, it provides insights on the domains of law

on which advocacy should focus, which includes labor laws in countries like Jordan where work is restricted to certain sectors for refugees, freedom of movement in particular in countries like Kenya where there are 'closed' encampment policies, asylum laws in countries like Turkey where obtaining civil documentation can carry a heavy administrative burden, property rights (and in particular the owning of land) in countries like Rwanda where refugees are mostly hosted in rural areas, but also increasingly basic financial freedoms (such as having a bank accounts, etc) in countries like Nigeria where access to the formal financial system is a major gap between refugees and host populations.

Where the policy framework is more inclusive and enabling, the focus can shift to including provision of legal aid and legal support in self-reliance programs [96]. While they can be implemented on their own, legal aid components are often successfully embedded into livelihoods interventions [9]. Related good practice includes the provision by specialized staff of legal counseling and / or legal assistance around documentation or business registration [96; 101]. It also encompasses more broadly the dissemination of legal information and awareness raising, such that individuals and groups know their rights and can make informed decisions for themselves [43]. Typically, legal information dissemination can support self-reliance programming by helping refugees navigate administrative environments that can be complex (and sometimes in a foreign language), as well as by providing them with general awareness about legal matters that can have a significant importance regarding their situation, such as labor laws and trade regulations [43] or process to get their diplomas and certifications recognized. Awareness-raising on legal matters has also proven to be effective when working with potential employers on decent work standards and inclusive hiring practices and can promote more inclusive and decent work opportunities for refugees [43].

Protection & Self-Reliance Programming

In the literature, addressing the policy environment through programming is often formulated in terms of the role for protection in self-reliance programming – either through advocacy relating to laws and policies (right to work, refugee status, freedom of movement, etc.), or through legal aid and activities that help refugees navigate existing rules and regulations (asylum, documentation, etc.).

The importance of protection work and the need for protection actors to be involved in the design and implementation of self-reliance programming is also mentioned in relation to social protection and the access and / or provision of social and care services [149, 18]. By contrast, we have found little mention in the literature of protection work within self-reliance programming that speaks to individual differences in vulnerabilities and to protection risks. In particular, there are surprisingly few lessons learned about self-reliance programming for individuals with special needs (with the exception possibly of the literature around the Graduation Approach that discusses the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the ultra-poor) [80, 147]. There is also little evidence overall about good practices for self-reliance programming and protection in terms of age, gender and diversity. Overall, we find a gap in the literature in terms of studying how protection work in self-reliance programming differs from protection work in other types of humanitarian programs (such as emergency or 'care and maintenance' programs).

SELF-RELIANCE PROGRAMMING: APPROACHES

Holistic approaches

Implementing agencies have taken a variety of approaches when selecting and combining the various components discussed in the first section of this brief to design self-reliance programs [70; 149]. For some time, the focus has been to take single-sector approaches to self-reliance programming, such as livelihoods, education, or health [149]. However, there is a growing consensus in the literature that appropriate and successful approaches for self-reliance programming are cross-sectoral and holistic [33].

Holistic approaches take into account the interdependencies and interplays of the different dimensions of self-reliance [144; 9]. These approaches consider a range of coordinated cross-sectoral services offered either by a single agency or by a consortium of agencies as particularly effective for improving self-reliance outcomes [80]. Typically, a holistic approach will involve multi-sectoral programming at an area-level, including through referral pathways across various activities [84]. For example, RefugePoint's Self-Reliance Runway approach, which provides a 'one-stop shop' of coordinated services to address housing, food, healthcare, psychosocial counseling, education, livelihoods for highly vulnerable refugees in Nairobi, Kenya, is an example of a holistic approach to self-reliance programming [123].

A notable aspect of most of the effective approaches to self-reliance programming discussed in the literature relates to the notion of 'graduating' from aid [107; 70]. 'Graduation' is the point that refugees reach when in theory they no longer need assistance from refugee-specific programs [107]. Insofar as self-reliance can be defined as "independence from international assistance", self-reliance could be viewed as the state achieved when graduating from assistance.

While different agencies take varying approaches to graduation programming for self-reliance, most are inspired by the Graduation Approach pioneered by BRAC and used extensively in anti-poverty programming in development contexts [147]. The Graduation Approach is built on four pillars: social protection, livelihoods promotion, financial inclusion and social empowerment, which can be adapted and combined in different ways based on local contexts and needs [147]. The Graduation Approach has been rigorously evaluated, mostly in non-displacement contexts, and is widely considered to be effective in increasing socio-economic resilience for those living in extreme poverty [147].

The four pillars of the Graduation Approach relate closely to the various components of social and economic inclusion that have been identified as relevant and effective for self-reliance programming in the first section of this brief. This suggests that when holistically selected and suitably integrated, these components could prove effective in helping refugees reach a point where they are ready to graduate from assistance. In the last 10 years, UNHCR and a number of agencies have adapted the Graduation Approach to refugee settings (See below: Self-reliance & the Graduation Approach). See also *Evidence Brief – Programming for Self-Reliance (Contexts & Populations)* for a detailed look at adapting the four pillars of graduation in different contexts and for different population groups.

Despite the rising interest in holistic programming, the intensive and high-touch nature of these approaches in practice raises questions about cost effectiveness, value for money, and scalability. This also links to debates about short-term humanitarian funding cycles that are incongruent with the multi-year nature of holistic programs, as well as a recognition that humanitarian financing is primarily sector-based and not set-up to support intensive and/or front-loaded integrated programs.

Self-reliance & the Graduation Approach

In 2014, Trickle Up and UNHCR piloted an adaptation of the Graduation Approach (GA), primarily aimed at ultra-poor refugees in urban settings. The GA is made up of a holistic, timebound, integrated and sequenced set of interventions and is focused on refugee households that are living in extreme poverty. Crucially, it provides a framework for sequencing program components related to the four pillars that can help move refugees to a point where they no longer need assistance to meet their basic needs.

Following positive results from the pilot, the GA is being widely adopted as a holistic program model for refugee self-reliance. For example, the Poverty Alleviation Coalition (PAC), a coalition made up of 15 INGOs and co-convened by UNHCR and the World Bank's Partnership for Economic Inclusion (PEI), has adopted the GA as its program model. The Coalition seeks to alleviate poverty and increase the self-reliance, economic and social inclusion of refugees and host communities by sustainably increasing income opportunities.

It is important however to note that the GA was designed for refugees living in extreme poverty, who require an intensive range of services and support in order to move towards self-reliance. Because the GA is the program model for self-reliance that has been the most extensively reviewed in the literature, we use it across the different briefs as an example and as a point of reference for self-reliance programming. However, it does not mean that it is the only existing or successful program model for refugee self-reliance, nor that this specific approach is necessarily desirable in all refugee contexts, for all refugee populations, or for all individuals within populations.

Author's note

Self-reliance is a multidimensional concept and as such there are various dimensions to self-reliance programming, relating to different sectors of humanitarian and development assistance. While specific sectoral interventions may contribute to improving one or more aspects of self-reliance, evidence suggests that only focusing on interventions in a single sector will likely be insufficient to support most refugees to become self-reliant. It is, however, important to note that holistic program models are not yet systematically documented, and efforts should be made towards documenting the impact of integrated programming in promoting self-reliance.

In addition, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to self-reliance programming. Broadly, it is helpful to consider approaches like the Graduation Approach that provide a useful holistic framework, which can then be adapted to meet local conditions and the needs of specific populations. This does not necessarily suggest though that every agency undertaking self-

reliance programming must shift towards holistic interventions. Instead, it encourages working in a coordinated manner across sectors to ensure that refugees receive support that is tailored to their needs and can lead to improved self-reliance.

Multi-stakeholder engagement

The success of self-reliance programming is dependent to a large extent on the operating environment in the host country [102]. In particular, there is increasing recognition that the level of self-reliance that refugees can achieve in a given context depends highly on the policy environment and the macroeconomic environment [102; 155; 40]. Beyond individual and household-level interventions, self-reliance programming also includes identifying the structural barriers that impact refugees, and designing the system-level interventions that contribute to addressing them. This implies roles and responsibilities for actors working in the broader ecosystem, including host governments, development actors, and the private sector, towards creating an environment that enables self-reliance [54].

Programming at the humanitarian-development nexus

Humanitarian programming aimed at improving refugee self-reliance is directly linked to efforts by other actors towards local economic development and poverty alleviation in refugee-hosting areas [35; 155]. In part, this relates to creating conditions in the macroeconomic environment that can enable meaningful economic inclusion for refugees [155]. As such, the literature highlights the complementary nature of self-reliance programming undertaken typically by humanitarian actors (refugee response), most often implemented on a short-term basis, and the work more traditionally assigned to development actors (poverty alleviation) which has longer timeframes [88]. Much of the traditional development work aims at addressing structural issues that affect the population at large (refugees and hosts alike), often both at the national and the sub-national levels [59]. In particular, development actors can facilitate local economic development by influencing the amount of development aid that flows into refugee-hosting areas, as well as work with authorities on general macroeconomic policies related to trade, employment, and taxation, all of which create an enabling environment for refugee self-reliance programming [59; 8].

The literature emphasizes that refugee-hosting areas are often in the first place less economically developed than other regions in the same country, particularly for rural or camp-based displacement settings [127, 90]. For refugee self-reliance programming to be effective over the long-term, beyond bridging the gap between refugees and host populations, there is therefore a need for interventions that affect system-level change of the local economic environment. For humanitarian actors, this can mean including system-level components in their interventions, such as the models of livelihoods programming discussed above aimed at affecting market systems, value chains and the business environment more generally [101]. For development actors, this can mean working with authorities on national development plans that effectively channel adequate support and appropriate resources to refugee-hosting areas [68]. In other words, there is a critical interplay between the microeconomic approach (support to individuals, households and communities and their livelihoods) and the macroeconomic approach to self-reliance programming (regional infrastructure development, and in particular the development of critical support functions to market systems with employment potential) [101].

Beyond local economic development, another aspect of building a conducive macroeconomic environment for self-reliance that typically falls under the expertise of development actors is the work that can be done with host states around the adoption of policy and legislative frameworks that are more business-friendly, such as tax incentives and simplified registration procedures [96]. While these policies are not refugee-specific (contrary to the policy framework discussed in the previous section), they still critically contribute to increasing the potential level of self-reliance achievable by both refugees and host populations.

Programming with local civil society and the private sector

The importance of partnerships and coordination between multiple stakeholders in self-reliance programming is highlighted in the literature [64]. In fact, self-reliance programming can arguably only be achieved through such strategic partnerships, at the scale required to match the needs. Yet, many of the self-reliance programs reviewed still do not systematically or effectively build on the possible synergies between the multiple stakeholders working in the same area of operation. Historically, the focus of partnerships for self-reliance programming has primarily been on the interplay of humanitarian and development work [88]. Over the years, the literature has increasingly emphasized the importance for these actors to work closely with local authorities, and to do so both at the national and the sub-national levels [108; 71]. A good practice highlighted in the literature in terms of working in partnership with the public sector is to design programs that effectively take into account, build on and contribute to support national development plans and efforts [68]. This is also expected to increase the ability of the aid community to positively influence existing policy and legislative frameworks so that they become more inclusive of refugees and more responsive to their needs [68].

In addition to working with host states to address broader structural issues, the literature addresses the importance of developing strategic partnerships with civil society actors as well as with the private sector. These partnerships are in particular seen as key to achieving more sustainable self-reliance outcomes [73]. A related good practice is to work more systematically with local partners, and to adopt, wherever feasible, relevant and appropriate, facilitative approaches in the implementation of self-reliance programming where local actors take the lead [44; 42]. In line with the localization agenda, the implementation of social inclusion programming components through various types of local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and their active participation in program design is highlighted in many resources as a promising, though still under-developed, practice [71; 42].

Beyond sustainability, partnerships with the private sector also show promise in increasing the scale of self-reliance programming including through livelihoods programming and large-scale employment commitments [73], financial inclusion programming and high leverage over loans through credit guarantees [27, 89], and even alternative and blended financing models for self-reliance programs [27].

Author's note

There is a growing recognition that in addition to direct programming at the individual or household level, it is important to understand the broader ecosystem that has the potential to enable or create impediments to self-reliance outcomes for refugees.

Taking a systems-approach to self-reliance programming helps identify structural barriers

impacting refugees and the broader development of refugee-hosting areas. As a result, it can inspire programming that contributes to system-level change needed to achieve refugee self-reliance.

Taking a systems-approach can also help identify a wider range of actors in the ecosystem that can positively influence system-level change, by impacting the policy environment, contributing to local economic development or by improving social inclusion. As a result, it can facilitate effective coordination and complementarity in the work of these various stakeholders and encourage strategic partnerships and more facilitative approaches that will in turn increase the sustainability and scale of self-reliance outcomes.

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