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RESEARCH ARTICLE

‘The food is not enough’: disability and food aid technologies in a Ugandan refugee settlement

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Abstract

In Uganda’s refugee policy framework, food aid targets the most vulnerable – among them people with disabilities – using a categorization system. This article explores the entanglements of this technology of food distribution with disabled people’s socialities. It reveals that the system does not achieve its proposed rationale of creating equal opportunities for people who are disadvantaged within Uganda’s refugee policy of self-reliance, and that it falls short in enabling disabled people to fulfil roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, food aid is a significant contribution that allows refugees with disabilities to cultivate family and non-kin relationships. Exploring these interdependent relations around food aid calls into question the ideas of equality and independence as fundamental principles of living together.

Résumé

Dans le cadre de politique régissant les réfugiés en Ouganda, l’aide alimentaire vise les plus vulnérables (au rang desquels les personnes en situation de handicap) en utilisant un système de catégorisation. Cet article explore les imbrications entre cette technologie de distribution alimentaire et les socialités des personnes handicapées. Il révèle que le système n’atteint pas le but proposé de créer une égalité des chances pour les personnes défavorisées au sein de la politique ougandaise d’autonomie des réfugiés, et qu’il ne parvient pas à mettre les personnes handicapées en capacité de remplir des fonctions et des responsabilités. Néanmoins, l’aide alimentaire est une contribution importante qui permet aux réfugiés en situation de handicap de cultiver des relations de famille et de non-parenté. L’exploration de ces relations interdépendantes autour de l’aide alimentaire remet en question les idées d’égalité et d’indépendance comme principes fondamentaux du vivre ensemble.

Introduction

It was a colourful event. As well as wearing dresses and headscarves with flamboyant designs, many of the women at the food distribution point in the Kyangwali refugee settlement were protecting themselves from the blazing sun with fancy umbrellas. The glare from white sacks of beans and maize emblazoned with the World Food

Programme (WFP) logo was almost blinding, as they were unloaded from the lorries and stacked up on a huge tarpaulin on the ground. People coming to collect their monthly allowance lined up, carrying all sorts of different-coloured plastic basins, buckets, jugs and mugs for transporting their food rations.

From afar, I was able to spy Odongo's[1] tricycle made out of wood with small, wide tyres and a little handlebar to manoeuvre the vehicle. With his paralyzed legs crossed, Odongo sat on one of the distributed sacks in a group of people who were about to divide their respective shares of the food rations. As well as a woman with a limp, the group included elderly people and children. I was told that they were a group of 'extremely vulnerable individuals', or, in short, EVIs – a category of refugees who were accorded special food aid.

Uganda had become known for its unusual open refugee policy, a policy that is regarded as one of the most progressive in the world since the implementation of the Uganda Refugee Act in 2006 and the Refugee Regulation of 2010 (Patton 2016; Thompson 2016; Givetash 2018). It grants refugees rights to property, work and movement, as well as access to public services including education (Omata and Kaplan 2013: 6). Most crucially, it aims to encourage refugees towards self-reliance and independence from aid structures and aid deliveries by allocating them a plot of land in assigned settlement areas.

The government of Uganda has followed this aim of self-reliance by gradually integrating service structures for refugees into national systems; first through the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS) in 1999, and later as part of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR's) broader global strategy of Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) and the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment strategy (ReHoPE) (Ilcan *et al.* 2015; Meyer 2006; Svedberg 2014). The naming of these policies – self-reliance, development, empowerment – is telling in regard to an overall transition from emergency assistance to development-oriented refugee aid.

In Uganda, the idea is that refugees become self-reliant by cultivating the land allocated to them, while the aid agencies gradually scale back their relief operation by reducing and eventually phasing out their food rations. People who struggle to use the land efficiently due to their health status, age, mobility or the number of dependants they have to care for are categorized as EVIs and entitled to special food aid. They continue receiving 100 per cent of the food rations indefinitely, no matter how long they have been registered in the refugee settlement.

When Odongo divided the corn and soy blend, he and a young boy laughingly complained about how small the rations were. They noticed my interest in the topic and went on to make jokes about having to count every single bean for a meal, commenting that, as refugees, they were not supposed to eat much. This was not an unusual situation during my fieldwork in Kyangwali.[2] During food distributions, strangers

[1] All individual names used in this article are pseudonyms.

[2] This article is based on twelve months of ethnographic research, which I conducted between April 2015 and May 2016 in the Kyangwali refugee settlement. The material used in this article was mainly generated through the methods of participant observation and different kinds of interviews with thirty women and men with different mobility and motor disabilities. These methods were also applied in interaction with aid workers and community volunteers. Informal conversations took place in Swahili and English, while most of the interviews were conducted with the translation assistance of my research assistant, Amani Bakunda. Quotes used in this article were transcribed and translated from Kinyabwisha and Swahili to English by other research assistants.

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often turned towards me and complained with their hands on their bellies, articulating that 'the food is not enough' (*chakula haitoshi* in Swahili). Also, in personal conversations, many disabled people and their families or carers stated that the food rations they received were too small. Often, they expressed the amount of food in cups and communicated it in the form of rhetorical questions: 'See, four cups of beans and 12 kilograms of maize – can you use it for a full month?' People with disabilities argued that the food rations would last for only a few days, maybe for one or two weeks, but definitely not for the whole month.

Initially, I considered some of the statements that the food rations lasted for only a few days as exaggerations. I was well aware that my perceived role as a potential helper and a possibly influential connection with the aid agencies might shape people's complaints about the amount of food rations (Schuler 2018). Ugandan aid workers never missed an opportunity to remind me that white people like me were associated with decision-making power and money. They assumed that disabled people were just lying to me to make a point and emphasized that the food rations contained sufficient calories to sustain human life. When the ever prevalent complaints that the food was not enough did not vanish nor even decrease after I spent considerably more time with disabled people and their families, I realized that they implied more than simply a matter of the amount of food or my skin colour.

Anthropologists have shown in other displacement contexts that food, although it is provided, can be an indicator of what is absent. They use expressions such as 'tastes of necessity' (Trapp 2016) or 'foods of sorrow' (Dunn 2014) to describe food aid that does not fit people's eating cultures or their preferences, and so is not capable of sustaining social connections, normalcy and dignity (Oka 2014). This certainly played a crucial role in how my interlocutors perceived and valued the food aid provided by the WFP as 'not enough'. People argued that 'you cannot eat beans and *posho* [stiff maize porridge] every day'.

Yet, focusing on disability, there seems to be more at stake. When I started to become increasingly interested in the ways in which disabled people understood the food as not being enough, I learned not only about the entanglement of food aid with people's socialities, but also about different understandings of disabled personhood and logics of distribution at play in Kyangwali. Assumptions of how food aid should be distributed to people with disabilities underlie the principles of the EVI category and are part of a much broader system that aims at distributing scarce resources in the most fair and effective way possible. These categories are again part of policies, concepts and sets of practices that serve to manage the refugee population.

This article aims to shed light on how the technology of aid distribution is entangled with people's socialities. Food aid becomes integrated in people's socialities through daily practices, not only of cooking and eating but also through sharing, parenting and other forms of care. Following from what anthropologists have observed as relations of patronage and mutual dependencies in African contexts (Englund 2011; Whyte 2014; Scherz 2014; Ferguson 2015), I show that food aid for people with disabilities is a matter of interdependence.

Disabled people made sense of the food aid technologies through relationships that were not always equal. Thus, the procedures that the food aid technology enabled could vary. While some of my interlocutors did not receive special food aid due to

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missing personal links to the aid agencies or the inadequacy of their working procedures, in other situations tensions emerged between being vulnerable enough to get help and having the support of family that could exclude one from this help. Yet, in many cases, these relations and the technology became fruitful for disabled people. In Kyangwali, as in other Central African contexts, unequal relationships have the potential for making claims and gaining access to necessary resources. By making it possible to receive special aid as a person with a disability, the food aid technology was even reshaping the category of disability itself. It repositioned disabled people because it made them valuable connections for other people, especially those with whom they had no familial ties. This was particularly relevant in their situation of displacement as they had often lost family members and caregivers.

First, I present the food aid categories as a social technology and the rationales of equality and independence that guide the allocation of food aid to people with disabilities. Based on this, I argue, first, that the criteria of the EVI category do not in fact treat disabled people as equals; and, second, that they treat them not as providers, but as dependants. In the next step I discuss how, despite not fulfilling its rationales in practice, the technology of distributing food aid nevertheless enables people to create and maintain crucial social relations and thus shapes people's socialities. Similarly, I show how the social technology of food aid builds and is dependent on interdependent personal relations for its application. With this look at the various interdependent relations surrounding food aid, I finally question the basic assumptions about equality and independence as the underlying principles of food aid technology in this context. This article thus contributes to the literature on refugee camps and humanitarian aid not only by describing the influences of a social technology and how it is used by those affected for their own interests, but by questioning the underlying assumptions of the technology itself.

A social technology and its rationales

The category of the 'extremely vulnerable individual' (EVI) is just one of many used to allocate food rations in Kyangwali. Based on the latest assessment mission for food security in 2014, the WFP (which provides food aid to Ugandan refugee settlements), the UNHCR (which coordinates and monitors activities in the camp) and the Office of the Prime Minister (the national authority in the refugee settlements) developed the current 'food ration schedule' for Kyangwali. They categorized refugees into the following further groups for food aid: 'asylum seekers' and 'new arrivals' designate people who have lived in the refugee settlement for less than three years; 'new case load' denotes people who have arrived within the last four to five years; and 'old case load' refers to people who were registered more than five years ago.

Like people who are categorized as EVIs, asylum seekers and new arrivals are not able to produce their own food immediately after their establishment in the refugee settlement; hence, they receive 100 per cent of what is calculated as the minimum to survive. As the provider of food aid, the WFP calculates the rations according to the daily calories needed to sustain human life. The recommended minimum is 2,100 calories per day, and this is what a refugee on a 100 per cent food ration in Uganda receives (The Sphere Project 2011: 185). These required calories are provided in the form of maize, beans, CSB (a corn–soy blend for porridge), vegetable oil and salt

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(WFP *et al.* 2014). People from the 'new case load' and the 'old case load' are entitled to 60 per cent and 50 per cent of the food rations, respectively (*ibid.*).

The food aid categories are part of a broader set of practices and measures that serve to implement Uganda's self-reliance strategy. These legal, social and physical procedures can be understood as a 'social technology' that organizes, administers and controls the refugee population, as anthropological research into humanitarianism and refugees – often influenced by Foucault's work on power, governmentality and biopolitics – has shown (Malkki 1996; Hyndman 2000; Inhetveen 2010; Turner 2010; Agier and Fernbach 2011; Jaji 2012). Since the late 1980s, different actors have pursued the idea of self-reliance not only in refugee camps, but also in development cooperation and the fight against poverty. In line with neoliberal values as a governing principle, various measures encourage refugees to actively take on more responsibility to meet their basic needs in order to get by with as little humanitarian aid as possible (Ilcan *et al.* 2015: 1).

As part of this social technology made up of international and national policies and practices, Uganda's settlement approach ought to provide an enabling environment in which refugees can develop their capacities and – at least in theory – become economically independent. Like other refugee settlements in Uganda, the Kyangwali settlement, which hosts around 40,000 people, mostly from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was not fenced in order to facilitate entrepreneurial activities. The biggest of its sixteen villages offers a range of shops, restaurants and bars, and is home to hairdressing salons, phone-charging stations, a small market, and a mobile money centre. Young men with motorbikes are especially busy on the weekly market day in another village of the settlement, transporting merchants and clients along the mud roads in and out. However, Kyangwali refugee settlement is located in a remote rural region in western Uganda, 80 kilometres from the next largest urban centre. The 147 square kilometres of land were allocated to host Rwandan refugees in the 1960s as the area was sparsely populated (Adelman and Suhrke 1999: 10). After most Rwandan refugees were repatriated from Uganda in 1994–95, the settlement area was declared vacant until 1997, when Congolese refugees began arriving with the rise of the current crisis in Eastern DRC (Werker 2007: 463).

As well as this physical technique of managing refugees, the food aid and other humanitarian categories have a specific role to play in self-reliance. The UNHCR began to categorize people according to their basic needs and vulnerability in the 1990s (Glasman 2015: 15); since then, this has been at the heart of its working procedures. Orphans, elderly people, single mothers and people with chronic medical conditions are also categorized as being vulnerable, as well as people with disabilities, due to their assumed physical, economic or social disadvantages. This is captured in the 'Guidance on the use of standardized specific needs codes', a booklet that informs on the use of the category PSN, 'Person with Specific Needs'.[3] The aid agencies in Kyangwali used this categorization approach to vulnerability for assessing and registering information about people, for programme planning, reporting and accounting, as well as for allocating aid and services. Technologies thus do not have to be material artefacts, but they serve to accomplish a specific purpose, often for a very specific

[3] 'Guidance on the use of standardized specific needs codes', document received by email from a UNHCR aid worker, 12 February 2016.

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group of people. In this sense, I understand the categorization system for food distribution as a technology that enables certain procedures aimed at allocating aid to refugees and that has consequences for disabled people.

The basic idea behind categorizing people according to their vulnerability aims to create equal conditions for people who are disadvantaged. This derives from a Western ideal, something that Whyte and Ingstad have called the 'desirability of equality' (1995: 7). As Harri Englund also points out, the English concept of equality arose as a term of measurement, based on an assumption of autonomous and separate individuals (2011: 49–50). For people with disabilities, this ideal became important after World War One in Europe. In order to care for the wounded of the war, rehabilitation emerged as an endeavour to restore a previous, 'normal' condition, and special entitlements were established to support people who had trouble competing on the labour market (Whyte and Ingstad 1995: 8). Special food aid for disabled people through the EVI category can be understood as compensation for their physical incapacity to pursue agriculture, with the aim of making them more equal in accessing food.

In what follows, I outline the ways in which my interlocutors considered their food rations as not enough. Understanding their perspective makes it imperative to grasp how concerns and complaints about food, which play an essential role for all refugees in Kyangwali, were specific to people with disabilities.

'The food is not enough, not even for a child's school fees'

When I sat in the circle of Odongo's group as they divided the food aid into their individual rations, I was not surprised to see them soon buy and sell the rations among themselves and with others. As I had observed in other situations, food distribution points became an important marketplace, although no one called out to advertise their merchandise. Trading food aid was prohibited, and people were constantly reminded of that by announcements over the loudspeakers, or the instruction 'NOT TO BE SOLD OR EXCHANGED', which was printed in large letters on the huge cans of vegetable oil.

Due to budgetary constraints, refugees were expected to adapt to the most economical provisions, the most nutritional and calorific food available for the lowest price on the world market (Trapp 2016: 414). Governments are by far the largest group of donors to the WFP, contributing in the form of either cash or in-kind donations (WFP 2018). When such donations were in cash, the organization prioritized buying food locally and tried to adapt to people's ordinary eating habits. Yet any kind of donation counts as significant, so food donations were being transported from different parts of the world to the refugee settlement, while people in Kyangwali often produced a surplus that they sold very cheaply in the local market (Omata and Kaplan 2013).

For people from Eastern DRC who made up the majority in Kyangwali, the food aid enabled them to cook one of their staple foods, a basic maize meal (stiff porridge); this was accompanied by beans and normally eaten twice a day. But my interlocutors wanted more diversity in their diet, and they usually sold part of their food rations or supplemented them. Nearly all my interlocutors had a plot of land, and often close family members who cultivated the fields, primarily with maize, beans, cassava,

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sorghum and potatoes. Whenever possible, people supplemented this food with various vegetables, adding predominantly tomatoes, onions or carrots to the bean sauce; very rarely, they augmented that with small dried fish, meat or chicken. People also tried to supplement their diet with fruit including mangoes and bananas, which they sometimes grew in their fields. Sugar, tea, additional salt, and a Congolese dish called *sombe* made out of pounded cassava leaves were celebrated as delicious luxuries. The expression that 'the food is not enough' thus also pointed to the fact that the 'economical food' (Trapp 2016: 414) of the rations was not always the right food.

In the monthly food distribution of October 2015, the UNHCR and the WFP introduced the option of choosing between food aid and an equivalent of this support in cash. This was part of a new approach that the aid agencies had been gradually implementing since 2014 in the various refugee settlements in Uganda and worldwide. This shift aimed to empower refugees by allowing them to choose what they wanted to eat themselves; this constitutes quite a paradigm shift in aid provision. People were sometimes blamed by aid workers for 'playing with their nutrition' when they sold food rations, as the rations were specifically calculated according to the calorific and nutritional needs of a person.

The novelty of providing cash also allowed people to meet some of their monetary needs directly. But whether the provision was in products or in cash, the amount was definitely not enough to fill a person's stomach and provide for their other needs as well. When my interlocutors argued that 'the food is not enough', they referred to the fact that the food they received as EVIs was not in any way equivalent to what an able-bodied person could acquire through farming. While a big part of Kyangwali's population still received at least a percentage of the initial food rations, their agricultural activities enabled them to sell part of their produce to cover other needs, such as soap, airtime for mobile phone services, clothes, school fees and medicine. Disabled parents and their spouses felt that it was unfair that the aid organizations did not provide them with more food, or at least support them with their children's school fees and study materials, as they were unable to cultivate the land themselves. One of my interlocutors expressed this pointedly when he said: 'But that maize cannot be enough, not even for a child's school fees.'

Most disabled people's situation of not being able to grow crops also conflicted greatly with the fact that they received the same food support as everyone else among the newly arrived refugees. Until refugees had their first harvest, they were all considered disadvantaged in terms of making a living. Most of them, however, were soon able to cultivate their fields, unlike my interlocutors, but they continued receiving the full food rations. In theory, disabled people who had just come to the camp should have received a slightly different composition of their 2,100 calorie allowance per day. In contrast to able-bodied 'new arrivals', people in the 'EVI' and 'asylum seeker' categories received daily amounts of 390 grams of maize meal instead of maize kernels, only 70 grams of beans, but an additional 5 grams of salt. This meant that they did not have to invest money to mill their maize or acquire salt on their own.

During my field research, however, the EVI category among newly arrived refugees did not exist. Everyone simply received the 100 per cent food ration in its normal constitution, as the EVI assessments had not been done in time due to budgetary constraints and coordination challenges. Hence, people with disabilities who had arrived

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between 2014 and the end of 2016 received their maize unground. In order to make this food edible, they required money, or they had to give a specific amount of their food ration as payment to the local grinding machine operators.

Despite their disabilities, my interlocutors were not entitled to any additional food allowance. The Ugandan refugee policy's stated objective was self-reliance, but the food aid provided for those categorized as 'extremely vulnerable' merely targeted their survival. It is, however, not only through the amount of the food rations that disabled people considered that they were treated unfairly.

What kind of dependency?

Mansanga developed a weakness in her legs as a child in Eastern DRC, and she was used to moving slowly on her hands and knees all her life. When I visited the elderly woman in her family's grass-thatched wattle and mud hut, her clothes were always a bit dirty, especially when it was rainy season. When Mansanga and her grandchildren joined her son, who was already living with his spouse and children in the camp, she initially received food rations in the category of an 'asylum seeker' for her grandchildren and herself. But as there were complications in her acquisition of refugee status, she was not able to receive food aid for nearly six months.

Much later that year, when I found Mansanga at home alone as her restricted movement made it difficult for her to attend church with her relatives, she talked about conflicts in the family with a lot of bitterness: 'The problem is, here at home they [her relatives] fight, and for me, I do not like to stay with people who fight like that. All the time you hear *kakakakaka*, and even when they give you food you fail to eat it. This fighting is every day, they fight with that woman [her daughter-in-law].' Although there were other reasons for family quarrels, Mansanga expressed how much her being left off the food log had intensified the already existing tensions: 'This woman has said several times that I ate their food, but that I did not add anything. The food in the house was already little, and I felt bad, so that I would even refuse to eat.'

Mansanga's story shows how the technology of food aid is entangled with disabled people's fulfilment of roles and responsibilities. The several months when Mansanga did not receive food rations had created tensions in her relationship with her daughter-in-law, who complained that Mansanga was a burden when she could not contribute to the household's food. Important in this regard is that the UNHCR and the WFP do not perceive disabled people as *necessarily* having special food needs. The eligibility criteria for people with disabilities state that: 'A person qualifies for food assistance, if he/she is unable to access food due to the direct consequence of his/her disability and doesn't have family and/or external support.' If a single head of a household is considered unable to access food, all their children aged eighteen or under qualify for 100 per cent of food rations.[4] If they have support from an able-bodied spouse or a grown-up child, they are seen as being able to access food, and thus they are excluded from special food aid. With this, disabled people's vulnerability is relationally defined.

[4] Document 'Selection criteria for WFP, EVIs', received by email on 12 February 2016 from a UNHCR aid worker.

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The main reason why the criteria for being categorized as EVI entailed family or external support as an excluding factor lay in the overall effort to avoid aid dependency. Independence from humanitarian aid is the overall goal of the self-reliance strategy; dependence, even if only dependence on food aid, contradicts the ideal of equality and individual freedom as manifest principles of development. The aim of the self-reliance strategy is also to 'maintain self-sustaining community structures' (Dryden-Peterson and Hovil 2004: 30), and this includes the community taking responsibility for caring for its vulnerable members as much as possible itself.

Aid organizations in Kyangwali feared the withdrawal of community or family support when they gave disabled people food rations. One WFP representative argued: 'I have seen that the assistance given to vulnerable people draws the other members in the community away from supporting them. If they are provided with that kind of assistance, it is already an indication to the community that they have enough support.' This led to the contradiction that, while the service providers were trying to reduce dependency on aid, they accepted people's dependency within their families. Claire, a woman who had lost both a leg and an arm during shootings in Eastern DRC, explained how she was not listed as an EVI for several years:

> They had refused to put me down as 'vulnerable', because I have a husband who should work and take care of me. They said that it was impossible to give me food. I came to see my name there after how many years? Seven years! I was really so disturbed. I wondered if my husband would abandon me, what could I do, because he was the one trying to support us all the time.

With familial support comprising an exclusionary criterion that prevented people from receiving special food aid, the EVI category recognized only certain vulnerabilities, while neglecting or possibly even creating others. Claire felt that being forced to depend on her husband had left her even more vulnerable. She also explained: 'You see, a disabled person cannot dig [farm]. So you find the life of disabled people's children is wasted. Even though I am disabled, my child should have an education.' Being a parent and a wife locates disabled people like anyone else as 'persons' within their social milieu (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Ramsay 2017). Claire's possibilities to fulfil these roles were considerably influenced by the food aid technology.

Several disabled people in Kyangwali were not categorized as EVI because they had an able-bodied spouse or grown-up children in their household, or, more importantly, on their attestation card. By having to rely on family support, disabled people were not only deemed to be dependants; their role as providers was also neglected. Another of my interlocutors worried: 'There comes a time when they remove you [from the food log] and say your children will support you, the adult children. But the problem with the older children is that they are at school and instead it is you who should be helping them.' The criteria for the EVI category overlooked the point that disabled people perceived themselves as being treated equally only when they were enabled to carry out the role of looking after their children, like anybody else. Also, in this sense, for many, 'the food was not enough'.

Hence, instead of realizing its rationale of ensuring equality and independence, the technology of food aid carries the danger of even widening the gap between the ones who are dependent and the ones who are able to provide. This observation and

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argumentation is based on an understanding of equality and dependence that has grown historically in the global West and is anchored in the food aid categories. But if we examine the manifold interdependent relations surrounding food aid, this understanding needs to be questioned further.

Enabling sociality

The observation that food aid is an important contribution to the family should not only be grasped in quantitative terms; food aid can provide reliability in a context of uncertainty. An elderly man with a leg prosthesis that prevented him from doing any hard physical work explained: 'We used to suffer a lot because I depended on the garden and my family. The only option we had was the garden, and you know with things of the garden, you only get to harvest when it is [the] season.' Without food aid, people's food security was dependent on the harvest time itself, but also on how good the season was for cultivating crops. Sifa, who had a limp, described the food rations as being especially important when there was a bad season and explained: 'My brother, he can help, but it is not much. We cannot go to him every time we have food problems.'

Personal relationships always involved some kind of uncertainty, as people could never be sure how their significant others would want to, or be able to, react in specific situations. Whyte and Siu (2015) speak about 'personal contingencies' to describe this kind of dependency, which bears both potential and uncertainties; personal relationships can be beneficial in multiple ways, but also risky, they argue. My interlocutors informed me about problematic situations, such as when a certain family member fell sick and was not able to dig in the field for a while. This risky dependency on others has intensified for some people with disabilities under displacement. Not only did they, in DRC, have a wider network of family, relatives and friends to rely on; also, in the camp, when family members were around, they often lacked the same capacities and resources to support their disabled relatives as they used to have in DRC, where they had a more regular income, a bigger business or more land.

Considering these dependencies, food aid as something stable and regular took on a very specific significance in people's lives, in contrast to unpredictable help from significant others and agricultural uncertainties. In their research on access to antiretroviral treatment in Uganda, Whyte and Siu suggest that, compared with interpersonal dependencies, dependence on institutions is more reliable (2015: 22). For refugees, dependence on institutions seems to be even more significant, as they have often lost people from their social network during war and displacement.

In his book *Give a Man a Fish*, Ferguson (2015) has written of the ongoing importance of patronage for how people in Southern Africa survive by drawing on social networks of mutual exchange and obligations in their claims for assistance and resources. Both care and material support are realized through relations of mutual dependence, within which people who have more support protect those who have less (*ibid*.: 25; Scherz 2014: 3). Ferguson also discusses dependence and claim-making on NGOs and governments – actors with an often greater capacity to provide and protect – as alternatives to dependence on other people (Ferguson 2015: 231). In Kyangwali, I was able to observe how aid agencies became potential patrons and providers for people with disabilities who have been forcibly displaced. And people's

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access to food aid enabled them to be providers in turn. It allowed them to 'have people' (Smith 2004) – to build up and cultivate relations with others.

The example of Rafael illustrates these dynamics. He was already elderly when he arrived nineteen years ago in Kyangwali. He used to farm maize, beans, Irish and sweet potatoes, but one night he suddenly developed pain and stiffness in his legs and knees. Since that day he had never been able to stretch or move his legs, and he became highly dependent on other people's help. When I visited Rafael for the first time, I found him by his small hut directly next to one of the paths, sitting in front of his open door on a plastic mat. His wrinkled face and grey hair contrasted with his bright blue hip-hop-style hoodie and the glaring yellow plastic rosary around his neck. He had his knees drawn up to his chest and seemed to experience pain when he changed his posture. In our talk, Rafael soon referred to his neighbour Mohammed, saying: 'He helps me in various ways. Like, when I am thirsty, he brings water, and he always carries me to bed ... He even gives me money, sends his child to fetch water for me.'

Rafael lived without family in Kyangwali. Being categorized as an EVI, he received 100 per cent of the food rations every month, but it was Mohammed's family who collected the rations and cooked the food for him. When I talked to Mohammed's family on other occasions, I learned that they struggled to take care of him at times, but without the additional food rations they would have more difficulties. Mohammed referred to a time when Rafael did not receive food rations because he lost his attestation papers and food ration card: 'In those three months, I struggled with Rafael and those 12 kilograms of maize would have helped me with buying soap; it could have helped me with medication so that I could get a way to ease life for him.'

No one who had fled Eastern DRC or who had already lost relatives over the long duration of the conflict there was surrounded by a big circle of aunts, uncles or cousins in Kyangwali on whom they could draw when in need of support. Yet, this became especially visible and critical for people who were more dependent on the help of others. Food aid could thus enable caring relations with non-relatives. A community social worker made the same observation when he argued: 'These vulnerable people, if they are not put on the food ration, they cannot find a family or a person who is cooking for them. They need that food such that another family can support them.'

In her research on food aid to orphans in a Botswana village, Bianca Dahl observed how these interventions challenged local caregiving practices. When government food aid was distributed to households during the AIDS crisis, the elderly within the community in particular feared the waning of the moral obligation to take care of the family's orphans. They felt 'discomfort with a system in which relatives appeared to require a kind of governmental bribery to provide a supposedly cherished responsibility – the raising of their families' children' (Dahl 2014: 633). Later, when a humanitarian organization in the same village provided food aid directly to the affected children within a day orphanage, the problem arose that some orphans did not want to fulfil their family obligations in the household, as it was no longer the family who would feed them. Food aid in Botswana has thus complicated familial relations of patronage, as Dahl argues.

In Botswana, the imperative of food aid was based on the assumption that, without it, relatives would neglect their orphans – an outcome similar to the one that the aid worker in Kyangwali feared for disabled people without family. However, the

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influence of food rations on caring relations seemed to be quite different in this context. While I often heard and observed that people were generally willing and ready to help disabled people in Kyangwali, I argue that longer-term care engagements were encouraged by the food aid that disabled people received. Although Mohammed's family also used produce from their own field to take care of Rafael, his food aid was a welcome contribution to their household. As a regular form of support, food aid could strengthen some degree of stability, and not just for the person receiving the food rations. As people without familial ties seemed to attach themselves more easily to disabled people when they received food rations, one could argue that the technology of the categorization system enabled sociality. It positioned people with disabilities as valuable connections for others.

Disabled people found themselves in dense webs of interdependencies, and access to food aid, among other services and goods, influenced these relations. As beneficiaries of special food aid they can be understood as being 'simultaneously patrons and dependants, receiving from those above them and giving to those below them, taking their positions in long hierarchical chains of support', as Scherz (2014: 19) wrote of the workings of interdependent relations in southern Uganda. Disabled people's relations to 'brokers' – aid workers and community social workers as the people who administer the food aid categories – became especially important in these 'hierarchical chains of support'. I want to draw attention to the contested role of the community social workers, who were refugees themselves, as the people through whom disabled people were in personal interaction with the aid agencies.

The community social workers' role is to identify 'vulnerable' people in their village, assess their needs, and inform them about any relevant aid distribution. They did not have decision-making power in relation to the categorization or whether a person eventually received special food aid, but they were influential in determining which cases for support were taken forward. The quality of one's relationship to a community social worker could thus be crucial to successfully making claims to be integrated into the EVI category. The following statement of an elderly father of a teenage boy with epilepsy reveals the dependency such a relationship can entail:

> Whenever they call for the EVIs or people with disabilities, I always go there, but the [community] social worker does not want our records to reach the office. And when I try to go to the office myself, they tell me to go back and come with the social worker. So, if he is good to you, you will get the services; if he is not good to you, you do not get the services.

Whyte and Siu (2015: 22) characterized the importance of such relationships in accessing HIV care and treatment as 'technical know who'. The man whose son had epilepsy and whom he wanted included on the list of EVIs argued that the community social worker was ignoring their requests due to their different ethnic backgrounds. There were also many complaints that the community social workers would not do their jobs properly unless the applicants gave them money or sex. Conversely, community social workers recounted that people tried to bribe them in order to receive certain services. Through the figure of the community social worker, disabled people experienced their access to food aid as a very personal issue.

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Historian Joel Glasman, who has described the UNHCR's classification of refugees in the African Great Lakes region, emphasizes that it claims to be objective, non-political and universally applicable 'in the sense of making it possible to take action towards establishing norms, standards or categories that do not depend on who applies them' (2015: 4). The case of the community social workers calls into question the assumed universality, objectivity and mere technicality of such a categorization system. Even though the system as a technology seems to be strict and rigid, it is people who put it into practice and their relations with others that shape access to food aid. This makes it very blurred where a social technology begins or ends.

Claiming equality

These relationships of mutual dependence, which shape access to and are reshaped by food aid, call into question the premise of equality as a fundamental principle of living together. While the claims around the initially postulated statement that 'the food is not enough' were based on an understanding of formal equality between independent units, the statement must also be understood against the background of hierarchical patron–client relations. As I wrote in the introduction to this article, when disabled people claimed that 'the food is not enough', aid workers made me aware that they were just lying to me to make a point. And, indeed, they wanted to make a point: namely, one that goes beyond the demand of being treated equally in relation to other refugees.

When disabled people communicated to me or to aid workers that the food rations were not sufficient for a dignified life, this was not simply a statement; at the same time, it was a hopeful demand to be helped in some way. One day, for instance, I was challenged by Philippe, a young man with paralyzed legs, who saw it as problematic that I asked questions about the adequacy of the food rations without offering something to eat after receiving a negative answer. He saw it as my duty to help him. When disabled people complained that they received the same food rations as newly arrived refugees who were able to cultivate their fields, they reminded the authorities of their obligations towards them. They knew well that in the EVI category they should receive more salt and ground maize.

Specifically, in regard to disability, anthropologists have contrasted Western values of independence and equality with hierarchical and interdependent relations of patronage (Devlieger 2018: 7; see also Grischow 2015). Some, however, have pointed to the possibility of equality within these hierarchical relations (Englund 2011; Durham 1995). In his book about a Malawian radio show, Harri Englund manifests equality as 'a condition of the very claim dependants can place on their masters, benefactors, and leaders' (2011: 14). The stories provided by the radio listeners describe dissatisfaction with their relationships with teachers, authorities or husbands. The listeners made use of the hierarchical order and the socially expected obligations that come with it, rather than trying to undermine it (*ibid.*: 10). As Englund argues, equality comes into play at the very moment of claim-making, expressing mutual respect between such unequal positions (*ibid.*: 179).

Even though there is no single notion of 'personhood' in African contexts, as Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) point out, literature from different Central African contexts often reveals similarities. What is specific for my interlocutors regarding

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unequal relations, however, seems to be their experience of humanitarian aid interventions. Whereas aid agencies and much of the scientific literature usually frame the problem of displacement as a rupture of an original connection between people and place, resulting in a shared feeling of cultural uprootedness, anthropological literature has critically questioned this assumption, emphasizing relations and interactions with aid agencies as the common denominator of their lives (Harrell-Bond 1986; Malkki 1995). This seems to be the case for my interlocutors too, many of whom have been internally displaced in the DRC before coming to Kyangwali. In addition, the border regions between Eastern DRC and Uganda are very blurred, with a lot of movement and shared languages and cultural habits.

My interlocutors have always stressed how important food rations are for them – not only for their own survival, but also in their relations with others. When they argued that they were (much more easily) supported by extended family in the DRC, they did not question their dependence within this network. In her research with Congolese refugees in Tanzania, Shelly Dick pointed out that it was not common to be reliant on oneself in Congolese society, as individual strategies to manage life were always linked to those of extended families (Dick 2002: 22). There seems to be a crucial point about challenging the validity of the concept of 'self-reliance' in any society, but especially in those where poverty and inequality are a reality that cannot be ignored. Ferguson writes on the 'self': 'While modern liberal common sense often universalizes an ideologically conceived liberal individual, and sees society as composed of transactions among such individuals, anthropologists of Africa have long insisted that relational persons do not precede relations of dependence; they are, instead, constituted by those relations' (Ferguson 2015: 226).

Rather than self-reliance in the sense of independence from others, including the aid agencies, disabled people's aim seems to be a fruitful form of relatedness, as the cases in this article have shown. My interlocutors felt that, precisely because they no longer had a network of extended kin, they should receive more support from the aid agencies. While the aid workers attempted to reduce the 'dependency syndrome' (the aid organizations' fear that aid will create passivity and excessive demands (Harrell-Bond 1986; Malkki 1992)), it is precisely the food rations as handouts that enable relations of mutual dependence and that foster people's independence in certain ways.

The pervasive complaint that 'the food is not enough' shows that equality is claimed at the moment of application within these hierarchical relationships. However, the success of these demands was sometimes limited. The possibility of receiving more food rations, for example was non-existent. The calculation of the minimum 2,100 calories per day was a universal standard that could not be adapted. Yet, the situation was different for the criteria relating to the food aid categories. During my fieldwork period, most of my interlocutors were in fact categorized as EVI, even if they were living with an able-bodied spouse or grown-up children. This obviously contradicted the EVI conditions, but aid workers thought it was important to apply the categories in practice by carefully scrutinizing each case, instead of sticking strictly to the criteria. This might have been a result of the constant demands, and the reaction, of well-meaning aid workers using their autonomy to alleviate one of the far-reaching shortcomings of the food distribution technology.

The food aid categories, as part of a broader social technology to manage refugees towards the overall goal of self-reliance, assume equality in the sense of separate,

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independent individuals. This governing principle underlying the social technology is, however, anchored in a very specific historical and cultural context and it travelled to Kyangwali through different policies, practices and procedures. Literature on refugee camps from the perspective of governmentality has not only described the various effects of such social technologies, but often also highlighted refugees' agency and strategies in using such technologies for their own purposes (see contributions in Turner 2016). However, even this anthropological work often remains caught up in 'Western' concepts of equality, independence or self-reliance, overlooking the alternative views and forms of behaviour important to the people concerned as a counter to the dominant interventions.

Food aid: a matter of interdependence

This article has tried to capture the mismatch between Uganda's policy of self-reliance and food aid for disabled people as a means of survival. The WFP's provision of food aid did not truly compensate for disabled people's exclusion from the self-reliance strategy. Hence, my interlocutors felt unjustly treated in this situation and complained that 'the food is not enough'. In their view, food aid should also enable them to become self-reliant, and to support their families. My interlocutors' assertions that 'the food is not enough' thus encompassed more than simply an account targeted at the quantity of the food aid. It was, rather, a statement of how disabled people understood their vulnerability within Uganda's refugee policy of self-reliance and their roles and rights within their social network in relation to provision and the fulfilment of responsibilities.

The vulnerability criteria that entitled disabled people to special food aid were based on their compromised access to food due to their inability to pursue agriculture *and* a lack of social support from others who could farm. With this focus on familial support, the EVI criteria therefore forced disabled people to be dependent on their family and community. They not only failed to fulfil their proclaimed purpose of compensating for people's identified vulnerabilities in terms of inequality and dependence; they even bore the risk of widening the gap between those who were dependent and those who were able to provide.

This perspective borrows from the understanding of equality as an ideal between independent individuals. Yet, food aid became an important part of people's socialities, when they shared, exchanged and contributed it within their social networks. Food aid could help disabled people to create and maintain social connections – an endeavour that was especially relevant in this refugee camp, as the situation in the DRC and associated displacement had often led to ruptures within those connections. Instead of bringing about the withdrawal of family or community support, food aid enabled disabled people to be more easily helped with cooking, fetching water or collecting firewood, especially as it provided some reliability in a context of uncertainty.

The technology allowed disabled people to take part in social life in a more engaged way, while people's sociality could be both enabling and hindering in receiving food aid. People were not categorized as EVIs if they had able-bodied family members, yet it was easier to be categorized when having the 'technical know who'. The entanglement of the technology of categorization with disabled people's sociality is

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thus a very complex one when looked at in this contextualized way and when we recognize the lack of clear boundaries.

Looking at these manifold interdependent relations around food aid also revealed another perspective on the claim that 'the food is not enough'. Namely, such claims can also be a marker of equality as a condition of hierarchical relationships. Yet, when such claims are not taken seriously and are instead interpreted as lies or a sign of the dependency syndrome, aid providers run the risk of missing or misinterpreting the consequences of their interventions. Bringing disabled people's socialities around food into focus reveals that their life realities do not fit well with the presumptions of a categorization system based on a specific understanding of vulnerability and equality.

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