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Shifting the paradigm on refugee-hosting landscapes: From land degradation to land restoration and resilience

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Abstract

In sub-Saharan Africa, refugee hosting landscapes are located in fragile ecological zones in arid and semi-arid areas. The low economic value and natural resource base of these sites is one reason these locations are selected for development into refugee camps and/or refugee settlements. The sites are characterised by high levels of land degradation, deforestation and loss of biodiversity due to invasive species infestations, such as *Prosopis juliflora*. Furthermore, if these sites are located in the vicinity of urban sites, towns and/or host settlements then the local carrying capacity may already be exceeded, placing further pressures on local natural resources and development infrastructures. Due to the combination of environmental factors, refugee hosting landscapes are some of the most challenging to engage with across the humanitarian-development nexus. Despite these complex challenges, there are still opportunities to shift the paradigm on refugee-hosting landscapes, moving from the dominant ‘land degradation’ assumption to the realm of ‘land restoration’ and ‘resilience’, through the implementation of gender-sensitive nature-based solutions (NbS). In the IWMI and ICRAF managed project ‘circular bioeconomy solutions for resilient refugee and host communities in East Africa’, the NbS have incorporated a nexus around home gardens, agroforestry and cooking energy, resulting in the development of a household circular bioeconomy model that builds food, nutrient and energy security. The regenerative activities that have been implemented at the household level include: stove construction; briquette making; charcoal making; compost production; livestock integration; greywater irrigation, home garden cultivation and tree planting. All these regenerative activities are not only crucial in restoring landscapes but are instrumental in building climate change adaptation capacity. In this paper, findings, constraints and lessons are presented not only from the IWMI and ICRAF managed circular bioeconomy project from four refugee camps and settlements in Kenya and Uganda, but also NbS work is presented from additional refugee hosting landscapes in Cameroon and Tanzania. The evidence-based

findings from this work are applicable to other fragile environments, particularly in the context of climate change adaptation in arid and semi-arid areas.

Keywords: Adaptation, climate change, cooking energy, food, gender inclusion