



Engendering localization of humanitarian aid; Case Study of strengthening Women's Leadership to champion gender equality in SSD Refugee Response in Uganda

1. Background

Uganda hosts Africa's largest refugee population, with the number standing at 1,276,208 as of May 2019 and 82% of these refugees are women and children.¹ Men and women are perceived as unequal and cultural norms bar women from decision making and participation in leadership, the displacement creating more female headed households and women assuming more responsibilities that are considered to define manhood, like providing for the family needs and protection roles. baseline survey carried out by Refugee Law Project on women's leadership in 2018, less than 10% of 341 women interviewed occupied leadership positions.² In host local council leadership structures of Yumbe; there are only 2 female chairpersons out of 600; in Bidibidi refugee settlement, there are 930 RWCs and only 243 are female; five of the zones in Bidibidi are headed by RWC3 and all are men.³

Uganda's refugee response is overseen by a national level steering mechanism-The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). It is a multi-stakeholder coordination model on refugee matters focusing on humanitarian and development needs of both refugees and host communities. The CRRF in Uganda encompasses five mutually reinforcing pillars as outlined by the global objectives: (i) Admission and Rights, (ii) Emergency Response and Ongoing Needs, (iii) Resilience and Self-reliance, (iv) Expanded Solution and (v) Voluntary Repatriation. The CRRF also operationalised the ReHoPE strategy-which brings together the humanitarian and development actors to working together in humanitarian contexts of Uganda; specifically recommending a stronger role for refugee hosting local districts government in taking leadership in refugee management, and 30/70 allocation of resources to national and refugees respectively. In the context of the CRRF and other national frameworks to support the realisation of the rights of South Sudan refugee women in Uganda's West Nile refugee settlements, UN Women partnered with Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) to challenge the limited understanding of Local Council roles and responsibilities by women refugee and host leaders; improve the working relationship between local councillors and district local government; and increase the level of participation and influence of women in decision making in refugee settlements and host communities.

OPM in Yumbe and Adjumani District where UWONET and UN Women are operational have total registered 85 partners supporting the South Sudan refugee response as of May 2019.⁴ Only 12 of these partners are National Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), a few are Community Based Organizations (CBOs) s and 1 is a Women Rights Organization (WRO) -exclusive UWONET and International Women's Peace Center (IWPC). UWONET in June 2019 did a mapping of organizations focused on women's rights and with over 85% women initiated and managed; and identified 45 organizations in the two districts. A capacity assessment was done for the identified WROs and only 3 are operational in the SSD refugee response in West Nile Uganda-with action to support women's rights and economic empowerment. Only 3 had received training on gender and women rights. The WROs had no knowledge of gender rights, gender policies and instruments, gender concepts, different approach for gender analysis, action planning, advocacy and fundraising plans. For those active in the

¹ UNHCR and OPM Refugee Statistics. Uganda Refugee Response Portal <https://ugandarefugees.org/en/country/uga>

² Refugee Law Project LEAP project baseline report, August 2018.

³ Bidibidi Refugee Settlement OPM report during the Gender Reference Group Meeting, April 2019

⁴ OPM Uganda Partner Registration List Adjumani Districts and Bidibidi Refugee Settlement West Nile Uganda

host community, they had no proper monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems. Their funding was meagre and irregular, often relying on locally mobilized funds to finance their activities

The case study captures experiences UWONET in Uganda to work with WROs and mainstream gender and enhance humanitarian response to specific gender needs of women and girls in line with national gender advocacy on women's rights and gender equality.

2. Uganda Women's Network (UWONET)

Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) is an advocacy and lobbying Non-Governmental Organization comprising of 16 national women's rights and gender equality organizations/institutions and 9 individuals. The organization was born out of the East African Women's Conference held in Kampala in 1993 in preparation for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women-Beijing, China. The organization is registered at national level with a vision and mission of a Ugandan society free from gender-based discrimination.

Central to Uganda's mission and vision is strengthening women's participation and influence in leadership and decision making. In the humanitarian response, UWONET is working with women leaders in the host communities as well as in the Refugee Welfare Councils to strengthen participation in leadership and influence decision on specific gender needs of women and girls. UWONET is working with 40 women groups/CBOs, 100 women leaders at LCIII district Councils in the host community and 120 women leaders in the RWC. This is aimed to strengthen voice, participation and influence of women in the different leadership structures. It's also to strengthen institutional capacities of existing women's rights-based CBO to support women's leadership through collective advocacy and information sharing; strengthen institutional functionality to participate in humanitarian response and sustain community mobilization after existing of INGOs.

UWONET believes that since the women's rights-based CBOs are born out of community need, they are in better position to link community need to boarder humanitarian decision and action. They will therefore ensure the rights, needs and voice of women refugees and host communities are an integral part of the humanitarian response.

In addition to the capacity building, this year UNWOMEN and UWONET were able to influence the refugee leadership election process whereby the Government of Uganda have agreed to ringfence 50 percent of seats on the refugee welfare councils (RWC) for women. This affirmative action is far above the constitutional provision of 33 percent of positions for women. A study of women leadership in the refugee settlements had showed that women held less than 10 percent of all leadership positions. This affirmative action has already gone a long way in encouraging more women to run for these positions thus breaking down barriers for women accessing decision making in the refugee response. In the lead up to the elections, due to take place later in July 2019, a record number of women have come forward to vie for the positions and UWONET and UN Women will work together to build on this momentum and ensure that women have the support needed.

3. Localization of Humanitarian Aid

While discussing the emerging in-country consensus in terms of understanding and measuring localization of humanitarian aid, the following are the key response from UWONET on each of these identified points of discussion.

i. Capacity Building & Strengthening:

UWONET and WIPC in the early years of 2000, played a central role in coordinating women's participation in the peace building of northern Uganda. The organizations continued to work in the region to address after effect of peace recovery. This has enabled UWONET and WIPC build experience in peace building and peace recovery.

However, the organizations have only recently participated in direct refuge settlement-UWONET started in May 2019 and while WIPC since 2010 in Western Uganda and 2014 in West Nile region. The

new engagement with UN Women in West Nile therefore calls for intense capacity building of WROs organizations. Some of the capacity challenges that limit participation of National Women's rights-based organizations in the humanitarian sector are mainly issues of funding, research and availability of information to enable response, accessibility to the settlement areas-hard to reach and risky.

UWONET is also banking on building capacity of the Women Rights Organisations from host and refugee communities to effectively participate in Humanitarian Action. The network will also collaborate with district local governments and other development partners currently operating in the refugee settlement such as, to build partners, undertake joint assessment and research.

ii. Financing:

As the case study reported, there are limited numbers of national NGOs and more especially women's rights-based organizations in Humanitarian response in the country. This partly attributed to lack of resource to engage in humanitarian response. District local governments hosting refugees encourage partners to share their resource envelopes annually be incorporated into the District budget. It is however still difficult to establish actual figures for funds channelled to national NGOs and WROs as each of the organizations do not want to declare total grants. UWONET recognised the need to establish funding channelled to WROs as a case for stronger argument on specific granting to gender and women rights. Compounding factors to challenges around financing include:

- a) Unlevelled competition for funds by the national NGOs and the INGOs that disadvantage national NGOs due to experience, skills, capacity and human resource. These gaps include; designing competitive sensitive projects/programmes, difficulties in using proposal templates and the on-line systems, weak organizational structures and governance in place.
- b) Short term funding that cannot enable national NGO to make long term response pre, during and after refugee hosting. This therefore limit national NGOs to short term interventions that can adequately addressed prolonged effect on change of gender roles, climate effect, diseases-HIV/AIDS. This partly explains why Northern Uganda is taking longer than expected to recovery from the effect of the war and refugee settlement.

iii. Coordination:

The Government of Uganda through the office of the Prime Minister and the United Nations Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) have instituted coordination structures at district and national level to regulate, share information and provide vertical and horizon accountability. There is the Development Partners' Engagement and more sector specific inter-agency coordination engagements including Refugee Protection Working Groups, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, Child Protection, Persons with Specific Needs, Education, Livelihoods, WASH, Environment, among others- chaired and co-chaired by UNHCR, OPM and district local government.

National and local organizations are coordinated under the National NGO Forum-although coordination needs strengthening in humanitarian contexts. Given the limited presence of national NGOs in the humanitarian response, more especially women's rights focused NGOs, UWONET and Women's International Peace Centre believe that there is need for specific platform for National Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) to enable sharing of unique experience, joint fundraising and programming that would bring more organizations into the sectors and thus strengthen engagement and influence in the sector. It's also of recommendation that where these coordination platforms exist, there should be deliberate efforts to include WROs and local women's group, to partner with go ensure that a portion of funds are allotted to them.

This is based on experience and achievement realised in the country through collective actions of women's rights-based organization. Over the years, UWONET has coordinated different coalitions the Women's Democracy Group; The Marriage and Divorce Bill coalition; the women's trade cluster; gender action group on Peace Recovery Programme for Northern Uganda. Because of these, there were

reforms in laws for example the Domestic Violence Act, reform of the land policy i.e. clause of spousal consent in any handling of matrimonial property.

UWONET therefore believes that coordinating women's collective voice on policies, practices within the settlements and host community will propel gender response and that can create substantive change in the humanitarian system.

iv. Gender:

Over the last 10 years, UWONET has enhanced capacities of over 4,000 women leaders in the country at different levels. Within the settlement, UWONET has currently trained 180 women leaders within the host communities and intend to train 120 women leaders in the Refugee Welfare Councils.

Under the protection and SGBV working groups, the partners carry out joint annual Age Gender Diversity Mainstreaming assessments within refugee settlements. The utilisation of the findings to address the specific needs of men, women, boys and girls is however still low. Gender is mostly approached from a protection and SGBV angle; largely ignoring deep rooted effect of changes in gender roles and policy design. More recently, UN Women has supported District local government and OPM to establish gender coordination forums for humanitarian and development partners-to be able to facilitate joint gender analysis, identify targets and support gender mainstreaming across various sectors, and develop joint monitoring and mechanisms on gender mainstreaming.

Together with UN Women, UWONET has initiated discussion with staffs of different INGOs on different aspects of gender and humanitarian response i.e. feminist approach to programming; women's movement building

This is because UN Women and UWONET have realised a gap in knowledge for gender and gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action. This therefore influences design of programmes, policies and practices in humanitarian response.

Currently, no projects in the humanitarian Action are using the gender and age marker and trainings for key humanitarian partners on Gender in Humanitarian Action by UN Women and UWONET is under way.

4. Recommendations:

- i. Humanitarian actors (HAs), Uganda government and donors should ensure increased development and use of sex and age disaggregated data in planning, coordination, resource allocation, implementation, monitoring and reporting of humanitarian programs, situation updates, strategies and frameworks
- ii. UN Women and other gender focused agencies/ organisation should build capacity of Humanitarian/development actors, WROs and refugee/host leaders on mainstreaming gender into humanitarian action and follow up on implementation and use of tools and skills for GiHA. This will be made possible through increased allocation of resources or capacity building on gender by donors.
- iii. Donors should increase allocation of resources to WROs and National NGOs -for advocacy on women's rights, for women's economic empowerment, and to enable proven approaches to address unequal gender norms upscaled.
- iv. All humanitarian/ development actors especially sector leads, and agency senior representatives should Commit to effectively and sustainably participating in the intersectoral/interagency gender coordination forums at national and district level networks to be able to; meet regularly to share information on gender, carry out joint sectoral gender analysis, develop common tools on gender mainstreaming, establish baseline on key gender indicators in humanitarian settings, monitor and report on progress towards indicators.
- v. The CRRF steering committee should operationalise its commitments to gender as one of its core principles-by developing an interagency/intersectoral Gender strategy for refugee response in Uganda

- vi. Donors should support HAs with funds to implement approaches to increasing women's leadership and decision making in HA through skills building, civic education, developing gender responsive refugee leadership frameworks, affirmative action for women and training of women leaders to make them effective in their positions.
- vii. INGOs and national NGOs should carry out joint planning, resources mobilisation and implementation and evaluation; or improvise for options such as sub granting to be able to benefit from local knowledge and experience that can strengthen sustainability and harmonization of engagement between host and refugee communities

5. Conclusion

While the response critically looks at immediate physical needs of the refugees, it is important to integrate empowerment programming to generate skill and knowledge beyond displacement. Equally, gender and women's rights should be looked at beyond numbers but into deeper relationship and effect on policies, privileges and opportunities for women and men.

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