

2021 Regional NGO Consultations

Southern Africa
1 - 3 September 2021

Summary Report

Overview

The 2021 regional NGO consultations for Southern Africa, on the theme of ‘localization of humanitarian action and engagement with communities in the COVID-19 context’, brought together UNHCR, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), international and national NGOs, civil society and refugee-led organizations from across Southern Africa. The event was an opportunity for participants to share experiences, good practices and lessons learned, and to constructively discuss opportunities and challenges in the region.

The event was held over three half-days between 1 and 3 September, in a virtual format due to the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The event was attended by people in 28 countries, from Southern Africa and worldwide. Daily sessions covered three sub-themes in depth, with speakers from UNHCR, ICVA, NGOs, refugee-led organizations, women-led organizations and community-based organizations.

“To make a difference, we need to work together. Governments, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society organizations should work in harmony, focused on supporting people in need.”

Dr. Emmanuel Taban, leading pulmonologist in South Africa, and former refugee

Proceedings were opened by Mr. Valentin Tapsoba, Director of UNHCR’s Regional Bureau for Southern Africa, and Mr. Marco Rotelli, ICVA’s Regional Director for Africa. Mr Tapsoba spoke about the growing importance of effective, inclusive partnerships and ways of working in the face of the unprecedented challenges of climate change and COVID-19 and their impact on the ever-increasing number of people forced to flee their homes in Southern Africa and worldwide. Mr. Rotelli’s opening remarks positioned the event as a catalyst within an ongoing process of improvement. The keynote speech was delivered by Dr. Emmanuel Taban, a leading pulmonologist in South Africa, and former refugee. Dr. Taban spoke about his long journey on foot from South Sudan to South Africa and the supportive role played by NGOs on the way, ending with a call to reinforce the whole of society approach in responding to humanitarian emergencies, which laid the tone for proceedings. At the close of the event, UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, Mr. Raouf Mazou, gave concluding remarks and reflections on the way forward, highlighting the importance of sharing responsibility, and working harmoniously together. Mr. Mazou underlined UNHCR’s commitment to turning recommendations into reality, and outlined the next steps UNHCR would take in advancing the process. Mr. Rotelli closed the event with a reflection on the increasing diversity of partnerships and inclusive ways of working, highlighting the importance of consolidating the localization of action and engaging communities meaningfully and sustainably.

Participation and participant feedback

An average of 200 people participated in each session, with more than 600 individual log ins recorded on the platform over the course of the three days. A virtual platform was established for participant feedback, which, in combination with live discussions, the chat function on the event portal and other, interlinked digital platforms, facilitated a high level of interactivity throughout.

All respondents to the feedback survey reported finding the event to be a useful exercise, and 95 per cent said that they learned something new over the course of the three days. The three individual sessions were also highly rated, with more than 80 per cent of respondents giving the highest possible rating for the content of each session.



Displaced and host community girls play in a football tournament organized by UNHCR to mark World Refugee Day.
©UNHCR/Martim Grey Pereira

Direct feedback from participants was both encouraging and useful for mapping the way forward. There were direct calls

for UNHCR to put words into action, especially when it comes to empowering refugees and grassroots organizations, and for stronger linkages between global words and local action, not least to expand awareness of mechanisms like the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). UNHCR's acknowledgement of these recommendations in the closing session received positive feedback. The call for greater transparency and accountability in partnerships, as well as concrete actions to build capacity and

“There needs to be more awareness raised at grassroots levels about the Global Compact. It’s otherwise too removed from the realities on the ground.”

Participant feedback

trust across the partnership spectrum were major themes throughout proceedings, and were echoed strongly in the feedback. The move to multi-year planning was well received, as was the possibility of flexible funding targeted more towards the specific circumstances of refugee-led and community-based organizations.

Common themes



A woman cooks food for her family in a temporary site for people displaced by the eruption of Nyiragongo volcano near Goma, DRC. The eruption left some 23,000 people homeless and 350,000 in need of humanitarian assistance. ©UNHCR/ Guerchom Ndebo

Over the course of the three days, some common themes emerged that lay the groundwork for planning the next steps. There was general agreement from speakers and participants of **the importance of increasing engagement between different actors**: from strengthening ties between local NGOs and national governments to UNHCR increasing meaningful engagement with refugee-led organizations.

There was broad support for **fostering a more inclusive approach to protection and assistance**. This was particularly noted in the face of the impact of climate change across the

region, especially on people of concern. Increased engagement was also considered to be important to progress towards the actualisation of the Global Refugee Forum pledges, and to encourage States and NGOs to increase their pledges.

The importance of **building trust and accountability between UNHCR, partners, refugees and governments, and building the capacity of grassroots organizations** also emerged as key themes. The importance of doing more to empower refugees through supporting community structures and refugee-led organizations was repeatedly highlighted, including by simplifying processes and advocating with donors for more flexible funding streams.

There was a strong consensus of opinion that **as well as challenges, COVID-19 has provided opportunities to build trust and capacity**. It has led to innovation and ingenuity, and new ways of working together towards common goals under a collective vision. Integrating these reforms into existing systems was widely considered to be a priority, as was consolidating the move towards an increasingly localized approach.

Crosscutting recommendations

“We all have a role to play in turning recommendations into reality. UNHCR looks forward to developing with you a collective and concrete action plan to take these recommendations forwards.”

Mr. Raouf Mazou, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Operations

- More should be done to **build capacity and trust at the national and local level**, and to strengthen engagement.
- **Good practices should be shared, with a view to building skills and capacity**. Ways to simplify and harmonize processes should also be sought.
- **Consultation should become a regular exchange** in the region as part of the whole of society approach.
- **The participation of civil society and refugee-led organizations should be meaningful and empowering for national and local actors**, positioning displaced people and host communities as key contributors to the humanitarian response.

Session 1: Localization of humanitarian action and engagement with communities

Key takeaways

- Build trust by increasing the accountability of UNHCR's actions and decisions.
- Build capacity by engaging more frequently and meaningfully with representatives from the refugee community.
- Work with donors to increase flexible funding options, taking into account the capacity of community-based and refugee-led organizations.
- Move towards a more realistic way of working that considers the different specialities and capacities of individual actors.

Moderators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utete Chikwara (Deputy Director, Zimbabwe, Terre des Hommes - Italy) • Stella Ogunlade (Chief, NGOs and Civil Society Section, UNHCR) • Annika Sandlund (Head of Partnership and Coordination Services, UNHCR)
Panellists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lilliane Mukendi (Managing Director, UMOJA) • Toussaint Farini (Director and Founder, Salama Africa) • Zawadi Bisomeko (Secrétaire Exécutive, Solidarite des Associations Féminines pour les Droits de la Femme et les enfants - SAFDF) • Gift Mvula (Child and Youth Care Worker, Zambia Association of Child and Youth Care Workers/Isibindi Project - ZACCW) • Eman Ismail (MENA Regional Representative and focal point on localization, ICVA) • Yasmin Rajah (Director, Refugee Social Services) • Kuitakwashe Mavudze (Country Emergency Response Manager in Zimbabwe, OXFAM)

“Refugee leaders and refugee-led organizations need to be supported. It must not be on paper only.”

Participant feedback

Community-based organizations, local NGOs and local government institutions are often the first responders in an emergency. They provide support and services where access is limited, and have

contextual knowledge and experience. Efforts to localize humanitarian responses and empower communities have grown in recent years under the whole of society approach, accelerated by the realities of delivering assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. This session brought together two panels to discuss how localization is operationalized in the region, identify good practices and establish steps to empower local actors. The first panel brought together representatives from four refugee-led organizations, and the second was composed of local NGOs.

Recommendations

- **For UNHCR:** More needs to be done to localize humanitarian action and empower displaced and host communities by building trust and capacity. Under the commitments laid down in the Grand Bargain and Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR and international NGOs have an important role to play to **translate global ideas into local action**, and **ensure local NGOs, community organizations, faith-based organizations and refugees feel empowered to act**, and take a leading role, including through increased engagement in local languages.
- **For UNHCR:** **UNHCR must take stock of steps towards localization that were facilitated by the pandemic**, not least the innovative solutions established by refugee-led organizations (RLOs) and local NGOs. UNHCR and INGOs must ensure these steps are built upon, and progress is not lost.
- **For UNHCR and donors:** Refugee-led organizations can find themselves excluded from competitions for funding due to capacity. To make funding more accessible, **create small grants targeted at RLOs with lighter reporting loads**, combined with support with financial management and monitoring from UNHCR.

Session 2: Partnerships in challenging times

Key takeaways

- Build trust and capacity across the partnership spectrum.
- Increase strategic partnerships with common goals and a shared vision.
- Invest in preparedness for climate-related events, given the vulnerability of the region to climate change, and the intersection of climate events with the protection risks faced by forcibly displaced people.

Moderator	Sakura Atsumi (Head, Strategic Planning and Management Unit, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Southern Africa)
Panellists	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jeremy Rempel (Head of Finance Section, ICVA)• Robert Hurt (Deputy Director, Division of Resilience and Solutions, UNHCR)• Andrew Harper (Special Advisor to the High Commissioner on Climate Action, UNHCR)• Fr. Celestino Tchitata Butao Epalanga (Deputy Director, Jesuit Refugee Services Angola)

“COVID-19 has challenged the very basis and fundamental approaches to humanitarian work. The pandemic has prompted rapid and innovative adaptation, and the need to harness synergies and strengthen our collaboration.”

Valentin Tapsoba, Director, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Southern Africa

The multi-stakeholder approach is critical for the inclusion of persons of concern into national systems and structures, as is highlighted in the Global Compact on Refugees. This session was an opportunity to assess the innovation and transformation of partnerships seen since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, and to reflect on

the challenges, opportunities and progress made in the context of the pandemic and climate change. Discussion and recommendations had significant crossover with the localization session, although from the complementary perspective of finding ways to improve the system to bolster resilience and integrate lessons learned.

Recommendations

- **For UNHCR:** To strengthen partnerships, **UNHCR’s engagement with partners must be transparent, predictable and consistent, and embrace new approaches.** Building capacity and mutual trust with partners must be an integral part of UNHCR’s current reforms, and consultation should be an ongoing and collective process.
- **For UNHCR and NGOs:** **Collective and complementary action under a common strategic vision is vital to respond effectively to the complex, intersecting crises of climate change and forced displacement,** and build resilience. Allow partnerships to evolve in the broader context of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and invest in preparedness.
- **For UNHCR, NGOs and donors:** **International support should be provided to State mechanisms and local actors to strengthen the inclusion of persons of concern into national systems** in line with UNHCR’s strategic direction, improve access to communities and ensure protection structures are operational and fit for purpose in the evolving operational context, including the impact of climate change and extreme weather events.
- **For UNHCR and donors:** **To grow and maintain sustainable partnerships requires flexible funding.** Processes to disburse funds must be simplified to reduce delays that compromise the agility of humanitarian responses. In the context of ongoing aid reforms at the global level and increasing localization at the national level, increased donor trust and flexibility of funding is needed to support the transition.

Session 3: Implementation of the Global Refugee Forum pledges

Key takeaways

- Increase proactivity to boost the realisation of pledges in the region, and generate enthusiasm for further pledging opportunities.
- UNHCR should do more to facilitate engagement, include partners in existing networks, and reignite enthusiasm at the global, regional, national and local levels.
- Use the High-Level Officials Meeting in December 2021 as a platform to increase support from the international community to help NGOs implement their pledges.

Moderator	Addis Tesfa (Deputy Regional Representative for Africa, ICVA)
Panellists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perveen Ali (Senior Policy Advisor, UNHCR) • Angele Dikongue-Atangana (Deputy Director, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Southern Africa) • Sindisiwe Moyo (Advocacy & Child Protection Officer, Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town) • Colin Dyer (Technical Director, Livelihoods Quality and Innovation, and acting Global Sector Lead for Livelihoods, World Vision International) • Judge Dunstan Mlambo (Judge President, Gauteng Division of the High Court of South Africa; President, Africa Chapter of the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges) • Jacob Van Garderen (Director, The Public Interest Practice) • Jasmine Simperingham (Global Project Coordinator on Forced Displacement, PILnet) • Sharon Ekambaram (Manager, Refugee and Migrant Rights Programme, Lawyers for Human Rights) • Noro Ravaozanany (President, Focus Development Association) • Lloyd Kuveya (Research and Advocacy Manager, Amnesty International)

Since the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, some 139 pledges were made by States and NGOs in Southern Africa, of which 80 per cent are being implemented as of early 2021. The third session of the NGO consultations took stock of progress towards realising pledges, and explored ways to reignite the level of commitment shown by Southern African actors at the Forum, and to increase the number of pledges in the region, collating concrete suggestions to achieve this, including potential areas in which to pledge.

“If we look at the GRF, its core, its vision is precisely that only as a whole, societies can overcome obstacles. And Southern Africa is an incredible laboratory for it. Communities, institutions and civil society organizations acquired a remarkable experience in that regard, overcoming historically massive challenges.”

Marco Rotelli, Regional Director for Africa,
ICVA

Recommendations

- **For NGOs: Greater commitment is needed from NGOs to fully implement their pledges.** NGOs are also encouraged to consider Southern Africa as a region in which to implement pledges made at the global level, and make new pledges.
- **For NGOs: NGOs should join existing networks in the region, and expand networks further afield, to engage with global initiatives.** In turn, these networks should make efforts to be more inclusive, including through taking into consideration the languages and dialects spoken in the region.
- **For States: The commitment shown during the 2019 Global Refugee Forum needs to be revitalised.** States should work collaboratively with UNHCR and NGOs to realize their pledges, and find mechanisms to support NGOs to implement their pledges.

Good practices

The consultations also showcased some good practices in the localization of humanitarian action and the tangible impact that the successful implementation of GRF pledges has had on the lives of people of concern in Southern Africa.

Using a business model for sustainability:

Successful refugee-led organizations in the region have built their operating structure on a business model, which has helped them to sustain their membership and do more to support refugees and host communities.

Increasing leadership opportunities for

women: Organizations led by women in DRC have seized the chance to lead, underlining that women's participation in humanitarian

emergencies is a question of opportunity, and something that can be expanded.

Expanding legal aid networks to achieve pledges: A group of civil society actors in South Africa pledged to create a network of NGOs providing legal aid, which has expanded across the region since its inception. Another civil society network, the Southern African Nationality Network, mobilized civil society organizations from across the region to pledge to eradicate statelessness.



A refugee student performs a science experiment in the secondary school in Tongogara refugee camp, Zimbabwe. ©UNHCR/ Zinyange Auntony

Next steps

The consultations were an important step in a process to strengthen partnerships at the local, regional and global levels, with a view to enhancing the protection of forcibly displaced people and their hosts. [A dedicated page has been established on the UNHCR website](#), containing all the key documents.

In the immediate term, the recommendations from the sessions will feed into the meetings of UNHCR's Executive Committee in October 2021 and the High-Level Officials Meeting on the Global Compact on Refugees in December 2021, and will feed into the 2022 Global NGO Consultations. An action plan, annexed to this report, has been devised based on the recommendations. The plan will act as a blueprint for the subsequent steps in the process of localizing the humanitarian response, strengthening partnerships and bringing the Global Refugee Forum pledges to fruition. It breaks down the recommendations into activities and achievable goals, for implementation over a two-year period, from the last months of 2021 until June 2023.

Action Plan

September 2021 – June 2023

This Action Plan has been developed based on the recommendations put forward during the 2021 regional NGO consultations. It is intended to put words into action and serve as a blueprint for collective goals and next steps in the process of localizing humanitarian response, strengthening partnerships, and bringing the Global Refugee Forum pledges to fruition.

Goal 1: Strengthen localization of humanitarian action and engagement with communities

Key recommendations:

- Empower NGOs, community-based and refugee-led organizations to act and take on a leading role.
- Increase funding opportunities for NGOs and RLOs.
- Continue and consolidate progress towards the localization of humanitarian action.

ACTIONS	TIME FRAME	LEAD ACTORS
Organize workshops / online trainings to support capacity building for RLOs and NGOs in financial and organizational management, administration, as well as monitoring.	Quarters 2 and 3, 2022	UNHCR
Advocate with donors for small grants targeted at RLOs with lighter reporting requirements.	January 2022 - June 2023	UNHCR, donors
Conduct a stocktaking exercise to assess progress towards localization, and document innovative solutions.	Quarters 1 and 2, 2022	UNHCR, ICVA
Develop a platform to share good practices.	Quarter 1, 2022	UNHCR, ICVA

Goal 2: Strengthen partnerships

Key recommendations:

- Ensure transparent, predictable and consistent engagement with partners.
- Respond effectively to forced displacement in the context of climate change, and build resilience.
- Provide support to State mechanisms to strengthen integration of persons of concern into national systems.
- Simplify processes to disburse funds, and increase donor trust and flexible funding.

ACTIONS	TIME FRAME	LEAD ACTORS
Expand engagement with partners across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.	Quarters 1 and 3, 2022	UNHCR, NGOs
Proactively engage and contribute to collective and complementary action on climate change within the governmental and regional framework to benefit displaced populations, and people who are stateless or at risk of statelessness.	January 2022 – June 2023	UNHCR, NGOs
Advocate for an increase in flexible funding streams.	January 2022 - June 2023	UNHCR, donors
Hold regular donor briefings.	Quarters 2 and 3, 2022 Quarters 1 and 2, 2023	UNHCR, NGOs
Explore alternative ways to mobilize funds.	Ongoing until June 2023	UNHCR, donors

Goal 3: Increase implementation of Global Refugee Forum pledges

Key recommendations:

- Fully implement pledges made by NGOs.
- Revitalise States' commitment to implement pledges.
- Expand network and partnership opportunities for NGOs in Southern Africa.

ACTIONS	TIME FRAME	LEAD ACTORS
Explore ways to create opportunities and establish linkages for NGOs to offer expert support to States.	Ongoing until June 2023	NGOs
Create mechanisms to support NGOs to implement their pledges.	Quarters 1-3, 2022	UNHCR, NGOs
Use High-Level Officials Meeting in December 2021 as a platform to reignite commitment.	December 2021	States, UNHCR
Expand opportunities for NGOs to join existing networks such as the Southern Africa Nationality Network, the SADC NGO Forum and the Southern African Legal Advocacy on Asylum and Migration (SALAAM) network, to participate in global/regional initiatives.	Quarters 1-3, 2022	NGOs, ICVA
Build links between international, national and local NGOs to expand networks and strengthen partnerships.	January 2022 – June 2023	UNHCR, NGOs, ICVA
Advocate for increasing the inclusivity of networks and coalitions, taking into account issues such as language.	January 2022 - June 2023	NGOs, ICVA

Moving the action plan forward

UNHCR, ICVA and partners are committed to putting words into action and ensuring concrete progress towards the collective objectives and actions in this plan. UNHCR and ICVA will form a regional interagency Task Force to support progress towards fulfilling the action plan, and ensure inclusive oversight of its implementation.

ACTIONS	TIME FRAME	LEAD ACTORS
Establish Task Force with representatives from UNHCR, ICVA, INGOs, NNGOs, CBOs, FBOs and RLOs to support progress on the Action Plan.	End 2021	UNHCR, ICVA
Ensure recommendations feed into ExCom, High Level Officials Meeting, and 2022 Global NGO Consultations.	ExCom: October 2021 HLOM: December 2021 2022 Global NGO consultations: 2022	UNHCR, ICVA
Hold a meeting to review progress of the action plan and to prepare regional input to the 2022 Global NGO Consultations.	Quarter 2, 2022	UNHCR, ICVA

Contacts

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