



Localising Uganda's refugee response

Uganda is a co-convenor of the second Global Refugee Forum, 13-15 December 2023.

Learn more: www.unhcr.org/global-refugee-forum-2023

This outcome document summarises the ideas and discussion from the Localizing the Refugee Response: Strengthening the role and impact of local and national responders roundtable, including recommendations on pledges that could shape commitments towards refugees and host communities in Uganda for the next four years. The roundtable was held in August 2023 and was chaired by the Hon. Minister of Local Government.

The localisation roundtable is one of five thematic discussions that have taken place as part of preparations for the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). The meetings aim to assess the current refugee situation, identify main challenges and opportunities, and outline priority areas for possible new pledges to be made.

UGANDA:
**The World's
Model for Refugee
Response**

*Let's make it
sustainable*

What is localisation?

The move towards localisation was accelerated by The Grand Bargain (GB), an outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. While there is no universal definition of 'localisation,' it is understood as a shift in power and resources within the humanitarian system towards local and national actors. A commonly used definition is:

Localisation is a process to recognize, respect and strengthen the leadership of local and national actors in humanitarian action to better address the needs of the affected populations.¹

Uganda has a strong civil society with more than 2,000 registered organisations working across sectors and regions. However, in 2017 following the adoption of the GB, less than 10% of international humanitarian funding was being channelled indirectly or directly to local and national organisations in Uganda.²

Uganda's Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) provides a common framework to be applied to situations of forced displacement to achieve more predictable and effective response implemented by a broad range of stakeholders. It is governed by a multi-stakeholder CRRF Steering Group, chaired at high level by the Government of Uganda. Its members include national and local governments, UN agencies, donors and international finance institutions, private sector, five district officials, one national non-governmental organization (NNGO), one international NGO (INGO), and two refugee representatives.

¹ Fabre, C. 2017. *Localising the Response*. OECD.

² Degnan, C. and A. Kattakuzhy. 2019. *Money Talks: Assessing funding flows to local and national actors in Uganda*. Development Initiatives and Oxfam

What is the Grand Bargain?

The Grand Bargain (GB) is an agreement between donors and humanitarian organisations to "get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action."

The 66 signatories committed to channel "at least 25% of annual global humanitarian financing to national and local actors 'as directly as possible.'"

The updated Grand Bargain 2.0 refined the scope to focus on two enabling priorities:

- **Quality funding:** More flexible, predictable, multi-year funding channelled close to the frontlines.
- **Localisation/participation:** Greater leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders and the participation of affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs.

Key advances in localisation in Uganda to date are:

- Localisation is prioritized in the 2021-22 CRRF National Plan of Action.
- A Localisation Task Force was formed to develop a roadmap for localisation.
- At least 107 local organisations have been actively working in refugee settlements; 66 local organisations currently have a valid operational permit and 41 have expired permits.
- New funding opportunities opened for local organisations, such as the UNHCR's Refugee-led Innovation Fund
- Women from local NGOs (LNGO) are participating in national humanitarian coordination spaces.

Advantages of localisation?

The roundtable participants, representing a range of stakeholders in the refugee response, committed to furthering localisation in Uganda. The group identified the main advantages of localisation in Uganda:

Following the influx of refugees from South Sudan to Uganda in 2016, national actors led the initial response. The 'localised' response allowed refugees to be settled in a timely and effective manner before INGOs joined to support.

- **Timeliness:** Local actors take less time to mobilize and can act faster. LNGOs, NNGOs, and local and regional governments are the frontline responders.
- **Access:** Local and national actors have existing networks, which gives them an advantage of access to communities compared to international organisations. Networks can also support the integration and peaceful co-existence with host communities.
- **Knowledge of the local context:** Local responders have expert knowledge of the context, they speak the local language, and are often part of the same communities. Local expertise ensures that interventions are appropriate and tailored to the affected people.
- **Cost effectiveness:** Local responders can operate more cost-efficiently than international organizations. Fewer sub-granting arrangements between donors and organisations further improves cost-effectiveness.
- **Sustainability:** Capacity development of local responders enhances the sustainability of interventions. Local actors continue to operate after bigger organizations have withdrawn from the response.

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Challenges to localisation in Uganda

Though the advantages are clear, there are constraints to moving forward localisation in the Uganda refugee response. These challenges to localisation can be grouped into three areas – equity, sustainability and representation – as detailed in the table below.

EQUITY There is an imbalance	SUSTAINABILITY There is a short-term focus	REPRESENTATION Role of L/NNGOs is not recognized
<p>Restrictive policies</p> <p>Donors have restrictive policies and processes that are not aligned with the Grand Bargain commitments.</p> <p>Factors such as compliance, eligibility requirements, project duration, and funding mechanisms limit L/NNGOs meaningful participation.</p>	<p>Risk aversion</p> <p>Donors and INGOs are generally risk averse. They may lack confidence in the L/NNGOs financial management or operational capacity to adequately manage a response.</p> <p>Rather than investing in strengthening L/NNGOs with limited capacities, they will seek other partners. The lack of institutional investment hinders the L/NNGO's ability to improve.</p>	<p>Sub-contracting</p> <p>L/NNGOs are often subcontracted by international organisations to implement activities of an approved project. L/NNGOs are not viewed as partners and have little influence in the design of the intervention and use of resources.</p>
<p>Indirect funding</p> <p>Donors opt to channel funding indirectly through UN agencies and INGOs with a greater response capacity. The indirect channel reduces the funding available and limits the L/NNGOs decision-making power on the use of funds</p>	<p>Short-term focus</p> <p>Funding for humanitarian assistance has a focus on life-saving actions, often over a short term. Capacity development activities may not be eligible or prioritized in the operation.</p>	<p>Visibility</p> <p>The work of L/NNGO partners gets minimal visibility. Communication and reporting often focuses on the INGOs and other international partners.</p>
<p>Overhead</p> <p>L/NNGOs have limited staff, resources, and equipment, which they mobilized during a response.</p> <p>Donors and INGO often do not provide support for overhead or core staff. Only expenses directly related to the response activities are eligible. This can weaken rather than strengthen the L/NNGOs as it overstretches their resources.</p>	<p>Knowledge transfer</p> <p>There is a lack of multi-year funding and twinning arrangements between L/NNGOs and international partners. This hinders knowledge transfer and systematic capacity strengthening.</p>	<p>Voice</p> <p>The coordination spaces allow for one refugee or L/NNGO representative. It is hard to have influence when it is one voice representing a large, diverse group.</p> <p>Refugee groups face barriers in registering as an NGO or community-based organization, which limits their opportunity to participate in coordination spaces.</p>
<p>Inability to compete</p> <p>L/NNGOs often lack the accounting, reporting and risk management systems required to qualify for large funding from donors. Thus L/NNGOs cannot compete equally with INGOs.</p>	<p>Exit strategy</p> <p>International actors do not have exit strategies to adequately prepare and transfer responsibilities to L/NNGOs when they withdraw.</p>	<p>Unequal partnerships</p> <p>Partnerships are often unequal or lack transparency. L/NNGOs may lead the implementation of activities, but they do not have the same access to project documents, financial information, or donors.</p>

Recommendations for international partners

The consultation process generated recommendations for donors and international organisations to facilitate and encourage localisation in Uganda's refugee response.

It is recommended that donors:

- Adopt inclusive application processes: Introduce clear measures and partnership guidelines that allow L/NNGOs, including refugee-led organizations (RLO), to access opportunities.
- Reform internal systems: Assess internal systems to identify and remove barriers for the participation of L/NNGO.
- Support capacity strengthening: Provide resources that support strengthening the capacity of L/NNGOs and RLOs, as well as for overhead expenses.
- Explore flexible funding options: Examine the feasibility of increasing contributions to support a humanitarian pooled funding.
- Support more direct funding: Reduce the channelling of funds through various agencies. Support models that favour partnerships with L/NNGOs rather than sub-contracting arrangements (e.g., consortium).

It is recommended that INGOs and UN agencies support localisation through:

- Partnerships: Form and maintain meaningful, transparent, and equitable partnerships with L/NNGOs with a clear division of roles.
- Inclusive programming: Involve L/NNGOs in the full project cycle from the design and set up through to monitoring and evaluation.
- Capacity strengthening: Support L/NNGOs with technical and financial assistance that will allow them to improve their operational capacity and ability to fulfil donor compliance requirements.
- Strategies and policies: Review and adopt organisational strategies that will enhance the partnerships, leadership, and visibility of L/NNGOs in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
- Coordination and advocacy: Participate in dialogue spaces with other INGOs and L/NNGOs to identify ways to address barriers to localisation, share good practices, and identify key messages for advocacy. Support local actors to participate in or co-lead coordination spaces like clusters and working groups.
- Exit strategies: Design and implement exit strategies that set up L/NNGOs to continue working following a withdrawal.

Pledge matching

Pledges and contributions are commitments by States and other stakeholders, including organizations, development actors, cities, parliamentarians, businesses, academics, and refugees themselves, to achieve tangible benefits for refugees and host communities. These commitments can be financial, technical or material contributions in nature.

Partners planning to pledge in support of the Uganda refugee response can refer to the pledge development document or reach out to the following contacts:

- Mr. Koma Stephen, Assistant Commissioner District Inspection, Ministry of Local Government, skidhaa@gmail.com
- Ms. Helen Bugaari Director, CRRF Secretariat, Office of the Prime Minister: helen.bugaari@opm.go.ug
- Ms. Carol Sparks, Senior External Engagement Coordinator, UNHCR: sparks@unhcr.org

The Government of Uganda invites partners and stakeholders to match its pledges and create better outcomes for refugees and host communities.

Links to further reading

Details on the Grand Bargain localisation workstream:

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/localisation>

Details on current pledges:

globalcompactrefugees.org/pledges-contributions/matching-pledges

Infographic on how to match pledges:

globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/Matching_Infographic_v07.pdf

Localising Humanitarian Action report from U-Learn:

ulearn-uganda.org/localising-humanitarian-action/

Charter for Change website:

charter4change.org/

Research report on humanitarian funding in Uganda in 2019:

Money Talks: Assessing funding flows to local and national actors in Uganda.