

THE CONTRIBUTION OF HUMANITARIAN AID - REFUGEE PERSPECTIVE

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together" - African Proverb

This is true on many levels, especially when I think about the role of international development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Most great programs implemented by local humanitarian organizations begin with an idea, but the reality is that very few have the resources to see their ideas come to life. Their goal is to aid their target population, but it is very difficult to achieve much without support, yet support should not suppress creativity and independence, but rather facilitate the ideas behind the development of such great programs.

I have been involved in humanitarian work for the past 18 years. I came to Uganda as a refugee in 2000 and founded Hope of Children and Women Victims of Violence (HOCW) in 2008. Uganda hosts one of the largest refugee populations in the world, with over 1,400,000 refugees as of February 2020.

HOCW was one of the 4 organizations that founded the Refugee Led Network in 2016, a network of over 28 Refugee Led Organizations (RLOs) driven by the desire to advocate for the needs, rights, and programs for refugees.

On the 25th and 26th of June 2018, 72 refugee representatives from 27 host countries around the world gathered at the Geneva Press Club for the first-ever Global Summit of Refugees. Building on their participation in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) consultations and negotiations, UNHCR's annual NGO consultations and regional and local advocacy, representatives of 8 refugee-led networks, including the Network for Refugee Voices (NRV), the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW), Network for Colombian Victims for Peace in Latin America and the Caribbean (REVICPAZ-LAC, for its initials in Spanish), New Zealand National Refugee Association, Asia Pacific Network of Refugees, Refugee Led Organizations Network (Uganda), and the Syrian Youth Volunteers - Netherlands, convened and organized the Summit.

The Summit made history by bringing together representatives from forcibly displaced populations from all over the globe for the first time to discuss, plan and critically analyze the issues affecting refugee initiatives. This marked the birth of the Global Refugee Led Network



"HOCW trained me in how to grow vegetables in a small place. I no longer starve due to lack of food, sometimes I grow and sell to get my other needs"

- Babirye Prosy, age 43, single mother of 7 children



Over 1400 lives impacted

HOCW HAS BEEN FUNDED BY THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS SINCE JUNE 2015. FOUR PROJECTS HAVE BEEN FUNDED FOCUSED ON LIVELIHOOD, FOOD AND WATER SECURITY. THESE PROJECTS HAVE HAD A TREMENDOUS IMPACT ON THE LIVES OF HOCW BENEFICIARIES. 395 YOUNG GIRLS AND WOMEN HAVE GAINED SKILLS IN HAIRDRESSING WHICH THEY CAN USE TO GET JOBS OR START BUSINESSES. THE MUSHROOM PROJECT SUPPORTS 20 FAMILIES WHO BENEFIT DIRECTLY FROM THE PROGRAM, AROUND 15 WOMEN WERE HIRED TO BE INVOLVED IN MARKETING AND SELLING WHERE THEY EARN A COMMISSION. THROUGH THE FUNDS, HOCW WAS ABLE TO PURCHASE 7 ACRES OF LAND WHERE REFUGEES AND NATIONALS CULTIVATE CROPS AND VEGETABLES INCLUDING LIVESTOCK. THIS PROJECT SUPPORTS 170 FAMILIES. THROUGH THE URBAN FARMING PROJECT, 700 FAMILIES GROW VEGETABLES WITHIN THEIR BACK YARD THROUGH WHICH 4,900 PEOPLE ARE RECEIVING FOOD.

Oftentimes, refugees are seen as beneficiaries that need support, or as persons of concern incapable of organizing themselves, where plans and decisions are made for them without consulting them. This has led to the funding and implementation of projects that do not necessarily focus on the critical needs of refugees. It has also led to a dependency syndrome due to a lack of focus on enhancing self-sustainability among refugees.

If international cooperation and humanitarian aid could provide opportunities for refugees to respond to their problems as they understand their needs it would create a lasting impact. This can be achieved by creating partnerships between international and local refugee-led organizations, as refugees are more in need of empowerment than handouts. I believe that this is possible because I have seen the impact HOCW has had through the support of its partners, without whom HOCW would not have been able to create the impact that it has.

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016 brought significant attention to Localization. The Grand Bargain confirmed a commitment from the largest humanitarian donors and aid organizations to make sure national and local partners are involved in decision-making processes in any humanitarian response and to deliver assistance in accordance with humanitarian principles. Because local actors often have the best understanding of the context and acceptance by the people in need of assistance and protection, they are essential for an effective humanitarian response. Localization is needed because it is more cost-effective as local and national actors are cheaper than international workers. I believe that once localization is honored many hanging issues will be solved.

Challenges Associated with Humanitarian Aid

ONE OF THE MAJOR CHALLENGES WITH THE FUNDS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IS THAT HOCW MUST INITIALLY PAY OUT OF POCKET BEFORE BEING REIMBURSED AFTER REPORTING ITS EXPENSES. CHANGING THIS PROCEDURE WOULD ALLOW FOR EASIER PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AS MOST LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO COVER THE COSTS OF IMPLEMENTATION OUT OF POCKET.

SEVERAL REPORTS FROM RLO LEADERS HAVE INDICATED THAT SOMETIMES THE CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY FOR SUPPORT IS TOO HIGH. GIVEN MANY ORGANIZATIONS ARE GRASSROOTS WITH LIMITED LEVELS OF MATURITY WHICH IS NOT A REFLECTION OF THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE THEY SUPPORT. THERE IS A STRONG CALL FOR FLEXIBILITY WITH HUMANITARIAN AID AND DONORS.

In the coming months, HOCW will set up a dairy project and a fish pond. In August 2021, the Water for Decent Life project was launched. It was embraced by local leaders who vowed to participate and contribute towards its success. We are looking at building 9 wells, 60 water harvesting tanks, 200 tip taps and 10 eco-sanitary toilets, including liquid soap, sanitizer, masks, and other items used in order to fight against COVID-19.

I have worked with a few other humanitarian aid organizations but I have found the Republic of Slovenia's aid unique as it focuses mostly on empowering the organization so that even when the project funding ends, the organization will have the capacity to continue with the activities self-sustainably.

The projects have impacted the organization to a great extent, such that in a few years, the organization will be self-reliant. This has been possible with support from international cooperation and it is a call for humanitarian aid to invest in refugee-led organizations.

The trend is gradually changing as more and more international cooperation and humanitarian aid organizations have started to respond to the request of refugee-led organizations.



"I had never tried farming before but due to the opportunities that HOCW offered to us, I was trained on how to conduct modern agriculture and on how to do a balance diet which has improved on the nutrition of my children. During this pandemic I was receiving food from the farm which helped my family to survive. These included vegetables, fruits, and crops."

- Lina Deng, age 48, refugee from South Sudan with a family of 20. She is involved in HOCW agriculture at the Nakawuka Farm

Appreciation goes to Asylum Access for its initiative in promoting refugee participation and providing funds to refugee-led initiatives. Open Society Foundation is the first donor to the Refugee Led Organization Network. Oxfam, Independent Diplomat, Urban Refugee, and All the Sky Foundation are all organizations that have taken the lead in supporting refugee-led initiatives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was Refugee Led Organizations that came to the rescue of communities where international organizations were nowhere to be seen.

<http://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/publication/localisation-humanitarian-assistance-response-covid-19>



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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



SLOVENIAN
AID



FORUM FOR
EQUITABLE
DEVELOPMENT



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