

Refugee Engagement Forum in Uganda

Good Practice Study Brief

Uganda July 2021

Introduction

This two-page brief presents the summarised findings of the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF) Good Practice Study.

The REF Good Practice Study, in recognition of the unique structure and value of the REF, seeks to identify key lessons and successes from the REF, and document the experience in Uganda for the benefit of wider audiences. For all the details, please view the full report on the U-Learn website <https://ulearn-uganda.org>.

Why was the REF created?

The REF was established in October 2018 by the Office of the Prime Minister Department of Refugees (OPM/DoR) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to create systematic communication between refugees and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Steering Group (CRRF SG), the overarching national refugee response coordination forum.

Uganda was one of the first countries worldwide to take concrete steps to engage refugees to participate in and influence high-level decision-making that affects their lives, launching the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) on 24 March 2017. Less than a year later, Uganda established the CRRF Road Map that paved the way for meaningful and effective two-way feedback from refugees, while ensuring improved, systematic accountability.

What is the REF?

The REF is a successful pioneering refugee-participation mechanism designed to systematically ensure refugee voices are considered in national decision-making, thus empowering refugees throughout Uganda.

Through a representative system, elected REF members are able to directly advocate on behalf of their communities at the highest level of Uganda's refugee response coordination structure.

The REF succeeds in:

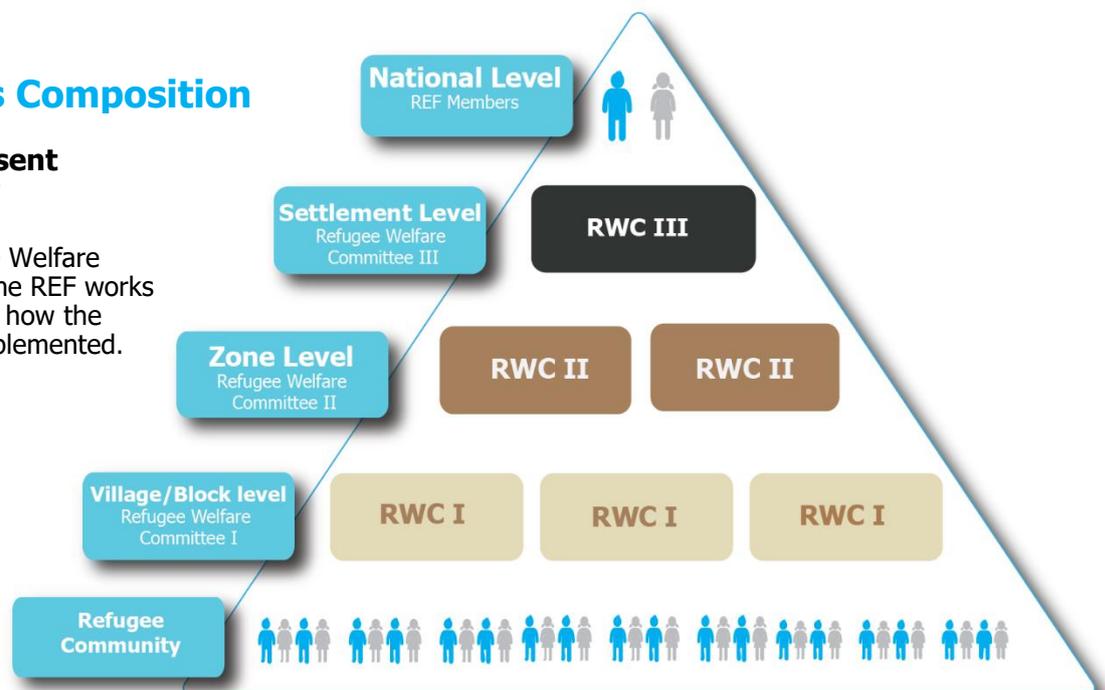
- Informing policy-making & programme design through two-way feedback
- Raising awareness of, and engaging with refugee leaders in national, regional and global forums

The REF Structure's Composition

How does the REF represent the refugee community?

As part of the elected Refugee Welfare Committee (RWC) structure, the REF works with RWC members to discuss how the CRRF Roadmaps are being implemented.

Because RWCs exist from the village level up to the settlement level, where REF leaders are appointed, concerns and ideas in communities are channeled upwards to unite in finding solutions.



RWCs I-II-III

3

Hierarchical levels of Refugee Welfare Committees elected under OPM supervision to link refugees & refugee response actors.

REF members

37

REF members from settlements and Kampala meet 4 times per year to share concerns from their community.

REF at the CRRF SG

2

REF representatives meet with government, aid & development partners, NGOs, and the private sector at the quarterly CRRF SG meetings.

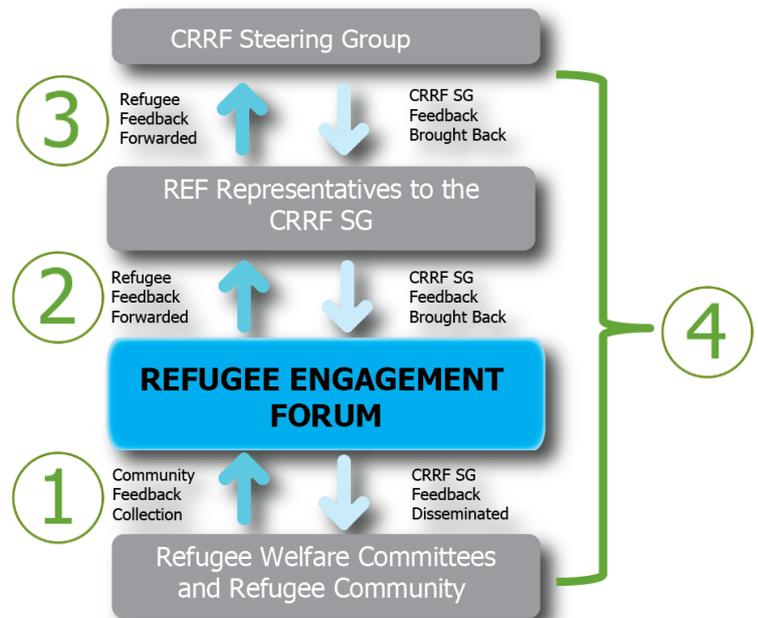
How it works?

The majority of the 37 REF leaders are appointed through the Refugee Welfare Committees (the elected refugee leadership structures in the settlements). The RWCs link refugees with service providers, help to monitor ongoing projects, proactively solve community conflicts, and promote respect for human rights and cooperative values in communities.

The REF members:

1. Identify community concerns and conduct consultations.
2. Review and discuss at the quarterly REF meetings to identify key concerns.
3. Present the information to the CRRF SG meetings, which run four times per year.
4. Report back to communities by sharing the outcomes.

Two-Way Feedback Mechanism



The quarterly REF meetings are organized by the REF Task force (REF TF), which is headed by the OPM and UNHCR, where the election of the two REF leaders to represent at the CRRF SG also takes place.

Six Lessons Learned for Refugee Engagement in High-Level Decision-Making

Lesson 1. Building upon existing structures

The REF draws its legitimacy from pre-existing democratic structures.

Lesson 2. A diverse and inclusive forum

- Intentionally inclusive structures and reserving leadership positions for specific minority groups allow the REF to represent a highly diverse population.

Lesson 3. Fostering interpersonal relationships

Close working relationships keep people motivated, and ease consensus building and decision-making.

Lesson 4. Operationally flexible structures

Adaptable structures and systems are essential in a changing context.

Lesson 5. Ongoing learning and adaptation

- An ongoing learning and adaptation process allows for continuous improvement and innovation.

Lesson 6. Support across stakeholder groups

Wide-ranging cross-stakeholder support from the outset - including staff time and financial support – is key for sustained the growth and development of the mechanism.

