

Localising Research, Learning, and Accountability to Affected Populations in Uganda's Refugee Response



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Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to Affected populations
ACBON	Association of Community-Based Organisations in Nakivale
BIMS	Biometric Identity Management System
CBO	Community-Based Organisations
CSO	Civil-society organisations
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DLG	District Local Government
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FFS	Farmer Field Schools
FGD	Focus group discussions
FRRM	Feedback, Referral and Resolution Mechanism
GBV	Gender-based violence
GoU	Government of Uganda
HAI	Humanitarian Aid International
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
INGO	International non-governmental organisations
LH	Learning Hub
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
MAAIF	Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NNGO	National Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
REF	Refugee Engagement Forum
RELON	Refugee Led Organisation Network of Uganda
RIMS	Referral Information Management System
RLO	Refugee-Led Organisations
RWC	Refugee Welfare Councils
SLAM	Settlement-Level Actor Mapping
SOHS	State of the Humanitarian System
U-Learn	Uganda Learning, Evidence, Accountability and Research Network
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
URRMS	Uganda Refugee Response Monitoring System
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

Executive Summary

At the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, leaders called for humanitarian action that was “as local as possible and as international as necessary”.¹ As the host of the largest refugee population in Africa, Uganda has been a strong proponent of localisation; it demonstrated its commitment through its pledge on localisation at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023.

This assessment responds to the rising demand among response actors for evidence on localisation progress.

This assessment has a dual focus: on one hand, increase understanding of actors’ current practices around learning, research and accountability for affected populations (AAP) in Uganda’s refugee response, with a focus on local actors; and on the other hand, to analyse local actors’ views, roles and existing capabilities. This understanding will (1) help actors better respond to gaps, (2) facilitate capacity exchanges that support the localisation of learning, research and AAP, and (3) enable actors to further ‘localise’ their work. The goal is to explore the extent to which localisation is currently supporting—and has the potential to support—the quality of the refugee response by leveraging evidence and ensuring the active participation of affected populations in decision-making. The research question that guided the assessment is **“How are local actors generating, sharing, and using evidence to make decisions related to the refugee response and how is the affected population engaged in the process?”**

A light touch desk review of global literature on localisation in research, learning and AAP was conducted to provide context. The desk review found that, globally, there have been advances in enhancing the leadership of local communities within evidence-generation/research and dissemination/learning in the humanitarian sector. Studies analysed localisation in humanitarian research using criteria, such as the type of knowledge, authorship, language, primary data collection, and visibility in publications. They showed more predominance of Global South actors at data collection stage than at the stages of analysis, sharing or use of evidence.

For this assessment, 40 key informant interviews were held with governmental representatives (local, district and national), local and national non-profit organisations, refugee representatives, an academic institute, and international NGOs. Six focus group discussions were held with refugee leaders in Nyumanzi, Palabek, and Nakivale Refugee Settlements.

Findings show that in the Uganda refugee response, local actors use both primary and secondary data to inform their projects, activities and services. Local non-government organisations (LNGOs), refugee-led organisations (RLOs), and national NGOs (NNGOs) collect primary data, through interviews, surveys, home visits, and focus group discussions. Data is collected to inform their own projects, and in some cases, international organisations. The district local government (DLG) and national government representatives do not collect data but will use data collected by these organisations. Key barriers for the LNGOs, RLOs and NNGOs to collect data are the lack of digital tools and equipment, language barriers, logistical constraints, and respondents’ survey fatigue.

In terms of information management, some LNGOs and NNGOs store information digitally on computers, while other actors such as the DLGs store information primarily in hard copy. This makes sharing data more challenging. Data often flows upwards: from local to centralised or international organisations (UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)) who consolidate data in monitoring systems for the refugee response.

1 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). 2025. *The Grand Bargain*. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>

The flow of data reinforces power inequalities: local actors collect data but are not part of the decision-making that results from analysing the data they have collected. Factors that discourage data-sharing of are a lack of feedback about the information shared, the distortion of messages, differing data privacy policies between organisations, and a lack of internet connectivity to share or access information.

In terms of accountability to refugees, most local actors interviewed stated that they engage with refugees. Local organisations collect feedback from refugee leaders and activity participants. Local and national governments do not have formal feedback mechanisms but do conduct monitoring visits. Refugees recognize that in recent years more and more organisations consult them at the beginning of the project, but not all. There is dissatisfaction with feedback processes because refugees either do not see a change, receive negative responses, or receive no response at all. Refugees suggested improvements, such as having two-way feedback processes between refugees and the organisations collecting feedback, compliance desks in convenient locations, and communicating through local leaders (refugee welfare council, zonal leaders, religious leaders).

Locally collected evidence is being used by actors at all levels. Local and national governments use data to contribute to planning and decision-making; local, national and international organisations use the data to assess needs and design projects. Respondents recognise the benefits of local actors working with the community, because of the shared culture, language, and understanding of the struggles refugees face. The evidence generated locally is considered more relevant and useful than that collected more broadly. While local actors have a demonstrated capacity and advantage in collecting data, there are challenges to moving forward locally-led learning. Key barriers are the different learning culture, low visibility of local actors, varying levels of skills and capacity, lack of funding and resources, and the late consultation of local actors.

The main conclusions of the localisation assessment are that local actors in Uganda have expertise in data collection, but face limitations to take on a greater role in other stages of locally led research. Local actors share information through various channels – but are often limited to verbal sharing or hard-copies. The limited digital management and publication of information hinder wider sharing and visibility. More local and international actors are implementing mechanisms for accountability to affected populations, but feedback loops are not closed. Local actors, particularly local organisations, have mechanisms to collect feedback from refugees and are using the feedback to improve their activities and service offering to the community.

Recommendations to enhance localisation in research, learning, and accountability in Uganda's refugee response include:

- Learning and research organisations to engage RLOs, LNGOs and refugee leaders in defining research objectives, and build their capacity in data collection methods, data analysis, and the use of standardized tools. The findings to be disseminated back to the settlements through preferred channels.
- Donors and organisations funding research to create funding opportunities for local researchers and research institutions and offer opportunities for direct, multi-year funding to RLOs, LNGOs, and NNGOs.
- Governments to strengthen the role and capacity of DLGs to store and manage information relating to the refugee response in their district, improve local actors' access to the data in national refugee response monitoring systems, and make regular use of the Refugee Engagement Forum to engage refugees voices in decision-making.

Introduction

Uganda has been a strong proponent of localisation within the refugee response. Uganda is host to the largest refugee population in Africa, with over 1.8 million refugees reported by UNCHR as of February 2025.² The country's refugee response is guided by the [Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework \(CRRF\)](#), which is a multi-stakeholder coordination model that brings together local, national, and international actors, including donors, private sector, and refugee representatives.³ The Government of Uganda (GoU) has been recognised for its progressive model for the refugee response and was invited to be the co-convenor of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF).⁴ The GoU held [roundtable discussions on localisation](#) in the lead up to the GRF, and affirmed its commitment to localisation by pledging to include localisation into its refugee response frameworks.⁵

Evidence-based programmatic and policy decisions are central to the quality of humanitarian action. The quality of humanitarian action can be determined in relation to a number of parameters such as effectiveness, appropriateness, timeliness, accountability to affected populations ([Core Humanitarian Standards](#)). Thus, the ultimate objective of collecting, analysing and sharing evidence in the Uganda refugee response is to support decisions and adaptations of practices that lead to high quality assistance for refugees and host communities. The evidence that is needed for that objective is multidimensional: factual data points, information from various stakeholders, as well as insights and information provided specifically by crises-affected communities on their preferences and priorities.

The [Uganda Learning, Evidence, Accountability and Research Network \(U-Learn\)](#) has played an important role in increasing access to information and learning to enable evidence-based decision-making in the refugee response. Furthermore, U-Learn has strengthened AAP capacities and supported refugees' participation in decision-making fora, ensuring their insights and priorities are taken into consideration.

Through its three components (Research, Learning Hub and AAP), U-Learn has supported localisation processes in the Uganda refugee response by creating spaces for stakeholder groups to exchange insights,⁶ conducting research on [localisation](#)⁷, capacity sharing on [accountability to affected populations \(AAP\)](#) with local actors⁸, and creating the [Settlement-Level Actor Mapping \(SLAM\)](#).⁹ U-Learn is uniquely placed to explore how localisation intersects with evidence generation, evidence-based learning, and the integration of community perspectives into response design and delivery.

2 UNHCR. 2025. *Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Portal*. Accessed March 31, 2025. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/uga>

3 UNHCR. 2023. *Localising Uganda's refugee response*. https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/grf_outcome_document_localising_refugee_response.pdf

4 UNHCR. 2023. *Localising Uganda's Refugee Response*. https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/grf_outcome_document_localising_refugee_response.pdf

5 Government of Uganda 2023. *Global Refugee Forum 2023: Pledges by the Government of Uganda*.

6 LH spotlight, publication upcoming 2024

7 U-Learn. 2023. *Localising Humanitarian Action – Case studies from Uganda, Kenya, the Philippines, and India*. <https://ulearn-uganda.org/localising-humanitarian-action/>

8 U-Learn. 2024. *Does equipping humanitarian actors with applied Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) skills yield distinct outcomes?* <https://ulearn-uganda.org/aapa-programme-blog/>

9 U-Learn. 2023. *Settlement Level Actor Mapping (SLAM) – Overview*. <https://ulearn-uganda.org/settlement-level-actor-mapping-slam-overview/>

The objective of this assessment is to explore how actors currently generate, share, and use evidence and how they engage affected populations to inform decision-making in the Uganda's refugee response. It analyses local views and practices in the response in relation to research, learning and AAP.

It begins with a desk review of localisation in humanitarian evidence generation, learning and AAP, examining existing studies at a global level. The desk review serves to frame the localisation assessment within a broader context. The rest of the report summarizes the findings from the primary research conducted in Uganda. The findings are divided into four sections:

- local actors' approach to evidence generation/research (the data they need and collect and how they go about it);
- how local actors engage affected communities to gather insights and feedback;
- focus on local actors' practices around learning and sharing evidence; using evidence and local insights to support decision-making;
- and a summary of local actors' views on the role of different types of actors in localisation (including challenges and opportunities)

The report concludes with recommendations for actors in the refugee response to enhance localisation in research, learning, and AAP to support more evidence-driven and community-centred decision-making and implementation.

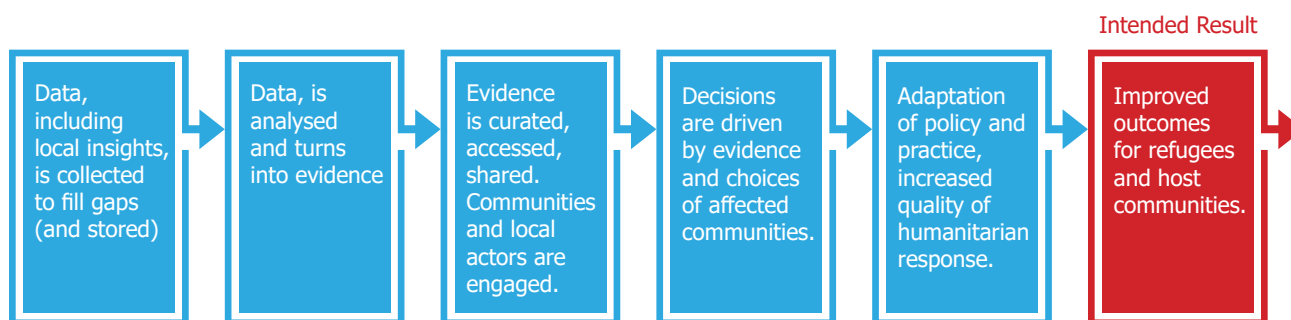


Methodology

The assessment responds to an increased focus of response actors on localisation. The Government of Uganda (GoU) is currently drafting a strategy for Localisation in the refugee response. There is also a general need for evidence on various aspects related to localisation in order to understand and enhance the role and leadership of local actors.

This assessment has a dual focus: it aims to better understand how various actors—particularly local ones—engage in learning, research, and accountability to affected populations (AAP) within Uganda's refugee response, and to explore the perspectives, roles, and existing capacities of local actors in these areas. This understanding will (1) allow actors to better respond to gaps, (2) facilitate capacity exchanges that support the localisation of learning, research and AAP, (3) enable U-Learn to further 'localise' its work. The ultimate objective is to see if and how localisation currently supports (and can continue to support) quality in the refugee response through evidence and engagement of affected populations in decision-making.

The role of evidence and engaging affected populations in supporting quality humanitarian action



The main research question that guides the assessment is:

How are local actors generating, sharing, and using evidence to make decisions related to the refugee response and how is the affected population engaged in the process?

The specific questions explored are:

1. How are local actors collecting, managing, accessing, and sharing information about the refugee response?
2. How do the local actors engage and feedback information to the refugee and host communities?
3. How are local and international actors using local information to inform decision-making?
4. What are the opportunities and barriers for local actors to lead learning processes related to the refugee response?

During interviews, information emerged on refugees' perceptions of various response actors, and on responders' views of localisation as a broader topic. This information is also included in the report.

There are varying definitions of who is a 'local actor' or 'local responder' within literature on localisation. For the purposes of this assessment, 'local actors' refer to the following five types of actors in Uganda:

1. **National government:** Department of Refugees, Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Ministry of Internal Affairs, CRRF Secretariat.
2. **Sub-national government:** District Local Government (DLGs), District Engagement Forum.
3. **National non-profit organisations:** Ugandan national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs), Uganda National NGO Forum, Humanitarian Platform.
4. **Local non-profit organisations:** Local non-governmental organisations (LNGO), refugee-led organisations (RLO), civil society organisations (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), the Refugee-Led Organisation Network of Uganda (RELON).
5. **Private sector actors:** Ugandan-owned private sector actors operating in the refugee response.
6. **Academic Institutions:** Public and private Ugandan universities, higher education and research establishment.

The assessment was carried out using three data collection methods.

Desk review:

A brief literature review was conducted to explore if similar research on localisation in research, learning and AAP had been conducted at a global level. The desk review helped frame the analysis of data collected in the Uganda refugee response.

Key informant interviews:

Key informant interviews were held with a variety of stakeholders in four locations: in Nyumanzi Refugee Settlement (Adjumani District), Palabek Refugee Settlement (Lamwo District), Nakivale Refugee Settlement (Isingiro District), and Kampala. Interviews were held with the following actors:

- 9 DLG and Local Council representatives
- 5 National government representatives
- 11 LNGO, CSO, and CBO representatives
- 9 RLO representatives
- 3 Refugee Welfare Councils (RWC) representatives
- 2 International NGO representatives
- 1 academic institute.

Local private sector actors and host community members were not consulted during this assessment.

Focus group discussions:

Six focus group discussions (FGD) were held with refugee leaders in Nyumanzi, Palabek, and Nakivale Refugee Settlements. Of these six FGDs, two were held exclusively with refugee women only.

Primary data was consolidated and analysed according to the research questions and the type of local actor.

Localisation in Research, Learning, and Accountability

This section summarizes the desk review on localisation in humanitarian research, learning and AAP from a global perspective.

There is growing literature on localisation within the field of humanitarian research. This research often examines the advances against the Grand Bargain commitments.¹⁰ There are also efforts to document promising practices and learning about localisation from organisation-specific initiatives. This research tends to focus on the outcomes of specific localisation initiatives in relation to funding, capacity or the quality of partnerships.¹¹ There is little research that measures the impact of localisation or the high-level outcomes for affected communities to validate assumptions that localisation will bring greater effectiveness, efficiency, economy and equity.¹²

Localisation overview

At the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, leaders called for humanitarian action that was “as local as possible and as international as necessary.”¹³ The outcome of the WHS was ‘The Grand Bargain,’ an agreement between humanitarian organisations and donors to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian action.¹⁴ Signatories committed to providing more support and funding tools for local responders and ensuring accountability to affected populations.¹⁵

A secondary outcome of the WHS was the Charter for Change (C4C), an initiative launched by national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), committing themselves to implement a more locally-led humanitarian response.¹⁶ Through the Grand Bargain and C4C, ‘localisation’ came to the forefront of discussions on reforms within the humanitarian system.¹⁷

The Grand Bargain left it open for signatory countries to define the concept of localisation according to their context and needs. As a result, there are a range of definitions and interpretations of localisation.¹⁸ Common definitions include variations of phrases like “shifting power and resources to local actors,”¹⁹ “recognizing, respecting and strengthening the leadership of local and national actors,”²⁰ or “strengthening the capacity and resources of local organisations.”²¹

10 Metcalfe-Hough, V., W. Fenton, P. Saez, and A. Spencer. 2022. *The Grand Bargain in 2021. An independent review.* Humanitarian Policy Group

11 Barbelet, V., Flint, J., Kerkvliet, E., Phillips, S. 2024. *Humanitarian Action: Evidence synthesis and best practice review on AAP, Inclusion and Localisation.* ALNAP

12 Barbelet, V., Davies, G., Flint, J., and Davey, E. 2021. *Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation.* HPG

13 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). 2025. *The Grand Bargain.*

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>

14 Ibid

15 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). 2025. *More support and funding tools for local and national responders,* <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/more-support-and-funding-tools-for-local-and-national-responders>

16 Charter for Change. 2025. *Localisation of Humanitarian Aid.* Page accessed May 8, 2025. <https://charter4change.org/>

17 Centre for Humanitarian Leadership. 2021. *Transformation in the aid and development sector? Localisation.*

18 Humanitarian Aid International (HAI), 2024, *Localisation – An Unfinished Agenda Beyond 2026.*

https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/Beyond%202026_Final.pdf ; Fabre, C. 2017.

Localising the Response. OECD. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2017/06/localising-the-response_ef7f6339/3f91329d-en.pdf

19 Australian Red Cross. 2017. *Going Local. Achieving a more appropriate and fit-for-purpose humanitarian ecosystem in the Pacific.* <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ARC-Localisation-report-Electronic-301017.pdf>

20 Fabre, C. 2017. *Localising the Response.* https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2017/06/localising-the-response_ef7f6339/3f91329d-en.pdf

21 European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. 2023. *Localisation..*

In its second iteration in 2021 – the Grand Bargain 2.0 – two enabling priorities were identified. The first enabling priority is on quality funding and the second is on localisation and participation, described as “Greater support is provided for the leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders and the participation of affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs.”²² By creating these two enabling priorities, it elevated their importance in the discussions of reforms in the humanitarian system and demonstrated that localisation is not only about funding, but also about local actors’ leadership and capacity to respond.

Local actors’ capacity can be considered through different prisms; one of them is the ‘operational’ capacity to deliver quality assistance. Skills and expertise to generate evidence (research), to use it (learning and decision-making), and to engage affected communities meaningfully (through AAP) are part of this operational capacity and are important factors of localisation in terms of supporting local leadership and delivery.

More information on localisation can be found in U-Learn’s Localisation in Uganda Refugee Response – [Evidence Brief](#).

Localisation in evidence generation and research

Box 1: Research

Research is a process of generation of explicit evidence and knowledge. It includes data collection and analysis. It can be used for multiple purposes at different stages of the humanitarian project cycle, including needs assessment at the beginning, or impact evaluations at the end and many more options.

Literature on localisation to generate evidence in the humanitarian context is limited. There are limited resources (evaluations and other types of research) that analyse localisation.

Evaluation:

The movement to enhance community leadership within research is not new, especially within the field of evaluation.²³ Traditional evaluation is rooted in Western ways of knowing, applying top-down, quantitative approaches that neglect the perspectives, values, and knowledge of communities.²⁴ To counter this, evaluation approaches have been developed to shift power to communities and bring the perspectives of the ‘evaluated’ to the forefront. Such approaches include participatory evaluation, empowerment evaluation, development evaluation, culturally responsive and equitable evaluation,²⁵ and community-led monitoring and evaluation. Further, evaluators from the Global South are increasingly calling for approaches that are rooted in local culture, values and ways of knowing.²⁶

22 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). *Grand Bargain 2.0 Framework and annexes*. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/grand-bargain-20-framework-and-annexes-deenesfr-0>

23 Husn, H.A, and Albiento, D.M. 2024. *Advancing locally led evaluation: Practical insights for humanitarian contexts*. ALNAP <https://alnapp.org/help-library/resources/advancing-locally-led-evaluation/>

24 Husn, H.A, and Albiento, D.M. 2024. *Advancing locally led evaluation: Practical insights for humanitarian contexts*. ALNAP <https://alnapp.org/help-library/resources/advancing-locally-led-evaluation/>

25 Backhouse, J. and Tiernan, A. 2020. *Decolonizing evaluation – Whose value counts?* Christian Aid.

26 Husn, H.A, and Albiento, D.M. 2024. *Advancing locally led evaluation: Practical insights for humanitarian contexts*. ALNAP

Research:

The few studies that specifically examine localisation within humanitarian research explore the differing roles of researchers in the Global North and Global South in the generation of evidence, the power imbalances in the research, and the challenges that researchers in the Global South face. The studies analysed published humanitarian documents, such as research reports, response plans and joint evaluations, academic literature, and research opportunities. Key informant interviews with stakeholder were also conducted.²⁷

The studies examined localisation in humanitarian research through various criteria, including the following:

- **Type of knowledge**²⁸
- **Setting the research agenda and research questions**²⁹
- **Roles of researchers from Global North and Global South**
- **Authorship**³⁰
- **Language**
- **Type of actors involved in primary data collection**
- **Origin of the cited secondary data**
- **Type of actors leading data analysis**
- **Partnerships**
- **Visibility of partners**
- **Credibility and expertise**

Key learnings from these studies are that localisation has partially influenced the way knowledge is generated and shared and the way Global South actors are engaged in humanitarian research. However, it is also recognised that humanitarian research has traditionally been dominated by institutions from the Global North, and this continues to be the case, in part due to their greater access to funding. With control over funding, comes the ability to set the research agenda, the scope, criteria, and research questions.³¹ The research agenda is then more aligned with donor requirements or organisational agendas, rather than being informed by communities' needs.³² The Global North actors also select the countries and regions of their interest, which can result in blind spots in humanitarian research or limit funding for countries experiencing crisis.³³

There is structural bias in knowledge systems that tend to value one style of evidence (empirical, quantitative) over others (anecdotal, storytelling). This may lead to favouring researchers from the Global North or excluding Global South researchers that propose non-traditional methods or styles of evidence.³⁴

27 Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG), et.al., 2022, *Needles in a haystack: an analysis of global south roles in humanitarian knowledge production*; Fitzpatrick, M., Cordua, I., Atim, T., Kattakuzhy, A. and Conciatori, K. (2023) 'Co-investigators but with different power': local voices on the localization of humanitarian research. Boston, MA: Feinstein International Centre and NEAR. <https://alnap.org/help-library/resources/co-investigators-but-with-different-power-local-voices-on-the-localization-of-humanitarian/>

HAG, CoLAB, GLOW, InSights, PIANGO & Pujiono Centre (2022). *Stories for Change: Elevating Global South Experiences in Humanitarian Knowledge Production*. Humanitarian Horizons. Melbourne: HAG. <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/stories-for-change-elevating-global-south-experiences-in-humanitarian-knowledge-production/>

28 Viswanathan, V. 2023. *Learning to be more 'locally led'? Current practice and evidence gaps in the international humanitarian sector*. ALNAP. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/learning-be-more-locally-led-current-practice-and-evidence-gaps-international-humanitarian-sector>

29 HAG, CoLAB, GLOW, InSights, PIANGO & Pujiono Centre (2022). *Stories for Change: Elevating Global South Experiences in Humanitarian Knowledge Production*. Humanitarian Horizons. Melbourne: HAG. <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/stories-for-change-elevating-global-south-experiences-in-humanitarian-knowledge-production/>

30 HAG, CoLAB, GLOW and InSights, (2022). *Overlooking Local Voices: An Analysis of Global South Roles in Humanitarian Knowledge Production*. Humanitarian Horizons. Melbourne: Humanitarian Advisory Group.

31 HAG, CoLAB, GLOW, InSights, PIANGO & Pujiono Centre (2022). *Stories for Change: Elevating Global South Experiences in Humanitarian Knowledge Production*. Humanitarian Horizons. Melbourne: HAG. <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/stories-for-change-elevating-global-south-experiences-in-humanitarian-knowledge-production/>

32 Ibid

33 Fitzpatrick, M., Cordua, I., Atim, T., Kattakuzhy, A. and Conciatori, K. (2023) 'Co-investigators but with different power': local voices on the localization of humanitarian research. Boston, MA: Feinstein International Centre and NEAR

34 Viswanathan, V. 2023. *Learning to be more 'locally led'? Current practice and evidence gaps in the international humanitarian sector*. ALNAP.

The studies also found differences in the roles of actors from the Global North and Global South. While researchers from the Global North have leadership roles throughout the research process, researchers from the Global South often had minor roles.³⁵ The local actors were mostly involved in the production of primary data. This includes both as 'data collectors,' conducting interviews and focus groups discussions, or as 'data sources,' being consulted in the process.³⁶ Contributions of local actors are not always visible. It was found that in response plans, in particular, there was acknowledgement of the role of local actors and institutions in collecting data for needs assessments.³⁷ A case study review found that local actors were not often identified as authors of the products.³⁸

Localisation in learning

Box 2: Learning

Learning is the act of acquiring knowledge, the process that ensures evidence is turned into actionable knowledge that is used to adapt and improve programmes and policies. It includes dissemination and uptake support.

Since evidence generation and learning are closely related processes, the following information on localisation in learning was identified in the reports that reviewed localisation in humanitarian research practices mentioned in the previous section. The overall findings show that Global North prevails in processes of analysing and disseminating evidence, even when its generation has included local actors.

Global South actors tend to participate less during data analysis and sense-making, and when they do, their role is not always well documented within the publications.³⁹ The visibility of Global South actors in publications was also found to be often insufficient, inconsistent or absent.⁴⁰ Research opportunities and research reports are published in English, which further favours Global North actors in the generation and use of research.⁴¹ A study found that all of the humanitarian documents examined were available in English, while only 10% were published in another language.⁴² Research institutions from the Global South were found to be less frequently cited in the humanitarian documents reviewed, and that the search for secondary information in English further limits the consideration of research from the Global South available in different languages. The local sources cited were mostly government documents or statistics that put the crisis into context, rather than local research publications.⁴³

35 Fitzpatrick, M., Cordua, I., Atim, T., Kattakuzhy, A. and Conciatori, K. (2023) 'Co-investigators but with different power': local voices on the localization of humanitarian research. Boston, MA: Feinstein International Centre and NEAR

36 HAG, CoLAB, GLOW and inSights, (2022). Overlooking Local Voices: An Analysis of Global South Roles in Humanitarian Knowledge Production. Humanitarian Horizons. Melbourne: Humanitarian Advisory Group.

37 Ibid

38 Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG), CoLAB, GLOW, InSights, PIANGO and Pujiono Centre. 2022, Stories for Change. Elevating global south experiences in knowledge production. <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/insight/stories-for-change-elevating-global-south-experiences-in-humanitarian-knowledge-production/#:~:text=It%20uses%20stories%20that%20highlight,%2C%20partnerships%2C%20visibility%20and%20credibility>

39 HAG, CoLAB, GLOW and inSights, (2022). Overlooking Local Voices: An Analysis of Global South Roles in Humanitarian Knowledge Production. Humanitarian Horizons. Melbourne: Humanitarian Advisory Group.

40 Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG), CoLAB, GLOW, InSights, PIANGO and Pujiono Centre. 2022, Stories for Change. Elevating global south experiences in knowledge production

41 HAG, CoLAB, GLOW and inSights, (2022). Overlooking Local Voices: An Analysis of Global South Roles in Humanitarian Knowledge Production. Humanitarian Horizons. Melbourne: Humanitarian Advisory Group.

42 Ibid

43 Ibid

Despite the challenges that researchers from the Global South may face, some studies found that humanitarian actors are increasingly using local evidence for decision-making, including local expertise and feedback collected from affected populations.⁴⁴ There is recognition that enhancing locally-led research can improve outcomes and result in more credible, meaningful and useful findings. Further, the underrepresentation of researchers from the Global South is considered a missed opportunity to conduct research that is more relevant and potentially more impactful.⁴⁵

Localisation and AAP

Defining AAP

According to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)⁴⁶ accountability to affected populations (AAP) is how humanitarian actors “use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people humanitarian organisations seek to assist” (see Box 3).⁴⁷

Box 3: Three elements of Accountability to Affected Populations ⁴⁸

Taking account: The ability of people affected by crises to influence and participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Giving account: Level of transparency and sharing of information with people affected by crises.

Being held to account: The ability of people affected by crises to assess and sanction actions by humanitarian actors.

AAP seeks to put people at the centre of decision-making and enable them to have a say in the services and assistance they receive. An ALNAP study found that there are diverse understandings of AAP. The study found that the two most known aspects of AAP is the establishment of complaints and feedback mechanism (CFM) and conducting participatory needs assessment.⁴⁹

44 Turner, E., Lokot, M. Lange, I, Wake, C., and Roberts, B. 2024. Accountability and objectivity: Humanitarian narratives at the intersection of evidence and localisation. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*. 9 (17). <https://jhumanitarianaction.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41018-024-00160-x>

45 Fitzpatrick, M., Cordua, I., Atim, T., Kattakuzhy, A. and Conciatori, K. (2023) ‘Co-investigators but with different power’: local voices on the localization of humanitarian research. Boston, MA: Feinstein International Centre and NEAR. <https://alnnap.org/help-library/resources/co-investigators-but-with-different-power-local-voices-on-the-localization-of-humanitarian/>

46 IASC. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/strengthening-accountability-affected-people>

47 Barbelet, V et al. (2024) *Harnessing evidence and learning for people centred: Evidence synthesis and best practice review on AAP, inclusion and localisation*. London: ALNAP/ODI.

48 Barbelet, V et al. (2024) *Harnessing evidence and learning for people centred: Evidence synthesis and best practice review on AAP, inclusion and localisation*. London: ALNAP/ODI. Barbelet, V et al. (2024) *Harnessing evidence and learning for people centred: Evidence synthesis and best practice review on AAP, inclusion and localisation*. London: ALNAP/ODI.

49 Barbelet, V et al. (2024) *Harnessing evidence and learning for people centred: Evidence synthesis and best practice review on AAP, inclusion and localisation*. London: ALNAP/ODI.

Evidence on AAP

To help advance AAP further, IASC has developed a Framework for Collective AAP⁵⁰ which highlights the importance of integration of community feedback and feedback loops in the evaluation and review of AAP actions.

The ALNAP study found that existing evidence on AAP tends to focus on the challenges and barriers, as well as the technical and operational aspects of AAP. For example, there is some evidence of good AAP practices, specifically relating CFM and participatory needs assessment. Studies have examined the effectiveness of complaint and feedback mechanisms. The evidence suggests that the uptake of complaint and feedback mechanisms increases when multiple channels of communication ((physical suggestion box, hotline, office hours, WhatsApp, email, etc) are available to suit diverse needs. They are also more effective when communities know why and how to give feedback.⁵¹

There is evidence that early participation of the affected population enhances satisfaction with the aid provided. The State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) report found that “those who said that they were consulted before assistance was given were more than twice as likely to say that they felt it addressed their priority needs than those who said they weren’t consulted.” However, most stakeholders consulted found that in practice, the needs assessments do not sufficiently consult communities.⁵²

Research shows that most recipients do not feel that they are able to influence decisions about the aid they receive. There are gaps on how feedback is used or was factored into project design, or why CFMs are not leading to greater accountability or participation.⁵³ A survey reported in the SOHS report showed only 36% of aid recipients believed agencies communicated well, and only 33% felt able to provide feedback or complain. There is a failure to ‘close the feedback loop’ by providing a response to aid recipients, which is causing aid recipients to lose trust in agencies.⁵⁴ In the Uganda context, a [UNHCR Participatory Assessment](#) report had similar finding in 2023, where 54% of respondents felt their needs were unmet and only 33% felt they were consulted on their preferences.⁵⁵

50 The tool aims to improve accountability in six areas: preparedness, needs assessments, recognizing capacities, funding for AAP, implementation, and evaluation and review. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-force-2-accountability-affected-people/iasc-collective-aap-framework>

51 Barbelet, V et al. (2024) *Harnessing evidence and learning for people centred: Evidence synthesis and best practice review on AAP, inclusion and localisation*. London: ALNAP/ODI.

52 ALNAP (2022) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.

53 Metcalfe-Hough, V, Fenton, W, Saez, P. and Spencer, A. (2021) *The Grand Bargain in 2021: an independent review*. HPG commissioned report. London: ODI (www.odi.org/en/publications/the-grand-bargain-in-2021-an-independent-review).

54 ALNAP (2022) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.

55 UNHCR. 2023. *Uganda. Participatory Assessment 2022*. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/99977>

AAP and localisation

The two concepts are related but are typically discussed separately. The IASC argues that the linkages between AAP and localisation are that they are both rooted in people-centred approaches and that “both focus on addressing systemic power imbalances within the humanitarian system by transferring decision-making power and resources to affected population and local and national actors.” The key linkages between the two concepts are that:

- a) localisation aims to ensure that decisions are made closer to the communities they serve, and that humanitarian assistance better reflects local needs;
- b) feedback provided by affected communities can inform locally led actions; and
- c) local actors can help to ensure accountability mechanisms are contextually relevant and inclusive.⁵⁶

ICVA further argues that local and national NGOs have a central role to play in AAP, where they develop and manage accountability mechanisms. By making the linkages, localisation can enhance AAP, if it is not treated as “a separate, external requirement of the international system.”⁵⁷

AAP, localisation and evidence-based decision-making

AAP, localisation and evidence-based decision-making are closely linked. Using local insights, for instance on affected populations’ priorities, can strengthen AAP.⁵⁸ However, research tends to examine the role of local actors as first responders separately from AAP and not how local actors themselves are implementing or influencing accountability mechanisms.

Despite the advances in AAP, “there remains an inherent power imbalance in the relationship between humanitarian actors and the people they serve; the relationship is one of choice for humanitarians, while it is almost always one of necessity or circumstance for crisis-affected people.”⁵⁹ The supply-driven system that focuses on donor priorities and timelines makes it hard to listen and respond to community perspectives.⁶⁰ In a context of shrinking resources, there is a risk that participatory process will be de-prioritised. However, shrinking resources also provide a strong case to enhance AAP so that communities are able to prioritise how resources are used and decide for themselves what is necessary, fair and legitimate.⁶¹ By better linking localisation and AAP, local actors can play a role in enhancing accountability mechanisms, thereby ensuring that they are contextually relevant and inclusive, and embedded within community structures.

56 IASC. 2024. IASC Discussion Paper: Exploring the linkages between AAP, Localisation and the HDP Nexus. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-force-2-accountability-affected-people/iasc-discussion-paper-exploring-linkages-between-aap-localisation-and-hdp-nexus#:~:text=Within%20this%2C%20the%20approaches%20of,grassroots%20level%20enabling%20local%20actors>

57 ICVA. 2019. Unpacking Localization. Humanitarian Leadership Academy. <https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/08/Unpacking-Localization-ICVA-HLA.pdf>

58 Turner, E., Lokot, M. Lange, I, Wake, C., and Roberts, B. 2024. Accountability and objectivity: Humanitarian narratives at the intersection of evidence and localisation. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*. 9 (17).

59 ALNAP (2022) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.

60 Doherty, 2023. Moving humanitarian accountability from a tickbox to a turning point. ALNAP. <https://alnapp.org/commentary-multimedia/index/moving-humanitarian-accountability-from-a-tickbox-to-a-turning-point-the-crucial-role-of-organisational-leadership/>

61 Doherty, Jennifer. (2023) *From tick box to turning point: Getting accountability right for improved humanitarian action*. London: ODI/ALNAP. <https://alnapp.org/help-library/resources/from-tick-box-to-turning-point-getting-accountability-right-for-improved-humanitarian/>

Generating Evidence / Research

This section summarises findings from key informant interviews with local actors within Uganda's refugee response. Informants were asked about evidence generation, including the type of data they need and collect, how they collect it, and the challenges they face. Respondents largely focused their answers on project-related data collection, such as for needs assessments and monitoring and evaluation.

What data do local actors need?

Local actors all reported that they need data and information to inform their work and decisions relating to the refugee response. Most actors want data on refugees' needs and challenges. However, the type of data required varied by type of local actor (see Table 1).

Local governments commonly cited needing information about ongoing projects in their districts and in refugee settlements for monitoring and compliance purposes. Local governments gather information from response actors about what they plan to do, which groups are targeted, the progress achieved, and the employment opportunities created by funding. Local governments are interested in ensuring that response actors comply with regulations and have required documents like operation permits, registration certificates, and recommendation letters from local councils. Some local governments also are interested in data related to child protection issues, teenage pregnancies, school dropouts, and gender-based violence. Ultimately, they are concerned with information that ensures the assistance provided is appropriate, does no harm, and is beneficial to both the refugee and host community.

“We also assess whether their planned activities are suitable for the community. Additionally, we look at whether they are targeting both refugees and host communities and how the services are shared between the two groups, including the percentage allocated to each.” – Local Government respondent.

Refugee Welfare Councils had similar interests in information about the activities actors plan to implement and the beneficiary groups targeted to “ensure that their programs address the unique needs of different segments of the community”. They also want information on the progress achieved by response actors. Information on children's school attendance was of particular importance.

“The most important data to my department is school attendance because we are more concerned about the education of our children than any other thing. We lost everything during the war, and we need to go back when our children are properly educated.” - RWC respondent.

Table 1: Type of data required by local actors

Type of local actor	Type of data needed
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on projects and activities of response actors • Registration, permits, certificates and Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) • Data on community issues, gender-based violence, and child protection cases
Local NGOs and refugee-led organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data relating to the sector focus (e.g. Student enrolment, literacy) • Data on refugee needs and the challenges they face • Contextual information on intertribal conflicts, conflicts with host communities, cultural practices, gender-based violence • Eligibility criteria for NGO projects • Eligibility for scholarships
Refugee Welfare Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on plans, activities, progress of response actors • Information on selection criteria and target groups • Data on school attendance
National NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary and secondary data for refugee and host community related to the sector of focus (e.g. HIV prevalence, food basket monitoring) • Refugee needs, challenges and risks; mental health and economic empowerment trends
National government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data on refugees (e.g. Registration, Number of households composition) • Information on needs, health, and livelihoods

RLOs, LNGOs, and NNGOs require data to design their projects and activities. RLOs focus on local issues, such as intertribal conflicts, peaceful coexistence, and cultural practices, as well as on livelihoods, and referrals to partners. One RLO specifically wanted data on gender imbalances in the community in part to identify barriers to participation and cases of gender-based violence (GBV), but also unintended consequences of assistance – “...Data on domestic responsibilities that men have transferred to women because they claim that women are already empowered and registered as household heads.” NNGOs used both primary and secondary data relating to the project focus, such as food basket monitoring, HIV prevalence, student enrolment and retention, employment, and information on refugees’ needs and the challenges they face.

How are local actors collecting data?

Local actors are involved in collecting primary data. LNGOs and RLOs are active in collecting data in the refugee settlements. Some data is collected systematically through surveys and questionnaires or tracking data about target groups, such as students' school attendance and completion registers. Many RLOs collect data through face-to-face or participatory methods, including interviews with leaders, home visits, focus group discussions and community meetings.

“We do outreach in the communities, and we talk to the people and ask them what are the needs and the challenges that they are facing in the community to reach their potential goals.” – RLO respondent.

“We talk to individual women about issues affecting them at their homes so that we respond appropriately... Periodically, we conduct community meetings where we listen to community issues that affect their peaceful coexistence.” – RLO respondent.

NNGOs also collect primary data in the settlements. Data is collected at the beginning of projects to inform the design and targeting, during implementation to monitor progress, or at the end to evaluate projects. NNGOs use surveys, community meetings, focus group discussion, or household surveys to collect data. NNGOs collect both quantitative and qualitative data through these methods. One organisation is also using in-depth interviews as a means of data collection for storytelling:

“We are going to be displaying the stories of refugees, what are the difficulties, the challenges, because many people come into the refugee settlement, and most of them are working here, but they don't really know who these people are, what do they face, what do they think, what are their challenges.” – NNGO respondent.

Data is either collected directly by NNGO staff and enumerators, or the NNGO engages local organisations and actors in the community to collect data. *“We have a team in the field, they are called Dignity Fellows. These people are charged on the collection of data daily in the community. They are refugees.”*

RWCs collect data on issues that the community is experiencing, such as refugees who miss food distribution or cash ration, refugees with registration issues, or information on services lacking within the community. RWCs are also involved in monitoring and validating data of response actors. *“We volunteer to monitor the activities of local actors to ensure they are implementing their programs as planned. We double-check the records of local actors to verify the accuracy and reliability of their reported data.”*

Local governments do not conduct primary data collection, nor do the national government representatives. The local governments gather information from the organisations operating in the refugee response about their activities, receive data collected by all types of response actors, or record information from refugees that visit their offices. They informally gather information about refugee needs, through community meetings.

“We are just involved as leaders, being leaders in the host community, in the refugee settlement. So, on many occasions, we've been invited to take part in meetings through the NGO and other partners to take part in activities that are going on in the refugee settlement, where we get to learn that information, the challenges that people face, how they live their lives, the projects they're engaging in, and stuff like that. So, that's how we collect information from those meetings.” – Local Government respondent.

What challenges do local actors face when collecting data?

All respondents readily identified challenges they face collecting data. The most common barriers cited were as follows.

Language barriers:

The diversity of nationalities and languages in the settlement made data collection challenging for organisations at all levels. Many local organisations do not have the resources to engage interpreters. Those that do, face challenges with the reliability of the data.

“*The issue of language affects the accuracy and reliability of the data we collect because most of the women we talk to are illiterate. Thus, they cannot easily understand our questions even after thorough interpretation.*” – RLO respondent

Logistics:

Transportation was frequently cited as a challenge. The long distances coupled with the limited resources and means of transportation makes it difficult for many local actors to reach all the households. These challenges were cited by RLOs, LNGOs and NNGOs. Refugees expect a refund for transportation to participate in the activities, which organisations do not always have.

Expectations:

Some refugee respondents expect direct support in exchange for providing information. Due to resource constraints, many local organisations cannot provide even refreshments to encourage participation. Respondents stated that since many refugees experience hunger and food insecurity, they may give inaccurate information to access potential benefits and opportunities. This is an important consideration in research because if respondents believe that giving certain answers will lead to direct assistance, they may alter their responses to align with what they think researchers or aid organisations want to hear. Also, offering support in exchange for participation can blur the line between voluntary and coerced participation, and can create tensions within communities if some individuals benefit and others do not.

Lack of digital tools and standardisation:

Most L/NNGOs and RLOs lack the equipment and devices like tablets and smartphones. Additionally, lack of a stable internet connectivity and access to a reliable telecommunication network further limits the use of digital tools for data collection. Local organisations often use paper-based methods, which slow the data collection and are costly to print. Data is then manually uploaded into Excel spreadsheets, which takes time and increases the potential for error. From the perspective of international actors, it can be difficult to use the data from local actors, because it is not collected systematically nor using standardised tools making it difficult to compile and analyse it.

Survey fatigue and lack of trust: Refugees experience survey and interview fatigue, particularly when there are unfulfilled promises. Trust has been eroded because they have given information before and have not seen any direct benefit.

“*Many interviewees feel exhausted from constant interviews and often ask where all the data goes*” – RLO respondent.

“*The challenge is very many partners come to collect data and do not disseminate. Refugees do not see the purpose of the exercises as information collected does not always translate into improvement in the quality-of-service delivery, a lot of data is collected but nothing changes.*” – NGO respondent.

Gender and Culture: Gender norms can pose a challenge in reaching the target groups. For examples, some male refugees have refused interviews conducted by female NGO staff. Cultural barriers hinder the collection of data on girl child education. Many parents will not permit children to give data to interviewers. Further, women may not be able to participate without consent of the husband.

Other challenges cited were the approval from OPM, which makes the data collection process bureaucratic, and the lack of harmonisation in the rates of pay for enumerators. Mobility of refugees was also mentioned as movement to different settlements or across borders may create data inconsistencies.



Engaging communities for their feedback and insights

This section summarises findings from key informant interviews with local actors and focus group discussions held with refugees. Key informants were asked how they engage with refugees and what mechanisms exist to collect feedback and insights. In turn, refugees were asked their views on those mechanisms. These mechanisms, largely lumped under AAP practices, can be a key source of evidence on localisation for the response.

What feedback mechanisms do local actors use to engage refugees?

Most local actors cited engaging with refugees in some way. Local NGOs and RLOs were active in engaging refugees directly to collect feedback on numerous aspects using a variety of methods. Local NGOs and RLOs hold face-to-face meetings, community meetings, and encourage refugees to provide feedback directly. *"We have open door policy asking community members to come to us and share with us."* They also engage with community leaders, such as block leaders, football coaches, and youth champions for change. The engagement of community leaders was considered effective because *"the community leaders are always at the forefront and trusted by other community members."*

They collect feedback about specific activities, like trainings, to find out how to improve them.

Similarly, RWC engage directly with refugees through community outreach activities and community feedback sessions to listen to their concerns.

National NGOs engage refugees through community structures, including RWC and community leaders. They have established feedback mechanisms, such as suggestion boxes. They conduct post-distribution monitoring, focus group discussions, gender audits, surveys, or face-to-face feedback.

“*"We are also members of the FRRM ⁶² and we get feedback through the toll-free line."* – NNGO respondent.

“*"In one of our community engagements, we got positive feedback from the community on a paper-based tracking tool which we developed and later adopted by UNHCR for roll out to all partners."* – RLO respondent.

Local governments and national governments did not have formal feedback mechanisms. However, they conduct monitoring visits to the refugee settlements, or community meetings.

62 FRRM: Feedback, Referral and Resolution Mechanism

How do refugees view the feedback and accountability mechanisms?

Receiving information

Refugees described how information flowed from the OPM to RWC, who disseminated messages to community leaders. The leaders then shared the information with the community in meetings, in church services, or by megaphone.

“We receive information about the services and assistance available in our community through our community leaders who usually use megaphones to spread the information. Few people get information through the radios as most of the refugees don't have them.” – Refugee respondent.

Refugees shared that the reliability of information they receive depended on the type of information and who delivered it. Refugees trust information coming from community leaders the most: RWC, chairpersons, zonal leaders, and religious leaders. Refugees considered information from humanitarian agencies reliable, while the information from OPM was considered to be more theoretical than practical. There is a large distrust in the information about food rations due to previous experiences of households not receiving rations or cash assistance.

Sharing insights

Refugees identified the ways that feedback was solicited from them. They recognised that compared to the past, more organisations are now seeking information at the beginning of a project, through questionnaires and surveys. However, the respondents believed that there are still some that do not and *“just design what they feel works for us.”*

There are mixed feelings about the feedback collected during project implementation. On the positive side, organisations make the effort to ask about refugees' needs and if they are meeting these needs effectively. Refugees are satisfied to have the opportunity to give input. *“I feel happy when partners consult me, for they will implement according to my needs.”* Refugees are also aware that organisations consult with the local chairmen/RWC who respond on behalf of the refugee community.

On the other hand, there is dissatisfaction in how organisations use the feedback provided. Refugees feel that their concerns are not taken into account, they do not know what happens with the information, or they do not see change. A clear example was given for cash transfers.

“We were asked about cash transfer modality which we rejected. However, the response organisation imposed Mobile Money modality (without consultations) which has led to lack of trust on cash ration distribution especially among those who missed the cash transfer.” – Refugee respondent.

This issue was reiterated when refugees were asked about the challenges to feedback mechanisms. Two key challenges were the accessibility of the mechanism and the lack of response from organisations. Partner offices are far to reach and sometimes are found empty, leading to a growing frustration.

“The main challenge is absence of partner staff in their offices... Thus, refugees can't share information with them easily. Many refugees have lost hope or are already frustrated because of lack of feedback from partners. People normally refuse to attend feedback sessions because of hunger, especially, those who always miss cash ration. There is a challenge of language as majority of the refugees are illiterate women.” – Refugee respondent.

Sharing evidence for learning

This section summarizes KII in relation to the dissemination (sharing) of evidence, as a critical part of any learning process that would allow responders to make use of it in programmatic and policies decisions. The ways and channels of storing and sharing evidence influences the ability for it to be used by others. This section reviews different practices before summarising views around the current opportunities for locally led learning processes.

How are local actors managing and store information and data?

The way data is managed influences the ability for it to be shared and used by others. While the data storage varied slightly between local actors, it was common to use rudimentary, manual methods. Local governments and local councils most commonly store data as hardcopies in files, boxes, and cabinets. Some stored information in computer files but not with a specific information management system. The national government representatives operating in the area also stored a lot of data physically. One representative, however, noted that some refugee data is “stored digitally in the refugee monitoring systems – BIMS, RIMS⁶³ and Progress V4.”

RLOs and RWCs used both manual and digital storage options. They often had printed copies, record books and physical files. They also used smart phones and computers hard drives for data storage. These actors generally face challenges with no airtime or data, or lack of computers, devices, printers and stationery. Although they may face limitations, there were examples of RWCs and RLOs being diligent about data protection and confidentiality.

“We store collected information in a physical book. Each local actor has a dedicated file where any progress or new information is added. Local actors do not have access to their files. This restriction ensures confidentiality and data integrity but also limits the actors’ ability to directly review their progress or feedback.” – RWC respondent.

“We have written Standard Operating Procedures on data management and storage. After collecting and cleaning the data, we store a soft copy on the computer and keep a printed copy in a file, ensuring the data is anonymized.” – RLO respondent.

NNGOs were more likely to store information digitally on their computers. A couple NNGOs had access to cloud storage. Though it varied between respondents, the NNGOs also mentioned a more systematic organisation of information, generally around the project monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

How is local evidence shared and accessed?

The prevalent storage of data and information in physical files rather than digitally makes sharing between actors more difficult. It was common among all actors to share information verbally during regular coordination meetings, including sector, interagency, and partner meetings. One RWC noted: “We have partner meetings every month, security meetings, quarterly meetings and annual meetings during which information is shared.” The local governments shared information primarily in these coordination forums or individually with different partners that request information for their planning purposes.

63 BIMS: Biometric Identity Management System; RIMS: Referral Information Management System

Local governments receive information from NGOs and CBOs during meetings to address common challenges. There was a particular interest by local governments to receive and track data on how funding is spent between sectors and between refugee and host communities. Much of the information flowed from the most local actors to national and international actors.

The RLOs and L/NGOs noted regular reporting to UNHCR and OPM. *"We submit weekly reports to UNHCR through ECHO, ensuring they stay informed about our activities and findings."* Others mentioned reporting also to District Local Governments (DLGs) or to INGOs. Through these channels, information is generally shared in the form of written reports.

While there was little mention of national and district-level actors sharing information to local actors, many stated that their information is available to anyone. The national government representative in the districts noted that information is shared with whomever is interested.

"The data is available on a forum for all actors to access. A major part of the data is on the Uganda Refugee Response Monitoring System (URRMS)." Similarly, local governments noted that information is available upon request. Nonetheless, accessing it would require action from local actors, there is no systematic intentional mechanism targeting them. The unidirectional flow of information to centralised and/or international actors reinforces power asymmetries, where local actors collect data but are not part of the decision-making.

Respondents identified specific platforms that are facilitating sharing between local actors. One is through a network of community-based organisations in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement – the Association of Community-Based Organisations in Nakivale (ACBON). This group meets every month to share progress and challenges, and to support each through learning and data sharing. A local government representative noted they use a sub-county NGO coordination forum WhatsApp group for quick updates. Another platform is the Livelihoods, Energy and Environment Working Group. It is described as a *"collaborative space where all organisations, including DRC, OPM, and others, are represented. When you complete your work or need support, like when seeking funding, you can reach out through the group."*

Local actors expressed an overall willingness to share information. Local organisations were willing to share if it would be for the benefit of the community. However, sharing did not occur spontaneously or systematically, but rather upon request. Additionally, sharing is most often not done through digital channels which is the primary channel that international actors use.

“You see, for us, we share the information with everyone. Like anyone who comes up, who has a plan towards the well-being of this community, we are open to share our information.” – LNGO respondent.

“It's not that we are unwilling to share; it's simply because they don't approach us or show an interest. If others don't make a request, we assume they don't need or want the information.” – LNGO respondent.

What are the barriers for local actors to share evidence?

Several challenges were cited that impede or discourage sharing of evidence. In addition to the challenges of transportation, equipment, communications and connectivity identified in the previous section, common challenges to sharing were:

- **Lack of feedback:** Local actors find there is a lack of response from the organisations with whom they share information and a lack of recognition and acknowledgement of their contribution.
- **Information distortion:** Shared information has been sometimes misrepresented or misquoted.
- **Timelines:** Local actors are frequently submitting reports late to OPM, which creates challenges in sharing timely consolidated information about the refugee response.
- **Referrals:** Referrals are not responded to, and there is a perception that referrals can be a way to dodge responsibility.
- **Data privacy and protection:** Actors have different protocols on data privacy. Not knowing another organisation's data privacy protocols can hinder sharing. "Sometimes, we're not sure if other organisations will respect our data privacy and protection guidelines" – RLO respondent.
- **Lack of trust:** There is a lack of trust when organisations feel that their information is not valued, that actors are not straightforward about discussing information, or information is being used for personal own benefit. The lack of trust was a factor that discouraged actors from sharing.

"People take information and use it for their own benefit without seeking permission. This can discourage open sharing, as collecting, processing, and storing data requires significant effort. Sharing it with someone who then uses it for personal gain presents a challenge." – LG respondent.

Access to information is an additional challenge. There were few indications that the local actors are publishing and disseminating reports online to be easily accessible to others. However, international actors stated that their primary way to gather information is through online searches. When information is not formally documented and shared, it limits its usefulness.

"One of the biggest hurdles is the lack of clear research sources. Much of the knowledge exists informally, stored in people's minds rather than documented systematically. Because of this, disseminating information is a challenge—it is often unavailable in written form and exists only as verbal accounts." – INGO respondent.

On the other hand, the local organisations that mentioned sharing stories and updates through social media, have seen it raise awareness of their work and prompted international actors to reach out for more information or partnerships.

What are the barriers for local actors to access evidence generated by other responders?

Digital, written resources are the main format of evidence for many international organisations. This limits the use of evidence from local actors if it is not available in that format. Many international organisations will share resources, reports, and good practices on their websites, but this is not easily accessible to local actors. The international actors will also share information to the OPM and UNHCR dashboards, which may not be easily accessible to local actors without access to technology. Academic institutes will publish papers and journal articles that do not target local audiences. In some cases, the findings will be disseminated in seminars and conferences, where local actors or refugee representatives may be invited, but would be limited by the cost of attendance.

Views on locally led learning

Key informants were asked about opportunities and barriers for local actors to lead learning processes.

If the overall goal is to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance by making it *"as local as possible and as international as necessary"*, then the evidence used to make decisions about the assistance should also be sources as locally as possible. The engagement of local actors in learning processes not only allows high-level decisions to be more relevant, but it also enables local actors and refugees to make use of the learning to which they contributed.

“*"Making learning inclusive and championed by refugees to change their mindset and make them more independent."* – NNGO respondent.

By engaging with local actors, particularly those closest to the refugee community, in all phases of the research and learning process, the evidence generated is likely to be more relevant and useful.

“*"Given that they're on the ground, that means they're able to reach the problems immediately, they're able to collect the data as soon as possible. But then also they have the local expertise. Their local expertise, the cost efficiency, that means they are able to be in the forefront."* – INGO respondent.

However, locally-led learning is not limited to data collection. Local actors, especially refugee leaders and RLOs, can be part of the design and prioritization of learning objectives, the design of the research methods, and the analysis or sense making of data. Locally led learning includes sharing the results with the stakeholders to inform their programs, and in particular feeding back the results to the refugee community with information on why it is useful for them.

Moving towards locally-led learning can be challenging, due to factors such as a lack of learning culture, but it is ultimately seen as positive.

“*"Learning culture is not so strong in the refugee response as it's hard to track lessons learnt through mapping all stakeholders and what they are learning from the refugee response."* – NNGO respondent.

“*"I think when we talk about localisation and learning, it's often perceived as pressure rather than a positive step forward. But this is the way to go—we need to learn to appreciate each other."* – LNGO respondent.

Using evidence and local insights in decisions

This section summarises findings from key informant interviews and FGDs. The focus is on how the evidence collected and the insights received through the engagement of community in feedback mechanisms are used and influence decision-making. Settlement-based local actors and Kampala-based key informants were asked how they use data collected by local actors. Refugees participating in FGDs shared their views on challenges with existing feedback mechanisms.

How do refugees perceive response actors' use of their feedback and insights?

When asked how they view feedback mechanisms, refugees highlighted that although they share insights, they often do not receive responses from the actors soliciting or collecting it. Those who receive feedback are further demotivated because the responses are often negative, saying that due to the lack of resources the suggestion cannot be addressed. The refugees also identified the language barrier as a difficulty and *"it is hard to get somebody who will genuinely translate for you without giving them something in return."*

To improve feedback mechanisms, refugees suggested:

1. Have a two-way feedback process to not only share concerns but also receive follow-up on the responses. Respond to complaints and requests in a timely manner.
2. Have a complaint desk in each location that is easily accessible. Have suggestion boxes to give anonymous feedback.
3. Send the people with authority to respond to request to the settlement, rather than having messages sent through field staff and possibly miscommunicated.
4. Work with interpreters as intermediaries to bridge the gap between refugees and service providers.

Further, to make projects more responsive to their preferences, refugees suggested:

5. Go through local leadership before starting a project. Hold consultations and community dialogues in the community block rather than on a zonal basis. Include community structures like religious leaders.
6. Include refugees in projects from the onset as volunteers or recruited as staff.

How are local actors using local evidence?

Although refugees formulated complaints about the use of their feedback, local NGOs and RLOs report that the purpose of the data they collect is to support adaptations to their work in line with refugee preferences. The organisations were keen to use the feedback to make changes in their operations.

“Whenever we get the data, it's not just to have it, it's to see what it means for our program. And then we learn, we bring out the learning and then the adaptation.” – LNGO respondent.

Local governments are using data to report on the activities and services provided in the area and assess if the activities are relevant to the community's needs. "Since these actors are meant to complement government efforts, we ensure that those who don't meet the standards are not allowed to operate. This review process happens regularly." The local governments also use the information to report back to the community and to other response actors. The local governments may also use it to improve the services they provide.

RWCs use the data collected to deliberate on whether the response actor should operate in the community. This ensures that only beneficial activities are implemented, that they align with community standards, and *"to determine whether the activities of the actors are safe and not harmful to the community."*

The national government offices use the reports they receive for planning purposes, policy making and monitoring. They rely on data that partners collect and use it for prioritisation, allocation, and to understand gaps. They use the data for lobbying and advocacy, showing the trends in topics of interest to donors.



How do international actors use evidence gathered by local actors?

There are mixed views among local actors about how international agencies use and value evidence gathered by local actors. Some believed that international agencies valued their information because it is primary data, and it reflects an understanding of refugees' real need. Occasionally, there is positive feedback received, and appreciation of the work being done. There are examples of the information sharing having positive impacts, particularly relating to funding decisions. Two RLOs gave examples of receiving additional funding after sharing their data with a UN agency, and another received funding to deliver additional training. Another RLO confirmed that the data they collected on school dropouts was used by other organisations. However, there are also cases where it does not seem like the information is used at all.



"At times, we feel that the information is valued and utilised, but at other times, it seems to have little impact." – RLO respondent.

The most common concern expressed by local organisations is that they do not get feedback from the actors with whom they have shared information. They feel that the information provided, such as data about refugees and their needs, is not valued by some organisations. They believe that some organisations come with pre-conceived projects and either do not need the information or are not flexible to adjust based on the information provided. There are also cases where the data collected by local actors is used by international actors, but the reports are not shared with the actors who provided the information.

International actors use data for different purposes. Commonly, they refer to data to assess needs and design projects or activities. During implementation, data is used to report on participation and progress, for which the data needs to be disaggregated for example by refugee and host communities, to report to the OPM dashboard and UNHCR.

There are no standardised tools for data collection in each sector. Each local or refugee-led organisation is collecting data in different ways using different tools, which creates inconsistencies and gaps in the data. As a result, it is difficult to compile and analyse data from various local actors.

Although some do, the international actors interviewed did not collect data directly from refugees. If they did collect data, it was through community leaders and those managing refugees in the country. The international actors who have adopted localisation strategies are more likely to engage local partners in the different stages of planning and data collection. One international organisation describes the co-creation process as a journey.



"Then, right from the planning stage, the development of the proposal, they are walking the journey with us... That means if as they are collecting the data, we are in the back end supporting and ensuring that the data quality checks are there." – INGO respondent.

How are refugees engaged in decision-making?

The space where refugees were found to have the greatest influence is the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF) platform. In this platform, refugees have been able to voice concerns and there are examples of how their input has influenced decisions. One respondent cited that resources were shifted to tree planting because of refugee involvement in the REF.

All stakeholders interviewed were asked to identify barriers to involving refugees in decision-making processes. The RLOs and RWC representatives identified barriers such as the gap between the expectation and the offer, for example the expectation to receive something for their participation in interviews. Tribal conflicts, gender dynamics, and their financial situation were also barriers.

Another key challenge cited was that organisations will consult community members directly without speaking to the refugee leaders, a breach of hierarchy, which creates misunderstanding and reduces trust. A RWC representative pointed to power imbalances as a reason why refugees are not involved in decision-making.

“*There is no way refugees can express their voices to be heard. Sadly, decisions are made at higher levels and just imposed on the refugees because they don't have any choice. The refugees feel that they don't have powers in decision-making processes. Thus, they submit to any agenda or decisions imposed on them.*” – RWC respondent.

Other barriers to engaging refugees in decision-making is their mobility, language, cultural practices that restrict participation (e.g., early marriage), and their daily focus on survival. The large distances and poor infrastructure reduce the ability to consult everyone. The low digital literacy and access to technology limits both their access to information and their ability to participate.

“*Digital tools are limited, and resources to organise meetings or outreach for refugees are insufficient. The majority have not gone to school, have low levels of education, and the world has gone digital.*” – OPM representative.

How are local actors engaged in decision-making?

Governmental stakeholders were asked to what extent they believe local actors are involved in decision-making processes related to the refugee response. Most respondents recognised that there are spaces where local actors, such as LNGOs, CBOs and RLOs, are engaged and can influence decisions. The local organisations participate in coordination meetings to share opinions and perspectives about needs and priorities. One national government organisation cited local actors' engagement in meetings for “all actors to arrive at decisions.”

Respondents also found that local organisations involve communities in decision-making processes to ensure their needs and concerns are considered. The influence of local organisations and communities, however, is limited, influencing plans only at the village level; many decisions are made and approved at district level, or even the national level, where they have little influence.

“*This hierarchy often means that the contributions of local actors are treated as advisory rather than authoritative.*” – Local Government respondent.

Local views on localisation

This section summarises findings from the key informant interviews and the FGDs with refugees.

How do refugees view response actors?

Refugees have a positive view of local actors, which they define as “community-based organisations owned and run by our people” or a variation of the same. There is a view that these local actors are easily accessible, can communicate in the local language, have a strong understanding of refugee needs, understand the culture, are more accountable and use resources properly. *“They understand the need for they have been part of the crisis.”*

A few refugees had a broader definition of local actor, including RLOs, CBOs, and NGOs “from within Uganda.” However, there is a different view of local and national NGOs in relation to their understanding of the context and their capacity. *“While local actors contribute, we feel they lack the capacity and experience needed to effectively manage the work.”*

By comparison, refugees do not feel that international actors understand their context or needs. They feel that international agencies are “judgmental and first want a lot of information before the respond”.

“*“I believe the far away actors, some may sleep in Kampala, or even in Kabingo, they may not feel the pain of the neighbour who slept on an empty stomach. A local actor is a shock absorber, he can tell the pain more than the person who is far away.” – Refugee respondent.*

Refugees feel that international actors take decisions without understanding refugees’ realities. Knowing that local actors often report to international actors, refugees encourage international actors to trust local actors more because they know the struggles firsthand.

What are response actors’ perceptions on localisation?

Key informants were asked about actions that could be taken to support localisation. The stakeholders consulted in this assessment are broadly supportive of localisation. They reaffirm the sentiment that local actors, particularly those closest to the community, can take a leading role in various aspects of the response. They see that the “localisation agenda that empowers local actors to take lead in these processes.” They recognise the benefits of local actors’ work with the community, because of the shared culture, language, and understanding of the struggles refugees face.

“*“For localisation to be effective, the interests of refugees must inform all decisions regarding refugee response.” – RWC respondent.*

Stakeholders often spoke of localisation in terms of local actors’ participation in project design and implementation or humanitarian assistance delivery. The messages were that local actors can be the main implementers: they are available, have capacity, can be trusted, and have “the power to bring solutions to themselves.” There is a need for effective partnerships, greater transparency, improved collaboration, and a focus on accompaniment and technical support rather than delivering assistance for them.

International actors were asked about their perspectives on localisation and their efforts to advance localisation in their operations. Some international actors report having already advanced localisation goals: they are shifting to enable local organisations to lead the actions in the community and participate in coordination spaces. One international actor described the model of local leadership as “allowing them to be in the lead and giving them that technical backstopping.” This philosophy extends through various aspects of their operations, including data collection, where the international actor provides the accompaniment that will allow the local actors to collect and manage their own data.

What are the barriers and opportunities to supporting localisation?

Stakeholders were asked about the barriers and opportunities to supporting localisation. The following summary is relevant for localisation in the broad sense of the term (leadership, capacity, etc.). It is specifically relevant for how localisation can be further supported in the field of learning and research to support decision-making that is more evidence-driven and engages the community. Box XX is specific to suggestions specific to locally-led evidence generation and learning.

1. There is a low visibility of local actors and a perceived lack of credibility.

“As refugee-led organisations, we sometimes face scepticism. When we approach funders or request support, there’s often hesitation or doubt regarding our reliability. This credibility issue is, I believe, the main challenge refugee-led organisations face in leading learning and research processes.” – RLO respondent.



There are many local organisations operating in the country, but they are unknown to international actors and donors. There is little visibility of the work they do, making it difficult to demonstrate their credibility. RLOs face additional scepticism about their reliability, due to the refugee population's mobility. The opportunities that key informants identified to overcome the challenge are:

- Continue to map local actors and make the database easily accessible;
- OPM, district governments and local leaders can help N/INGOs identify; local organisations that have experience in the sector of interest;
- Present reports of local actors' accomplishments to attract support;
- Acknowledge the contributions of local actors in reports, social media, and websites;
- Give local actors a chance and trust that they will stay and deliver.

2. Local actors have varying levels of capacity and skills.

“*Local actors are often viewed with doubt regarding their ability to lead the response, which undermines their role in decision making and research processes.*”
– RLO respondent.

Local actors have varying strengths and weaknesses. While they are knowledgeable in many thematic areas, they may not have specific skills required due to limited human resources available. For example, an NGO respondent noted that there is a lack of settlement-based research specialists. International actors are also concerned with the local actors' ability to meet donor requirements. They see that many of the groups are newly formed and unorganised. As a result, local organisations repeatedly must go through capacity assessments with each potential partner. The opportunities identified are:

- Build the capacity of local organisations, strengthen systems to enhance accountability and transparency, and provide training to staff to gain the required skills;
- Employ local staff to gain skills that will remain in the community;
- Local organisations can form or be part of a network of local organisations (e.g. ACBON), that will give local organisations the ability to lead collectively;
- Develop and use a common capacity assessment tool that can be periodically updated.

3. Local actors do not have sufficient funding and resources.

“*Funding is the biggest challenge preventing local actors from leading learning and research processes.*” – RLO respondent.

Lack of funding was the most cited barrier to localisation and locally led learning. Currently available funding is short-term or is focused on lifesaving interventions over research. Many local actors noted having limited resources, such as IT equipment, devices, transportation, office space and internet connectivity. The opportunities identified are:

- Establish meaningful, collaborative partnerships between international and local actors;
- Create consortiums to deliver initiatives, while increasing the capacity of RLOs as they implement;
- Provide support to local organisations in proposal writing;
- Equip local actors with the devices and technology to collect and manage data.

4. Sector coordination is led by international agencies.

“*Sector leadership is always done by international agencies... Support some RLOs to lead some community engagements sectors to break the barriers of having all sectors led by international agencies,*” – NNGO respondent.

It was noted that international actors are always taking the lead, particularly in sector coordination spaces. However, local actors felt that their strength is in the thematic, sector knowledge. The opportunities identified are:

- International agencies can identify the local actors working in the same sector and build their capacity to lead;
- Let local actors (including NNGOs) take a lead in specific sectors like livelihoods, health, education, peaceful coexistence, and skilling;
- Train local actors and leadership structure to effectively engage with refugee communities, to lead a refugee response;
- Empower the local actors to take over key roles like handling resettlement processes;
- Train Refugee Welfare Committees on government laws.

Box 4

Suggestions to specifically support locally -led evidence-generation and learning

- Give due recognition to local actors for their data collection and the evidence they generate;
- Support skilling of local actors on research, data collection, and management;
- Support the development and use of tools to systematically collect and manage information;
- Ensure funding to local actors can include research, learning and AAP work;
- Identify thematic learning workstream to be led by local actors in the coordination structure.

5. Local actors are engaged late in the project cycle.

Interviewees stated that local actors are involved only after projects have been designed or initiated. Further, the local leaders may be bypassed by teams collecting data to go directly with the community.

This limits their ability to influence the decisions and ensure that the intervention is aligned with local priorities. The opportunities identified are:

- Enhance teamwork between international actors, DLG, Local Council and refugee leaders for coordinated planning projects;
- Engage local actors in project design;
- Work with the existing structures that help govern the settlement, including RWC, zonal leaders, block leaders, youth and counsellors;
- Mainstream programs and activities into subcounty planning.

A general opportunity that was presented is to capitalise on the willingness of international actors, government and donors to move towards localisation. Further, there was emphasis that it will not be a sudden transition, but rather a gradual, step-by-step shift. Localisation is considered a phased processes where capacity is being built to enable local actors to take the lead.

“Whereas we are pushing for localisation, it’s gradual. It tends to be gradual. And then for actors to be prepared.” – NNGO respondent.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Localisation and accountability to affected populations is of growing importance within the humanitarian agenda. However, there has been limited focus on localising the generation of evidence for decision-making or the linkages between localisation and AAP. This assessment explored the opportunities and barriers to localising research, learning, and AAP in the context of Uganda's refugee response.

Local actors in the Uganda refugee response have expertise in data collection, but face limitations to take on greater roles in research. The desk review found that actors from the Global North tend to lead the research process from setting the agenda to publishing findings, whereas local actors are mainly involved in data collection. In line with that finding, the localisation assessment found that local and national non-profit organisations are greatly involved in data collection, particularly for monitoring and evaluation of projects. While some of the data collection is done for or together with international organisations, it was also found that local actors collecting data for their own organisation's mission, in which they are leading the decision-making and agenda setting. The challenges these local organisations face in taking on a greater role are that they have limited technical tools and insufficient resources to collect data efficiently and systematically across locations.

Local actors share information through various channels, but the (digital) publication of information hinder wider sharing and visibility. The desk review found that the citations and visibility of researchers from the Global South in publications is limited. In the Uganda refugee response, there is a good engagement of local actors and refugees' representatives in learning processes. They share information informally to actors upon request, send reports to national actors, and share information in coordination spaces. However, the publication and sharing of data faces limitations. Many local actors, particularly government representatives, do not have digital equipment and store and manage hard copies of information, which hinders information sharing. The local organisations collecting information use their data to enhance their interventions, but their publications are limited to reports shared with local and national governments or verbally sharing information in multi-actor coordination spaces. The lack of published information, couple with limited internet connectivity, limits wider sharing and use of locally collected data, as well as the visibility of local organisations. Further, the RLOs and LNGOs feel that they are unknown to international actors or not considered reliable.

Local actors, particularly local non-profit organisations, have mechanisms to collect feedback from refugees and are using the feedback to improve their activities and services. There is general sentiment among refugees that the more local the organisation (i.e. refugee-led), the greater understanding they have of the challenges they face and the easier it is to communicate with them. However, even local and national non-profit organisations face language barriers due to the multiple nationalities, languages and cultures found in the settlements. Female staff face additional barriers to collecting data due to refugees' varied views of gender norms and beliefs. Despite these practices, many refugees do not perceive that their views are being taken into consideration in decision-making processes.

An increasing number of local and international actors are implementing mechanisms for accountability to affected populations, but feedback loops are not closed. In line with the global research, there have been advances on establishing complaint and feedback mechanisms. Refugee respondents acknowledge that more and more organisations are asking for the input in the design of the interventions and requesting feedback on activities. However, from the refugee perspective, there is fatigue from regularly being asked to give information, while not receiving support in return, hearing about how the information is used, or seeing any changes. The feedback loop is not being closed and there is growing frustration that input is not being considered. The lack of feedback towards refugees is eroding trust in actors, particularly international actors.

Overall, the localisation assessment found that local actors have demonstrated capacity to generate evidence for the refugee response. They are engaged in assessing needs, collecting data, and integrating feedback from refugees. However, they face limitations related to the availability of resources, technology, and logistics, among others. With the right tools and support, their role could be further enhanced. The following are recommendations for actors involved in Uganda's refugee response to enhance localisation in research, learning, and AAP.

Research and Learning organisations

Research and learning

1. Engage RLOs, LNGOs, and refugee leaders in defining the research objectives and questions and continue engagement through to the data analysis
2. Consult refugee leaders about collaborative strategies to engage the refugee community in a way that addresses duplication and survey fatigue.
3. Build the capacity of RLOs, LNGOs and NNGOs on data collection methods (quantitative and qualitative), data analysis, and the use of standardised tools to collect data consistently on a large scale within and across settlements. Provide the equipment and training in digital tools to improve data collection.
4. Create and share a mapping of local actors and their expertise in research and data collection. Coordinate the research process and data collection through networks of LNGOs and RLOs.
5. Facilitate in-person spaces to exchange and share learning between local actors, including DLGs, to share learning.
6. Increase the visibility of local organisations involved in the research in publications and communications. Support them to have a web presence to share their stories.

AAP

7. Disseminate results back to the settlements through preferred channels, such as the RWC. Create spaces for dissemination in person, rather than sharing digitally.
8. Set up two-way feedback mechanisms and support RLOs and LNGOs to do the same. Consult refugee leaders on best channels to collect feedback, and the best channel to send back a response, especially when feedback is anonymous.

Donors/organisations funding research

Research and learning

1. Create funding opportunities for local researchers and research institutions in Uganda to apply directly or in partnership with an international institute.
2. Create funding opportunities for research that encourages participatory and community-led methods.
3. Offer opportunities for direct funding and multi-year funds for RLOs, LNGOs and NNGOs, given the long-term nature of their engagement and contextual knowledge.

AAP

4. Allow eligible expenses for research organisations to engage the affected population in the design phase and to feedback the findings and how they are being used to the refugee population. Allow eligible expenses for refugee representatives to participate in forums where the research is being disseminated for example transport refunds, etc.

National government

Research and learning

1. Provide DLGs with digital equipment and strengthen their role in storing, organising and sharing information and data collected locally about the refugee response in their district.
2. Provide feedback to local organisations that submit reports and data to national monitoring systems.
3. Review and address barriers for local actors to access the data being consolidated at the national level. Share back consolidated reports and analysis on a regular basis.
4. Make use of existing coordination spaces, such as coordination meetings, to allow local actors to share locally collected evidence.

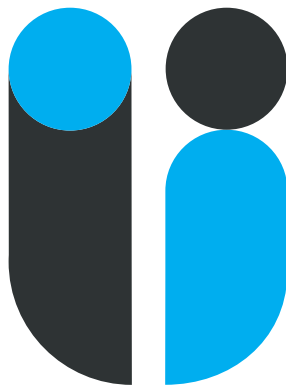
AAP

5. Strengthen and make use of the REF to engage refugees regularly in decision-making.

Annex 1: Contributing Organisations

This page features logos of some of the organizations that participated in the assessment.





U-LEARN

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