

## REGIONAL POSITION PAPER ON THE ROLE OF HUMANITARIAN ACTORS IN UGANDA

### Introduction, Humanitarian situation in the region:

In 2020, a number of local and sub-national humanitarian actors in the Mid-Western Uganda (Albertine and Rwenzori sub-regions) formed a regional humanitarian platform in response to numerous humanitarian crises and emergency situations that caused and continue to inflict human suffering on thousands of refugees, victims of land conflicts, climate change & other natural disasters. Currently, the platform comprises of 15 member actors<sup>1</sup> and covers 16 districts of Kagadi, Kibaale, Hoima, Kikuube, Buliisa, Masindi, Kiryandongo, Kakumiro, Kyenjojo, Ntoroko, Kabarole, Kyegegwa, Bunyangabu, Kamwenge, Bundibugyo and Kasese.

The overarching objective of the platform is to build synergies among the sub national level actors in humanitarian response as well as exchange learning, information and leverage from collective coordination and partnerships. More so the platform helps create avenues for the sub national Humanitarian actors to carry out collective advocacy around humanitarian response action. But also to join other humanitarian actors in saving lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity especially in refugee and internally displaced peoples' camps. The platform focused on supporting access to basic life needs<sup>2</sup> and services, promoting co-existence between host communities and refugee communities and, promoting systems strengthening for protection of children's rights, legal representation of vulnerable and poor communities including survivors sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

It is important to note that the Albertine/Rwenzori region hosts about 322,084 refugees<sup>3</sup>, accounting for 22% of the total refugee community in Uganda. Refugees hosted in the two regions in Kyaka II, Kyangwali and Kiryandongo settlements are mainly from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) following sporadic conflicts and episodes of extreme violence committed by armed groups or militias in Eastern DRC especially in the Kasai and south Kivu regions. Up-to-date, the conflicts continue to cause internal and external displacement of populations, loss of human life and property. Although borders are closed as a result of COVID19 pandemic. Refugees continue to express the need to exit DRC with some most often seen escaping through porous borders in Kikuube, Kanungu and Kisoro Districts.

Similarly, on various occasions, the Rwenzori region faced devastating floods and land slides which have forced families into internally displaced people's camps (IDPs), disrupting livelihoods and social wellbeing. The most recent incident in May 2020 left more than 10,000 people<sup>4</sup> in Kasese homeless, and further destroyed a total of 15 schools, several access roads and as well a health center that provides health services to thousands of people in the region. Such displaced people and disrupted services usually require humanitarian assistance in order to maintain an acceptable level of human dignity.

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*1 World Voices Uganda (WVU), Kitara Civil Society Organization Network (KCSO), Uganda Rural T, Africa Rural University (ARU), Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS), IDI, World Vision, Hope Partners Africa (HPA), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Juna Amagara Ministries Uganda (JAM), Hoima Caritas Development Organisation (HOCADDO), Rwenzori Forum for Peace and Justice (RFPJ) Kabarole Research and Resource centre (KRC), Buliisa Rural Development Organisation (BIRUDO)*

*2 Food, shelter, water, beddings among others. Basic services included basic health services and markets*

*3 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/uga>*

*4 <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/kasese-grapples-health-sanitation-issues-after-floods>*

Most recently, vulnerable communities in the Albertine region have faced and continue to experience displacements as a result of implementation of oil and gas projects by government and oil companies, without Free, Prior and Informed consent. Such projects include the oil waste treatment plant in Rwamutonga which led to brutal evictions of 250 families. The affected families have since been living in an Internally Displaced Persons camp (IDP) in Rwamutonga with no stable source of livelihood. Other oil projects include the construction of an airport in Hoima, Kabaale sub-county and the east African crude oil pipeline (EACOP) which continues to spur land conflicts in the region. Apart from oil related oil projects, the Albertine region has also faced other brutal evictions including the Hoima Sugar project that evicted about 5,000 people in 2015, from an 1,860-hectare piece of land in Kiziranfumbi sub-county. The affected people are since living in Kigyayo camp where they initially depended on charity.

Other displacements and disasters that have caused human suffering include floods in Bundibugyo, Lamia River in which over 3000 people were displaced and left one dead in 2020, Lake Albert floods towards the end of 2020 that displaced residents of Ndaiga and surrounding areas, displacement of over 5 villages with 200 households in Kagadi district due to overflowing of Lake Albert in Ndaiga<sup>5</sup> fish landing sites. The villages included Kamina, Kabukanga, Songaraho, Kitebere and Nyamasoga

## **2. Achievements of the platform since inception**

In the face of disasters and refugee challenges in the region, the platform registered progress despite resource challenges. In regard to this, the platform mobilized local actors to provide relief support (Food and Non- food items) to the communities along the Lake Albert shoreline, affected by floods from the overflow of Lake Albert. The platform continues to actively advocate for re-location of the affected communities to better and safer areas to live. The affected communities at the landing sites were also sensitized about other associated risks.

The platform members also undertook a research on the informal mechanisms for justice practiced in one of the refugee resettlements (Kyaka II) to inform legal interventions in refugee settlements and the findings and recommendations have since been integrated into member legal service providers. Key among them is building capacity of Refugee welfare committees (RWCs) who play a crucial role in resolving conflicts among refugee communities.

Based on research on nutrition in emergencies, platform members also undertook nutrition interventions including provision of nutrient foods such as soya for children under 5 months, Pregnant and lactating mothers. Members with a media background such as URDT used their specialty to share crucial information on nutrition with refugee and host communities to prevent malnutrition among such vulnerable groups.

In view of COVID19 pandemic, the platform also built capacity for her members to adopt COVID19 using new technologies to continue coordinating and responding to humanitarian needs of the region. The platform further held peer-to peer reflections, and interactions through online platforms to keep members energized and encouraged despite challenges of COVID19. Besides, the platform was very instrumental in providing advisory services to the COVID Task Forces and presenting community concerns and also advised on priority populations during the distribution of relief items

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<sup>5</sup> <https://kkcr.urdt.net/2020/06/16/uganda-red-cross-society-donates-non-food-items-to-kagadi-flood-victims/>

and other emergency support. In the same vein, the platform was instrumental in advocating for the respect of Human rights by the security and law enforcement agencies during the COVID19 lockdown and contributed to a reduction in excesses in terms of violations. The platform further bridged the gap in information on COVID 19 and shared information with members in respect to the existing opportunities such as funding etc.

### **How have these aspects affected the region?**

Although hosting refugees comes with a number of advantages, such as creation of market for produce, readily available labour to support production among others, for the region, it has aggravated the challenge of shortage of land and created stress on the limited natural resources such as water, food and energy resources. As a result, this leads to degradation of land and encroachment of protected areas such as swamps and forest reserves especially for energy sources. In the same vein, there is competition for the available social services such as health centres, schools among others.

Floods and landslides on the other hand have resulted into displacements of people, loss of lives and property, destruction of public infrastructure such as hospitals such as Kilembe mines hospital, outbreak of diseases like cholera and generally causing loss of livelihood. This also leaves the victims dependent on aid which is also shrinking over time. For refugees World food program has over time reduced food rations by 30% in response to declining funding in the Covid 19 era. Similarly, with other actors, funding has been affected and this is likely to lead to increased failure to respond to key emergencies.

As a result of COVID 19, government closed over 62 landing sites which affected livelihoods of fishing folks whose ultimate survival was fishing. Most of the affected continue to suffer the effects of the pandemic and can hardly afford the basic necessities of life. The pandemic further caused inability of some people to access courts of law due to restrictions of transport and access to court especially during the lockdown. Further to this, the idleness among most people during the covid19 pandemic led to accelerated cases of defilement and sexual based gender violence as well as high teenage pregnancies, a factor that is proven to halt children's future. There are also reports of an increase in school drop outs after the COVID 19 measures on schools were partly lifted. COVID19 has also led to loss of livelihood due to restrictions on diverse of economic activities such as bars. Further the restrictions imposed halt the platform members activities i.e. community-based research projects were adversely affected. Further to this, the COVID 19 restrictions including on public transport led to many HIV positive clients failing to honor their clinic appointments leading to suppression issues.

For Internal displacements for stance the Project affected person (PAPS) of the oil projects, living in camp set up leaves them with limited options to support their livelihoods. For instance, people who were who were brutally evicted in Rwamutonga to pave way for the oil waste treatment plant have never regained their lives, are psychologically tortured and unable to restore their livelihoods. As such, they live in abject poverty and heavily dependent on support for survival.

### **Key humanitarian stakeholders in the region**

Apart from international humanitarian actors such as care international, save the children, Finn church aid, International Rescue committee, Danish refuge council, Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS), World Vision, Infectious Disease Institute (IDI), there are also local actors that are actively

working to save lives, respond to natural disasters, victims of land conflicts and needs of refugee communities. Among these is World voices Uganda (WVU) which focuses on access to justice, Peace building, conflict management and mitigation. Similarly, Kitara Civil Society Organization Network (KCSON) works towards fostering sustainable development mainly through service delivery monitoring & advocacy, coordination & vulnerable groups' capacity enhancement. On the hand, Uganda Rural Development and training program (URDT) works to economically empower youth, by creating a critical mass of all-around male and female entrepreneurs who have integrity and the capacity to improve their own situation, create their own jobs, are responsible citizens and contribute to larger development goals. Other actors include African Rural University (ARU) which provides transformational education to create effective change agents, while Juna Amagara Ministries Uganda (JAM) raises up vulnerable children in a loving environment and equip each of them with the tools they need to be confident, competent and Christ-centered leaders. Likewise, Hope Partners Africa (HPA) cares for vulnerable children, provide community medical services and provide essential psycho-social services to displaced African populations, KRC, RFPJ, Caritas Hoima Development Organisation (OCADEO)

## **Contribution of local and national humanitarian actors in addressing the humanitarian crises**

The network of humanitarian actors (Local and national) undertook various interventions in response of humanitarian crises. Among such is; Provision of legal aid and representation for victims of SGBV, victims of violence and other community members with access to justice needs. The actors also worked to strengthen informal justice systems within refugee settlement as part of sustainability efforts within the refugee communities. Part of the efforts was building capacity of Refugee Welfare Councils (RWCs) to enable them to dispense timely justice within refugee communities. Within the platform, there are also partners that have worked towards child protection, providing trainings of caregivers and parents on parenting without violence and creating child protection committees within refugee communities. Similarly, platform members have conducted life skills trainings, business and entrepreneurship trainings aimed at empowering youth to gain skills for livelihoods. Some of the platform members have also provided psychosocial support to children using various techniques including games to improve on their wellbeing and avoid trauma as a result of conflict memories. Members of the platform have also provided direct support of food and non-food items such as beddings, clothes and nutritional foods to those facing crises.

On the other hand, platform such as HPA provided sponsorship to ~~xxx~~ orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC) enabling them access education reducing the risks of early marriages, defilement and illiteracy. KCSON delivered of care and treatment services such as community refill to HIV positive clients.

In relation to COVID19, the platform also provided trainings for VHT and local council leaders on COVID19 management. The VHTs were also empowered to create community awareness sessions on COVID19 and how it can be prevented. Likewise, for members to adopt well and effectively work during the Covid 19 period, the platform organised trainings on how to use the zoom platform as means of communication for coordination and communication with different partners to lobby for aid and support for the affected communities.

In relation to advocacy, platform members advocated for the compensation to persons initially affected by the acquisition of lands without Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC). Although it involved long process, a few of those affected have been compensated. In view of floods and landslides, the platform members have been actively engaged in advocacy towards relocation of victims to safer places. Although the victims initially refused to relocate, the platform continued to create awareness about risks associated with flood prone areas. A number of commitments have been made by government and local leadership and the platform will continue to follow members. Members of the platform also aggressively advocated for representation civil society representation on the district COVID 19 task force to ensure that victims of the pandemic equitably benefit from available support.

### **Constraints/ challenges faced while addressing the humanitarian crises in your region**

Members of the platform continued to face the challenge of inadequate capacity in terms of human resource, funds and infrastructure to deal with crises and emergency situations. Most emergency responses require a lot of resources to facilitate staff, transport as well as purchase food and non-food items. Unfortunately, funding for local entities in humanitarian work is not readily available. This had been worsened by the Covid19 pandemic which has had negative impact on key funders.

The lack of risk and disaster management and response plans and funds by most districts in the region creates a non-supportive environment for response to disasters. Most times, districts look up to the humanitarian actors to manage all costs and proceedings yet they too have a big role to play. The platform is looking at supporting districts in development of response plans but also advocate for funding to support districts that have continuously faced challenges related to disasters and emergencies. District hosting refugees have also been promised more funding by UNCHR following previous advocacy efforts. Most districts constitute ad hoc committees as and when disaster strike.

Other challenges include 1) COVID 19 government restrictions arising from curfew and SOPs regulations and adjusting to the new normal challenges. 2) slow response from Government of Uganda (GoU) and other key stakeholders in provision to humanitarian support 3) Inadequate preparedness from responsible mandated agencies 4) Fragmented response actions and lack of Disaster Early warning systems

7. What effect/impact has COVID 19 had on the local and national humanitarian actors in realisation of their role in the humanitarian sector?

- Limited movements on the part of the humanitarian actors which eventually impacted on the quality and timely response
- Reduction of opportunities for resource mobilisation
- Staff turnover as a result of dwindling funding
- The challenges that are associated with “*the new normal*” way of coordination mechanisms. I.e adjusting to Zoom and working from Home. This limited effective delivery of response actions.

8. What are some of suggestions/what needs to be done to strengthen your role more as LNHA and your sustained engagements in the humanitarian sector of Uganda?

- Capacity building in the disaster and risk management

- Support for the platform members to develop comprehensive disaster and risk management and response plans
- Advocacy Plans
- Benchmarking and case studies and scenarios in regard to the disaster and risk management practices
- Strengthen coordination and synergy among the platform members
- Platform members engage with government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and Local Governments on various humanitarian needs.
- Establishment and implementation of referral pathway mechanisms. This will aid proper coordination, enhance synergy and leverage form various capacities resident within and outside the platform membership.
- Develop a comprehensive data base for subnational and national Humanitarian Actors, likeminded actors etc
- Joint resource mobilization and covenanting/program implementation
- International and national Humanitarian Actors should work with Local Humanitarian Actors to ensure local content and leverage from the proximity with the affected communities.