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LAUNCH OF THE HUMANITARIAN PLATFORM FOR LOCAL AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN UGANDA

Improved Transparency, Accountability
and Coordination among Local and
National Organizations in the
Humanitarian Sector in Uganda



Table of Contents

List of acronyms.....	2
Foreword.....	3
1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT.....	2
1.1. Establishment of the humanitarian platform.....	5
2. THE HUMANITARIAN PLATFORM FOR LOCAL AND NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN UGANDA.....	6
2.1. Key objectives of the platform.....	6
2.2. Membership.....	7
2.3. What has been done so far?.....	7
3. THE LAUNCH.....	7
3.1. On the question of accountability and transparency ...	8
3.2. Humanitarian action as an entry point to achieving Sustainable Development Goals.....	8
3.3. The role of government and a need for a facilitative NGO operating environment	9
3.4. What has government done and can do to support the platform?.....	9
4. WHAT NOW? KEY ENTRY POINTS FOR CHANGE... ..	11
4.1. What should the platform be focusing on? What should it guard against?	12
4.2. Beyond just accountability to effectiveness and efficiency	12
4.3. It is only moral that we act and relent not... ..	13

List of acronyms

FBOs	Faith Based Organisations
INGOs	International Non-Government Organisations
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNNGOF	Uganda National NGO Forum

Foreword

Uganda National NGO Forum is thrilled to share the report from the launch of the Humanitarian Platform for Local and National Organisations, which was took place on 7th March 2018, on the theme *‘Improved Transparency, Accountability and Coordination among Local and National Organizations in the Humanitarian Sector in Uganda.’*

Increasingly, local and national organizations are concerned that the humanitarian ecosystem excludes them; does not recognize them as first responders. During the Humanitarian Consultative Meeting on Uganda’s Refugee Crisis and National Civil Society Response held in June 2017, CSOs underscored the need for an open platform as a mechanism to strengthen the coordination and contribution of local and national organizations to the humanitarian system in the country.

The launch of the Humanitarian for Local and National Organizations brought together over 120 representatives from Government, Members of Parliament, Development Partners, UN Agencies, Academia, Civil Society and the Private Sector; and this space enabled participants to collectively recognize, identify, create and strengthen relationships with potential humanitarian stakeholders. The meeting also provided an opportunity for a rich and meaningful discussion on how the platform can tap into various opportunities to sustain humanitarian response engagements.

Throughout the event, discussions focused on strategic areas to focus on and opportunities both at national and international level, most especially the ongoing processes feeding into the localization agenda such as the Grand bargain, Charter for Change, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework at national level among others. Key humanitarian stakeholders also pledged their support towards realization of the vision of the Platform. Members of the Platform endorsed an Accountability Charter where they committed to be more transparent and accountable to the financial management and humanitarian standards; to strengthen their institutional and technical capacities for effective humanitarian response and preparedness; and provide humanitarian services in an efficient and cost-effective manner for the benefit of the affected people.

I wish to recognize the invaluable contributions of IKEA Foundation and OXFAM. I would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to the Chief Guest Hon. Eng. Hillary Onek the Minister of Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees; the Keynote Speaker, Mr. Ali Abdi the Chief of Mission-International Organization for Migration; the Panelists-Mr. Jens Hesemann, Senior Field Coordinator- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Mr. Robert Kwesiga, the Secretary General Uganda Red Cross Society, Hon. Lyndro Komakech, Chairperson-Greater North Parliamentary Forum and Mr. Abdul Muwanika, Acting Commmissioner Monitoring and Evaluation, Office of the Prime Minister and other dignitaries that graced the launch of the Humanitarian Platform for Local and National Organisations.



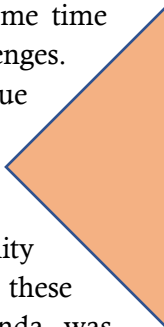
Richard Ssewakiryanga
Executive Director
Uganda National NGO Forum

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The world has witnessed one of the largest immigration strains in the recent history, caused broadly by increased conflict, persecution, famine and the search for better economic prospects. Currently Uganda is home to over 1.3 million refugees – the highest in the whole world – a position which among other things is due to Uganda’s open-door policy, the hospitality of the Ugandan people and a model refugee policy. This has undoubtedly imposed a strain on domestic resources. The government has nonetheless created room while at the same time dealing with own domestic development challenges. This transformative stance is certainly unique especially now, at a time when asylum space is shrinking in many parts of the world¹.

It is indubitable that the international community has been at the center of supporting these humanitarian efforts. Moreover, when Uganda was dealing with a fresh influx of asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who were fleeing inter-communal violence in the country’s volatile Ituri region, feeling the increased burden, the president of Uganda, H.E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres convened the Refugee Solidarity Summit in Kampala to persuade the international community to raise \$2 billion but only managed \$358.2 million. This partially indicates that the humanitarian system is increasingly becoming unable to meet the rising needs of crisis affected countries and the gap is increasing over time². In 2007, for example, 50% of the humanitarian disasters had an international response but this has since reduced to 25%.

Now, while it is easy to qualify and quantify the international organization’s response and contribution to humanitarian crises in the country, what remains more nuanced and less recognized is the contribution and support of the host communities, local and national humanitarian organizations who oftentimes are the first responders in events of crisis. Traditionally, in Uganda, domestic actors have been instrumental and at the forefront of humanitarian response through provision of services such as water, food, shelter, education, humanitarian advocacy, legal support, livelihood, capacity building among others, yet there exists little documentation of these efforts. This makes the humanitarian system look exclusive – excluding the type of organizational life that is in communities and is neither fully recognized nor documented. This observation is augmented by Mr. Ali Abdi, the Chief of Mission – International Organization for Migration (IOM) who, while speaking



“When you talk about humanitarian action, eyes turn to international actors. However, before you get World Food Program there is Community Food Program. Because of those actions that are not always visible, it is easy to overlook these efforts. It is thus important to have a conversation that is more structured and not abstract about their significance” **Mr. Richard Ssewakiryanga - Executive Director, Uganda National NGO Forum.**

¹ Mr. Ali Abdi’s Speech at the Launch of the Uganda National and Local NGOs Humanitarian Platform, Kampala - Uganda

² OCHA, 2013 (f) World Humanitarian Data and Trends

at the launch of the Humanitarian Platform for Local and National Organizations in Uganda contended that, for a longtime, the humanitarian system has been dominated by international actors.

Despite the increased amount of international aid, it has not kept with the rising need in terms of numbers. Whatever amount of money and human resource, the stress is big. The key therefore, is to bring to the fold other actors and people. This would mean mobilizing local and national actors who have been doing some work without recognition. While it is true that most of these actors may not be the trained experts in humanitarian response, it only makes the need for capacity building and training in effective response even more relevant and an imperative.

1.1. Establishment of the humanitarian platform

The foregoing contextual exposition is what



Mr. Richard Ssewakiryanga - Executive Director, Uganda National NGO Forum making his remarks about the humanitarian platform

undergirded the establishment of the Humanitarian Platform for Local and National Organizations in Uganda. It should be recalled that, in June 2017, local and national organizations under the auspices of the Uganda National NGO Forum and OXFAM Uganda held conversations about the growing influx of refugees in the country and the fact that response ‘seemed’ [sic] to only come from the international actors yet a significant burden was being borne by local actors. Among the key recommendations from these discussions were; the call for a more structured dialogue and the resolution to establish a humanitarian platform - one that will act as a mechanism to strengthen coordination of local and

national organizations, profile and make visible local, organic, humanitarian and human actions.

The platform has since been established, an interim steering committee constituted. It is expected that the platform members will be the primary source of support before the humanitarian international agencies and government. The platform was launched on the 7th of March 2018 at Hotel Africana, Kampala. The launch of the platform attracted over 120 representatives from international, national and local NGOs, Local government, government MDAs, academia, development partners, media and other well-wishers. The highly powered event was characterized by a much-needed debate about the significance, and future effectiveness of the platform. All speakers welcomed the idea of the platform as an important step towards a more structured domestic response to humanitarian crises in the country.



Ms. Rose Atim - OXFAM's Acting Country Director delivering welcome remarks

This report provides serves a dual purpose: it provides a snapshot of information about the humanitarian platform - its background, membership, vision and objectives. The report also provides a brief narrative about the launch of the platform, participation and synthesis of the key issues in the debate in the quest for a more sustainable humanitarian response mechanism. This structure is particularly adopted to provide readers with a fair understanding of context that precipitated the establishment of the platform, its place in the global and domestic humanitarian framework and key entry points for transformation and growth.

2. THE HUMANITARIAN PLATFORM FOR LOCAL AND NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN UGANDA

Over the years, the humanitarian system has been a preserve of international actors particularly United Nations (UN) Agencies and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). In light of the shrinking humanitarian aid and increasing emergencies globally, relying on the international humanitarian actors alone is not sustainable. It is therefore important that cost effective and sustainable humanitarian response mechanisms-that recognize the feasible leadership of local and national humanitarian actors are adopted, to ensure efficacy and impact of the available resources.

In Uganda, the potential of local and national actors and organizations in humanitarian response and preparedness has not been fully exploited. Increasingly, there are concerns by local and national NGOs that the current humanitarian response does not fully recognize them as critical stakeholders in humanitarian response work in spite of being first responders. Furthermore, their contribution to the broader policy debate on humanitarian response in Uganda remains minimal and is constrained by limited capacity, poor coordination, limited funding, among others.

The humanitarian platform for local and national organizations in Ugandan is thus established in response to the above context, to contribute to “strong local and national organizations, that are well coordinated, informed and have the ability to influence the humanitarian agenda”.

2.1. Key objectives of the platform

- To promote information sharing, learning and knowledge management for better humanitarian preparedness and response.
- To strengthen the institutional and technical capacities of local and national organizations to influence the humanitarian agenda.
- To strengthen coordination with local and national organizations and enhance engagement with other humanitarian actors.
- To act as a collective voice for local and national organizations to influence the humanitarian agenda at national, regional and global levels.
- To promote partnerships and collaborations between the platform members and other humanitarian stakeholders.

2.2. Membership

The membership of the platform is open to local and national organizations that work or are interested in humanitarian preparedness and response. These include, community-based organizations, district and national based organizations and faith-based organizations. The platform also welcomes individuals, international agencies, government entities and authorities that have an interest or stake in seeing that local and national organizations play a more active and effective role in Uganda's humanitarian system.

What has been done so far?

of the Prime Minister, the platform convened a high level meeting on the 'humanitarian localization agenda' that birthed the draft Kampala Humanitarian Local Content Agreement; the platform participates in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework Steering Committee to amplify the voice of local and national NGOs; and recently participated at the Solidarity Summit and made the case to roll out the Grand Bargain³ and the localization agenda at country level. The platform convener⁴ continues to compile a database of local and national humanitarian organizations.

3. THE LAUNCH



The platform was launched at a high level dialogue organized by the Uganda National NGO Forum on the 7th March 2018. The Dialogue attracted key actors in the global and local humanitarian system, including; representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organization for Migration, the Office of the Prime Minister, Members of Parliament, Members of the Humanitarian Platform steering committee and the Minister of Relief, Disaster and Refugees who was the guest of honor at the function. Media practitioners and representatives of local and national humanitarian organizations and well-wishers were also present.

The key issues discussed at the dialogue spanned different topics which are central to the future, effectiveness and sustainability of the platform. Key among these issues highlighted in this report include; the question of accountability and transparency, effectiveness of humanitarian aid and nature of partnerships, the role of the government. The ideas expressed therein and drawing on the key

³ The Grand Bargain is an agreement between more than 30 of the biggest donors and aid providers, which aims to get more means into the hands of people in need. It was first proposed by the former UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing in its report "Too Important to Fail: Addressing the Humanitarian Financing Gap" as one of the solutions to address the humanitarian financing gap.

⁴ The Platform is convened by the Uganda National NGO Forum.

recommendations from the discussion will be instructive in shaping the debate on the humanitarian agenda, not only in Uganda but also the rest of the globe.

3.1. On the question of accountability and transparency ...

The Grand Bargain seeks a stronger role of local and national actors. In the same, there's an increased emphasis on the aspects of accountability and transparency – accountability to both the beneficiaries of the humanitarian aid, and towards the financial chain. Mr. Jens Hesemann, the Senior Field Coordinator of United Nations High Commission for Refugees – Uganda, believes that these accountability demands, largely driven by donors and international accounting standards have become more stringent and sometimes border on becoming a bottle neck to the efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance. It is not surprising that the commitments of the platform and its charter underscore the importance of accountability and transparency. What this means therefore is that local organizations need to build strong accounting systems.

Conversely, while on the surface, this appears defensible, the sophistication of the systems often demanded and required by donors do not correlate with the resource envelope and or capacity of local and national organizations. To this end, Mr. Richard Ssewakiryanga, the Executive Director of the Uganda National NGO Forum argues that it would be fallacious to assume that being national or local organization means that you are less accountable. He believes that the accountability systems in place (at local organizations) are oftentimes fit for purpose and are a question of equivalence. He thus recommends that the stakes should be as high as the magnitude of the projects and infrastructure and that accountability demands should always correspond to the size of the organizations.

3.2. Humanitarian action as an entry point to achieving Sustainable Development Goals



Mr. Ali Abdi - Chief of Mission IOM delivering opening remarks at the launch

The 'New Way of Working' adopted by the UN Agencies and the World Bank at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, underscores the importance of working to not only meet the humanitarian needs but also reduce them over time. This implies that whenever possible, humanitarian action should be undertaken in a way that can contribute towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Speaking on behalf of Ms. Rosa Malango, the UN Resident Coordinator and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative in Uganda, Mr. Ali Abdi

argued that the SDGs were not set out just to meet the existing needs, but also reduce risk, vulnerability and the overall levels of need. To achieve this, it would require providing a reference framework for both humanitarian and development actors to contribute to the common vision of a future in which no one is left behind - where people and the planet are placed at the epicenter of all actions.

This call was reiterated by various speakers at the dialogue who contended that refugee and or humanitarian response is not only a humanitarian issue but also a development one. What this means therefore is for the humanitarian platform is to engage and work with its membership to design and adopt modalities of support that whenever possible meet the development needs of the communities. This will also call for advocacy to ensure that government efforts also link short term humanitarian assistance to long term development goals.

3.3. The role of government and a need for a facilitative NGO operating environment

“The platform should work with parliament – parliament needs to be part of the platform and devise means on how it can protect the members from state interference.” **Hon. Komakech Lyandro speaking at the launch.**

The NGO – Government Relationship in Uganda can be arguably characterized as ‘cat and mouse’ with the later often suspicious of NGO intentions and activities which has triggered a myriad of regressive actions towards some actors and enactment of legislations and regulations that are below the minimum standards for a pluralistic society. Some national and local non-government actors have oftentimes had to navigate snags of this regressive NGO operating environment as they purvey through their operations. Whereas others, under the auspices of Uganda National NGO Forum have engaged in more than a decade long collective advocacy in the pursuit of more facilitative NGO legislations.

In the recent past, humanitarian organizations such as ActionAid – Uganda, have had to face the crowds of the regressive state in form of sieges on their offices and closures of their bank accounts. This, some participants at the dialogue believe is as a result of negative attitudes of the state towards NGOs which hampers the progress of humanitarian efforts especially in a region with high vulnerabilities. Government representatives at the launch recognized the significance of these concerns and called for more structured partnerships between the humanitarian platform and the government, specifically the Office of the Prime Minister and the Parliament of Uganda. More so, the Parliament of Uganda needs to be part of the platform and devise means on how parliament can protect the platform members from state interference while they carry out their activities.

3.4. What has government done and can do to support the platform?

As earlier indicated, Uganda has a history of providing a haven for refugees while dealing with challenges its own development. The influx of refugees in the country has grown exponentially in the past five years. For many countries in the world, this would be a huge emergency, yet Uganda has ungrudgingly taken this responsibility in its stride. Uganda has a model policy and impressively, local



Hon. Hillary Onek - Minister of Disaster, Relief and Refugees delivering his speech shortly before launching the platform

and national NGOs have undertaken a significant share of the burden. The communities in which crisis victims are hosted have also had to bear the cost of inconvenience and stress on local facilities and resources. Therefore, to ensure that NGOs are mainstreamed into the national accounting system, the Office of the Prime Minister established a department of Monitoring and Evaluation for NGOs and agencies.

In as far as what government can provide, in form of support to the platform, Mr. Abdul Muwanika, who represented the Prime Minister at the dialogue

indicated that it will depend on the results produced by the platform. More so, Hon. Hillary Onek also added that the Office of Prime Minister has not enough manpower and as such simply coordinates humanitarian action in the country. The deficiencies in resources has also hampered effective disaster response. He however believes that collectively, working with the platform, these challenges can be addressed adding that the platform will not only promote coordination but also partnerships between the NGOs and government.

Refugee hosting areas in Uganda⁵ have some of the poorest communities in the country and arguably in the world, shouldn't refugee hosting be a criterion to look at for development projects? Now, linked to the question of providing humanitarian aid in way that helps achieve sustainable development goals and the role of government, is the question of how the host communities benefit. In response to this question, the Minister indicated that for every \$100 expenditure on refugee response in Uganda, 30% goes to the host community. These resources often go to expanding schools, hospitals, and other development infrastructure which has a transformative effect on the host communities.

⁵ Some of the refugee hosting districts in Uganda include; Adjumani, Arua, Hoima, Isingiro, Kamwenge, Kiryandongo, Koboko, Kyegegwa, Lamwo , Moyo, among others

4. WHAT NOW? KEY ENTRY POINTS FOR CHANGE...



Mr. Robert Kwesiga, the Secretary General Uganda Redcross Society

Nothing was more pronounced than the fact that local actors are oftentimes the first responders in times of crisis. This was echoed by Mr. Robert Kwesiga, Secretary General Uganda Red Cross who noted that local actors have comparative advantage, knowledge of the local terrain and proximity to the crises. There was thus a particular emphasis on the need and importance of empowering and recognizing local actors. This is what makes the platform an imperative - providing an opportunity for improved diagnosis (when something goes wrong) and provide coordination in response to avoid duplication of interventions. The platform should also carryout training

programs to improve the skills and knowledge of local actors. Speaking on behalf of Oxfam, Ms. Rose Atim, the Acting Director – Oxfam Uganda emphasized the fact that the platform members will also be the primary source of support before the humanitarian international agencies and government.

In the final analysis, there were numerous statements of support from both the international actors, donors and government which were flash lights of hope - hope for a more meaningful engagement with the increasing need for humanitarian assistance in Uganda. The essence of this support is rooted in a statement by the Minister for Disaster, relief and refugees - Hon. Hillary Onok who expressed his gratitude for the invitation to be part of the intervention to make local humanitarian response more credible and legitimate. He further underscored the need for more accountability especially to the

Summary of Key Recommendations

The Platform should:

- Engage and work with its membership to design and adopt modalities of support that whenever possible meet the development needs of the communities.
- Intensify advocacy efforts to ensure that government efforts also link short term humanitarian assistance to long term development goals.
- Establish structured and formal partnership between the humanitarian platform and the government, specifically the Office of the Prime Minister and the Parliament of Uganda
- Appoint representatives to the Humanitarian response coordination team
- FastTrack the establishment of the database to act as a depository where international actors locate the right actor to engage with locally.

beneficiary – the recipient of humanitarian assistance, emphasized the need for effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and encouraged actors to keep the resolve in the pursuit of this moral duty - work for the people deserving of support.

4.1. What should the platform be focusing on? What should it guard against?

“... for us to achieve our goals, participation of everyone will be very critical. The role international agencies play is very different from what local actors play, bringing them together will bring a very good recipe...” **Jackson Olema**

Some regions in Uganda have an elaborate history of conflict. Sadly however, it is most of these communities that host the largest number of refugees in the country. It is thus highly imperative that humanitarian assistance in Uganda adopts methods that are conflict sensitive. This implies looking to the historical and socio-economic context of the host communities for lessons on the relevant mechanisms of response. Secondly, the establishment and launch of the humanitarian platform for local and national organizations in Uganda is by no means an effort to discount the contribution of the international actors. What it focusses on is to harness both the potential of local actors and work in complementarity with international actors to realize the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian assistance in the country. For this to happen, Mr. Jackson Olema, one of the members of the platform believes that it will require the participation of everyone to harness the comparative advantage of each actor.

4.2. Beyond just accountability to effectiveness and efficiency

“... the key question you need to ask yourself is whether you have changed communities within which you operate, ... I think organizations need to focus more on results, efficiency and effectiveness not just accountability.” **Hon. Hillary Onek**

In his speech, , the Minister of Disaster, Relief and Refugees, Hon. Hillary Onek emphasized the need for organizations to look beyond accountability and focus on efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. Quoting examples from the current local actors, Hon. Onek



Hon. Eng. Hillary Onek signing on the accountability charter while launching the humanitarian platform for local and national organisations

argued that oftentimes, the operational costs of delivering aid are much higher than the actual expenditure on assistance. This, he believes ought to be addressed in order to achieve the desired impact. To do this, organizations need to adopt result-oriented approaches in the planning, implementation and monitoring of their interventions. He also called upon international actors and donors to make use local and national organizations to reduce operational and overhead costs which would make humanitarian action more cost effective.

4.3. It is only moral that we act and relent not...

“...so, I encourage you, take hurt, keep the resolve to work for the people in need ... the challenge may seem insurmountable ... but focus on this journey that we have taken, bring on board as many well-wishers as possible...” **Hon. Hillary Onek.**

At the heart of humanitarian work is the philosophical understanding that each one of us is our brother's or sister's keepers; the appreciation of the fact that those who are successful and enjoying comfort have an obligation to those who are not - often amongst us and across the world; that it is only moral that whenever possible each one of us extends a helping hand to those in need. This was at the heart of the minister's concluding clarion call just before he launched the platform - that all of us keep the resolve and continue to work for those in need.

