

HPG Working Paper

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

Progress in Uganda

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Methodology	1
1.2	Outline of the report	1
2	The Global Compact on Refugees and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework	2
3	Uganda in brief: refugee hosting and its impacts	4
3.1	Uganda’s refugee model	4
3.2	Refugee livelihoods and the reality of self-reliance in Uganda	4
3.3	Factors influencing Uganda’s approach	5
4	CRRF in Uganda: a model architecture and process?	8
4.1	The CRRF in Uganda: timelines and strategies	8
4.2	CRRF and financing: little progress on responsibility-sharing	9
4.3	CRRF Uganda: a positive process, catalysing shifts in approaches	12
5	Putting the CRRF into action: livelihoods and refugee self-reliance	13
5.1	Settlements: a flawed model for refugee self-reliance that is not being addressed	13
5.2	Weak CRRF strategy, prioritisation and buy-in for the response plans	13
5.3	Lack of a clear vision and costed plan for self-reliance	14
5.4	A compact without trust: corruption, lack of capacity and inefficiency	14
6	Supporting the CRRF: options for donors and advocates	16
6.1	Policy shifts aimed at promoting self-reliance within and outside settlements	16
6.2	Prioritising investments in jobs and livelihoods	16
6.3	Supporting ‘whole of government’ approaches to refugee management	17
6.4	More predictable development funding	17
7	References	18

Tables and figures

Tables

Table 1: Refugees and asylum-seekers in Uganda, by country of origin	5
Table 2: Composition of the CRRF Steering Group in Uganda	9
Table 3: Timeline of key milestones in Uganda’s CRRF process	10

Figures

Figure 1: Refugees and asylum-seekers in Uganda, by camp	6
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Acronyms

CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IFI	international financial institution
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LDPG	Local Development Partners' Group
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
ReHoPE	Refugee and Host Population Empowerment
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1 Introduction

1.1 Methodology

This study is part of an IKEA Foundation-commissioned research project by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at ODI. The overall objective is to contribute towards realising the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The research takes stock of current progress towards reaching CRRF goals in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda, with an emphasis on refugee self-reliance in each country.

This paper on Uganda is one of four country papers which were originally drafted to inform IKEA Foundation's strategy for refugees. It draws on an in-depth literature review of published and grey literature as well as 30 interviews with key stakeholders, including from national and donor governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private sector actors.

1.2 Outline of the report

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the CRRF and the GCR. Uganda's refugee-hosting model and the factors that influence it are discussed in Section 3. Section 4 examines the status of the CRRF in Uganda. It explores the CRRF process and application in Uganda; the degree to which the objectives and principles of the CRRF are being applied in practice; challenges to CRRF implementation; and the catalytic role played by the CRRF in promoting coordination and developmental approaches. Section 5 explores how the CRRF is being put into action in Uganda, including efforts to promote self-reliance for refugees. Section 6 identifies possible entry points for advocacy and assistance to sustain and strengthen the CRRF in Uganda.

2 The Global Compact on Refugees and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

On 19 September 2016, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, reaffirming the importance of international refugee rights and committing to strengthen protection and support for people on the move (UNGA, 2016). The Declaration focuses on supporting those countries and communities that host a large number of refugees and to promote refugee inclusion, ensuring the involvement of development actors from an early stage and bringing together national and local authorities, regional and international financial institutions, donor agencies and the private and civil society sectors to generate a ‘whole of society’ approach to refugee responses (UNHCR, 2018a). Many of these concepts are not new. However, the adoption of the New York Declaration is viewed as a welcome sign of continued global solidarity and commitment to comprehensive responses to refugee protection at a time of unprecedented displacement and retrenchment from multilateralism.

The New York Declaration called upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to develop and initiate the application of a CRRF in specific situations that featured large-scale movements of refugees and protracted refugee situations, with four key objectives:

1. Ease pressure on host countries.
2. Enhance refugee self-reliance.
3. Expand access to third-country solutions.
4. Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

On 17 December 2018, the UNGA affirmed the non-binding GCR, following two years of consultations (UNGA, 2018). The GCR is a framework for more predictable and equitable

responsibility-sharing, in recognition that solutions to refugee situations require international cooperation. The CRRF is incorporated into the GCR, and the two frameworks share the same four objectives (identified above).

The GCR sets out a ‘programme of action’ with concrete measures to meet its objectives. This includes arrangements to share responsibilities – mainly through a Global Refugee Forum (every four years, with the first in December 2019) and support for specific situations as well as arrangements for review through the Global Refugee Forum and other mechanisms.

Commentators have highlighted numerous challenges associated with the CRRF and GCR. Key among them are the exclusion of key actors (such as communities and local authorities), insufficient financial support from the international community and the limited engagement of the private sector (Montemurro and Wendt, 2017; Thomas, 2017; ICVA, 2018). Commentators have noted, along with the other shortcomings, that the CRRF lacks a monitoring framework even though it had been foreseen in the GCR (Huang et al., 2018). In 2018, UNHCR presented a Global Dashboard that assesses five outcome areas charting progress towards the CRRF objectives but noted that it will only be possible to measure this several years after the CRRF’s implementation (UNHCR, 2018c). However, with the first Global Refugee Forum scheduled for December 2019, there is interest among many stakeholders to capture progress under the CRRF.

Uganda is viewed as a forerunner and early adopter of the CRRF. Its progressive approach to refugees ‘both predate[s] and inspired the negotiations for the

New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants' (UNHCR 2018b: 4). Given this long-standing policy of welcoming refugees and encouraging refugee integration, many international actors view Uganda as almost a 'proof of concept' for the CRRF.

The Uganda case thus provides important insights into the degree to which the CRRF process can galvanise national and international commitment and support as well as serve as a catalytic force to advance refugee inclusion and self-reliance.

3 Uganda in brief: refugee hosting and its impacts

3.1 Uganda's refugee model

Refugee self-reliance has long been at the heart of Uganda's approach to refugees. Hailed as having some of the most progressive refugee policies in the world, Uganda gives refugees the right to work, establish businesses and access public services, including education and health. Refugees are not encamped – upon arrival they are granted plots of land in village-like settlements – and they are free to move, subject to administrative restrictions, although assistance is only provided to those residing in the settlements. The Refugee Act 2006 and Refugee Regulations 2010 form the basis of refugees' rights in Uganda and, according to UNHCR, 'unquestionably constitutes the most progressive refugee law in Africa' (UNHCR, 2018b: 3). Settlements were first established in 1958 and, since 1999, refugee self-reliance through agricultural production has been central to Uganda's approach (World Bank, 2016).

Concurrent emergencies in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi led to close to 1 million people arriving in Uganda between June 2016 and July 2018. With 1.24 million refugees as of March 2019 (see Table 1), the country is now home to the largest refugee population in Africa and the third largest globally. Those aged 17 years and below make up 61% of the refugee population. Although the refugee profile was disproportionately female in the early days of the crisis, this has shifted downwards to 52% as displacement has become more protracted (UNHCR, 2019g).

These large numbers have had major implications in terms of supporting development approaches to refugee hosting and the achievement of self-reliance. High numbers are not the only issue. Uganda has a long list of strategies designed to give effect to its

settlement model, to refugee integration into national service delivery systems and to achievement of self-reliance.¹ However, these strategies have suffered from a lack of development funding and experience to put them into practice and limitations in terms of capacities of the Ugandan government (World Bank, 2016). As outlined below, refugees face considerable obstacles to achieving self-reliance on limited and poor land in remote settlements.

3.2 Refugee livelihoods and the reality of self-reliance in Uganda

Uganda's progressive policies and decades-long strategies promoting refugee self-reliance have not been proven to be effective. Most refugees live in extreme poverty and food insecurity. Studies show that 80% live below the international poverty line of \$1.90/day (FAO and OPM, 2018) and 89% of refugee households had recently experienced food insecurity (Development Pathways, 2018). Alarming evidence also suggests that under Uganda's current approach, refugees do not become more resilient with time (*ibid.*). This has led to commentators calling for a more honest conversation about the Ugandan model (Hovil, 2018) and greater recognition that self-reliance policies may not necessarily lead to self-reliance outcomes (Betts et al., 2019).

With more than 90% of refugees officially residing in rural settlements (though this number may be inflated due to high numbers of 'self-settled' refugees in urban areas), agriculture is a primary source of livelihoods, with 95% of refugees and 97% of those in host communities engaging in crop production in northern Uganda (UNHCR, 2019f). However, much

1 These include the 1999 Self-Reliance Strategy, the Development Assistance to Refugee Hosting Areas Strategy in 2005 and the Settlement Transformative Agenda in 2015, which was supported by the UN and World Bank's Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHoPE) Strategic Framework. Through the Settlement Transformative Agenda, refugee-hosting districts were also recognised in Uganda's National Development Plan II 2015–2020 as particularly vulnerable, although refugees were not integrated into national plans.

Table 1: Refugees and asylum-seekers in Uganda, by country of origin

Country of origin	Number of refugees and asylum-seekers	Percentage of refugee and asylum-seeker population
South Sudan	808,554	65.2%
DRC	332,506	26.8%
Burundi	38,526	3.1%
Somalia	27,899	2.3%
Rwanda	15,170	1.2%
Eritrea	11,247	0.9%
Sudan	2,738	0.2%
Ethiopia	2,545	0.2%
Others	727	0.1%
Total	1,239,912	100.0%

Source: UNHCR (2019e)

of this is for household consumption or subsistence: only an estimated 22% of refugees sell part of their produce (FAO and OPM, 2018). Limited access to land is the foremost challenge. Studies indicate that between one and two acres of land is required for self-sufficiency, but only 9% of refugee households have more than half an acre and only 3% have more than one acre (Development Pathways, 2018; UNHCR, 2018d). Across refugee-hosting districts, agriculture is characterised by low production and productivity, limited access to agriculture technologies, tools and quality assets, high vulnerability to climate change and high post-harvest losses (UNHCR, 2019f).

There are few alternative, non-agricultural livelihood opportunities in these remote, under-developed locations. One survey reported that only 2% of refugee households have managed to obtain salaried employment (Development Pathways, 2018). Overall, 13% of refugees aged 15 years and above are classified as self-employed and one in five households has at least one member engaged in informal trade and services. However, wages are low and there are several barriers to gaining employment, including language, lack of documentation indicating education and skills, and limited social networks (ibid.). Limited access to land for cultivation and the geographic isolation of settlements means that most refugees remain heavily dependent on humanitarian assistance.

There are an estimated 100,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Kampala and unknown numbers in other secondary cities (see Figure 1).² The largest refugee populations in the capital are from the DRC (49%), Somalia (25%) and South Sudan (5%) (Agora,

2018). Despite opting out of Uganda’s ‘self-reliance’ model, these ‘self-settled’ urban refugees are in many ways more self-reliant than their settlement-dwelling counterparts. Indeed, some Somali refugees in Kampala have higher incomes than Ugandan nationals, other urban refugees and settlement residents (Betts et al., 2019). Urban refugees generally have better livelihoods options, but they struggle with discrimination, expensive rent, difficulties in obtaining business licenses and access to services (Monteith et al., 2017). Many aid actors acknowledge that there is a major gap in terms of both knowledge of and assistance to urban refugees, particularly those residing in secondary cities.

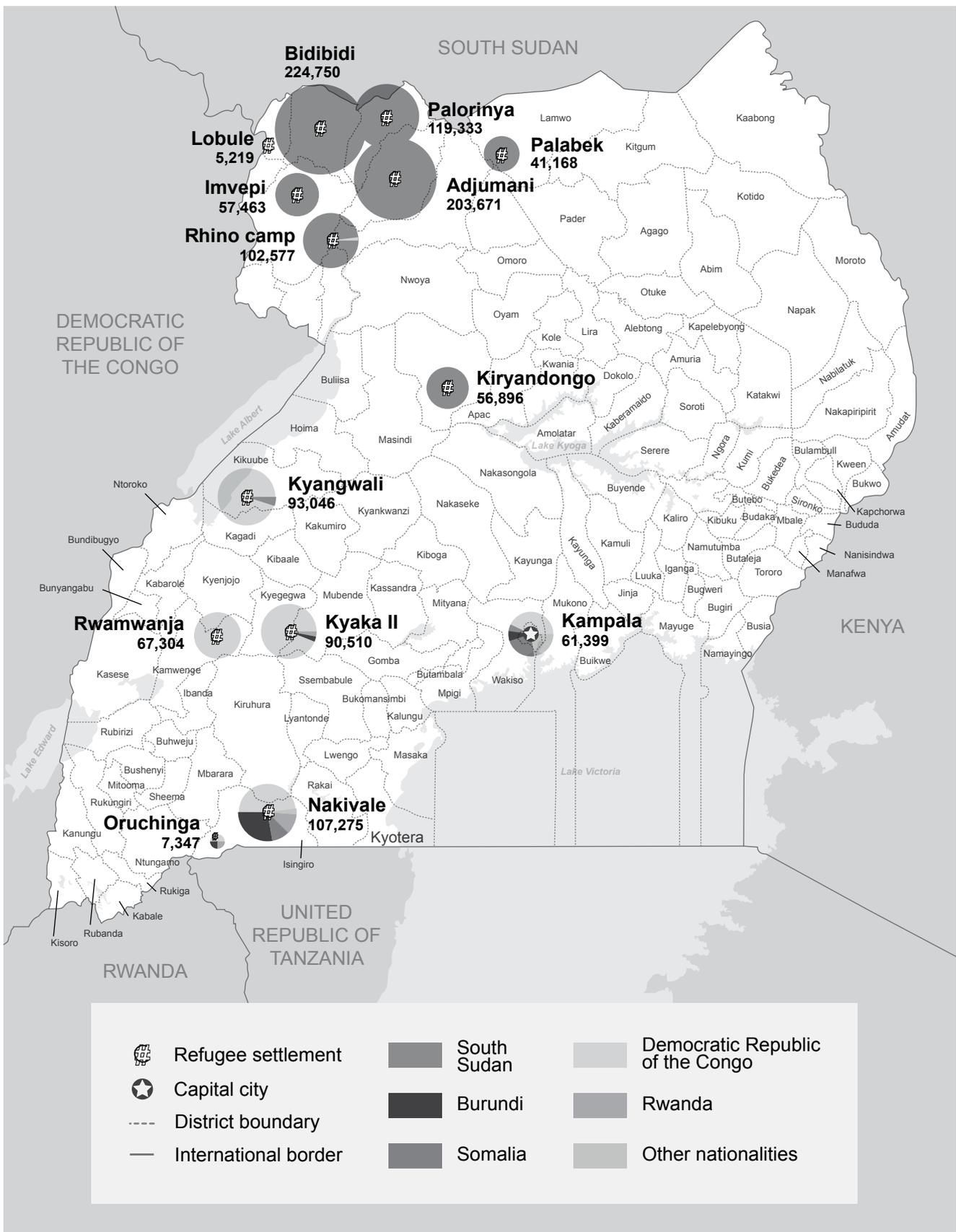
3.3 Factors influencing Uganda’s approach

There are three significant dimensions to Uganda’s delicate refugee-hosting environment. First, the receptiveness demonstrated by the 12 refugee-hosting districts is underpinned by shared ethnicities and identities among many of the northern Ugandans and particularly the Central Equatorial South Sudanese. These border communities also share common histories of displacement and reciprocal refugee hosting and exchange (O’Callaghan, 2018).

Second, land grants to refugees, which are fundamental to Uganda’s settlement approach, contribute to ongoing sensitivities in regard to land among host communities due to land-grabbing by central government and powerful locals. The land

² Unverified figures put the estimate in Arua at 50,000 for example.

Figure 1: Refugees and asylum-seekers in Uganda, by camp



Source: UNHCR (2019c)

allocated to refugees has also not kept pace with the increase in refugee numbers, particularly in districts in the south west where refugees reside on government-gazetted land. This has meant that refugees' plot sizes have been steadily decreasing and many only have access to 30m x 30m plots, with severe implications for their prospects of self-reliance through agricultural production.

Third, from an economic perspective, refugees are seen as a lever for development by their chronically poor hosts who hope to benefit from improved access to services, infrastructure and economic opportunities. However, despite investments in host areas and the inclusion of host communities in refugee assistance (generally on a 30:70 ratio), the reality often falls short of their expectations of more direct material benefit and employment opportunities (O'Callaghan, 2018).

This delicate balance has been put under pressure by the sheer number of refugees. The proportion of refugees to Ugandan nationals is very high, even outnumbering locals in some districts. Relations between hosts and refugees have remained largely positive despite being tested by the perceived lack of tangible benefits for the hosts. However, there are signs of increasing tensions, not least due to mounting environmental impacts in the heavily populated settlements, most particularly the depletion of natural resources (Poole, 2019). Host anger is generally directed towards central government and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), which is charged with managing and coordinating refugee affairs, but refugees and aid actors are increasingly caught in this fraught dynamic. There have been a number of public protests and incidences of violence due to concerns about the lack of benefit from hosting, including some directed towards NGOs.

4 CRRF in Uganda: a model architecture and process?

Adoption of the CRRF in Uganda has been spurred by impressive energy – across a diverse range of stakeholders – to foster commitment to more developmental approaches to refugee-hosting in Uganda. Sustained by international momentum resulting from the New York Declaration and with the assistance of a well-resourced Secretariat, CRRF ‘roadmaps’ and response plans in a number of sectors have been completed. These take important steps towards defining needs and drawing a range of governmental actors into the response. But despite this focus on architecture and process, it is unclear whether it is sufficient to attract donor buy-in of the scale needed to transform the response on the ground. As the CRRF plans take its first steps towards implementation, there are also warning signs – some echoing defects in past initiatives – that maintaining momentum and achieving positive change for affected populations will be a formidable challenge.

4.1 The CRRF in Uganda: timelines and strategies

The scale, composition and focus of the Uganda CRRF coordination structure is considerable and could be seen as a model in ensuring diverse and inclusive governance to the Framework. A government-led, multi-stakeholder CRRF Steering Group (see Table 2) was set up in October 2017 to oversee delivery, with 32 members drawn from different ministries of the Ugandan government (including the Ministry of Local Government as co-chair), national and international aid actors as well as refugee and host community representatives. A CRRF Secretariat was established in the OPM to provide technical support to the Steering Group throughout the implementation process. With government officials seconded from the OPM and international delegates seconded from UNHCR, donors and NGOs, the 12-person Secretariat has both the capacity and political capital to coordinate the development of a range of plans and initiatives.

Buoyed by international attention and support, the CRRF in Uganda has thus gone further than previous strategies in fostering greater engagement of both the district

government and line ministries in refugee affairs. In so doing, it appears to have loosened the grip that the OPM has traditionally held over refugee response, a monopoly that critics claim helps sustain a long-running emergency response model and refugee responsibilities centralised in one government department. The extent to which ‘whole of government’ facilitation efforts will attract greater international commitment and advance self-reliance for refugees remains an open question.

The CRRF Secretariat has been prolific in terms of the development of strategies and plans. An initial roadmap for CRRF implementation, launched in January 2018 and updated in 2019 (Government of Uganda, 2019), set out the strategic direction for the CRRF with the following deliverables by 2020:

- Burden- and responsibility-sharing for refugees hosted in Uganda.
- Improved preparedness and data collection at reception and admission stage.
- Support for refugees and host communities by implementing the prioritised comprehensive sector plans.
- Durable solutions for refugees formulated and reinforced both within Uganda and in third countries (Government of Uganda, 2018; 2019).

The CRRF has been the coordinating body for a series of sector plans, led by different line ministries, illustrating a ‘whole of government’ approach and efforts to include refugees within national systems. Sector plans include:

- Three-year education response plan for refugees and host communities (Ministry of Education, launched September 2018).
- Five-year health sector integrated refugee response plan (Ministry of Health, launched January 2019).
- Five-year jobs and livelihoods integrated response plan for refugee hosting districts (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, draft 2019).
- Water and environment plan (Ministry of Water and Environment, under development).

Table 2: Composition of the CRRF Steering Group in Uganda

Government of Uganda: 18 seats	Non-government: 14 seats
Office of Prime Minister (Permanent Secretary)	Two refugee representatives
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Permanent Secretary)	UNHCR
Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Permanent Secretary)	UN Resident Coordinator (Uganda)
Ministry of Local Government (Permanent Secretary)	Two additional United Nations (UN) agencies
Ministry of Internal Affairs (Security Departments)	One representative from an international non-governmental organisation (INGO)
Ministry of Works and Transport (Permanent Secretary)	One representative from a national NGO or civil society organisation
Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development	Three representatives from the Local Development Partners' Group (LDPG)
Ministry of Health (Permanent Secretary)	One representative of the Humanitarian Donor Group
Ministry of Education and Sports (Permanent Secretary)	One representative from the private sector
Ministry of Water and Environment (Permanent Secretary)	One representative from an international financial institution (IFI)
Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (Permanent Secretary)	
The National Planning Authority	
Refugees Department of the OPM	
Three representatives from the Local District Government (Chief Administrative Officers)	
Two senior representatives from local councils	

Source: Government of Uganda (2018: 14)

Perhaps even more significant in terms of refugee inclusion is the commitment to include refugee numbers as part of the overall population in the development of Uganda's new National Development Plan 2020–2030, which is under development at the time of writing. Table 3 sets out a timeline of different milestones relating to refugee self-reliance and inclusion in Uganda, illustrating how many predate the CRRF itself.

4.2 CRRF and financing: little progress on responsibility-sharing

Both the CRRF and the GCR seek greater financing for refugee-hosting countries, both to ease pressure on host countries and to enhance refugee self-reliance. The overall picture of donor financing in Uganda

points to a continued emphasis on humanitarian assistance for refugees as well as a slight shift towards resilience and development financing – most notably from the World Bank. The introduction of the CRRF in Uganda – including the elaboration of sector response plans within the CRRF over the past year – does not yet appear to be fundamentally altering the funding picture in terms of attracting significant new development resources or accelerating shifts from humanitarian financing towards funding the Government of Uganda.

4.2.1 Overall funding: an incomplete picture

There is no systematic global- or national-level tracking of humanitarian and development donor commitments aimed at refugees and refugee-hosting communities. A recent survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC)

Table 3: Timeline of key milestones in Uganda’s CRRF process

1958		Nakivale Settlement established, and policy of land allocation introduced
1999		Uganda’s Self-Reliance Strategy formally established by the OPM and UNHCR
2004		Development Assistance to Refugee-Hosting Areas Programme launched by the OPM
2006		Refugee Act passed, enshrining into law Uganda’s settlement approach and access to basic services on par with nationals.
2010		Refugee Regulations passed
2015		Settlement Transformative Agenda officially launched
		Refugees included in National Development Plan II (2015/16–2019/20)
		ReHoPE Strategic Framework introduced
2016	May	World Bank Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project approved
	September	New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, Leaders’ Summit on Refugees
2017	March	CRRF launched in Uganda
	March	Nairobi Declaration at Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Special Summit – Regional Application of the CRRF
	June	Solidarity Summit and Kampala Declaration
	October	CRRF Steering Group established
	December	Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education in IGAD Member States
2018	January	CRRF roadmap for Uganda adopted
	February	CRRF Secretariat established in Kampala
	December	Global Compact on Refugees adopted
	September	Education Response Plan launched (first sector plan)
2019	January	Health sector integrated response plan launched
	March	Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-Reliance for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities in the IGAD Region adopted
	April	Revised CRRF roadmap endorsed
	April	Jobs and Livelihoods Response Plan presented at Steering Group meeting
		Water and Environment Response Plan being developed

estimated that 75% of donor commitments to Uganda in this sector in 2017 (\$324.2 million) were humanitarian, while 25% (\$107.2 million) were development – proportions that seem consistent with the financing picture in 2018 and 2019 (Forichon, 2018).

Humanitarian expenditures for refugee programmes in Uganda are severely strained. As of the end of 2018, Uganda’s integrated Refugee Response Plan – including all the major UN agencies and NGO programmes – remained significantly underfunded at only 57% of the \$870 million requested (UNHCR, 2019d).³ As of June 2019, the Refugee Response Plan for 2019 (overall budget \$927m) had received

just 20% of its needs, or \$187m. In 2018, UNHCR expenditures of \$185 million amounted to just 44% of the agency’s overall needs for the year (UNHCR, 2019b). This has meant that basic needs have been prioritised over other longer-term programming relating to areas such as the environment and livelihoods, although these have now been prioritised in the current Refugee Response Plan.

On the development side, with the exception of new World Bank commitments, donor financial support for the CRRF appears to be tepid (aside from supporting the CRRF Secretariat itself). Much of the bilateral development funding identified as supporting refugee-hosting areas seems to have predated CRRF response

³ The Uganda Refugee Response Plan for 2019 is seeking \$1.04 billion in funding (UNHCR, 2019f). This was revised to \$927 million in June 2019, when just 20% of funding had been committed (UNHCR, 2019h).

plans. The Solidarity Summit in June 2017 raised only \$3.5 million in additional funding for integrated refugee response needs (from China and India). An initial tranche of funding from the Education Cannot Wait initiative raised \$3.5 million (UNHCR, 2019a), which has since been increased to \$11 million. Other funds for longer-term approaches to refugee support include:

- the EU Trust Fund for the Development of Northern Uganda (€150 million over six years);
- the German Development Bank's pledge of €10 million for refugee response projects;
- USAID's \$4.8 million for HIV relief for South Sudanese refugees;
- the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria's \$3.5 million for treatment; and
- Gavi's \$1 million for immunisation (UNHCR, 2019a).

The notable exception to this picture of development funding is the World Bank financing for refugees and refugee-hosting districts, which began prior to the Uganda CRRF process and does not appear closely linked to the CRRF and its roadmap or response plans. The Bank projects an overall envelope of about \$500 million over the next five to seven years, of which the following \$368 million projects are approved or in planning stages:

- \$50 million (loan) + \$150 million financing grant, Development Response to Displacement Impact (DRDIP) programme, start date June 2017.
- \$50 million (IDA18⁴ sub-window contribution within \$360 million loan): Support to Municipal Infrastructure Development Project in eight refugee-hosting districts (pending signature).
- \$58 million (IDA18 sub window contribution within \$280 million loan): 'Integrated Water Management and Development' in refugee-hosting districts (pending signature).
- \$60 million (IDA18 sub-window contribution within \$150 million loan): 'Secondary Education Expansion Project', including refugees and host communities and contribution to CRRF Education Response Plan (pipeline).

4.2.2 Failing to attract additional funding or shift donor government dynamics

Despite a well-staffed Secretariat in Uganda, there is little systematic work being done on tracking actual donor and government financial support to the CRRF – and especially on trying to untangle the

question of whether the CRRF per se is attracting additional financing. Without this mechanism in place, it is difficult to determine how overall progress on the CRRF will be measured. The CRRF Secretariat described plans for embedding CRRF pledges and funding within the government's overall Financial Aid Management Platform, but progress on this is unclear – including donor interest in full transparency when it comes to support for the CRRF.

Perhaps most worryingly, government officials in a number of key offices and ministries involved with the CRRF report no additional donor funding as a result of the CRRF and voice strong scepticism that the CRRF will result in any substantial change in donor funding patterns. CRRF response plans for education (launched September 2018, costed at \$389 million over three years) and health (January 2019, costed at more than \$500 million over five years) have so far not attracted significant pledges or commitments. The CRRF draft Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan, costed at \$648 million over five years, likewise is garnering little enthusiasm from donors, at least in its draft form.

This raises questions about the degree to which the responsibility-sharing component of the CRRF is being achieved in practice. Besides the lack of meaningful new commitments coming out of the CRRF process in Uganda, there is a continued reluctance from the donor community to directly fund or work through the government, therefore undermining hopes for moving from parallel and expensive UNHCR- and INGO-led refugee responses towards more cost-effective and sustainable national systems. Among the major donors, only the EU is testing the waters with budgetary support to the government, and only for very small programmes. Other donors may be waiting to evaluate the effectiveness of the World Bank programmes before committing to changing their position.

4.2.3 Risks for humanitarian action and refugees' basic needs

Finally, the talk and energy around the CRRF process is perceived as a major risk by some humanitarian actors in Uganda. They fear that rhetoric around the CRRF is encouraging closer alignment between humanitarian and development approaches and activities may be used as an excuse by donors to cut their humanitarian aid, irrespective of whether development aid is available. Humanitarian funding has been falling, but it is difficult to understand the degree to which this relates to allegations of corruption or diversion of current donor funding

4 IDA18 is the International Development Association's 18th replenishment of funds.

to development programming. In the absence of a transparent tracking instrument, a clear picture is impossible to discern.

4.3 CRRF Uganda: a positive process, catalysing shifts in approaches

4.3.1 Coordination and ‘whole of government’ approaches

On a number of levels, the introduction of the Uganda CRRF represents a model planning process and provides a platform to help achieve the CRRF’s overall goal in Uganda ‘to enhance the capacities, funds and skills of the government, especially in refugee-hosting districts, including different authorities concerned at national and district levels to address these challenges’ (Government of Uganda, 2018: 5). The CRRF reflects a comprehensive acceptance that refugees are part of the development landscape of Uganda for the foreseeable future and that, for the first time, a relevant and broad-based stakeholder group has formulated a comprehensive picture of the challenges and needs. District and local officials as well as representatives from refugee and host communities have also participated, to some extent, in CRRF planning.

Despite various government stakeholder interviewees describing the CRRF in Uganda as ‘a continuation of past policy and practices’, those same officials also acknowledged the added value of the CRRF process. They described it as providing clear governance structures and accountability lines and mentioned how previously fragmented processes (e.g. humanitarian response plans, sectoral and district plans for refugee and host community response) had been consolidated into a coherent framework. The individual sector plans were viewed as particularly useful policy documents to ensure more harmonised approaches. Linkages between the CRRF and preparation of the National Development Plan (2020–2030) – and especially the inclusion of refugees in planning figures – were highlighted as important steps forward in integrating refugees into national systems.

Government officials also mentioned a subtle, if incomplete, shift towards a whole of government or even whole of society approach. To some extent, the OPM’s monolithic position as the sole government body entrusted with refugee affairs is softening towards greater collaboration with line ministries and district authorities. OPM’s co-chairing of the CRRF Steering Committee – together with the Ministry of Local Government – was cited as an important change. The Ministry of Health explained how new space was opening to support a shift from a crisis-response model (led by OPM) to a preventative, community-based health approach.

4.3.2 Driving forward development approaches

There is recognition across all stakeholders of the requirement to shift to development approaches. The CRRF is not the only stimulus for this acceptance. The humanitarian–development ‘nexus’ policy agenda is also instrumental. For instance, Uganda is a pilot ‘nexus’ country for the EU and there have been several discussions about how longer-term approaches can be applied. However, the CRRF is seen as a useful and common tool for addressing this enduring challenge. Related to this is the recognition that refugees’ long-term needs must be addressed by supporting the development of refugee-hosting districts and their populations, rather than focusing on refugees alone. For instance, the World Bank funding targets refugee-hosting districts and the recently developed Education Response Plan aims to support both host and refugee learners. Finally, there are moves to ensure that refugees are more effectively included in national services than in the past. The Education Response Plan is the most progressed in this respect, providing for the education of 600,000 host and refugee children as part of an integrated approach.

These positive perceptions of CRRF progress were mirrored in interviews with donors and aid agencies, which also noted a number of benefits including broad recognition that refugees were a development challenge, a shift towards more participatory planning and the development of individual sector plans. Donors have concluded that the Secretariat, with its strong government and multi-actor coordination function, plays an important role in maintaining momentum for the CRRF and have signalled their readiness to fund the Secretariat beyond its original end date of 2020.

5 Putting the CRRF into action: livelihoods and refugee self-reliance

Despite generally positive reactions to the CRRF process, there are already troubling indications that many of the underlying structural issues in Uganda that impede refugee economic inclusion and self-reliance are not being addressed. Despite having begun with ‘an environment conducive to the self-reliance of refugees’, CRRF successes are still mainly framed by the government and UNHCR around the planning process itself (UNHCR, 2018c). The signs are that these long-standing structural issues cannot be overcome through the CRRF roadmap and response plans – a conclusion bolstered by the long historical record in Uganda of frustrated efforts to realise the aspirations of the country’s generous asylum policies. These structural challenges can be organised around four areas: (1) the continuing dependence on a flawed model for refugee self-reliance; (2) weak prioritisation and commitment in relation to the response plans; (3) lack of a clear vision and costed plan for self-reliance; and (4) government corruption, lack of capacity and inefficiency.

5.1 Settlements: a flawed model for refugee self-reliance that is not being addressed

As outlined earlier, at the heart of Uganda’s refugee asylum and integration policies is its refugee settlement scheme – premised on the idea that refugees who are settled on plots of land in refugee-hosting districts can achieve self-reliance through agriculture. Unfortunately, with some exceptions, the model has not worked. Most concerning, refugees do not appear to become more self-reliant with time: a recent study shows that refugees who have been in Uganda longest are not more food secure (Development Pathways, 2018). This has led to the reinstatement of full humanitarian food rations to almost all registered refugees in settlement areas, including those who have

been displaced for many years and had previously been phased out of the aid rolls. For the most part, families in settlements are engaging, at best, in some level of subsistence farming.

Despite decades of failed efforts for refugees to achieve self-reliance, the CRRF has not facilitated a common understanding of what self-reliance requires in the Ugandan context and a coherent strategy for achieving this for Uganda’s refugees. There are few efforts to support ‘self-settled refugees’ who have opted out of the settlement model and moved to urban centres (who many believe achieve greater self-reliance than their settlement-dwelling counterparts). In fact, since humanitarian assistance is tied to residency in the settlement areas, options for refugees to move freely (e.g. to cities or to more productive agricultural areas) in search of jobs and opportunities are limited – in some ways encouraging them to remain stuck in marginal settlement areas. In turn, the illusion of eventual self-reliance around agriculture – and the effective encampment it encourages – actually promotes the status quo of humanitarian approaches through the requirement of continued welfare transfers for those who fail to achieve self-reliance.

5.2 Weak CRRF strategy, prioritisation and buy-in for the response plans

Although the CRRF roadmap and response plans are praised for achieving a new level of inclusiveness and broad thinking, a lack of strategy and prioritisation in both the plans and the process have been met with scepticism from national and international stakeholders. A number of government officials, including some within the OPM, suggested that the CRRF would go the way of other unsuccessful plans, comparing it to preparations for the now forgotten

June 2017 Solidarity Summit. Officials also questioned the bureaucracy of the CRRF process ('just talk since inception' and 'not even one shilling' to show for the effort) as well as the actual buy-in of the government at higher levels ('is there really Permanent Secretary or minister-level buy-in?'). Donors and aid agencies are also critical of the CRRF's heavily bureaucratic and time-consuming coordination structure.

In addition, government officials highlighted vested interests in the current refugee management structure (both within the OPM and among the international agencies) that are difficult to break, especially if the CRRF attracts no significant additional resources. This is a view shared by some international actors who question whether a process aimed at dismantling and transforming a longstanding refugee approach should be led by the very agencies – the OPM and UNHCR – who own that legacy regime.

The response plans themselves present large budgets and many projects but offer little prioritisation and no strategy for moving from the planning stage to implementation. The Education Response Plan, which is fully costed and prioritised, is an exception here, although it too faces severe funding shortfalls. As one donor commented, 'All of it is needed, but not all of it can be funded – so where's the strategy?' As outlined below, this is particularly true of the draft Jobs and Livelihoods Plan. Meanwhile, further plans are being developed, including one on water and the environment, which will add to concerns about the gap between the overall cost of CRRF implementation and available funding.

5.3 Lack of a clear vision and costed plan for self-reliance

What is striking about the Ugandan context, relative for instance to refugee-hosting countries in the Middle East, is that despite the conducive environment pivoted towards refugee inclusion and self-reliance, there is both a lack of evidence in terms of what this will require in Uganda, as well as a lack of ambitious, transformative strategies to achieve this. There is widespread recognition among aid actors of the need to move beyond the emergency livelihoods approach that has typified the response to date, towards longer-term, developmental approaches in keeping with the vision of the CRRF. Government actors are among the most vocal about the need for greater coordination, pointing to the poorly coordinated, short-term interventions that lack economies of scale.

However, there is currently no coherent vision in the sector on the way forward. A draft Jobs and Livelihoods Response Plan, coordinated under the CRRF and led by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, has not, to date, won the enthusiasm of donors and the sector more widely. With a long list of unprioritised activities, it bears all the hallmarks of what is described as a 'hugely political' process involving up to seven line ministries. There are five strategic pillars: (1) peaceful co-existence for economic growth; (2) sustainable agricultural productivity; (3) food security and agribusiness, enterprise development and market access; (4) jobs, employment and decent work; and (5) vocational skilling and talent development.

The plan recognises that only the private sector will drive growth and create jobs in refugee-hosting districts, but it does not draw strategic connections to how small projects will form private sector linkages at scale. For example, there is little mention of incentives for larger-scale private sector engagement, such as infrastructure investment, incentives for private investment, plans to improve the business climate or subsidies to encourage companies that offer financial inclusion or better connectivity to remote communities. The imminent secondment of a private sector expert from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) into the CRRF Secretariat may eventually improve the overall approach.

5.4 A compact without trust: corruption, lack of capacity and inefficiency

The success of the CRRF, both globally and in Uganda, rests on a quid pro quo: trusting national governments and national service delivery systems to manage refugees in their regions of origin, with international donors playing their role through funding. In Uganda, there is little evidence of a credible path towards establishing donor-government trust, building necessary capacity at district levels and shifting away from parallel humanitarian structures towards government-led service delivery.

Allegations of fraud surrounding the misuse of UNHCR funds were published in November 2018, implicating Ugandan officials for inflating refugee numbers to siphon off excess aid. This cemented longstanding donor concern with corruption in the Ugandan government and resulted in a temporary

freeze on humanitarian funding to the larger UN agencies (The New Humanitarian, 2019). Donors report that this incident has reinforced their reluctance to channel resources through the Government of Uganda, particularly in the form of budget support. This distrust is keenly felt by government officials who cite lack of funding to the national government as undermining the spirit of donor commitments to the CRRF and GCR. This demonstrates the limits of the CRRF process in practice. A well-structured and resourced CRRF Secretariat and strong response plans cannot overcome chronic mistrust between major donors and the Government of Uganda, illustrating fundamental weaknesses in a 'nationally led' approach where donor confidence is weak.

A lack of confidence in district-level authority and capacity – recognised by all stakeholders as crucial to successful implementation of the CRRF – is also threatening the chances of transforming the refugee regime. The CRRF in Uganda has been a top-down affair, largely driven by central government. District governments are more involved than with previous plans and efforts are currently underway, for example

to 'bring the education response plan to the district'. Furthermore, district governments are beset with problems: poor planning and management capacity, poor technical capacity and lack of staff in service delivery functions, inability to attract or retain staff in remote areas and difficulty in resisting pressure from local politicians. These capacity issues are significant: one refugee-hosting district recently reported that only 30% of its teaching staff was regularly in schools.

UN and other agencies are hiring staff to bolster the capacity of various local offices (e.g. education and health) but with little coordination regarding numbers or pay scales and no discernible strategy for transitioning substitute staff into sustainable local government positions. Finally, despite an increasing number of capacity-strengthening initiatives by donors (Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), World Bank, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), to name a few), these too are uncoordinated and lack an overall governance, public sector or public administration reform strategy that might help tie together the issue of growing decentralised authority and building capacity.

6 Supporting the CRRF: options for donors and advocates

Uganda's position as a global model for refugee rights and inclusion, as well as an inspiration for the CRRF approach itself, means that the stakes are high for the CRRF in Uganda to be considered a success. This has resulted in a level of focus and support for the CRRF process and architecture unparalleled in any other CRRF roll-out country. However, decades of failed efforts to achieve refugee self-reliance in Uganda have taught us that the answer does not lie in technical processes, but rather in tackling the structural issues that have chronically undermined refugees' abilities to take advantage of the range of rights that Uganda offers and to achieve the economic independence envisaged. Galvanised by the CRRF, the Ugandan government has made steps in furthering refugee inclusion at a policy level, but line ministries and district authorities responsible for refugees are not yet taking the leadership roles that true integration requires. Achieving refugee self-reliance and inclusion will require policy shifts to tackle the greatest obstacles: addressing the political economy of refugee management in Uganda, commitment and support to a Jobs and Livelihoods Plan that can prove transformational, and the provision of predictable, long-term development funding that can shift the response on the ground.

6.1 Policy shifts aimed at promoting self-reliance within and outside settlements

Placing refugees in remote, rural settlements with limited access to land has proven not to be conducive to self-reliance. The following three policy shifts could help resolve some of the chronic challenges refugees face:

1. **Tackle access to land for cultivation:** There is widespread agreement that the cornerstone of any self-reliance strategy must involve unlocking the potential of agriculture. Currently, 90% of refugees live in settlements where non-agricultural livelihood opportunities are very

limited. Agriculture is the backbone of Uganda's economy, employing 70% of the population. Few refugees currently have land of sufficient quality or quantity to cultivate, let alone secure sustainable livelihoods. Tackling this major impediment to self-reliance is a hugely sensitive issue, given ongoing land-related conflicts and tension in Uganda. However, solutions must be found, which will require greater and more systematic engagement with host communities and local authorities, particularly in light of mounting tensions in refugee-hosting areas.

2. **Design future settlements for refugee self-reliance:** The location of refugee settlements, their proximity to markets and the availability of and access to fertile land all have major implications for the future economic development of refugees. Planning settlements at the height of a major influx makes it difficult to incorporate development, as well as humanitarian, objectives. Investments in future plans should be made now, with donors brought on board to finance these plans and ensure accountability.
3. **Support refugees in urban areas:** 'Self-settled' refugees who survive without the humanitarian assistance provided in camps are, de-facto, more self-reliant as they depend on their own income and entrepreneurship despite numerous challenges. Many support wider family and community networks. Supporting refugees' own livelihoods strategies, including those finding solutions outside settlements and in urban areas, must be a feature of any self-reliance strategy.

6.2 Prioritising investments in jobs and livelihoods

The current draft of the Jobs and Livelihoods Plan 'widens the scope of the sector beyond natural resource-based agriculture to include trade, labour markets, small businesses, cottage industry, commercial agriculture and individual talent development' but provides a long list of unprioritised

interventions that many view as ‘unimplementable’. Decisions on where to invest to promote self-reliance cannot be separated from the political economy issues raised above (e.g. access to land to grow agro-businesses). Donors and investors need a hard-headed jobs and livelihoods plan that realistically considers the political, as well as the economic, constraints to refugees achieving self-reliance as well as an evidence-based framework that offers the best chance for sustainable livelihoods for refugees and their hosts. Understanding the current footprint of private sector engagement in refugee settlement areas as well as incentives that could attract larger private sector engagement should form part of this, but recognition is needed that the achievement of self-reliance will require significant humanitarian, as well as development, funding over the long term.

6.3 Supporting ‘whole of government’ approaches to refugee management

The CRRF envisages a ‘whole of government’ approach where refugees are integrated into sector plans of different ministries, rather than managed as part of a parallel system. There have been small but important steps towards this in Uganda, as illustrated by the involvement of line ministries in the CRRF Steering Group and development of the different sector plans, but major gaps remain. For instance, despite the long-standing strategy of integrating services for refugees into national systems, there is a major gap between policy and practice. In Adjumani district, more than 60% of schools are funded, monitored and overseen by humanitarian partners (O’Callaghan, 2018). This is partly due to the historical lack of leadership of the line ministries of refugee education, which is linked to planning and budgeting and capacity, but is also a result of the limited capacity at the district levels.

Tackling this is a major process of public sector or administration reform – including addressing the politics of decentralising refugee affairs into different ministries and district authorities, as well as combatting corruption – which are complex, longer-term endeavours. Progress in this area is likely to be slow and onerous, requiring strong political and governance, as well as technical, engagement. While this may accrue relatively limited impacts for refugees and their hosts in the short

term, it is fundamental to the refugee inclusion envisaged in the CRRF.

District-level capacity across all sectors in refugee-hosting districts is weak and there does not appear to be a common analysis or plan for how to begin overcoming this constraint. As the example above illustrates, donors and agencies are supporting parallel structures and staff as well as increasing their capacity-strengthening interventions, but their efforts are not harmonised or underpinned by larger strategies aimed at public sector reform. A number of actors, such as the World Bank, JICA, UNICEF and GIZ, are engaged in district-level capacity strengthening; however, more work is needed, linked to a common framework and better coordination.

6.4 More predictable development funding

Trust between major donors and the Government of Uganda is ruptured and it is difficult to see how management of the refugee response under these circumstances might be shifted to more cost-effective and sustainable government systems and service delivery. Some interim ‘confidence-building measures’ might be considered, such as the establishment of a small government-managed refugee trust fund (using donor humanitarian resources usually earmarked directly to UN agencies) with appropriate oversight from civil society organisations or others. Different models are currently being tested, including a capacity-building approach by UNICEF for district authorities where a small amount of funding is allocated to the district. If successful, this could be scaled up.

One important gap in the relatively well-resourced CRRF Secretariat structure is dedicated financial management capacity: without transparent analysis of the financing of the CRRF, it is impossible to measure whether the overall objectives of the GCR around easing pressure on host countries and enhancing refugee self-reliance are being achieved and to what extent partners of the GCR and the CRRF are meeting their commitments. However, given the hesitancy of donors towards greater transparency, any support to the CRRF in this area would first need assurance from donors that they would provide the data required to make tracking possible.

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Cover photo: A woman carries firewood in a resettlement camp for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda. © Dorah Ntunga/Oxfam

