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# A Refugee-Led Study on Refugee-Led Organisations in East Africa

# Overview of the 'RLO study'

- A study on refugee-led organisations (RLOs), their responses and impact on displaced communities in East Africa.
- A study by Carleton University through the **Local Engagement Refugee Research Network** (LERRN) and in partnership with the **Refugee Studies Centre** (RSC) at the University of Oxford.
- In collaboration with the **Dadaab Response Association** (DRA) in East Africa, a COB led by refugee researchers based in Dadaab.
- Funded by Open Society Foundations, the Bosch Foundation, the Global Whole Being Fund, and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).
- Led by refugee researchers, from start to finish.

# Presenters



*From left to right:*

- **Mary Gitahi:** Kenyan refugee, lead country researcher in Uganda, Nakivale Settlement, Uganda
- **Uwezo Ramazani:** former refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, lead country researcher in Tanzania, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania
- **Mark Okello Oyat:** Ugandan refugee, Dadaab Response Association (DRA) Director, Dadaab, Kenya

# Presenters



*From left to right:*

- **Andhira Yousif Kara:** Sudanese refugee, lead country researcher in Kenya, Nakuru, Kenya
- **Abis Getachew:** Ethiopian, returnee / former refugee, lead country researcher in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

# Rationale

- Emerging evidence that RLOs in East Africa play a vital role in meeting community needs (more effective, efficient and legitimate).
- RLOs increasingly taking center stage in the context of COVID-19.

# Research objectives

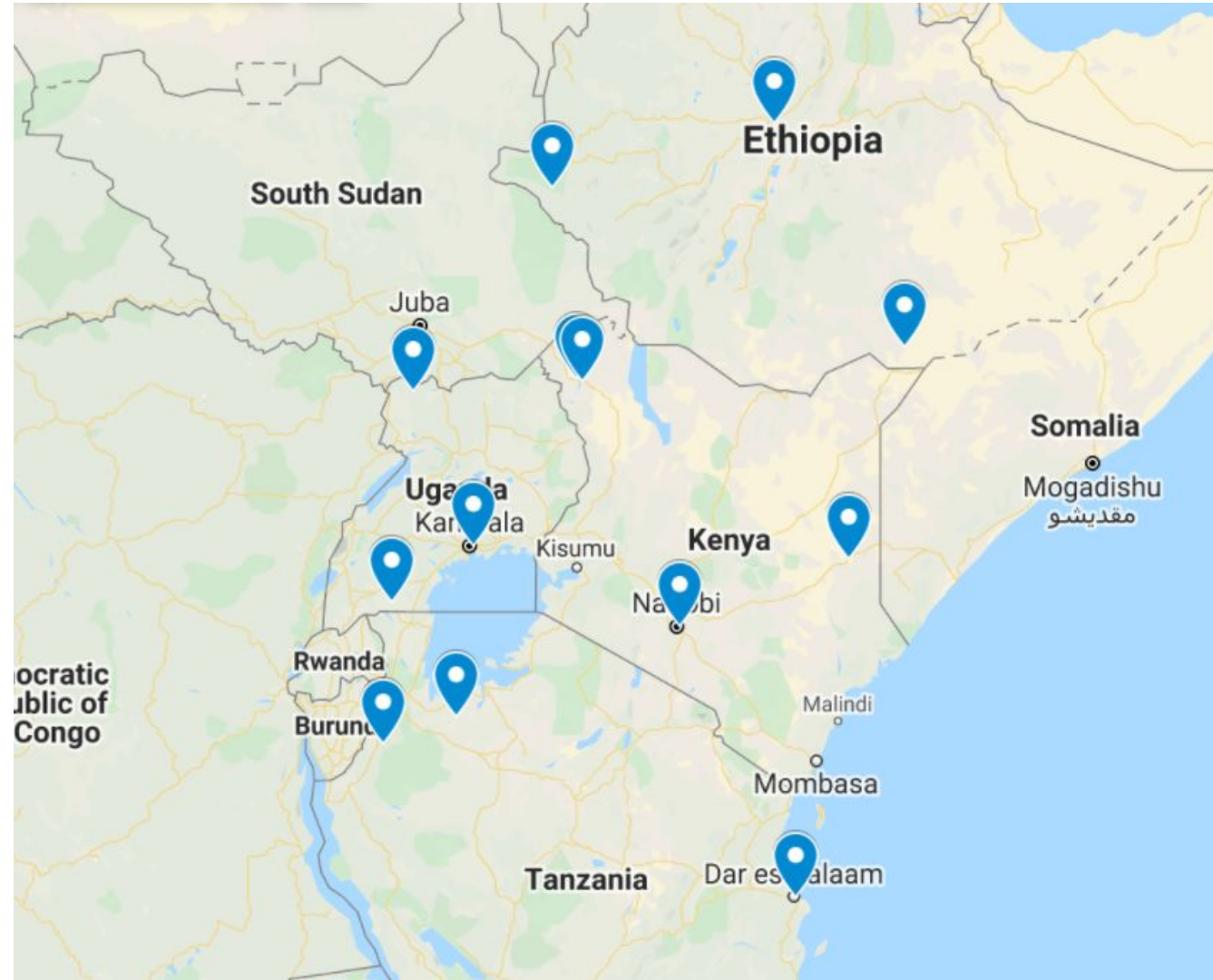
1. **Nature of the response:** What is the nature, scope and practices of RLO activities in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Ethiopia?
2. **Perceived impact of the response:** How is the impact of RLOs' responses on displaced communities they serve perceived by diverse stakeholders (including regional actors, States, local authorities, humanitarian and development service providers, host communities, and refugees)?
3. **Factors that condition the response and impact of RLOs:** What are common factors that determine the response and impact of all RLOs? What factors explain the variations in response and impact of RLOs in East Africa?



# Study sites

10 sites across Eastern Africa (urban and camp):

- **Ethiopia:** Addis Ababa, Melkadida camp and Pugnido camp
- **Kenya:** Nairobi, Kakuma Camp, Kalobeyei settlement and Dadaab Camp
- **Tanzania:** Nyarugusu camp, Nduta Camp and Dar es Salaam
- **Uganda:** Kampala, Nakivale and Bidi Bidi Refugee



# Desk review findings

- Emerging literature on RLOs in Kenya and Uganda (see the Global Governed, Refugees as Providers of Protection and Assistance by Pincock, Betts, & Easton-Calabria, 2020).
- Limited available information about RLOs in Tanzania and Ethiopia.
- Emerging evidence that refugees come together to serve the most vulnerable members of their community in many refugee-hosting contexts (Betts et al., 2021) and that they may be more effective than traditional humanitarian actors due to better community-level trust and social networks (Easton-Calabria & Hakiza, 2021).



# Nature of RLOs

- RLO activities appear to aim self-reliance, protection and assistance, advocacy, and political activism.
- As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, RLOs have adapted their activities to fill new gaps in the community (Pincock et al, 2021).
- In some cases, RLOs are co-led between refugees and host community members (Duale, 2020).
- In Uganda and Kenya, RLOs are increasingly coming together as networks (Pincock et al, 2020).
- RLOs are often created organically in the host country (Duale, 2020; Pincock et al, 2021) or can be a continuation of pre-existing organizations (Easton-Calabria et al, 2020).

# Impact of RLOs

Little evidence on the impact of RLOs on communities they serve beyond anecdotal evidence:

Potential factors that determine the nature & impact of RLOs:

- **External relations and influence:** relations with external actors, including the UNHCR, INGOs, local authorities, relations with refugee and host communities, co-leadership with host community members.
- **Resources of the RLO:** access to finance and funding (diaspora or international)
- **Setting:** camp versus urban
- **Regulatory framework**
- **Leadership of the RLO**

# Regulatory framework

**RLOs struggle to register legally in the four countries of the study, even when they have the right to.**

- Kenya: The Societies Act of 1968 does not mention refugees' right to create associations. The lack of regulation makes it difficult for RLOs to register.
- Ethiopia: the Ethiopia's 2019 Refugee Proclamation No.1110/2019 has created the legal space for refugees to establish their own organizations. No regulations and directives for RLOs to register and operate on the ground.
- Tanzania: the 1998 Tanzanian Refugee Act and the Non-Governmental Organizations Act do not mention whether refugees are allowed to register organizations they create.
- Uganda, although the process of registering a CBO is straightforward and relatively inexpensive, bureaucratic challenges remain.

# Difficulties defining RLOs

- No consensus on how to define RLOs.
- Significant variation of what RLOs can look like between countries (due to different displacement settings and regulatory frameworks).
- Key issues:
  - **For-profit versus non-profit organisations**
  - **Who creates and leads RLOs** (e.g. organisations with refugees in leadership roles but that are not led by refugees due to legal restrictions)

# Working definition (LERRN)

- *“Non-profit group where persons with lived experience of forced displacement play a meaningful role in the establishment, management and activities of the organization, and which has a defined structure, stated common objectives and regular activities focusing on responding to the needs of refugees and related communities. This definition stresses group participation of refugees and asylum seekers for the common good” (LERRN, 2021)*
- Research will shape this definition further.

# The Dadaab research site

- Research on RLOs in Dadaab by the Dadaab Response Association, a community-based organization in the Dadaab Refugee complex



# Dadaab camps

- Comprises of 3 camps: Ifo, Hagadera and Dagahaley.
- Founded in 1991/92 contradictions (sources).
- Nationalities in Dadaab: Kenyans, Somalis, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Congolese, Burundians, Ugandans, Ethiopians, Rwandans, Eritreans, and other nationalities
- Population: 223,817 (Jan. 2021)

# Pictures from Dadaab

Asylum seekers are  
mostly women & children



Aerial view of Dadaab



# Desk review

- Academic writings,
- Journals,
- Articles,
- Newspapers,
- Novels,
- Reliefweb, UNHCR website,
- Grey materials
- All these were sourced online through Google Scholar

# History of RLOs in Dadaab

- RLI started in Dadaab in 1992, with the initiation of a school under the tree by the community (Ochan 2020).
- Agencies source for funds and take responsibilities of such initiatives (Vega 2008).
- UNHCR and implementing partners collaborate with refugees in advocacy for social change.
- Community-based justice is refugee-led, for sustainable peaceful coexistence in diversity.
- Current global policy change in favour of RLOs (Duale 2020; Olivius 2013; Skran & Easton-Calabria 2020; Montemurro & Wendt 2018)

# RLOs in Dadaab

- Research study on the refugee-led non-profit organizations.
  - community court and justice
  - feminist environmental activism
  - community advocacy for social changes like egalitarianism, gender equality
  - minority rights group
  - environment management
  - youths umbrella groups
  - CBOs providing education materials and trainings
  - organizations of people living with disabilities
  - awareness campaign groups of health matters sexual gender-based violence and engaging men through accountable practice.



# RLOs in Dadaab

Feminist environmentalists

Fariah Ibrahim Farah (right) in Dadaab  
US Award of Courage 2008





# An RLO training youths against suicide (2020)





# COCONUT's monthly environmental cleaning campaign





# RLOs' challenges in Dadaab

- RLOs operated by volunteers and overshadowed by existing agencies.
- Lack funds to expand activities.
- Government policies affect legal registration.
- Seen by existing organizations as threats.
- Receive no support from the existing international non-governmental organizations.
- Those partnering with agencies are treated as beneficiaries and not as equal partners.
- Lack of training on how to run project activities.

# Positionality

- Research on refugees is often conducted by outsider researchers.
- Positionality is both an individual's worldview and the position they have chosen to adopt within a given study (Holmes and Andrew, 2020).
- The position of the researcher is clearly defined during the actual interaction between the researcher and the research participant. Hence, positionality is not something that is pre-defined but a negotiated process between researcher and participant (Holmes and Andrew, 2020).
- Critical research on refugees have argued on greater consideration of positionality, openness and critical reflexivity in research to avoid exploitation (Tannock and Sukarieh, 2019).

# Positionality within the RLO study

- The researchers in this study identify as displaced persons, and that position them as 'insider' researchers who share a common social experience, some identity status, culture and even language with their participants.
- However, there exist significant variation in regards to the lived experiences among the research leads (e.g. some live in camp settings while others live in urban areas).
- Researchers from Dadaab Response Association based in Dadaab camps have an active displacement background attributed to their long stay in encampment.

# Capturing positionality

- Mapping out of RLOs: Local knowledge, awareness of gender dynamics.
- Data Collection:
  - Advantages: knowledge of existing RLOs and the community, access to locations.
  - Challenges: biasness, entanglement, assumptions by researchers about participants cooperation, funding expectations.
- **Use of weekly journals and the Social Identity Map.**



# Research methods

Qualitative and exploratory approaches to answer the research questions:

Phase 1: Mapping of RLOs

Phase 2: Field Data Collection

# Phase 1: Mapping RLOs

- Mapping RLOs through a desk review and rapid phone-based KIs.  
*Preliminary mapping is critical to avoid overlooking smaller, less resourced RLOs that contribute to the well-being of their communities.*
- After completing the mapping, the selection of the RLOs will be based on diversity, looking at: 1) the RLO setting (camp versus urban), 2) registration status, 3) nationality, religion, gender, social status, education level or age of RLO leaders, 4) the level of external relations and influence of non-refugee actors (including co-led organisations between RLOs and host community members), 5) their resources and access to funding, and 6) their stated objectives (e.g. social protection, artistic, for profit).

# Phase 2: Field Data Collection

- Phase 2 will focus on collecting in-depth qualitative data on 15 RLOs per country
  - FGDs with RLO beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries and RLO managers, staff and volunteers, and RLO representatives
  - KIIs with RLO leaders and external stakeholders such as UN agencies, government representatives, local administrations, refugee supporting agencies and community representatives from the refugee and the host communities

*In-depth qualitative data collection will allow the team to understand the factors that condition RLOs' response and impact from the perspectives of RLOs themselves, refugees and related communities and other actors involved in the humanitarian response.*

# Timeline / What's next

- By the end of November 2021, we will be finalising the mapping process and field work will start.
- By the end of February 2022, data collection will be finalised.
- By the end of May 2022, the final report will be ready.
- Similar studies are taking place in the Middle East, in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon and collaboration is also taking place with the Middle East research team.

# Conclusion

- Thank you for your attention!
- Selection of RLOs
  - Difficulties identifying RLOs in Ethiopia and Tanzania (for-profit orgs, faith-based orgs)
  - Exclusion/inclusion in Kenya and Uganda
- Q&A