

Collaboration Between Academia and RLOs To Advance Refugee–Led Advocacy: Challenges and Benefits Were Discussed During a Roundtable at the Global Refugee Forum

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On the 14th of December, at the R-Space (the alternative space to the Global Refugee Forum led by Refugee-led organizations in Geneva), the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network (LERRN) and Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table (R-SEAT) organized a roundtable to discuss collaboration between academia and RLOs to advance refugee-led advocacy. The discussion was centered on how to put the norms related to refugee-led advocacy into practice, the challenges of these collaborations, the benefits, the misunderstandings, and the risks involved. Over thirty persons from academia and refugee leaders attended the space. The discussion was moderated by Professor Nyi Nyi Kyaw from Chiang Mai University in Thailand, one of the Research Chairs on forced displacement funded by the International Development Research Centre.

The panel's objective was to share tips and tricks from RLOs on how to collaborate with academia. Rez Gardi, co-director of R-SEAT, started the discussion by speaking about how they use research and data from their collaboration with LERRN for advocacy in their organization: to influence policies and statements at refugee-related forums. She recalled involving refugee leaders and experts in research to understand what are the needs they are trying to address and what are the refugees' needs. The co-production of knowledge is important. Project funds

must include refugee researchers from the beginning and give them remuneration, as it is a collaborative partnership.

Next, Professor Ulrike Krause from the University of Osnabruck in Germany took the floor. She started by acknowledging she was speaking on behalf of Bibe Kalalu, an LGBTI Congolese refugee in Uganda who couldn't attend the GRF because of the denial of his visa. She emphasized that cooperation takes time, money, and respect. Over time, trust must be built. Researchers and refugees must find mutual objectives together based on respect for each other.

Professor Tristan Harley from the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at the University of New South Wales in Australia then addressed the audience. He presented the [Guidelines for Co-Produced Research with Refugees and Other People with Lived Experience of Displacement](#) drafted with Najeeba Wazefadost, co-founder of the Global Refugee Led Network. The Guidelines present key terms, benefits of co-produced research, key principles, and the steps to co-produce research in practice.



Based on these presentations, the floor was open to the audience. One professor recalled how it was a privilege to work with refugees of the same nationality during her research. It is important to acknowledge the relational ethics that involves recognition and respect for the other. The issue of expectations was also discussed, particularly in the context where refugees might expect policy change or other outcomes from research. For this reason, the relationship between researchers and refugees must be based on honesty, to be able to manage these expectations.

The audience raised other issues to be considered for collaboration:

- It is important to privilege the partnerships over the projects.
- The audience emphasized the 'do no harm' ethical principle as the foundation for partnerships.

- In terms of informed consent, it must be a continuous discussion because there can be various goals on the journey.
- No research is objective, but objectivity is in the questions that need to be asked.

One key issue that was addressed by the participants involved questions on the publication and dissemination of the results of the research:

- In some contexts, there are risks involved in co-publishing for refugees. It doesn't always have to be co-published or co-produced.
- There can be an ethics agreement to not publish until the refugees have approved.
- Always ask this question: Are the advocacy recommendations that we're suggesting what you want as a community as well?
- Publication should be open access.
- Shaping literature is important but there are also other types of dissemination such as street graffiti and other literature that can be read to understand the context. What constitutes a knowledge product?
- It's important to consider giving back to the community and find alternative ways of dissemination particularly for refugees living in the camps. What immediate products can be shared?

To conclude, the question of how we change the structures was raised. Collaboration between academia and RLOs should not reproduce the structures and look beyond the narrative of partnership. Many challenges remain in dismantling some of the barriers for academics and researchers with lived experience of forced displacement.

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