

Civil society and the everyday politics of the global refugee regime:

Early lessons from the
Local Engagement Refugee Research Network



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Land Acknowledgment

We recognize that many Indigenous nations have longstanding relationships with the territories upon which York University campuses are located that precede the establishment of York University. York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Huron-Wendat, and the Métis. It is now home to many Indigenous Peoples. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.



Understanding the politics of the refugee regime

- What do we know about the politics of the global refugee regime?
 - Politics of asylum in the global North and global South
 - Role of national and international politics in the regime
 - Role of interests in local, national, regional and global contexts
 - How these actors, factors and interests are nested in structures
- Which actors have power and influence in the functioning of the global refugee regime across contexts?
- September 2015 workshop: Focus on states, IOs, NGOs and others
- **Key:** Limited understanding of the role of civil society actors



Civil society in the refugee regime: Surprising gap

- Role of NGOs in the practice of the regime
 - 2016: c. 40% of UNHCR's programming was undertaken by 837 NGO partners
- Historical role of civil society in the refugee regime
- Role of civil society in other regimes (Betsill and Corell 2001)
- Sources of civil society influence in range of contexts
- Potential role of civil society as “drivers of change” (Baynes 2002)
- Civil society as “that set of diverse non-governmental institutions... strong enough to counterbalance the state... prevent[ing] it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society.” (Gellner 1994)



Focus on everyday politics

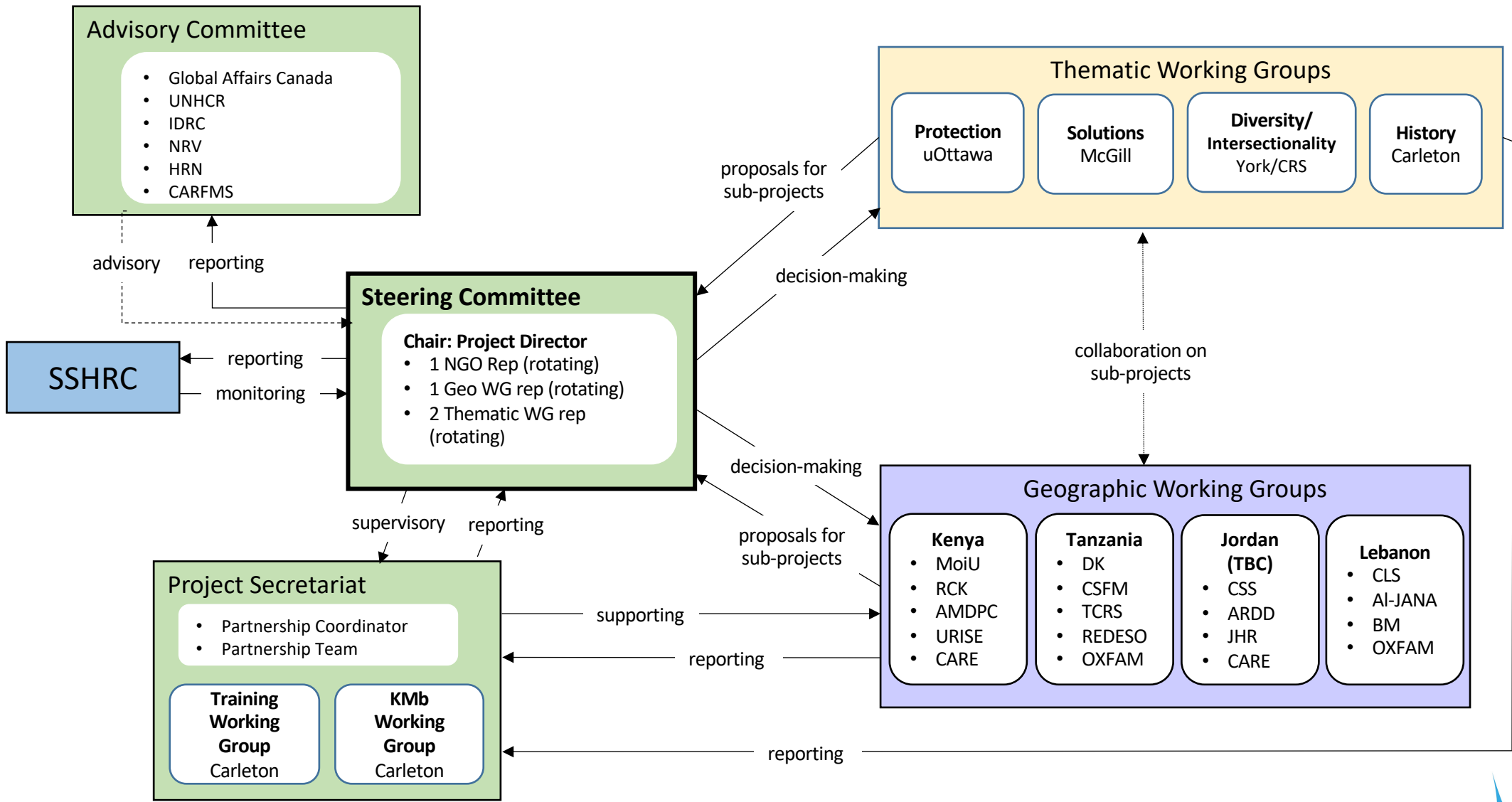
- Diverse manifestations of “everyday politics” of the refugee regime
 - Global, regional, national and local scales (Hyndman, 2000; 2001; 2004)
 - Diversity of governed spaces (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010; Landau and Amit 2014)
 - The role of “power brokers” and forms of power (Milner and Wojnarowicz, 2017)
- Civil society and everyday politics
 - Moral and expert authority conditioned by capacity and access
 - Ability to exercise productive power and influence
 - Ability to engage in “everyday forms of resistance,” which includes “foot-dragging, evasion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander and sabotage.” (Scott, 1987)



LERRN's goals and objectives

- **Key question:** How do we understand and enhance the role of civil society in the functioning of the global refugee regime?
- Who is civil society?
 - Researchers
 - National NGOs and country offices of INGO partners
 - Refugee-led initiatives
- **Focus:** Partnership between Canadian civil society and civil society in Kenya, Tanzania, Lebanon and Jordan
- Origins: Carleton-CARE-York 2013 MOU
- Development phase: 2016 to 2017: Proposal to SSHRC Partnership Grant
- Timeframe: 2018 to 2025





LERRN's core programs

- Co-create a **comparative study** of efforts to implement global refugee policy in diverse local contexts to identify the range of factors that mediate implementation, explain variation between contexts
- Develop and enhance a civil society network engaged in the functioning of the global refugee regime through **capacity-building, training and mentoring** activities for emerging scholars in the global North and South, NGO workers and refugees
- Produce **knowledge-mobilization mechanisms** to promote co-created knowledge through traditional and innovative forms, with a particular emphasis on seeking to address the political economy of knowledge production and to influence policy and public debates
- Support the development of **sustainable research ecosystems to support** scholarly dialogue and effective civil society networks, especially in the global South



Vision

OUR VISION: Refugee research, policy and practice are shaped by inclusive, equitable and informed collective engagement to contribute to timely protection and rights-based solutions with and for refugees

Goal

OUR GOAL: Empower civil society actors to advance protection and solutions with and for refugees

Objectives

Strategic Objective 1
Realize new knowledge and critical understandings on the conditions affecting refugees

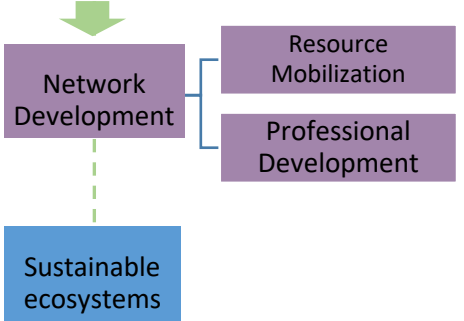
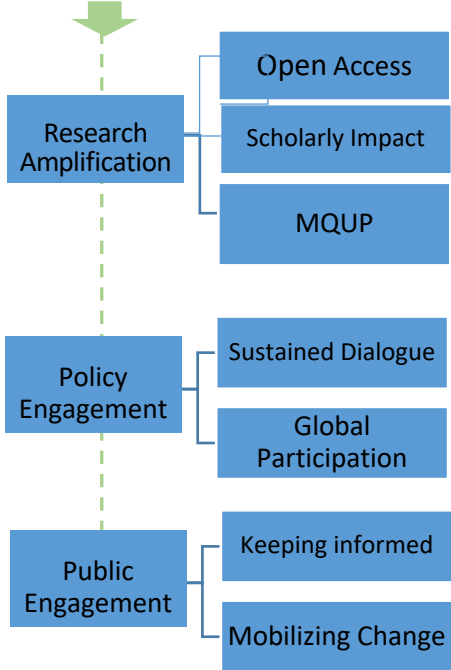
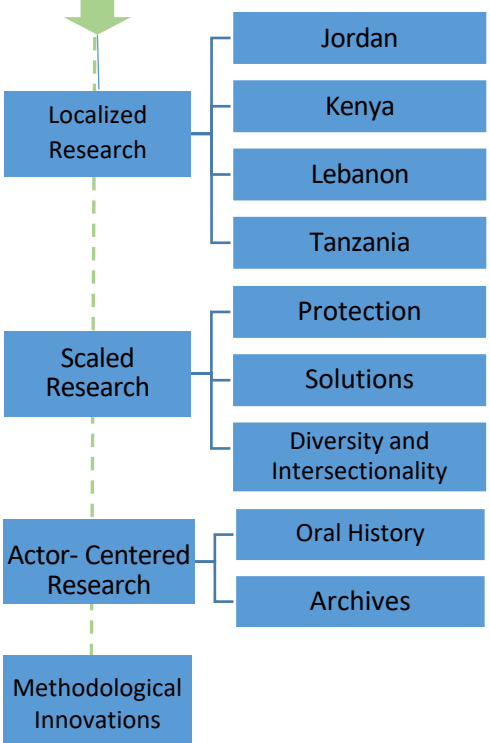
Strategic Objective 2
Enable civil society actors to affect change in local, national, regional and global contexts

Strategic Objective 3
Influence research, policy, and practice to advance the well-being of refugees

Strategic Objective 4
Sustain and expand scholarly dialogue and effective civil society networks, especially in the global South

Programs

Co-Created Research → Capacity Building and Training → Knowledge Mobilization → Partnership and Sustainability



Engaging with power

- How does LERRN work to understand and address expressions and experiences of power to condition the role of civil society?
 - Political economy of knowledge production (Shuayb and Brun, 2020)
 - Who publishes? Where? What access to literature? Who reflected in the 'literature'?
 - Power within research partnerships (McGrath and Young, 2019)
 - Objective, agenda and priority setting? Allocating resources? Overcoming asymmetries!
 - Competing expressions of productive power (Barnett and Duval, 2005)
 - Coalitions to amplify civil society perspectives across contexts
 - Decolonizing research, policy and practice (Taha, 2019)
 - Identifying and addressing assumptions in approaches
- How do LERRN's activities seek to reflect these lessons?



Co-created research

- Understanding actors, interests and factors that condition implementation of global refugee policy in local contexts
- Agenda set by Geographic Working Groups
- Research placements for Canadian and national students
- Collaborative research through process tracing in capitals and border regions
 - Open-access research tools
- **Example:** Localization and refugee participation in Kenya and Tanzania
 - Access and analysis through collaboration
 - Co-produced results due December 2019



Training and capacity-building

- Fieldwork preparation training for Canadian and national students
- Summer Institutes in refugee-hosting regions of the global South
 - Sharing knowledge and exchanging practice
 - 2019: Nairobi, Kenya
 - 2020: Beirut, Lebanon
- Refugee Participation
- Professional development



REFUGEE
CONSORTIUM
OF KENYA



Knowledge mobilization

- Leverage networks to mobilize knowledge
 - Global, regional, national, local
- Emphasis on knowledge translation for diverse audiences
 - Research, policy and practice
- Emphasis on addressing barriers to participation
 - Political economy of knowledge production
 - Imbalance between publications from scholars in North and South: 92% v. 8%
 - McGill-Queen's *Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* series



Sustainability

- Recurring challenge of inequality between research ecosystems in North and South
- How to ensure sustainability and impact for research ecosystems in key refugee-hosting regions in the global South?
- 12-month collaboration with IDRC
 - Regionally representative advisory committee
 - Phase 1: Mapping of capacity and need; learning from past experience
 - Phase 2: Developing proposal for regionally-specific responses
 - Results: July 2020 at IASFM



Refugee participation

- Involvement of refugee voices in LERRN
- Policy Dialogue in September 2019
- Canada's delegation to the GRF
 - Small step on a long journey
 - Goal for ExCom 2020
- Problematizing participation
 - Representation, legitimacy
 - Capacity, resources
- Refugee mentorship program
 - Launching 2020, with participants at CRS Summer Course



Preliminary conclusions (after 18 months)

- Everyday politics at multiple scales
 - From Geneva to Kakuma and everywhere in between
- The everyday triumphs of civil society are there if we look for them
 - Tanzania last week; Lebanon next week
- Differentiated understanding of 'civil society'
 - Researchers, NGOs, refugee-led initiatives
- Specificity of everyday politics and challenges of comparative research
 - Space for methodological and conceptual insights
 - Lessons for research, policy and practice
- Unique insights from partnered approach to full research cycle
 - Partnerships are built on trust and willingness to fail
 - Deep nuance of entrenched interests, inequalities and power relations
 - Need to address structures conditioning research and participation
- LERRN is one effort among many; keen to exchange and collaborate



Coming soon...

- New social media tools
 - @lerring
 - <https://www.carleton.ca/lerrn>
- LERRN Student Network Facebook group
 - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/433838990583520/>
- Training opportunities
- 2020 Research Placements
 - Kenya and Lebanon
- Annual Meeting and Workshop on power in research partnerships
- LERRN National Institute





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SSHRC  CRSH

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