

# STRENGTHENING REFUGEE AND LOCAL HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP IN UGANDA



## CONTEXT

In refugee displacement settings, it is usually Refugee Led Organizations (RLOs) that are closest to the affected refugee communities and best understand their needs and contexts.

While other local actors or members of the host community may be “more local” than national and international actors, they may not share a language, culture, or displacement experience with the refugee community which limits opportunities for refugees in areas of social networking and hence integration.

However, RLOs face significant hurdles in representing their communities in coordination and decision-making spaces within the current humanitarian system, where refugee responses, are often dominated by UN agencies and INGOs.

Like other local actors, RLOs often encounter negative assumptions about their capacity and organizational integrity. They experience multiple hurdles in institutional building—they often find challenges to register as local neither national NGOs, access banking services, or receive direct funding. They are rarely given the chance to design and implement programs, manage funds, engage directly with the policy and decision-makers and donors, or have a seat at the table where decisions are made.

## THE PROJECT

With funding of \$630,000 from Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Oxfam in Uganda is implementing an advocacy project strategy titled, *‘Strengthening Refugee Leadership and Local Humanitarian Leadership Advocacy in the Horn of Africa and Globally’* through national and local partners, including refugee led organisations under the localization agenda 2016. This is aligned to the Oxfam's commitments on Grand Bargain, Charter for Change and pledge for change in moving forward the localization from rhetoric to practicality with focus to ensure 25% of donor fund is shifted directly to RLOs/LNGOs to enhance efficiency.

The three-year project (2022-2025) aims to ensure that local actors experience a shift in both national and international humanitarian systems with a focus on the following;



**Local Leadership:** The core principle is shifting power and resources to local and national actors (RLOs) who are closest to the affected communities and possess critical contextual knowledge and networks.



**Capacity Building:** Through capacity sharing model, the project involves training of RLOs in areas of human rights, refugee protection and policy, media engagement, organizational capacity, to help them effectively advocate for the rights and well-being of refugees.



**Direct Funding and Sub-granting:** The initiative aims to increase the quantity and quality of direct funding to RLOs. Oxfam has experience in providing sub-grants to RLOs, enabling them to implement their own grassroots advocacy, engage decision makers at different levels and spaces to improve service deliveries for refugee protection and rights.



**Voices and Space:** The project aims to increase participation of RLOs/LNGOs in spaces at national, regional and global levels engage decision-makers, tell their authentic stories, and influence wider change through advocacy and response for greater impacts.

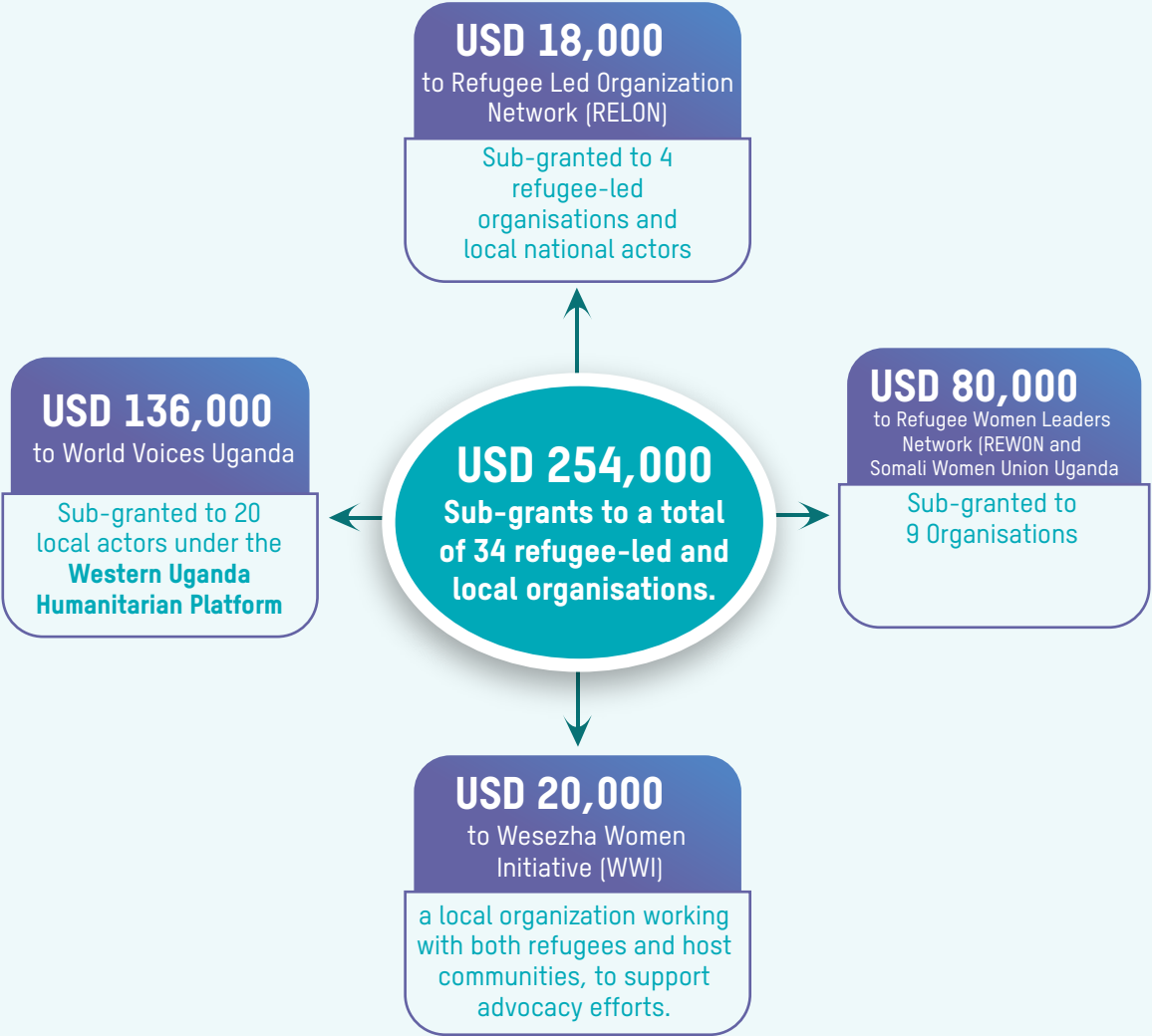


**Knowledge Sharing:** The collaboration involves documenting lessons learned and evidence of impact from locally led responses to build trust and encourage more investment from donors to support RLOs/LNGOs through bottom up approach.

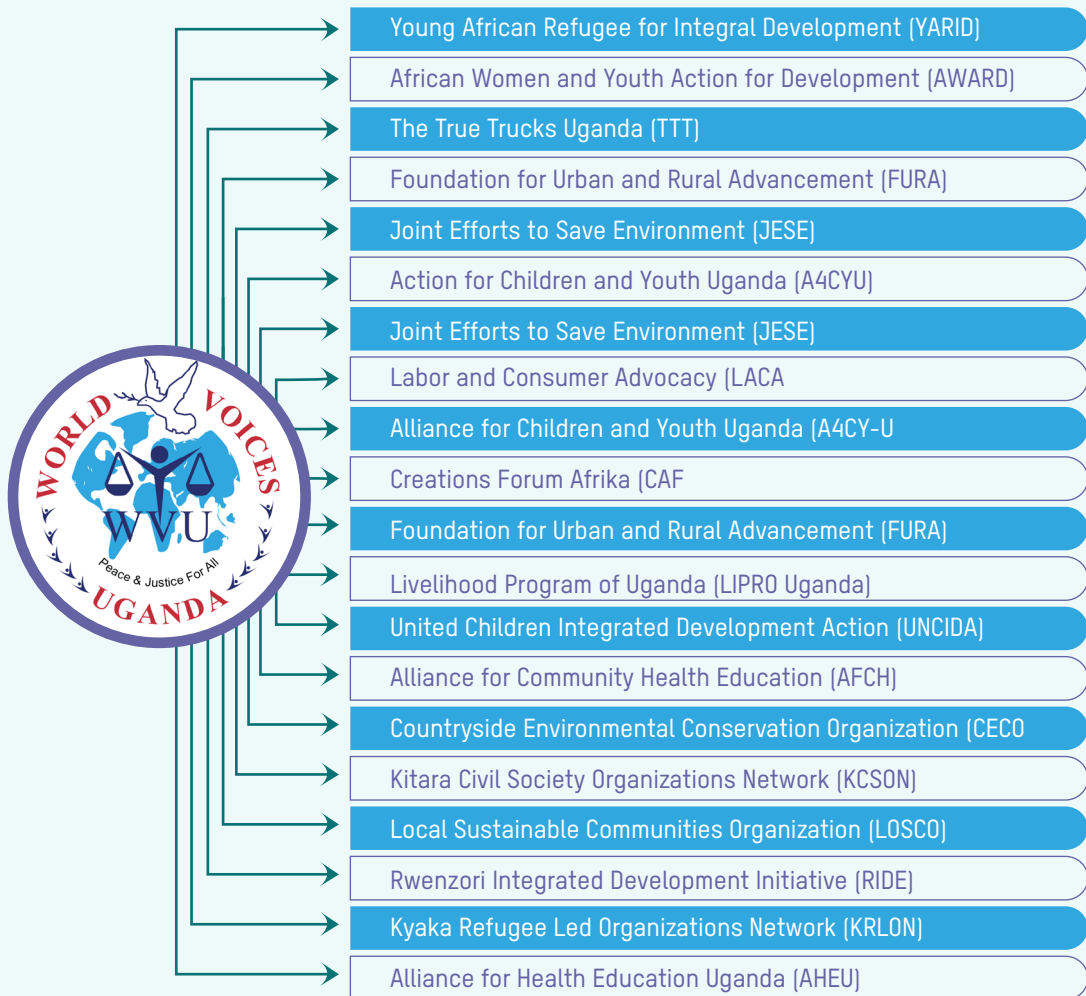
The project is implemented by RLOs/LNGOs networks and platforms such as Refugee Led Organization Network (RELON), Refugee Women Leaders Network (REWON), Western Ugandan Humanitarian Platform (WUHP), West Nile Regional Civil Society Network (WCESNET), Lango Humanitarian Platform (LHP) Acholi Humanitarian Platform (AHP), and Charter for Change Working Group Uganda, in a more systematic, collaborative and coordinated ways with focus on strength, voice and space for impact.

DIRECT FUNDING AND SUB-GRANTING

Oxfam directly sub-granted a total of \$254,000 to strategic partners within their networks/platforms from 2023-2025. These include Refugee Led Organization Network (RELON), Refugee Women Leaders Network (REWON), Wesezha Women Initiative (WWI) and World Voices Uganda (WVU) under the Western Uganda Humanitarian Platform (WUHP). These funds were then sub-granted to a total of 34 refugee-led and local organisations.



# 1. Western Uganda Humanitarian Platform under World Voices Uganda



# 2. Refugee Led Organization Network (RELON)



### 3. Refugee Women Leaders Network (REWON and Somali Women Union Uganda)



- ← Touch and Smile
- ← South Sudan Women Development
- ← Eve Organization
- ← New Life Family
- ← Touch and Smile for Development (T&S)
- ← Somali Women Union in Uganda (SWUU)
- ← Refugee Women Empowerment Association (RWEA)
- ← Girls Forum International (GFI)
- ← Sudanese Women for Peace and Development Association (SWPDA)

### 4. Wezesha Women Initiative (WWI)



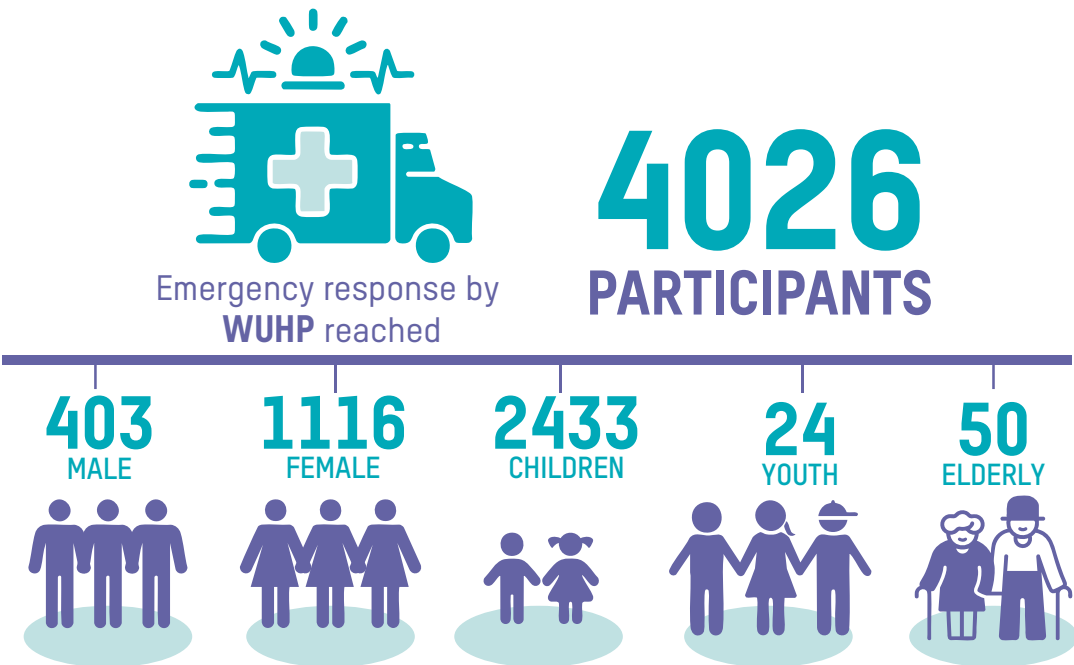
## IMPACT OF THE GRANTS

### INCREASED INSTITUTIONAL AND ADVOCACY CAPACITY OF SELECT REFUGEE-LED ORGANISATIONS

The funds enhanced the capacity of RLOs/NGOs to conduct advocacy and emergency response activities. World Voices Uganda focused on policy influencing for disaster response and management, especially advocating for a 0.5% contingency fund for disaster response to be placed at the local government level to provide effective response. However, accessing these funds has been a major hurdle. As a result of continuing engagement government departments and ministries like the Office of the Prime Minister, Members of Parliament on Disaster Management Committee, gave a positive response on the future management of disasters in Uganda.



The policy influencing and the contingency fund implemented by Western Uganda Humanitarian Platform (WUHP) reached 2567 participants (784 Male, 1783 female); while the emergency response by WUHP reached 4026 participants (403 male, 1116 female, 2433 children and youth, 24 People living with disabilities and 50 elderly).





*At River Nyamugasani, in Kasese District, locals are using an improvised footbridge over a water channel.*



*Barbra Etum Husna, The executive Director of Weshesha Women's initiative at the European Humanitarian Forum*

Oxfam directly supported the meaningful participation of refugee led organisations and local non-governmental organisations (RLOs/LNGOs) in key decision making spaces at national, regional and global levels.

Over 356 (241 Female and 115 Males) participants from the RLOs/LNGOs actors took part in the global and regional forums such as; Aidex and Grand Bargain workshops in Geneva, European Humanitarian Forum (EHF) in Brussels-Belgium, Global Refugee Forum (GRF), Humanitarian Network and Partnership Week (HNPW)-Geneva, International Learning in Gambela-Ethiopia, Right in Crisis (RiC) Workshop in Nairobi, and Programme review learning in Addis-Ababa.

**356**  
PARTICIPANTS



**115**  
Male



**241**  
Female

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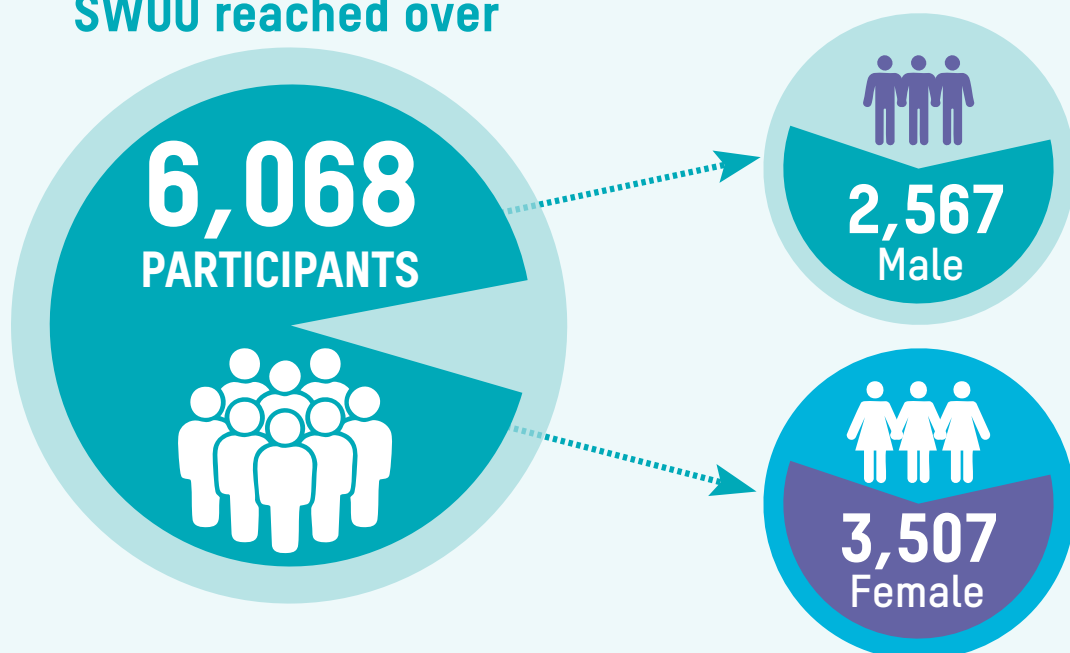
## Food prioritization by RELON reached



Somali Women Union Uganda (SWUU) conducted advocacy on ending ending Sexual Gender-Based Violence among refugee and host community women and girls. Dialogues were conducted at both local and national levels, involving men, women, girls, boys, and persons with disabilities.

This advocacy by WVI and SWUU reached over 6,068 participants (2,567 male and 3,507 female). It contributed to ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, and enhanced the capacity of Kikuube local government to respond and manage emergencies. As a result, the government provided referral pathways for reporting perpetrators of such violence, including toll-free lines, and pledged to work with communities to end the violence.

## Advocacy by WVI and SWUU reached over





## INCREASED RLO LEADERSHIP THROUGH PARTICIPATION AND ADVOCACY

At national level, the project directly supported the convening of spaces for RLOs/LNGOs during the National Reference Group under Grand Bargain 2.0, Charter for Change Working Group Uganda, and Refugee Engagement Forum (REF) among others.



*The spaces helped the RLOs/LNGOs to directly engage decision makers, both the governments, donors and development partners on issues affecting communities such as climate disasters, refugee influx, refugee protection, service delivery, funding limitation, policies, partnership, among others”.*

Through advocacy, the partnerships between RLOs/LNGOs; donors, government and development partners have greatly improved, and there has been increased trust between RLOs/LNGOs, and donors' agencies. Some donors have directly started engaging with local actors through direct funding opportunities. Social services are improving, though more work remains in funding to address chronic gaps in disaster response, capacity sharing and strengthening, among others.

At the request of the Uganda National Non-Governmental Forum (UNNOGF), the project directly supported and revamped the National Humanitarian Platform (NHP), which brings together local actors from different sub-national platforms to discuss issues affecting communities.

The project also supported the launch of the Lango Humanitarian Platform that brings local/national actors together with the Lango sub-region. The platforms are being used by the RLOs/LNGOs to engage government, development partners, and donors on policy issues affecting communities.

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## BUILDING NETWORKS AND PLATFORMS

The project has enhanced existing platforms and networks through capacity sharing and strengthening in training. RLOs and local/national actors have benefited from several demand-driven trainings. These include Local Humanitarian Leadership, Advocacy, Communication and Digital Rights, Safeguarding and safe programming, Human Resources policies, among others.



*Through these, RLOs, Local/National actors have been able to use the skills they have acquired to engage decision makers on policy issues, refugee protection, among others. Others have been in position to streamline their organization in terms of developing and improving human resource policies, safeguarding and safe programming.*

While others developed their organizational website and now use things like social media, twitter, etc. The platforms and networks include the West Nile Regional Civil Society Network, Western Uganda Humanitarian Platform, Acholi Humanitarian Platform, Charter for Change Working Group Uganda, National Reference Group of the Grand Bargain. In addition, the project directly supported the launch of the Lango Humanitarian Platform.

## EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY AND ENGAGEMENT ON REFUGEE RIGHTS, PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Following a request from the African Refugee Led Network, Oxfam in Uganda, through Oxfam in Africa, conducted joint research titled: *The Impact of Freedom of Movement on Self-Reliance of Refugees in the East and Horn of Africa*. The joint research was carried out in refugee settlements in Uganda and Kenya to gather refugee experiences on the topic.



*The research findings were analysed and will be used for public policy advocacy and sector-wide influence to improve practices and behaviours of policy implementers and practitioners.*

Equally, Oxfam in Uganda and Oxfam Geneva conducted research on the refugee participation in the coordination meeting, which is yet to be published to inform further advocacy on refugee engagement and participation.



*The launch of Western Uganda Humanitarian Platform in Kagadi District. The platform brings together over 56 local actors to respond timely to emergencies and disasters in Western Uganda.*



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