

REFUGEE ENGAGEMENT FORUM (REF)

The 19th REF Meeting Report



REF Meeting from 1st – 3rd November 2023 at Silver Springs Hotel - Bugolobi, Kampala, Uganda

Day 1: 1st November 2023

Session I title: Opening remarks and introductions.

Session time: 09:00 – 09.45

Session objective: To provide an overview of the agenda of the 19th REF.

- The meeting was opened with a word of prayer led by a volunteer REF member. Thereafter, the participants introduced themselves by name, position, and settlement/organization.
- Mr. Jerry Grants Anyoli, REF co-chair, welcomed all participants and thanked the REF Taskforce partners that were present at the Forum (UNHCR, GIZ, U-Learn, and CRRF Secretariat). He proceeded to ask REF members to reiterate the objectives and main task of the previous REF and stressed the refining of the refugee pledges as the main objective of the 19th REF. Mr. Jerry also expressed an apology on behalf of the OPM co-chair who was engaged in Kitgum with matters also related to the REF.
- Mr. Zbigniew Paul DIME from UNHCR also welcomed participants, highlighted the relevance of the REF, and underlined the importance of the pledges concerning the upcoming Global Refugee Forum (GRF).

Session II title: 20th CRRF S.G. agenda

Session time: 09.50 – 10.00

Session objective: To inform REF on the CRRF Steering Group Agenda.

- The next SG meeting will be held at the end of November. It will deal with primarily two substantive issues:
 - The Private Sector Engagement Strategy will be introduced.
 - A discussion will be held on how to improve the CRRF-SG, mainly the level of representation.
- Updates from REF and DEF will be given at the SG meeting.
- Updates on JLIRP and ERP II will also be provided.

Session III title: Briefing on Government pledges.

Session time: 10.00 – 10.50

Session objective: To inform REF on the pledges the Government of Uganda will present at the GRF.

- On self-reliance:
 - Creation of 300,000 viable economic opportunities by 2027
- On the environment:
- On localisation:
- On durable solutions:

REF members were subsequently allowed to ask questions on the pledges by the Government.

- Question: Regarding the pledge on transition, how can we be sure that government standards will be met?

- Question: Regarding the pledge on durable solutions, why is there no pledge on resettlement?
- Question: Would it be possible in the future for the REF to interact with representatives of the various ministries?

Session IV title: Updates by the REF representatives on CRRF S.G.

Session time: 10.50 – 11.30

Session objective: To brief REF members on CRRF S.G.

The two REF representatives at the CRRF S.G. provided feedback on the Government pledges and CRRF S.G. meetings. The points raised include:

- Dissatisfaction was voiced concerning the absence of a pledge to pave the way towards the naturalization of refugees in Uganda. Members expressed concern regarding a perceived lack of opportunities for resettlement in the pledges. On the aspect of resettlement, a member also brought forward the desire of refugees to reconnect with family members outside of Uganda.
- In terms of the Government pledge on transition, worries were communicated on whether service delivery standards will be maintained once the implementing partners withdraw. Members also criticized that the Government does not address the issue of land allocation and the limited availability of land in the pledges. REF members asked the Government to place enhanced emphasis on supporting peace-building measures in the region and to support initiatives enabling refugees to return to their homes.

Session V title: Review of action points and key takeaways from previous REF meeting.

Session time: 11.30 – 13.00

Session objective: To review the action points of the 18th REF in preparation.

- Jerry guided the REF through this session by first inviting REF members to remind the Forum of the draft pledges from the previous REF. The precise wording previously agreed upon was cited and discussions were held on why these pledges, and their exact wording, were supported by REF members in the previous Forum.
- Questions were raised by REF members on why there are no REF pledges on durable solutions and transition. REF members clarified that pledges shall only be made on issue areas that refugees have a sizable influence on and that lie within the mandate of refugees, which is not the case for durable solutions and transition.
- The representatives from the different settlements were invited to provide summaries of the community validation meetings for the GRF pledges. Representatives indicated positive feedback from the meetings in response to the question of whether refugees in their settlements perceive the pledges to be relevant and achievable. Representatives from Adjumani voiced concern regarding the pledge on self-reliance due to the limited availability of land, which renders self-reliance difficult to achieve. A further issue was flagged on the pledge of planting trees, as seedlings are often not delivered timely.

Session VI title: Presentation of HINGO pledges

Session time: 14.15 – 14.45

Session objective: To present the pledges of the HINGOs to the REF members.

HINGO director Mike Bruce briefly introduced HINGO to the REF and explained its role in the refugee response. He proceeded to provide a brief overview of the pledges and recommendations HINGO will make at the GRF. A short Q&A session followed. REF members asked for clarification on the role of HINGO, requested advice on where, and with whom, they can advocate when NGOs terminate or transfer projects, and expressed concern about the lack of organisations employing refugees.

Session VII title: Formulation of refugee pledges

Session time: 14.45 – 18.00

Session objective: To finalize the refugee pledges to be presented at the GRF.

The afternoon session was dedicated to finalizing the refugee pledges to be presented at the GRF. REF members were divided into three groups, each of which was assigned one of the draft pledges. REF members were asked to discuss in the groups whether the pledges were important and achievable, whether their wording needed to be refined, and whether the pledges would incite support from partners and the Government. Thereafter, each group presented their results, and together the exact wording of each of the three pledges was discussed and finalised.

Regarding the pledge on education, REF members voiced questions on what “cost-sharing” entails and communicated that different schools charge different fees. It was clarified that “cost-sharing” is a technical term that is, and will be, properly understood by experts if used in the pledge. In the end, the draft pledge was adopted with no changes, and it reads as follows:

“Refugees in Uganda pledge to continue advocacy to all refugee parents to enrol children of school-going age to Early Childhood Development (ECD), primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions.”

“Refugees pledge to actively participate in education by embracing cost-sharing and monitoring children’s performance at school.”

Regarding the pledge on self-reliance, REF members expressed concern about the usage of the word “assets”, as some perceive that it may paint an inaccurate picture of the financial and other means available to refugees. Instead, participants agreed to use the word “resources”. The final pledge on self-reliance reads as follows:

“Refugees in Uganda pledge to use their skills, knowledge, and available resources to engage in on-farm and off-farm income-generating activities to improve on household income.”

“Refugee leaders pledge to encourage community members to champion positive mindset change and actively participate in capacity building, skilling, and entrepreneurial training programs for both youth and adults.”

Regarding the pledge on climate action and the environment, participants agreed that the draft pledge is too long and wordy. REF members agreed to keep the overarching pledge and to include the details of how the overarching pledge will be executed as sub-pledges. The final version of the pledge on self-reliance reads as follows:

“Refugees in Uganda pledge to support actions and interventions towards environmental protection and restoration for refugees and host communities.

Refugees pledge to plant 7.5 Million trees around households and woodlots by 2027.

Refugees pledge to work closely with the local Government to enforce the laws and by-laws on environmental protection within the settlements.”

The session concluded with a brief conversation about Uganda’s role as co-convenor of the GRF, and the opportunities that came with it. REF members acknowledged the need for Uganda, and themselves, to lead by example and to, therefore, be smart about the pledges and be ready to respond to questions on them from community members.

Day 2: 2nd November 2023

Session I title: Session on legal identity (birth, marriage, death registration) – ICLA

Session time: 9.00 – 13.00

Session objective: To inform REF members on these documents and to answer questions on them.

The first part of the session was facilitated by representatives of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). It consisted of a presentation on the services provided by the NRC in Uganda and an interactive discussion on the importance of legal identity. Participants agreed that these documents give everyone ‘the right to have rights’.

- REF members were also introduced to the legal work done by NRC in Uganda, which includes free legal aid services (e.g., counseling), collaboration with the Government of Uganda on legal matters, and thematic work on legal identity, housing, land and property, employment and business, and access to essential services.
- It was emphasised that identification documents can only be provided by national authorities, not by UNHCR or NRC or others. In Uganda, the relevant organisation is the National Identification & Registration Authority (NIRA).

The next part of the session consisted of a presentation by NIRA on how to register births and deaths and how to obtain the relevant certificates.

- If a child is born in a medical facility, the facility records the birth and issues a birth notification record. If born in the community, the birth is recorded by sub-county chiefs or town clerks. To obtain a birth certificate, mother/father/other declarant visit a NIRA office and present the notification record, a filled in birth form by NIRA, and ID, refugee attestation or refugee ID.
- If a death occurs in a medical facility, the facility records the death, notifies the registration officer, and issues a death notification record. If a death occurs in the community, the sub-county chief or town clerk records the death, notifies the registration officer, and

issues a death notification record evidencing the occurrence of a death in the community. This is free for refugees.

- To process the death certificate, the death notification record is necessary as well as a medical cause of death or postmortem report from a pathologist. In addition, a photocopy of ID/refugee attestation of the deceased is required.

Thereafter, a representative of the Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB) spoke to the REF about marriage and divorce registrations.

- The mandate of URSB includes business registration, insolvency, intellectual property rights, civil registration, and non-tax revenue collection. The functions of the civil registration directorate consist of registering civil marriages in Kampala, to register all civil marriages recorded by Chief Administrative Officer, to register church marriages as well as Islamic marriages.
- There are different forms of marriage in Uganda: civil marriage, church marriage, Islamic marriage, customary marriages, and Hindu marriages. The eligibility criteria for a marriage registered by the URSB include: both parties are of the age of consent, heterosexual, not related, monogamous (except for customary and Islamic), and consensual.
- The requirements to conduct a civil marriage consist of proof of place of origin (refugees must have lived in a settlement for at least 15 days) given out by LCIs; valid ID; passport photos; and payment of 260,000 UGX.

After the presentations, the REF members were given the opportunity to ask questions to the present representatives of NRC, NIRA, and USRB. These questions included:

- What is needed to register a civil marriage if someone is from a different country?
 - The person from that country has to provide valid ID and a statement confirming that the person is not married.
- If a child is born to a mother, who is an asylum seeker, and father, who is a refugee, how will this affect the child's birth certificate?
 - NIRA registers all births occurring in Uganda, regardless of the status of the parents.
- How long does it take to obtain a death certificate?
 - If all information is provided, it will take between a day and one week. However, often the information provided is scanty, which delays the process.
 - In the case of a late registration of a death, violent death, or the presume death, a police report is required to obtain the death certificate.
- Are refugees allowed to acquire land in Uganda?
 - Refugees can lease land for up to 40 years in Uganda.
- What can be done if refugees are required to pay for services that are supposed to be free for them?
 - NRC provides information sessions in communities on such cases. For a marriage, if a church is not registered, refugees shall not proceed to get married there.
- What can be done if legal documents misspell the names of refugees and refugee children?
 - A help and information desk shall be established to address these issues.

Session II title: Training on clean cooking.

Session time: 14.30 – 16.00

Session objective: To inform REF members on clean cooking alternatives.

The first part of the afternoon session was dedicated to providing REF members with information on clean cooking alternatives. Representatives from Mandulis Energy/REPARLE led the session, which began with an introduction of the company and its projects and was followed by a Q&A session.

- The goal of Mandulis Energy is to pioneer innovative renewable energy projects that deliver climate mitigation alongside sustainable economic development for rural farming communities in Uganda and across Africa to address the energy success trilemma of sustainability, reliability and affordability. The core offerings of Mandulis are the generation of clean electricity, a zero-waste model, and climate-smart agriculture management practices.
- REF members were introduced to non-carbonised briquettes produced by the company. The briquettes constitute an alternative to firewood and are made of biomass raw materials such as maize cobs, rice husks or groundnut shells. The advantages of these briquettes in comparison to conventional firewood include that their supply is reliable, their longer burning time, and their cost-effectiveness. Biochar, which is a byproduct of cooking with these briquettes, can be used as a fertiliser.
- Questions by REF members pertained to how Mandulis Energy accounts for the limited resources of refugees, whether the company plans to extend to more settlements, and how the briquettes can be distributed effectively.

Session III title: Open discussion with World Food Programme (WFP)

Session time: 16.00 – 17.15

Session objective: Provide space to have a Q&A session with WFP.

For the final session of Day 2 of the 19th REF, a representative from WFP joined the REF to provide a brief update on ongoing processes and to respond to various questions by REF members.

- In the brief presentation, it was stressed that WFP's data-driven model relies on household data to be correct to minimise the margin of error of the approach. REF members were therefore invited to appeal to their communities to ensure that they update their household data whenever there are changes. Prioritisation was emphasised as necessary to ensure that the most vulnerable households receive assistance.
- A brief outlook was provided for the year ahead. In terms of resources, there is a significant shortfall, as only half of the resources needed are available. UNHCR, OPM, and WFP will continue to advocate with donors and request additional assistance.
- The prioritisation review mechanism has progressed, and feedback will soon be provided. It was stressed that claims submitted by households will not automatically result in a re-categorisation of a household.

REF members were subsequently given the opportunity to raise questions:

- Would it be possible for WFP to support refugees by advocating for the provision of additional land to be cultivated?

- This issue had been raised before. The resource mobilisation done by WFP considers land allocation as a possible way.
- Is there an update on donations of rice by the Japanese Government?
 - In-kind donations are often used for new arrivals in transit centres. If there are delays, it can be due to quality standards that need to be assessed first.
- A REF member expressed concern regarding disrespectful behaviour by WFP staff.
 - This was noted and will be addressed.
- A REF member raised an issue with cash assistance that is delayed, partially due to the poor quality of the mobile money provider selected.

Day 3 3rd November 2023

Session II title: Feedback Referral and Resolution Mechanism, (FRRM)/Integrity/Risk

Session time: 8.30 am – 11.00 am.

Session objective: To orient Refugee leaders on the importance of using FRRM platforms and to respond to their concerns on FRRM.

- The session was led by UNHCR. The objective of the session was to create a more transparent and accountable refugee response and improve coordination between OPM, UNHCR and partners. The FRRM system allows PoCs to report fraud, corruption, and misconduct confidentially and safely, and it provides an in-depth analysis of issues facing different population groups by location, nationality, and full AGD breakdown.
- It allows UNHCR, OPM and partners to measure the services PoCs are seeking to access and how effectively they are accessing them. It also identifies resourcing and protection gaps, to better target their funds and activities to achieve maximum impact. The system increases PoCs access to reliable information and as well as increased access to organizations operating with the refugee response.
- The system prioritizes refugee voices and offers a more informed, dynamic, and responsive protection environment, improving Uganda's refugee response to better address refugee needs.

ISSUES RAISED ON FRRM IN THE PREVIOUS REFUGEE ENGAGEMENT MEETING.

S/N	ISSUE	ACTION TAKEN
1	IVR use difficulties	Ongoing consultations to modify IVR. Community sessions on access to the helpline.
2	Fear of confidentiality breach	Agents were re-trained on consent and confidentiality by UNHCR protection staff.
3	Fear of retaliation	Discussion on stopping retaliation discussed at the National Protection Working group (NPWG).
4	Delayed feedback on some issues raised	Coordination meetings at settlement and national level to discuss response rates.
5	Poor network/connectivity in some locations	Need to follow up and advocate with telecom companies.

6	Low access to phones	Discussions ongoing
Next Steps: <i>Selection of a new service provider for the development and rollout of FRRM V3 and modification of IVR.</i>		

Session Take-homes:

1. There are over 70 partners with at least 800 focal points utilizing the FRRM platforms i.e., helpline, email, and protection desks amongst others.
2. In the reporting period January - September 2023, **Category 2**, information requests had 29,165 and was the highest in number followed by **Category 3** requests for support and assistance/referrals with 9,794. The highest number of calls were received from Nakivale with the least being received from Bubukwanga Transit Centre
3. The highest number of calls totaling **15,491** was received under the sector of food assistance.

Q&A/ CONCERNS AND RESPONSES

CONCERNS	RESPONSES
FRRM is not inclusive of persons with disabilities, especially the deaf.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AS FRRM team has designed various visual IECs for awareness creation. • Besides the helpline, other platforms of FRRM like protection desks, and emails can be used by these members to seek help. • Utilization of family members, leaders, or neighbors to seek help for those who are unable to speak or hear.
Confidentiality breach by communicating through third parties, for example a neighbor's phone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earmarked partner technical personnel are being used to verify and relay information to the affected persons and not through neighbors.
Partner staff discourage refugees from utilizing the FRRM helpline. They take feedback given especially category 4 personally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The caller always gives consent on if the information should be passed on to the responsible partner- only information that doesn't victimize the persons we serve is shared to partners.
Partners do not reach on ground and prefer to interact with the persons of concern at the help desks.	No response was provided.

Session II Title: Discussions matters arising in Education and Health.

Session Time: 11:00 – 13:00

Presenter Name and Organization: FCA AND WIU

Session Objective: To respond to the education sector concerns of the Refugee leaders.

EDUCATION | Question and Answer sessions

Q: What is the age limit for scholarships for Diploma and bachelor's students?

- Each scholarship has its own requirements but usually 18 -25 years.

Q: Why do scholarships usually consider beneficiaries who to the community appear to be well-to-do and capable of paying tuition as compared to those who are considered unable?

- The scholarship beneficiaries considered are based on marks and could be well-off. (Thorough background checks on beneficiaries so that we can support the families that can't afford them are also conducted).
- A selection criterion is developed depending on the scholarship requirements. The selection committee bases these criteria on selecting the beneficiaries who academically excelled but are vulnerable.

Q: Why can't the number of beneficiaries increase while lowering the level of education offered by the scholarships (i.e., 6 for diploma instead of 3 for bachelors)

- Scholarships at both levels are already being offered.

Q: Why doesn't the system have a consideration for refugees who have already attained some level of qualification?

- A recommendation being worked on is that a competency-based assessment is to be done before the assignment of classes for refugees.

Q: Why are there inconsistencies in contract periods for teachers and some ECDC operation periods?

- This results from differences in donor commitments in instances where a school has more than one donor at a time.

Q: There are also cases where teachers face difficulty in getting recommendations for their contracts leading to the end of the contract, yet their services are still required.

- Recommendation letters are usually given as and when it is needed, but end-of-contract recommendations are not being given but will be taken up as a recommendation for discussion amongst partners.

Q: Why can't refugee teachers get promotions just as national teachers?

- Advocacy is ongoing to ensure equity amongst teachers, for example having refugee teachers as part of the system and those with the required qualifications to have their documents worked on.
- The laws of Uganda have several guidelines that should be followed for refugee teachers to be recognized in Ugandan Government Schools. This is a collective effort of all partners and can't be done alone by the education partner at the school level.

Q: Why can't education partners hire teachers who communicate in the local language, especially French?

- There are teaching assistants in each school to support with translation during learning. Furthermore, language training could be considered for the children before enrollment in school.

Q: Are there scholarship opportunities for students that are not in the mainstream line of education?

- Under the UNHCR programming it is not being catered for but there are other existing programs for youth engagement and empowerment. For instance, in Rwamwanja, youth groups are being trained based on their skills.

CONCERN: Delegation of power to select scholarship beneficiaries given to headteachers who don't involve community leaders – Nakivale

- Recommendation is to follow up on the Nakivale scholarship on which the headteacher is said to have selected the beneficiaries – WIU.

Q: Why are children who have transferred settlements denied support in form of scholastic materials?

- Verification of this action will be done – Windle International Uganda.

CONCERN: Head teachers are making decisions without parents' consent on the amount of fees to be paid, for example PTA, exam fees, teachers feeding and development fund.

- Headteachers have no power to determine all these kinds of fees without consultation. This is done through an existing school management committee to which the headteachers are secretaries.

Q: Why is startup capital at the vocational training in Kyaka II distributed to groups of six? This seems not to work since the nationals tend to take ownership of the capital compared to the refugees within the group.

- Startup capital is given in groups because of limited resources. Group selection criteria take into consideration the geographical location.
- Grouping host and refugee community members is done to foster social cohesion it may not be working; it will be revised, and further action will be taken.

Concern: There is limited infrastructure at the special needs school, the schools lack special needs teachers as well, especially in Kyaka.

- Infrastructure is not enough because we are receiving special needs students from all settlements. Additionally, there is a Special needs teacher attached to each school.

Q: How are you going to support young women and school dropouts to further their education?

- They can join in school on various existing opportunities available.

Q: Is there an opportunity to upgrade for the vocational school graduates?

- In the Uganda education system, after vocational school (vocational-technical- diploma-bachelors – masters- PhD). There is need for career guidance to be emphasized in the existing vocational schools.

Q: What advice/help can be given to candidates who failed to do their senior four exams?

- Next year senior four exams will be according to new curriculum, the best option for those who missed this year would be to consider accelerated learning, since in the normal route they will have to go back to senior one to be able to seat exams on the new curriculum.

NOTED ACHIEVEMENTS

1. 3 schools registered to get Centre numbers - Palabek
2. 3 schools for new classes (1 – 2 blocks 6 classrooms, 2- 3 blocks and 9 classrooms)- Parabek

Action Points

- It is the responsibility of refugee leaders to further educate their communities about the importance of parents and guardians registering school-aged children with uniform names and all other documentation mandated by the schools.
- Vacancies in the educational infrastructure are acknowledged by the education sector throughout the settlements. They persist in engaging in collective endeavors that are focused on mobilizing resources to enhance the infrastructure.
- Education scholarships are provided to academically gifted yet vulnerable students who have completed an advanced level of education. The beneficiaries are evaluated by a selection committee comprised of numerous actors, including UNHCR, OPM, and refugee representatives, according to a predetermined set of criteria. A victor is determined based on this total score.

Time: 17:30 hrs

Meeting was Closused by Mr. Paul Dime Zbignew