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Turning the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework into reality

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As they work towards the adoption of a Global Compact on Refugees, States are implementing the CRRF. How can those involved in its implementation, including new actors, best achieve this collective approach to large movements of refugees?

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), one of two annexes to the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (New York Declaration), outlines a comprehensive response to large-scale movements of refugees, based on a collective approach engaging different actors and approaches. Its objective is “to ease pressures on the host countries involved, to enhance refugee self-reliance, to expand access to third-country solutions and to support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.”¹ Fundamentally, the CRRF is about changing cultures, mind-sets and the ways we do business. It is about engaging a greater range of stakeholders, and thinking in more creative ways to enable refugees to be more self-sufficient, while better supporting the communities that host them. States are working towards the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) based on learning from how the CRRF is applied.

Several countries including Uganda and Tanzania have stepped forward to implement the framework. Plan International Tanzania and Plan International Uganda have supported the work of a consultant to work with the broader community to look at what needs to be achieved, and what challenges addressed, if the implementation of the CRRF is to be successful. Many of the observations and recommendations in this article draw on meetings held with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government officials and UNHCR in Tanzania and Uganda in May and June of 2017, as well as on subsequent discussions in Geneva.²

Learning from previous attempts

The unanimous adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) of the

New York Declaration in September 2016 was historic – never before had so many States committed to responding better to refugees and migrants. The New York Declaration commits States to developing two compacts by 2018: the GCR and a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration. While the lack of attention to internally displaced people (IDPs) is significant, this opportunity to improve our collective response to refugees and migrants should not be overlooked.

However, the CRRF and the impending GCR have been met with limited enthusiasm. It is not the first time that many of these concepts, ideas and approaches have been put forward. Many of the concepts have been tried out before, not necessarily successfully. For example, the attempt to engage a broader range of stakeholders in refugee responses – what is being termed a ‘whole of society’ approach – has been made before under numerous different names. Engaging development actors in refugee responses from the beginning is also not new. For the CRRF to succeed, it is important to learn from past attempts – and failures – to ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated, and that learning is incorporated early on. There are a number of challenges that must be tackled if the CRRF’s implementation is to be successful.

Simple, practical language: Negotiated in New York, the language of the New York Declaration and CRRF does not easily translate into practical terms. At the time of writing there is still no clear, concise or consistent description of what the CRRF means in concrete terms. Even the acronym itself means little to many people. It even prompted the High

Commissioner at the UNHCR Annual NGO Consultations in 2017 to suggest (half-jokingly) a re-naming competition.

The CRRF is meant to lead to a change in the way business is done, both by those stakeholders who are currently involved and by those that should be. Simply relabelling ongoing efforts and programmes or resurrecting old ideas will not be sufficient to achieve the step-change required. There is a pressing need for communication and practical guidance showing clearly what is new and different, which can then be contextualised in each of the CRRF countries. Otherwise the risk is that differing interpretations of the CRRF simply lead to a repackaging of ongoing activities.

Engaging local, district and regional authorities: States agreed the New York Declaration but it is unclear how much consultation there was with local, district and regional authorities – those who

respond to refugees on a daily basis. These stakeholders also need to be brought into the implementation process early on, to ensure not only that their input is heard but also that they are given the support needed to lead this different way of responding.

Refugees often fall under the purview of a Refugee Commissioner or a particular ministry. The CRRF, however, foresees delivering services for both refugees and host communities. This shift would require the engagement of the ministries responsible for those services (for example, health, education, water and sanitation). Engaging these ministries will be essential in order to change the way that responses are planned, designed, budgeted and delivered. Without the authorities' early engagement and commitment, it will be difficult to ensure that refugees are included in local or district development plans, as well as national ones. It will also be at these local and regional planning levels, in



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www.fmreview.org/latinamerica-caribbean

particular, that gender, age and diversity issues can be incorporated and addressed.

Hearing refugee and host community voices:

Finding ways to listen to the priorities and ideas of refugees – especially refugee women and girls – and to involve them in decision making as much as possible will be essential for the CRRF's successful implementation. Including refugee and host community youth will also be important. As with many such processes, the challenge is to find a way to engage people in a meaningful way that does not raise expectations unduly. Consultation fatigue is already happening in Tanzania, with the CRRF yet to really start being implemented. A coordinated approach to engaging communities needs to be developed for use in participating countries if the views of refugees and host communities are to be incorporated.

Breaking down silos: For decades there have been initiatives to get humanitarian and development actors working better together and to ensure a smoother transition from emergency to development responses. The terminology has changed over the years – from 'divide' to 'gap' to 'nexus' – and improvements have been made but the goal remains elusive. The CRRF presents another chance to achieve this ambition.

Humanitarians and development actors have distinct backgrounds and different approaches, their coordination mechanisms are different, they engage with different parts of government, and they often have different donors. Many of these donors have their own silos, although some donors are working to provide more flexible financing and streamlined approaches. After many years, the World Bank and other development banks are finally finding ways to better engage with displacement responses but they also come with their own cultures and ways of working. Donor commitments to aid effectiveness need to be a part of the CRRF's implementation.

Currently, there is no coordination forum to bring together a broadly representative group of humanitarian and development actors and other whole-of-society stake-

holders, including government, donors, private sector actors and development banks. The challenge will be to create representative – yet not inefficient – coordination mechanisms that bring them together to collectively agree outcomes. Any such forum must not, however, compromise the speed of humanitarian response or principles.

Shifting mind-sets: For the CRRF to work there will need to be a shift in the mind-sets of those actors traditionally involved in refugee responses. Humanitarian organisations should look to hand over to other actors much more quickly than they would normally do. Development actors should examine how they can become more flexible and responsive to the needs of refugee-hosting areas and communities. These shifts are, of course, easier to describe than implement. The CRRF secretariats and steering committees being set up in several countries can play an important role in pushing for these changes. Organisations that provide both humanitarian and development responses, such as NGOs, may be able to help navigate between these two operating cultures.

Previous attempts to change mind-sets have not had the necessary time, space or clear incentives, with institutional 'turf' battles often resulting in good ideas not being implemented. Institutions rely on their profile and ability to attract funding in order to operate. The CRRF – if implemented properly – will mean that many organisations, particularly humanitarian organisations, could see a reduction in the amount of work that they need to do as other actors enter the arena. That will be a fundamental challenge to their usual ways of working, to their financing and, potentially, to the number or types of staff they employ. These existential threats to organisations will probably meet with resistance but must be openly addressed.

Setting realistic timeframes: While short-term advances are necessary to maintain momentum, a longer-term perspective is necessary to bring about the hoped-for changes. In some countries, bringing refugees into national development plans will mean

waiting until the next plan is developed. A more realistic timeframe of five to eight years would allow the time necessary for systemic changes to be put in place.

Responsibility sharing: The GCR presents the opportunity to put global responsibility sharing into much more concrete terms but it will take a great deal of political will to really examine how the responsibility to provide protection and assistance to refugees can be shared more equitably. Without this global approach those countries hosting the world's largest numbers of refugees may be unable to cope – especially when the resources required to support even the most basic needs of refugees are not being provided. Many refugee responses in CRRF countries are already struggling. With insufficient funds to respond to basic needs, how will the CRRF be implemented there and elsewhere?

Addressing root causes: While the CRRF rightly focuses on the various elements and phases of displacement, one of its most

important objectives is to address root causes. In the New York Declaration, States have committed not only to tackle the root causes of violence and armed conflict but also to work towards political solutions and the peaceful settlement of disputes, and to assist in reconstruction. If States take these commitments seriously, the numbers of people fleeing will decrease and the potential for durable solutions becomes more likely.

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1. UN General Assembly, *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 September 2016, A/RES/71/1, 3 October 2016 <http://bit.ly/UN-NewYorkDeclaration-2016>
2. The full report on which this article is based is available at <http://bit.ly/PlanInternational-CRRF-2017>



CRRF coordination structures: involving new actors

Tanzania's CRRF Secretariat is co-chaired by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG). Its members include government line ministries, regional authorities, UN agencies, civil society (including humanitarian and development NGOs), the World Bank and actors from the private sector and academia. Several of those government offices involved in the Secretariat's work have not been involved in refugee issues before; this new approach facilitates the inclusion of refugees in national development plans and budgets. The Tanzanian Secretariat and similar forums under government leadership in other roll-out countries are tasked with developing clear strategies to engage local, district and regional authorities in the implementation of the CRRF, and establish mechanisms for sustainable and predictable engagement with refugee responders.

In Somalia, at a regional level, Member States of the Inter-governmental Authority on Development signed the Nairobi Declaration in March 2017, committing to pursue together a comprehensive approach to finding durable solutions for Somali refugees, and agreeing to a set of commitments. Refugee

policies in neighbouring host countries will be connected to Somalia's national development plan, with a view to fostering conditions for sustainable return. Inside Somalia, the CRRF seeks to support the government in its State-building and peace-building efforts. Importantly, the CRRF contributes to existing frameworks, including the Durable Solutions Initiative, the Comprehensive Approach to Security, and the Fiscal Reform Agenda. Efforts underway under the CRRF include the organisation of a national forum on refugees and IDP solutions by the Government of Somalia, and a regional roadmap with national action plans of countries in the region hosting Somali refugees to support the principles of the CRRF and facilitate the reintegration of Somali refugees. Among these initiatives are the EU-funded RE-INTEG projects, designed to support sustainable reintegration of refugee returnees and the local integration of IDPs. With the EU's support, UNHCR, UN-HABITAT, UNDP and IOM are implementing a range of multi-sector community-based initiatives in Kismayo and Mogadishu.

For information on all participating countries, see the CRRF Global Digital Portal <http://crrf.unhcr.org/en>