

THE CASE FOR EMPOWERMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED NNGOs
as Part of the Programme of Action
to Ensure Effective Implementation of the CRRF
at the Local Level

SUBMISSION BY

ACTION FOR THE NEEDY IN ETHIOPIA (ANE)

Introduction

Our organization –ACTION FOR THE NEEDY IN ETHIOPIA (ANE) - has been engaged supporting refugees and vulnerable host communities since its establishment in 2012. ANE facilitates not only emergency services but also livelihood and development support.

We have benefited from the series of consultations and discussions organized by the UNHCR in the development of the CRRF, the GCR and the Programme of Action. We are grateful for the opportunity which enabled us not only to contribute but also to learn from the experiences of other organizations. We would also like to commend the UNHCR for taking the useful and timely initiative leading the charge in the development of these important initiatives based on a well-structured consultative process and engaging a diverse group of stakeholders including state representatives, civil society organizations, private sector actors, representatives from the refugee community, the youth and the academia.

We believe the process so far has been managed very well in a process that builds up the best attainable consensus around the paradigm shift the CRRF represents in a form of global public good towards the achievement of which everyone is expected to contribute based on the ‘whole-of society’ approach

We are also glad to note the concentrated effort currently being made, based on the momentum created so far, to develop the global compact on refugees consisting of the CRRF and the Programme of Action.

We are of the opinion that the conversations so far have provided valuable opportunities to enhance shared understanding of and increasing commitment to the CRRF, in terms of thinking and practice, as a basis for a stronger sense of unity of purpose, humanity, universality and solidarity.

We understand the effort is based on a very bold initiative seeking a major paradigm shift on the challenges and opportunities regarding the management of issues involving refugees and migrants. In spite of the challenges, however, it is encouraging to see that a lot of convergence seems to be already emerging from the consultations promising a positive change in the desired direction.

While we believe the policy direction laid out through the CRRF seems to be very well-defined and developed with well-structured participation of important stakeholders, we are not sure how the part that deals with the Programme of Action can be adequately developed without ground level participation and contribution of the primary stakeholders represented by the refugees themselves, host communities and community-based, national, non-governmental organizations(NNGOs) closely

working with them. It is not also clear whether the thematic discussions held in Geneva will be followed up by some kind of cascading process to ensure that the local level views are adequately reflected especially in the formulation of the Programme of Action

We would like to emphasize this, to avoid the danger of creeping /disguised disconnect which often frustrates well-intentioned development initiatives unless the necessary measures are taken at the programme planning stage including prioritization and style of implementation ensuring effective participation of the primary stakeholders at the local level.

In connection with this, we would like to underline the fact that community-based NNGOs, under the right conditions and working very closely with refugees and host communities, play a critical role in facilitating effective implementation of the CRRF at the local level. However, we are not sure as to how much they have been adequately involved in the consultation exercise.

More importantly, in countries with low level economic development, where more than 80 percent of the refugees are estimated to be currently hosted, the community-based NNGOs are best-positioned to play a crucial role in facilitating the effective implementation of the CRRF. However, their capacities are woefully inadequate to enable them to contribute with optimal utilization of their potential.

We would, therefore, like to propose that the Program of Action focus, among other things, on empowerment of community-based NNGOs, especially in countries with low level economic development. This should be considered as a key, intermediate objective the successful achievement of which can generate a dynamic multiplier effect substantially contributing to the achievement of the overall objectives of the CRRF.

With your permission, we would also like to present our reflections and suggestions as follows based on our experience closely working with and for refugees and host communities in Ethiopia and the insights we gained from the consultations and discussions in which we had the opportunity to participate.

Broadly couched in a general frame of reference covering conceptual and operational dimensions, the suggestions are presented with brief descriptions including background notes, rationale and recommended action steps.

1. Background

Based on the New York Declaration of 2016 which led to the generation of a series of pledges and commitments a number of states made to maximize and mainstream their support to refugees, the development of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) heralds an important paradigm shift with wide-ranging implications in terms of institutional and operational transformation. It reshapes fundamentally and substantially the way the whole concept and practice related to the challenges and opportunities of refugee-ism and migration, defined herewith as 'The R-M Agenda', and its multi-faceted implications are to be redefined and streamlined.

The radical shift should also help to recognize the free-willing and unbounded nature of the evolution of 'The R-M Agenda' often revealing itself as ubiquitous, but not necessarily uniform, categories under different political-economic and socio-cultural settings.

First, 'The R-M Agenda' historically represents an important factor underpinning the process of societal struggle, survival and development in the realm of normative practice and evolution- a normative practice increasingly based on myriads of movements of people from one place to another, and for a variety of reasons.

Second, 'The R-M Agenda', in the present day context, is not only widely prevalent but it is also growing in complexity due to the rising pushback, in some quarters, with flagrant denial of the fact that 'The R-M Agenda' has always been operating, front and centre, as part of the historical dynamics of the struggle, survival and development of humanity. The increasing complexity of 'The R-M Agenda', in terms of scale and intensity, is now demanding more attention and solution. The intensity of the demand has reached a critical point where it is increasingly capturing the top spot in the political-economic and socio-cultural discourse at local, country, regional and global levels.

- The comprehensive response requires not only mitigation of the consequences of the rising trend but also robust prevention to minimize the risk by debunking the unfounded claim of the modern day deniers and skeptics based on hard evidence generated from research and analysis of the historical dynamics. It is important to take this forward as an integral part of the Programme of Action. Effective engagement with academia within the CRRF umbrella can provide a good vehicle to realize this objective.

Third, the way 'The R-M Agenda' is managed in the present day context determines, to a very large degree, the extent to which the future evolves in one of the two directions promising, either:

- a more troubled world with increasing division, discrimination, exclusion, exploitation, and collective demise, or
- a more hopeful and peaceful world with growing unity, solidarity, inclusion, shared understanding and collective prosperity

The dynamic shift further recognizes the fact that 'The R-M Agenda' is no more the concern for the few who carry the brunt with limited support in terms of protection and assistance; instead, it sets the conditions in which 'The R-M Agenda' has to be addressed through well-harmonized collective efforts.

Moreover, reflecting the intricate web of 'The R-M Agenda' in a time series perspective, underscores the importance of all-rounded understanding of its depth and width with a seemingly endless continuum although the barometer of the wave rises and falls with time. It also implies that 'The R-M Agenda' can at best be managed but not necessarily resolved. The search for solutions should also be based on shared understanding of the unbounded nature of 'The R-M Agenda' in a continuum that encompasses the past, the present and the future

In a more practical sense, the broad-based effort currently being made to manage 'The R-M Agenda' is a giant step forward in the history of human struggle, survival and development. It represents a genuine search for proper management of the issues based on effective and sustainable contributions from all stakeholders.

The shared understanding of the unbounded continuity and ubiquity of 'The R-M Agenda' is likely to spur all and sundry to contribute to the collective effort. This should be done not only from the stand point of shared humanity and solidarity but also from the consideration of the enlightened interest with sufficient understanding of the fact that the implications of 'The R-M Agenda' can affect all in one form or another.

And here in lies the novelty of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The CRRF proposes 'whole- of- society' approach as a possible best model for the management of 'The R-M Agenda' in which the challenges and opportunities it represent can be equitably and predictably shared. In terms of responsibility sharing, the 'whole-of-society' approach unlocks the secret of the conventional wisdom underpinned by '*50 lemons, a burden for one, a jewel for 50*'.

The efforts made to date are commendable, as they have created the right platform in which a considerable number of stakeholders have been engaged early on in the consultation focusing on the CRRF. It was also appropriate that the consultation was pitched at a higher level to ensure buy-in with the required level of commitment towards equitable and predictable responsibility sharing in the process of implementation through the Programme of Action. We also believe that the series of consultations and discussions to

date have helped to deepen the understanding and advance the cause the CRRF stands for as a global public good to which everyone needs to feel obliged to contribute.

Furthermore, the useful work done to develop the global compact on refugees consisting of the CRRF as 'a global public good' and the Programme of Action, as an instrument of implementation, has enabled the participants to explore the dynamic linkage between the policy framework and to implementation plan.

However, we believe more needs to be done to develop the Programme of Action with more broad-based and substantive participation and contributions from the primary stakeholders at the local level including refugees and host communities to ensure adequate sensitivity to context specificity and diversity. This helps to underscore the fact that a programme of action stands a better chance of success when it is negotiated with the key local level stakeholders but not when it is ready made.

While community-based NNGOs play a key role as local level stakeholders, not much reference is made in the synoptic outline provided in the background documents. The level of their participation and influence in the discussion also seems to be one that leaves a lot to be desired.

We believe this needs further considerations with the required level of focus and emphasis. Community-based NNGOs, under the right conditions, exert a considerable power of influence, in terms of voice and service delivery, and make a difference in the lives and livelihoods of the communities they support including refugees and vulnerable host communities. Their role is too important to be ignored and too visible to be overlooked. Our contention is that community based NNGOs should be adequately empowered as part of the focus of the Programme of Action to ensure effective implementation of the CRRF at the local level.

Rationale

The practical value the CRRF generates, as a broad-based framework, can be optimally realized if and only if it is effectively implemented enabling as many stakeholders as possible to contribute their fair share towards the sustainable management of 'The R-M Agenda'. While the priorities are contextually determined to ensure local level effectiveness and relevance of the effort, it can be argued that stakeholders with the closest proximity working for and with the refugees and the host communities on the ground community-based NNGOs-are best placed to contribute to the collective effort to manage 'The R-M Agenda'.

In particular, community-based NNGOs are best placed, both operationally and strategically to ensure effective CRRF rollout at the local level

- In countries where refugees and host communities share similar but not necessarily the same adversities and vulnerabilities, community-based NNGOs are engaged on both sides of the equation facilitating humanitarian and development support for both refugees and vulnerable host communities. In Ethiopia, for instance, it is estimated that up to 80 percent of the refugees are hosted in pastoral and agro-pastoral regions frequently affected by extreme climatic variations including droughts and floods. Community based NNGOs, despite their capacity limitations, are always at the forefront navigating through the multiplicity of the challenges in the service they provide at the local level.
- The role community-based NNGOs play in the effective rollout of the CRRF, leveraging their long-established and active partnerships with both the refugees and host communities, is of paramount importance.
- This is attributable to the fact that community-based NNGOs, especially those born out of the communities including refugees and host communities, are strongly embedded in the political-economic and socio-cultural context in which 'The R-M Agenda' is to be configured and properly managed.
- Born out of the communities including the refugees, community-based NNGOs have the potential to identify the best management models that works organically in each context based on indigenous knowledge and resources in managing 'The R-M Agenda' without necessarily resorting to other approaches that require more sophisticated and more expensive management models.
- Naturally embedded within the communities, community-based NNGOs have more comparative advantages to manage 'The R-M Agenda' working closely with and for the refugees and vulnerable host communities. It is important to understand that they often enjoy cordial relationships with the refugees and vulnerable host communities based on increasing mutual trust and respect.
- Strongly positioned on the ground, the community-based NNGOs are the first to deal with 'The R-M Agenda' issues in time of refugee inflow in small and or large numbers. They are engaged from the start assessing needs and capacities of refugees and vulnerable host communities. They also play a pivotal role in initiating response actions in a phased approach in which emergency services are gradually turned over to recovery and livelihoods/development programmes.
- In situations where local integration turns out to be a realistic option, community-based NNGOs play indispensable roles facilitating the process and providing the necessary material and non-material support in terms of fostering understanding between the refugees and host communities

3. Recommended Action Steps

The hard fact that community-based NNGOs, especially in countries with low level development, survive with limited capacities represents a major caveat that hampers the optimal contribution they could make towards the effective rollout of the CRRF and the management of 'The R-M Agenda'. It is also widely recognized that even the states in countries with low level economic status face more or less the same challenge. Commenting on the positive efforts Uganda is currently making to improve the situation of refugees and the challenges it faces, a government representative sharing their experiences during one of the side events focusing on THE CRRF IN PRACTICE precisely described the dilemma when he said that 'Uganda has a big heart but an empty pocket.'

It is, therefore, a matter of strategic and operational imperative to empower the community-based NNGOs to enable them to contribute with their optimal potential to the effective and credible implementation of the CRRF at the local level.

Capacity building and empowerment of community-based NNGOs should be included as an intermediate objective that should be effectively addressed up front to ensure that the subsequent implementation of the main CRRF objectives can be based on sound footing. In connection with this, it is important to realize the fact that a limited investment in preparedness pays back much more in response.

The strategic and operational priorities may differ from one context to another. However, the following could be considered as a general reference in the process of community-based NNGO capacity building:

- Capacity building and empowerment in a direction that lifts their overall organisational and operational capacities/resources with increasing performance in terms of quantity and quality
- Capacity building and empowerment in a direction that enables them to ensure the required level of sustainability and gradual self-reliance to minimize the danger of prolonged dependency on external support
- Capacity building and empowerment in a direction that enables them to strengthen their capacities and resources to support refugees and vulnerable host communities providing not only emergency services but also livelihood and development support
- Capacity building and empowerment in a direction that enables them to consolidate their comparative advantages and sustain their roles in fostering understanding and cohesion between the refugees and vulnerable host communities as a basis for enhancing the culture of peace and non-violence.

- Capacity building and empowerment in a direction that enables them to consolidate and sustain their capacities and resources to contribute more actively to the process of integration supporting both refugees and host communities
- Capacity building and empowerment in a direction that boosts their capacities and resources to prove themselves as reliable ground level link in the chain of national, regional and global refugee support networks and groupings not only in terms of service delivery but also in terms of advocacy.
- Capacity building and empowerment in a direction that empowers them to contribute to the search for more sustainable management of 'The R-M Agenda' based on analysis of and learning from customary /informal community practices.
- Capacity building and empowerment in partnership development with relevant stakeholders enhancing collaboration and support based on effective and credible management of humanitarian and development services.