

Conceptual Framework: Meaningful Participation of Refugees in the Implementation of the Shirika Plan



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1. Introduction

This framework outlines a comprehensive approach to ensuring meaningful participation of refugees in the implementation of the Shirika Plan. Drawing on evidence-based practices in refugee integration, community development, and participatory approaches in the African context, this framework provides a structured pathway for promoting refugee agency, voice, and influence throughout all phases of programme implementation.

While seeking to address refugee protection and development needs, the Shirika Plan can only achieve sustainable impact through the genuine and meaningful participation of refugees themselves. Decades of research and practice demonstrate that refugee participation enhances the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of interventions. More importantly, meaningful participation upholds refugees' dignity and agency, countering the disempowerment that often accompanies displacement.

This framework aims to move beyond tokenistic consultation approaches by establishing mechanisms for practical refugee influence over decisions that affect their lives. By institutionalizing refugee participation across **governance structures, implementation processes, and accountability mechanisms**, the Shirika Plan can become a model for refugee-centered programming that can guide other countries exploring similar approaches.

2. Foundational Principles

2.1 Rights-Based Approach

The rights-based approach forms the basis of this framework, fundamentally **reframing refugees not as passive recipients of aid but as active holders of rights**. This principle draws directly from international legal instruments including the 1951 Refugee Convention, its 1967 Protocol, and the more recent Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), which collectively affirm refugees' right to participation in decisions affecting their lives. In practice, this principle demands that implementing organizations:

- recognize that refugee participation is not optional or merely instrumental to programme success, but rather a fundamental right;
- requires the protection of refugees' freedom of expression, assembly, and association—rights that enable genuine participation; and
- ensures that refugees can meaningfully influence decisions about resource allocation, service provision, and programme priorities without fear of reprisal or service reduction.

Essentially, the Shirika Plan should create formal mechanisms that institutionalize these rights and establish clear pathways for refugees to claim them when they are not being upheld.

Guiding Questions:

- **What existing mechanism(s) exist that ensures meaningful participation of a refugees in the Shirika Plan?**
- **How can these mechanisms be strengthened to ensure that refugees can participate meaningfully?**

2.2 Inclusion and Representation

Refugee populations are not homogeneous, and meaningful participation requires deliberate efforts to ensure diverse representation that reflects the full spectrum of refugee experiences. It is important to include perspectives across age, gender, education, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status among others.

Special attention must be paid to marginalized sub-groups within refugee populations who often face "participation poverty"—systematic exclusion from decision-making spaces. For women, this means addressing practical barriers like childcare responsibilities, cultural constraints, and gender-based harassment. For youth, it means creating age-appropriate participation mechanisms and challenging generational hierarchies. For persons with disabilities, it means ensuring physical accessibility, communication accommodations, and dedicated representation.

It is important to be aware of the complex power dynamics between host communities and refugee populations. In contexts where resources are scarce, these dynamics can lead to tension or competition. The framework therefore advocates for balanced representation in joint decision-making forums, transparent communication between communities, and conflict-sensitive approaches to resource allocation.

Guiding Question:

- *How can we ensure that marginalised sub-groups within refugee populations are included in the implementation process?*
 - *How can power dynamics with key stakeholders become more equitable?*
-

2.3 Agency and Ownership

It is important to acknowledge that refugees are individuals with capacities, skills, knowledge, and aspirations that are vital to effective programme implementation. It demands a paradigm shift from viewing refugees as "beneficiaries" to respecting them as key stakeholders and partners.

Agency and ownership extend beyond mere consultation to meaningful decision-making authority. Refugees are capable of influencing the programme design, contributing to direct resource allocation, providing critical feedback on the implementation approaches, as well as shaping the evaluation criteria that will improve the programming. Refugees have intimate knowledge of their own needs and circumstances that is essential to contextually appropriate programming.

For the Shirika Plan, there should be consideration for **concrete mechanisms for refugee-led decision-making, opportunities for refugees to assume leadership roles, and pathways for progressively transferring programme ownership to refugee structures over time.** This requires implementing organizations to reconsider or explore ways in which they can relinquish some of their traditional power hierarchies and control in favour of more equitable partnership models.

Guiding Questions:

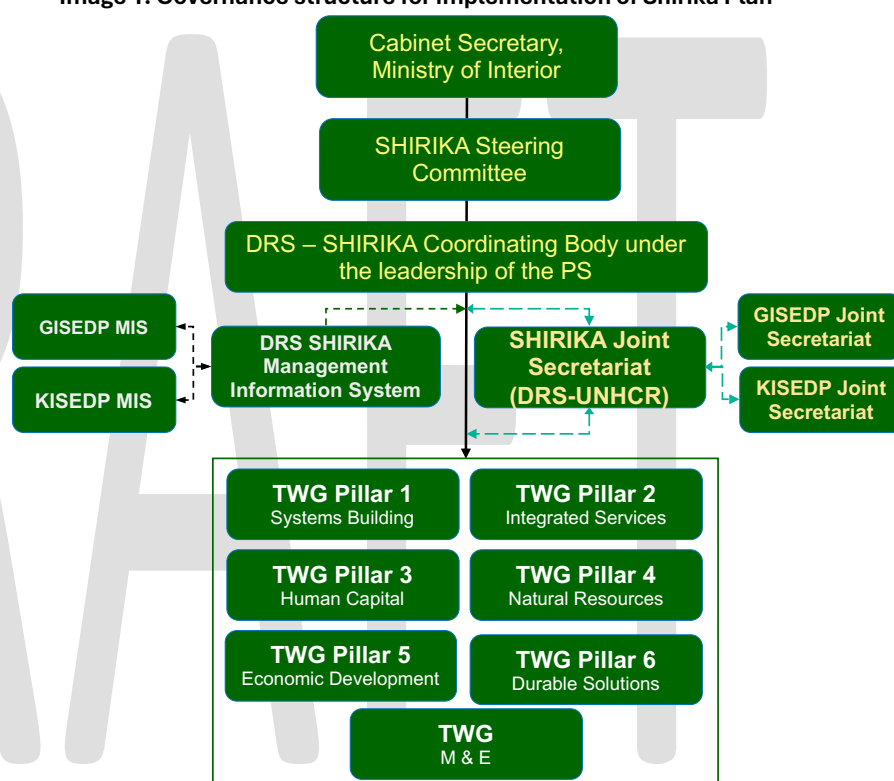
- **Is this possible? If so, how should this equitable partnership model look like?**
 - **What should be the role/responsibility of each stakeholder?**
 - **What needs to change to strengthen stakeholder engagement with refugees?**
-

3. Structural Framework Components

The Shirika plan is largely founded on the provision of the existing legal framework, particularly the Refugee Act, 2021. Therefore, the rights which will be realized through the implementation of the Shirika plan are provided for in section 28 of the Act and the relevant international and the OAU Convention on refugees and GCR. Paragraph 34 of the Global Compact on Refugees states that “responses are most effective when they actively and meaningfully engage those they are intended to protect and assist”. The major impediment to the realization of these rights is the lack of clear role and participation of refugees in governance structures designed to support Shirika Plan implementation in the 3 phases dubbed **Transition, Stabilization, and Resilience**.

Image 1: Governance structure for implementation of Shirika Plan

The development of the Shirika plan showed the participation of Refugees and refugee-led organizations (RLOs) whose engagement was on ad-hoc basis at the technical committee.¹ This committee was largely led by members drawn from line ministries at the National level and departments at the County level. The Governance structure of the implementation of the Shirika Plan is illustrated in image 1. It is not clear where the refugees participation is intended.



Borrowing from the governance structure that supported the development of the Shirika plan, **there is a high chance that the refugees and RLOs participation will be limited to technical working groups under the 6 Pillars as well as building on the existing refugee representation in the Secretariat at the County level that are implementing the GISDEP and KISDEP.**

It is notable that **meaningful participation of refugees in the above Governance structure should go beyond the technical working groups and be more formalized and steadier because they provide valuable insights and clear outlooks of refugees and host communities’ needs and solutions.**

¹ Draft Shirika plan popular version by DRS.

3.1 Governance and Decision-Making Structures

3.1.1 Refugee Representative Bodies

The foundation of meaningful participation lies in establishing legitimate and representative governance structures that includes refugee participation. These bodies must be democratically elected through transparent processes that ensure broad community participation and prevent elite capture or reinforcement of existing power imbalances.

At the camp or settlement level, refugee committees with clear terms of reference, roles, and responsibilities will require sufficient authority to influence programme decisions and adequate resources to function effectively. To ensure diverse representation, the framework recommends establishing representation quotas across all governance levels, for instance.

Selection processes should be transparent, with community-wide announcements of nominations and elections, independent electoral oversight, and established term limits (e.g. 1-2 years) to prevent entrenchment of power. Rotating leadership positions can help develop broader leadership capacity within communities while preventing dependency on specific individuals.

Documentation of selection processes and regular committee meetings should be maintained and made publicly available to refugee communities, enhancing transparency and accountability. In situations where security concerns exist, appropriate protection measures should be implemented without compromising representational quality.

Guiding Questions

- **Develop an organogram of the decision making and governance structure of the Shirika plan and identify where refugees should be represented**
- **Explain how they should be voted**
- **Identify the frequency they should meet**

3.1.2 Multi-level Participation Mechanisms

To ensure meaningful participation requires creating entry points at multiple levels of programme governance. A tiered approach can ensure that participation extends from granular, local concerns to strategic decision-making.

At the local level, neighbourhood or block committees facilitate grassroots participation, conduct needs assessments, and manage community-level interventions. These microstructures provide opportunities for broader leadership development and ensure concerns from the most vulnerable are voiced.

At the meso level, sectoral working groups can focus on specific domains (health, education, livelihoods, protection, WASH, etc.) bring together refugees with relevant expertise or interest to provide technical input on sector-specific interventions. These groups should include a mix of refugees and community representatives with different professional backgrounds and with lived experience of service needs.

At the strategic level, refugee representatives must be included in high-level coordination meetings, steering committees, and strategic planning sessions. This inclusion should be formalized through reserved seats (e.g. 25-30% of participants) and supported through pre-meeting briefings to ensure representatives can participate effectively.

At the policy level, platforms for refugee advocacy should be established to influence broader policy environments. These might include refugee advisory boards to government entities, participation in national development planning processes, or formalized feedback mechanisms to UNHCR and other humanitarian coordination structures.

Guiding Questions:

- **Where should refugees participate in the governance structure and why?**
- **What is the desired impact of their participation in the governance structure?**

3.1.3 Joint Decision-Making Forums

Beyond representation, **refugees must have actual decision-making authority within programme structures**. Joint decision-making forums bring together refugee representatives and implementing organizations in spaces of shared power and mutual accountability. **Coordination meetings should be co-chaired by refugee representatives and implementing organization staff, with agenda-setting as a joint process**. This co-leadership symbolically and practically demonstrates power-sharing and ensures refugee priorities receive adequate attention.

Resource allocation decisions—particularly regarding flexible funding, community development initiatives, or flexible programming elements—should incorporate formal voting mechanisms **with refugee representatives holding significant voting power**. A transparent criterion for decision-making should be established collaboratively and documented.

For decisions directly affecting refugee welfare, safety, or rights, **refugee representatives should hold effective veto power or, at minimum, trigger mandatory review processes when serious concerns are raised.** This ensures that even well-intentioned interventions cannot proceed without refugee consent, particularly in sensitive domains like protection programming or camp restructuring.

Guiding Questions

- Identify where refugees should contribute to decision making and explain why?
- What are the challenges/risks you foresee that refugees and other stakeholders may encounter in joint decision making?

3.2 Capacity Development Framework

3.2.1 Skills and Knowledge Transfer

Meaningful participation requires intentional capacity development that empowers refugees to navigate complex programme structures and effectively advocate for their communities. **This requires understanding the existing skills within refugee populations while addressing specific knowledge gaps related to humanitarian and development programming.**

Leadership and governance training should be provided to elected representatives, focusing on participatory leadership styles, constituency engagement, transparent decision-making, and ethical representation. This training should be culturally sensitive and build upon existing community leadership models while introducing complementary approaches.

Project management and monitoring skills are essential for refugees engaged in programme implementation. Training should **cover needs assessment, project design, implementation planning, budget management, monitoring frameworks, and adaptive management.** Where possible, these skills should be formalized through recognized certifications to enhance refugees' professional credentials. Given that refugees are on the ground, they can engage with host community representatives to identify the needs of the population and collectively identify the needs of the population.

Financial literacy and budget oversight training enables meaningful participation in resource allocation decisions. **Training on basic accounting principles, budget analysis, procurement procedures, and financial reporting will empower refugee**

representatives to effectively scrutinize financial information and ensure accountability for resources meant to benefit their communities.

Conflict resolution and negotiation skills are particularly important in contexts where competing priorities exist between different refugee groups or between refugee and host communities. **Training should address principled negotiation, mediation techniques, active listening, and strategies for finding mutual gain solutions in resource-constrained environments.**

Capacity development should be ongoing rather than one-off, with refresher trainings, advanced modules, and opportunities to practice skills in supportive environments. Training approaches should accommodate diverse educational backgrounds and learning capacities as well as utilize participatory methodologies that validate refugees' existing knowledge while introducing new concepts.

Guiding Questions

- **What are the anticipated barriers RLOs or refugee representatives have in skills and knowledge transfer in the implementation plan?**
- **How can these barriers be avoided? Provide examples**

3.2.2 Responsibility Model

Meaningful participation evolves over time, requiring a phased approach that progressively transfers greater responsibility to refugee structures as capacity and confidence develop. This graduated model adapts to different starting points and allows for contextual variation in the pace of transition.

PHASE 1: CONSULTATION AND INPUT

establishes foundational participation mechanisms where refugees provide substantive input into programme design and planning.

implementing organizations retain primary decision-making authority but document how refugee input influences decisions and maintain transparent communication about constraints.

PHASE 2: CO-IMPLEMENTATION WITH SUPPORT

introduces shared implementation responsibility, with refugees taking lead roles in specific programme components while receiving regular coaching from technical specialists.

Joint planning becomes standard practice, and refugees participate actively in monitoring processes.

PHASE 3: INDEPENDENT IMPLEMENTATION WITH OVERSIGHT

transfers primary implementation responsibility to refugee structures, with implementing organizations shifting to advisory and quality assurance roles.

Refugees participate in day-to-day operations, direct staff, and make operational decisions, while technical advisors provide troubleshooting support as needed.

PHASE 4: FULL MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY

- represents the highest level of refugee leadership, where refugee-led organizations or committees assume comprehensive management of programme components, including direct receipt and administration of funds.
- Implementing organizations transition to capacity-strengthening partners focused on enabling environment and institutional sustainability.

Progression through these phases should be assessed through participatory capacity assessments with clear, mutually agreed criteria. The framework acknowledges that different programme components may progress at different rates, with technical areas requiring specialized expertise potentially moving more slowly than community-based activities.

Guiding Questions

- **Provide feedback on the proposed phases described above and suggest any changes**

3.2.3 Mentorship and Accompaniment

Beyond formal training, ongoing accompaniment is essential to translate knowledge into practice and build sustained capacity. A multi-faceted mentorship approach creates supportive relationships that foster leadership development and technical proficiency.

Refugee-to-refugee peer mentoring leverages existing expertise within refugee communities and creates sustainable knowledge transfer mechanisms.

Experienced refugee leaders mentor newly elected representatives, creating a leadership pipeline that strengthens institutional memory and continuity. This approach

recognizes refugees' agency as knowledge-holders and trainers, not merely recipients of capacity building.

Technical advisory support from implementing partners complements peer mentoring by providing specialized expertise where needed. **These advisors should work alongside refugee leaders rather than directing them, modelling a coaching approach that emphasizes joint problem-solving.** Effective technical accompaniment requires advisors skilled in facilitative approaches rather than directive management.

Exchange programmes with other refugee-led initiatives facilitate cross-context learning and inspiration. **By connecting refugee leaders across different settings—both within and across countries—these exchanges build solidarity networks while exposing participants to diverse models of refugee leadership.** Such exchanges can take various forms, from structured study visits to virtual communities of practice or regional refugee leadership forums.

3.3 Feedback and Accountability Mechanisms

3.3.1 Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Meaningful participation extends to how programme success is defined, measured, and assessed. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches elevate refugee voices in determining what constitutes programme quality and effectiveness.

Refugee-led selection of indicators ensures that success is measured against criteria that matter to refugees themselves. While standardized indicators may be required by donors, **these should be complemented by locally-defined metrics that reflect refugee priorities and contextual understanding.** Practical approaches include community-defined scorecards, most significant change methodologies, and collaborative outcome mapping that captures qualitative dimensions of impact.

Joint data collection and analysis processes engage refugees as co-investigators rather than merely as data sources. **Refugees should receive training as enumerators, involved in survey design, and participate in data interpretation workshops.** This approach improves data quality by ensuring culturally appropriate methodologies while building research capacity within refugee communities. Mixed methods that combine quantitative measurement with qualitative storytelling are particularly valuable in capturing the complexity of refugee experiences.

Community-based feedback verification establishes mechanisms to validate findings with broader refugee populations beyond those directly involved in data collection. This might include community forums to discuss preliminary findings, random spot-checking of service quality by refugee monitors, or regular perception surveys administered by

refugee researchers. **Such verification helps identify discrepancies between official reporting and lived experiences, highlighting implementation gaps that might otherwise go undetected.**

M&E approaches should be formalized in monitoring frameworks and evaluation terms of reference, with specific budget allocations for refugee participation in these processes. Findings from participatory evaluations should directly influence programme adaptations and future design decisions, with transparent documentation of how refugee feedback shaped changes.

Guiding Questions

- **What are the primary key indicators that can be measured to identify success of the Shirika Plan to ensure the meaningful participation of refugees?**
- **Identify the potential risks or limitations in the M&E process?**

3.3.2 Information Sharing

For refugees to meaningfully participate, they must have access to timely, accurate, and comprehensive information about programmes, resources, and decisions that affect them. Information asymmetry between implementing organizations and refugee communities undermines participation and creates mistrust.

Regular town hall meetings should be conducted in multiple languages, with appropriate translation, to share programme updates, budget information, upcoming plans, and evaluation findings. These forums should be interactive, with substantial time allocated for refugee questions and input. Meeting schedules should accommodate refugees' availability, with multiple sessions offered to ensure broad accessibility.

Information boards and community radio programmes among others should provide continuous information access beyond periodic meetings. Centrally located notice boards should display programme updates, service availability, selection criteria for assistance, staff roles and contacts, and complaint mechanisms. Community radio programming—developed and hosted by refugees themselves—can disseminate information widely while providing a platform for community dialogue on programme-related issues.

Digital platforms, where appropriate and accessible, can expand information reach and real-time feedback opportunities. SMS alert systems, WhatsApp groups, or dedicated mobile applications can provide updates on service changes, distribution schedules, or community events. These digital approaches should complement rather than replace in-person information sharing, recognizing the digital divide that affects

many refugee contexts. All digital platforms must incorporate data protection protocols to safeguard refugee privacy.

Information should be provided in accessible formats that consider literacy levels, language preferences, and disabilities. This includes visual communication through illustrations, verbal information sharing for non-literate populations, and sign language interpretation or braille materials where needed.

Guiding Questions

- **What are the most effective ways of communicating information about the Shirika Plan? How regular should it be and what are the different means of communication?**
- **What has been the challenge communicate initiatives/programmemeing that impact on the lives of refugees?**
- **What needs to be done different to guarantee success?**

3.3.3 Grievance Resolution Mechanisms (GRM)

There is a need to establish or strengthen formal channels for addressing concerns when participation fails, or programme implementation deviates from commitments. There is a need to ensure that there is a robust grievance mechanism for providing recourse when standard feedback channels are insufficient.

An independent ombudsperson position, accessible to all stakeholders including refugees without intermediaries, serves as a neutral arbiter of complaints. This role should be filled by an individual trusted by the refugee community, with clear authority to investigate concerns and recommend corrective actions. The ombudsperson should report to senior leadership of the implementing organization or, ideally, to an oversight board that includes both refugee representatives and independent members.

Establishing a multi-stakeholder review panel will provide a forum for addressing complex issues that require collaborative resolution. These panels should include refugee representatives, implementing organization staff, and independent members with relevant expertise (e.g., protection specialists, legal advisors). Standing panels with clear terms of reference can be activated as needed to review specific cases, with time-bound resolution processes.

Documented follow-up and resolution tracking ensures accountability for addressing grievances once raised. All complaints should be registered in a secure database with assigned responsibility for follow-up, target resolution timeframes, and documentation of actions taken. Regular analysis of complaint patterns can identify systemic issues requiring broader programme adjustments. Summary reports on grievance resolution

(anonymized appropriately) should be publicly shared with refugee communities to demonstrate responsiveness and build trust in the mechanism.

Guiding Questions

- **Identify potential candidates that should be the independent ombudsman and why?**
- **Identify stakeholders that should be part of the multi-stakeholder review panel and briefly explain their role?**
- **Identify where the data should be stored and custodian of the GRM.**

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4. Implementation Across Programme Cycle

4.1 Assessment and Planning

For meaningful participation to take place, the process must start at the earliest stages of the programme cycle. As the needs that are assessed and priorities established fundamentally shapes whose voices influence programme direction. There is a need to ensure refugee participation begins at the early stages.

First, the process can start with a participatory needs assessments led by refugee researchers centring refugee knowledge and analytical capacity. Training of refugees in assessment methodologies should be expanded where they are involved in designing data collection tools, conducting interviews and focus groups, and analysing findings. This approach yields more nuanced understanding of needs while modelling the value of refugee knowledge from the programme's inception.

Second, community-driven prioritization of interventions aimed at transitioning decision-making about programme focus from implementing organizations to refugee communities themselves. Through structured processes like community score-carding, participatory ranking exercises, or town hall deliberations, refugees collectively rank the needs based on urgency and resource constraints. These processes should be documented to provide clear rationale for programme priorities that may be questioned by external stakeholders.

Refugee input on geographic targeting and selection criteria ensures fairness and contextual appropriateness in how limited resources are allocated. **Refugees should participate in establishing vulnerability criteria, determining appropriate targeting methodologies, and validating beneficiary lists.** This participation helps prevent reduce the risk of exclusion of vulnerable groups and reduces potential for conflict over resource allocation.

Co-creation of implementation plans and timelines engages refugees as design partners. **Joint planning workshops should involve refugee representatives alongside technical specialists to develop detailed implementation strategies, activity sequencing, staffing structures, and realistic timelines that account for community dynamics and contextual constraints.** These plans should specifically document roles for refugee leaders and refugee-led organizations in implementation.

4.2 Resource Mobilization and Management

Control over resources represents one of the most significant power dimensions in humanitarian and development programming. Meaningful participation requires

transparency about available resources and refugee influence over how they are allocated and managed. **Transparent budget allocation discussions open the "black box" of programme financing by sharing detailed budget information with refugee representatives.**

These discussions should include explanation of donor restrictions, overhead costs, and flexibility margins. Refugee representatives should have formal input on budget priorities, particularly regarding discretionary funding or budget reallocations during implementation. Financial literacy training should precede these discussions to ensure informed participation.

Refugee representation in procurement committees introduces accountability in purchasing decisions and contracting. Refugees should have the opportunity to review vendor selection, quality specifications, and delivery verification. This participation helps prevent corruption, ensures purchased items meet community needs, and identifies opportunities to source from refugee or host community businesses.

Community-based resource monitoring committees provide ongoing oversight of how programme resources are used at the point of delivery. These committees—distinct from general leadership structures—focus specifically on tracking resource flows, verifying distribution against plans, and flagging discrepancies. They should receive training in basic monitoring methodologies and have direct reporting channels to programme leadership.

Direct funding allocations to refugee-led organizations represent the highest level of resource control and demonstrate trust in refugee management capacity. **The Shirika Plan should establish specific funding windows with simplified application procedures and appropriate capacity support specifically for refugee-led organizations.** These might begin with small grants that increase progressively as management capacity is demonstrated, eventually leading to direct implementation contracts for programme components.

4.3 Implementation and Service Delivery

How services are delivered—and by whom—significantly impacts programme quality and sustainability. Meaningful participation in implementation moves beyond consultation to active leadership in service provision.

Refugee-led organizations should be considered as implementing partners working in collaboration with other implementing NGOs allowing them to collaborate in the implementation of the Shirika Plan. The Shirika Plan's procurement policies should prioritize qualified refugee-led organizations for service contracts. Where capacity gaps

exist, partnering arrangements between refugee-led organizations and established NGOs can facilitate capacity transfer while ensuring refugee leadership.

Employment of refugees in programme staffing should consider increasing refugee staff across all levels of programme implementation. Employment opportunities should extend from entry-level positions to include technical specialists, managers, and leadership roles. Recruitment processes should value lived experience alongside formal qualifications, with accelerated professional development pathways for promising refugee staff. Where qualified refugees are not immediately available for specialized roles, clear succession planning should establish timelines for refugee professionals to assume these positions.

Peer-to-peer service delivery models leverage refugee capacity as front-line service providers, particularly in culturally or linguistically sensitive domains. Community health workers, peer educators, paralegals, and teacher assistants drawn from refugee communities enhance service accessibility while creating employment opportunities. These approaches should include structured supervision and professional development pathways.

Regular adaptation based on refugee feedback establishes continuous improvement cycles driven by service users' experience. Formal feedback mechanisms should be established at all service delivery points, with regular review meetings to analyse feedback trends and make programmatic adjustments. Service providers should document how refugee feedback has shaped adaptations and communicate these changes back to communities, creating visible responsiveness that encourages ongoing feedback.

4.4 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Refugee enumerators and data collectors should be recruited and trained to lead ongoing monitoring activities and formal evaluations. This approach improves data quality through greater cultural sensitivity and community trust while creating skilled employment opportunities. Data collection teams should reflect the diversity of the refugee population, with particular attention to gender balance and inclusion of marginalized groups whose perspectives might otherwise be missed.

Participatory analysis workshops engage refugees in making meaning from collected data rather than limiting their role to data provision. These workshops bring together refugee representatives, programme staff, and technical specialists to jointly review monitoring data, identify patterns, explore causal factors, and recommend

programmematic responses. This collective approach can generate richer insights by combining technical expertise with contextual knowledge.

Refugee-led documentation of lessons learned shifts narrative control from external evaluators to community members as legitimate knowledge producers. **Refugees should be supported to document programme experiences through various media—written case studies, video documentation, oral histories, or community journalism.** These approaches value diverse forms of knowledge expression and create historical records owned by refugee communities themselves.

Co-creation of knowledge products and policy briefs ensures refugee perspectives inform broader humanitarian practice and policy debates. **Refugees should participate as co-authors of formal learning documents, with opportunities to present findings at learning events and policy forums.** This approach recognizes refugees as knowledge generators rather than merely knowledge subjects, with legitimate expertise to shape humanitarian practice beyond their immediate context.

5. Contextual Adaptation Considerations

5.1 Settlement vs. Urban Refugee Contexts

The framework must be adaptable to diverse displacement settings, recognizing that participation mechanisms appropriate for concentrated refugee settlements differ significantly from those needed in dispersed urban contexts.

In settlement contexts, where refugees live in designated areas with clear geographic boundaries, representative structures can be organized around physical zones with identifiable constituencies. **Block leaders, sector committees, and camp-wide refugee councils provide a clear hierarchical structure with defined representation ratios.** The physical proximity of refugees facilitates face-to-face meetings, community mobilization, and visible leadership presence.

In urban contexts, where refugees are dispersed throughout cities, alternative approaches are required. For instance, **representative structures may be organized around nationality groups, geographic neighbourhoods with significant refugee presence, or thematic interest groups rather than comprehensive geographic coverage.** Digital platforms and social networks play a more prominent role in communication and mobilization, with periodic in-person gatherings at community centres serving as hubs for participation.

Adaptation to formal and informal leadership structures requires mapping existing leadership dynamics before establishing new participation mechanisms. In some contexts, particularly protracted displacement settings, longstanding refugee-created governance structures may already exist alongside officially recognized leadership. The framework should incorporate these organic structures while ensuring they meet inclusion standards and representation requirements.

Context-specific communication channels must be employed based on refugee preferences, access, and security considerations. In settlements, community radio, information boards, and regular community gatherings may be most effective. In urban settings, WhatsApp groups, SMS networks, or community liaison volunteers who conduct home visits might better reach dispersed populations. **Media selection should consider literacy levels, language diversity, technology access, and privacy needs, particularly in contexts where refugee visibility carries security risks.**

5.2 Cultural and Social Dynamics

Effective participation mechanisms must be culturally appropriate, integrating with existing social structures while progressively addressing inequalities that limit inclusive

participation. **Respect for diverse cultural governance models begins with recognition that refugees bring diverse political traditions and leadership expectations.** Some communities may have hierarchical leadership structures while others emphasize consensus-building or representative democracy. **The framework should work with communities to develop hybrid approaches that incorporate cultural preferences while ensuring accountability and inclusion.** This requires substantial investment in understanding the cultural context of each refugee community before establishing participation structures.

Integration of traditional decision-making processes acknowledges the legitimacy and value of indigenous governance approaches. Traditional councils, elder groups, or religious leadership structures may provide important cultural continuity and legitimacy. **By creating formal linkages between these traditional structures and programme governance mechanisms, the framework will ensure they meet basic standards for inclusion and accountability.** This might involve establishing elder advisory councils that complement elected representative bodies, incorporating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms alongside formal grievance procedures, or creating specific roles for cultural or spiritual leaders within programme governance.

Consideration of gender and age dynamics recognizes that cultural norms often shape who can participate and how. While maintaining respect for cultural diversity, the framework must progressively promote gender equity and intergenerational dialogue within participation structures. This requires tailored approaches for different contexts—potentially including separate participation spaces for women where mixed forums are culturally challenging, gradual introduction of gender quotas with community endorsement, mentorship programmes that pair younger and older leaders, or facilitated dialogues on evolving cultural practices in displacement contexts. Change strategies should be developed in partnership with refugee communities themselves, identifying culturally appropriate pathways toward more inclusive participation.

6. Risk Management and Mitigation

Some of the potential barriers include power dynamics between stakeholders. There could also be language and literacy barriers as well as technical skills gaps that require capacity strengthening. There are also time and resource constraints for participation, especially during this time when there are resources constraints linked to humanitarian and development aid. Furthermore, there are potential protection risks for visible representatives especially when aspects of the implementation of the Shirika plan are not met.

Some potential mitigation strategies to consider include training on power awareness for all stakeholders and exploring ways of managing and coordinating activities that reduces power imbalances between stakeholders. Secondly, creating multi-lingual facilitation and materials that accommodates the needs of all stakeholders. Security assessments and protection protocols should be assessed for all stakeholders to ensure that their needs are met. Addressing financial/resource constraints is an on-going challenge where countries across the globe are exploring different financial option to address gaps.

Therefore, for the successful implementation of the Shirika Plan with meaningful participation of refugees, there requires organizational commitment to power-sharing, adequate resourcing for participation mechanisms, and continuous adaptation based on refugee feedback. By systematically implementing this framework, the Shirika Plan can establish a model for refugee participation that builds self-reliance while creating more sustainable and effective interventions.