

R-SEAT

UTILIZING REFUGEE PARTICIPATION IN THE SHIRIKA DEVELOPMENT AND KENYA'S REFUGEE RESPONSE SUB THEME: FROM BENEFICIARIES TO SOLUTION ENABLERS



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Introduction

On 25th March 2025, R SEAT in partnership with ReDSS, Oxfam, R-SEAT's Kenya Core Group and LERRN co-organized an interactive workshop bringing together key stakeholders in refugee management in Kenya to discuss and consider modes for utilizing meaningful refugee participation as a tool for an effective refugee response throughout the Shirika Plan's development and implementation. The meeting brought together representatives from refugee led organizations (RLOs), the Ministry of Interior, Department of Refugee Services, UNHCR, and other humanitarian agencies. The objectives of the workshop were to:

1. Highlight the value of meaningful refugee participation and how it can contribute to the Shirika Plan, and Kenya's new refugee response approach.
2. Discuss best practices on meaningful refugee participation globally, regionally, and locally; and conversely identifying harmful approaches that negate the meaningful refugee participation agenda.
3. Identify gaps and opportunities to utilize refugee participation within the Shirika Plan to achieve

The workshop was held on the backdrop of ongoing the changes in Kenya's policy landscape for refugee response. In 2021, Kenya enacted the Refugee Act 2021 and its 2024 regulations to guide its refugee response. Kenya is currently developing the SHIRIKA Plan (Socioeconomic Hubs for Integrated Inclusion in Kenya), which illustrates Kenya's ambition for greater refugee inclusion in accessing socio-economic opportunities, effectively shifting the humanitarian response to a more development-oriented approach. The workshop provided an opportunity for RLOs and other stakeholders to discuss concrete strategies for institutionalizing meaningful refugee participation in the Shirika Plan development and implementation.

Opening Remarks

The workshop was officially opened by Commissioner John Burugu, Commissioner for Refugee Affairs, Department of Refugee Services. He commended the RLOs and other stakeholders for setting the pace in promoting self-reliance among refugees in camps and reiterated government's commitment to enable inclusion of refugees in national government service delivery. He urged the refugee community to continue 'to push' the government 'within the law'. While revisiting the historical, policy and legal context of refugee management in Kenya, he noted that the protracted refugee situation coupled with donor fatigue and funding cuts led to a rethink of refugee management from a humanitarian approach to a more development oriented approach. Shirika Plan guides the shift towards a development oriented approach to refugee management in Kenya in line with national, regional and global frameworks.

He outlined ongoing efforts to integrate refugee issues in national and county government planning. For example Turkana and Garissa counties which host the largest population of refugees have led the way with their respective area integrated socio-economic and development plans namely the Phase II of Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan (KISEDEP) for Turkana County and Phase I of Garissa Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan (GISEDEP) for Garissa County. Kakuma and Dadaab have been chartered as municipalities and efforts are

underway to ensure service delivery systems and infrastructure commensurate with municipality status. More recently Nairobi County has included refugee issues in the 2022-2027 CIDP. More recently Nairobi have included refugees issues in their area integrated socio-economic and development plans or County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs).

He noted that Shirika Plan has incorporated voices of refugees and host communities in its development and implementation. The Plan will be implemented over three four-year phases. It will bring together government departments and agencies, donors, development partners, humanitarian agencies, the private sector, and RLOs under a whole of government, whole of development partner and whole of society approach arrangement. He lauded the workshop as a vital step toward an inclusive approach to realizing the vision of Shirika Plan, blending global insights with local action.

Lydia Atieno, the Focal Point on Accountability and Affected People at UNHCR Regional Bureau, reiterated UNHCR's continued protection of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons in Kenya and the region. She lauded Shirika Plan as an enhanced new approach to refugee management where inclusion, development, and opportunities will replace long-term dependence in humanitarian aid. With decreasing funding, the over 900,000 refugees, asylum seekers and host community members in Daadab and Kakuma stand to benefit from sustainable socio-economic inclusion. She noted that UNHCR promotes localization agenda through supporting establishment of RLOS and refugee engagement structures in collaboration with other partners including regional economic communities e.g. IGAD and government actors.

She outlined UNCHR initiatives supporting refugee inclusion agenda in the region where there are 1421 RLOs most of which are in Uganda, Kenya, and South Sudan. Despite hiccups in RLO documentation and registration, there are positive efforts in Kenya to ensure establishment of RLOs. She underscored UNHCR's effort to open structures for RLOs and communities participation in protection and expresses their commitment to continue working closely with the government of Kenya, RLOs and all refugees and asylum seekers to better the protection environment in Kenya and within the region

Ms. Patience Kiara, the Regional Director of the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS), expressed ReDSS firm belief in refugee leadership in the quest for durable solutions. She urged stakeholders to see refugee crisis as a development challenge with a humanitarian dimension and strong political undertones. Durable solutions are unlikely to be achieved with a focus on humanitarian dimension alone. She challenged refugee community to seize on the current funding crisis and the commitment on inclusion by the government of Kenya as an opportunity to make a difference and to work with the Government to solve outstanding challenges.

Mustafa Alio, Co-Managing Director, RSEAT underscored the need for meaningful participation of refugees in shaping decisions that affect their lives. He decried global and regional initiatives for refugees that have often overlooked refugee participation. These include the Jordan Compact on economic aid to refugees, EU-Turkey Deal, the Comprehensive Refugee Response

Framework and major cash assistance programmes which failed to realize their full potential despite their noble intentions. For Kenya's Shirika Plan, the lessons that can be drawn from all these efforts is clear: programs made *for* refugees but not *with* refugees often miss the mark.

He expressed hope in the Shirika Plan as a progressive approach that seeks to institutionalize refugee participation – not as a checkbox, but as a core principle. If done right, it could mark a turning point: a genuine effort to co-design solutions with refugees and refugee-led organizations, not just for them. For the plan to succeed, it must not sideline refugee perspectives or bringing them onboard when it is too late. He challenged partners and allies who have stood by the refugee movement not to see RLOs and refugee leaders as competitors but as collaborators. He called on Kenya and other stakeholders to stop designing systems *around* refugees and start building *with* them.

The Politics and Process of Refugee Leadership: A Comparative Analysis of Factors Conditioning Refugee Leadership in the Global South Report East Africa,

Dr. Ronald Kalyango of Local Engagement Refugee Research Network, Carleton University presented findings of a comparative research on refugee leaders in Kenya and Uganda. The research project was a partnership between R-SEAT and LERRN. The study sought to understand the politics of refugee leadership in East Africa, the largest host region in Africa. The study was conducted in Nakivale refugee settlement and Kampala in Uganda and Kakuma refugee camp and Nairobi in Kenya.

Dr Kalyango discussed the structures for refugee leadership in East African where there exists formal and non-formal leadership structures. The former structures include participation in camp administration through camp committees set up by governments. Non-formal leadership structures provide avenues for refugees and RLOs to raise and campaign for critical issues that may not be considered within government affiliated formal structures. Refugee leadership may be exercised by RLOs or individual refugees who have no affiliation to any RLO. RLOs are also becoming increasingly prominent avenues for refugee leaderships. Kenya has approximately 200 RLOs which are largely dominated by men. They are also women led initiatives either as individual women leadership or women led RLOs advocating for issues of concern to women and girls.

Lastly Dr Kalyango outlined several challenges facing refugee leadership including tokenism in refugee leadership and refugee inclusion; competition for scarce resources between humanitarian agencies and RLOs; lack of meaningful participation; restrictive laws that hinder meaningful participation and restrict space for civic engagement; limited resources; poor funding; structural barriers to accessing citizenship and residency status; limited opportunities for political engagement and political participation; and power imbalances between RLOs and key stakeholders. He noted that Kenya's Shirika Plan is an opportunity for refugee engagement.

During plenary, Dr Kalyango offered the following clarifications:

1. Policy makers and humanitarian agencies have a key role to play in refugee participation. Humanitarian agencies and partners have worked hand in hand with governments and RLOs to profile activities carried out by refugee leaders. They have impacted positively in grooming leaders.
2. Local integration of refugees within the EAC remains an advocacy point for operationalizing the EAC Treaty's goal of supporting free movement of persons, including refugees, within the region. Refugees from within the EAC states face challenges moving from one state to another within the EAC.
3. Another advocacy point is for stakeholders to work with EAC to address root cause of conflict that create refugees.
4. RLOs must be prepared for incremental approach to advocacy. Policy making is a slow process and it may not necessarily move in tandem with community needs and demands.
5. Refugee participation in various policy development and implementation that affect them remains an advocacy point. One strategy is for stakeholders to adopt an institution by institution advocacy strategy rather than a whole government approach to advocacy. This will ensure progress is incremental.

High Level Panel Session on “What opportunities do funding cuts and shrinking humanitarian assistance present for increased refugee participation in decision-making and refugee responses?”

Session Moderator, Obi, Senior Editor Africa, at The New Humanitarian

Panelists:

1. **Lilian Obiye – Policy Officer, Displacement and Durable Solutions, Embassy of the Netherlands**
2. **Jamil Kusuania – Senior Advocacy Manager, IRC (International Rescue Committee)**
3. **Nira Ishmael – Community Reporter & Communication Officer, RAI (Resilience Action International)**
4. **Robert Ochan – Director, Dadaab Refugee Association (DRA)**

The panel discussion explored ways in which RLOs can tap into the opportunities that the current funding crisis presents for increased refugee participation in decision making and refugee response. The panelists and plenary discussed the following questions:

1. *Where do RLOs start to ensure that hurdles to meaningful participation are eliminated and that the donor community recognize refugees as partners in longterm development?*
 - Donor mindshift: There should be a donor mindshift to recognize that refugees can contribute to their own socio-economic development. This entails
 - Advocacy for localization agenda across the development world.
 - Demonstrating that RLOs are capable of intervening as first responders where INGO are not able.
 - Partners should leverage on refugees who understand language and have local knowledge and expertise that is key for development activities in their areas.

- Collaboration among RLOs: Collaboration rather than competition among RLOs themselves is an imperative. RLOs can leverage on the respective expertise comparative advantages to collaborate on programmes that they are implementing. To address duplication of functions among RLOs, need to work together and collaborate on their programmes in order to have a greater impact.
- Collaboration between refugees and host community: The Shirika plan may encourage competition rather than collaboration between refugees and host communities. RLOs and partners should encourage collaboration between refugees and host community as the Shirika plan is rolled out.
- Cluster system offers one way of collaborative approach to support implementation of Shirika Plan.

2. How can we think around funding refugee programming?

- Explore innovating financing option and mapping of local resources. These include mapping social entrepreneurship by RLOs that generate their own resources and seeking impact investors who are willing to support institutions and businesses ran by refugees.
- As RLOs look for resources they should also consider the sustainability of ongoing initiatives and their ability to lead to self-reliance.
- Combat the ‘hegemony mindset’ that see refugees as dangerous, terrorists and a source of insecurity. Combating this negative attitudes will help bring change among refugee community and enable restrictions on their movement to be relaxed. This will allow them to participate in socio-economic development and collaborate with host communities. Refugees will be able to bring experience gained from their home country and use it productively in the host nation.
- Advocate for mindshift among policy makers to so that they can adopt flexible refugee friendly policies.

3. How do RLOs work through the institutional impediments for Shirika to work as intended

- Government of Kenya should reconsider policy of restriction of movement of refugees
- Government should give refugees the necessary identification documents to enable them to move freely.
- Government should to reconsider its refugee confinement policy and look at refugee as human beings.
- Government should review the long and tedious work permit application process and make it easy for refugees to apply for work permits.
- Government should make identification documents such as alien IDs issued to refugees in Kakuma widely recognized and acceptable by policy makers and law enforcement agencies throughout the country. This will enable refugees have easier access to opportunities.
- RLOs should look for opportunity to participate in both invited and uninvited spaces where RLOs can make valuable contribution. It is time that RLOs look beyond the invited spaces and engage with uninvited spaces.

- On the Shirika plan transition process, RLOS should critically identify and present the concrete recommendations of the changes they are looking for beyond the generic policy proposals outlined in the Shirika Plan. For example, a specific target number of work permits to be issued to refugees.

Plenary recommendations

The following additional recommendations emerged from the plenary:

- Refugees in Kakuma need travelling documents to enable them to travel and sell their products outside Kenya in order to be earn their livelihood and become self-reliant. Shirika plan should address the concern around travel documents and livelihoods for refugees.
- National and international organization should support localization agenda. RLOs have capacity to run and implement programmes.
- Some of the uninvited spaces that refugees can engage with are available locally. They include locally available avenue for funding such as Uwezo Fund, Youth Fund and Women Fund. Refugees can also position themselves strategically to leverage on partnerships at county and local
- RLOs should organize themselves to fill void that will emerge as a result of funding crisis. They should organized themselves in consortia where possible.
- RLOs should believe in their own capacity for self-reliance.

Conceptual Framework: Meaningful Participation of Refugees in the Shirika Plan ***Presented by Veronica Mwangi, African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC)***

R-SEAT commissioned African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) to develop a conceptual framework on meaningful participation of refugees in the Shirika Plan. The framework was developed by **Ms Linda Ocho**, the Executive Director, AMADPOC and **Ms Veronica Mwangi**, AMADPOC.

Veronica Mwangi took participants through the conceptual framework on meaningful participation of refugees in the Shirika Plan. The framework outlines institutionalized process and policies for meaningful participation of refugees in governance structures in more structured manner. It proposes frameworks for participation beyond tokenisms and provides a structure for participation in Shirika Plan through all stages from development through its implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

Veronica elaborated on the five key areas of the framework namely:

1. Foundational principles: She explained the foundation principles for meaningful participation anchored on a rights based approach. These are inclusion and representation of the diversity of refugee population; agency and ownership of refugees in programming and decision making.

2. Structural governance of Shirika Plan. The governance structure of Shirika Plan extends from policy making level to policy implementation level. It comprises the relevant Cabinet Secretary in charge of refugee affairs; the Shirika Plan Steering Committee, the Shirika Plan Coordinating Body, Shirika Plan Joint Secretariat and various technical working groups. The proposals for meaningful participation include
 - Participation through refugee representative bodies;
 - Engagement with the multilevel participation mechanisms at the local levels; meso levels (through sectoral working groups); strategic levels (through coordinating body and the steering committee) and policy levels (through refugee advisory body).
 - Participation in joint decision making forums.

According to Mustafa, R-SEAT champions **the advisory mechanism model** that facilitates refugee participation based on technical expertise and the transparent selection of members by a selection committee through a call for applications for refugee advisors/experts. This process involves a transparent method of interviewing and selecting refugee representatives, who act as advisors or experts, based on both lived experience and technical expertise.

Veronica Mwangi explained that the structural frameworks for participation go beyond governance and decision making, to encompass capacity enhancement, and feedback and accountability mechanism and grievance resolution mechanism.

3. Implementation across programme cycle: This entails meaningful participation of refugees throughout four programming phases namely:
 - Assessment and planning;
 - Resource mobilization;
 - Implementation and service delivery; and
 - Monitoring, evaluation and learning.
4. Contextual adaptation and consideration (focusing on most vulnerable).
5. Risk management and mitigation: This section addresses potential barriers to meaningful participation of refugees in the Shirika Plan including power dynamics, language and literacy barriers and time and resources constraints.

Plenary contributions to the conceptual framework:

- The conceptual framework is a tool that is meant to facilitate a discussion and process on meaningful participation of refugees in the implementation of Shirika Plan.
- On refugee participation in the Shirika Plan, it was acknowledged that there is now way that is inclusive enough to allow all individuals to participate. There has to be

institutionalization of mechanisms for presenting ideas from individuals through institutions. Refugees need to organize within special institutions and umbrella in order to effectively engage in policy development and implementation processes.

- Refugees should be involved in conducting research beyond limited roles as enumerators. They may provide technical skills as data analysts and research consultants.
- The conceptual framework has brought the different levels for partnership between government and RLOs. The RLOs would consider these levels and identify the most practical level of refugee inclusion in the Shirika Plan.
- The chapter on capacity development should take into consideration that may already capacity to undertake some of the activities that have been flagged out for capacity development.

Group Discussions On Conceptual Framework

This section summarizes group presentation on the different focus areas of the conceptual framework.

Group 1:

Foundational Principles

1. *What are some of the existing mechanism(s) that ensure meaningful participation of refugees in the Shirika Plan and how can they be strengthened?*
 - Existing mechanisms - 3 day consultations with refugees and host communities in the camps.
 - Capacity building of RLOs leaders in advocacy and information sharing and transparency of programmes and plans that require participation.
2. *How can we ensure marginalized sub-groups within refugee populations are included in the implementation process?*
 - Financial allocation for vulnerable groups.
 - Prioritize consultation and representation and tailor processes to ensure concerns of vulnerable groups are addressed.

Monitoring and evaluation

1. *How can refugees monitor progress of the implementation plan?*
 - Committee to ensure refugee representation to ensure
 - Review of external auditors to be led by refugees
2. *What kind of training would refugees need to lead on M&E related activities?*
 - Refugee leaders may not necessarily need training in M and E related activities that they already have capacity to implement.

- There is need for joint effort to develop M & E framework and to describe what it means and what success looks like.
3. *What is the best way to communicate the results of the M&E to the refugee population?*
 - Use private sector communication platforms such as safaricom.
 - Disseminate information in local language.

Group 2:

Governance

1. Develop an organogram of the decision making and governance structure of the Shirika Plan and identify where refugees should be represented
2. Where should refugees participate in the governance structure and why?
3. What are the challenges/risks you foresee the refugees and other stakeholders may encounter in joint decision making?

Where should refugees participate in the governance structure and why?

- Refugee representation should start at the steering committee composed of Principal Secretaries. The steering committee is where all reports prepared by the PS Immigration and Citizen Services are submitted to before they are forwarded to the Cabinet Secretary for Interior.
- The steering committee should have a refugee advisory board/refugee advisory network that is led by refugees themselves
- The advisory board should comprising representation by individuals in their personal capacity rather than representation through RLOs.

Group 3:

Capacity Development

1. *What are the anticipated barriers RLOs or refugee representatives have in skills and knowledge transfer in the implementation plan?*
 - Stereotyping of refugee representatives by key stakeholders.
 - Fragmentation in documentation processing in the system and lack of recognition of the documents issued to refugees.
 - Lack of leadership skills.
2. *How can these barriers be avoided? Provide examples*
 - Acceptance of refugee representatives by key stakeholders.
 - Harmonization of processing and recognition documentation.
 - Integration of refugees.
 - Leadership skills training and strengthening.
3. *Provide feedback on the proposed phases and suggest any changes*

- Phase 4: Include any individual who are not just RLOs leaders for responsibility of funds
- Involve other refugees who are not part of RLOs

Group 4:

Feedback and Accountability

1. *What are the primary key indicators that can be measured to identify success of the Shirika Plan to ensure meaningful participation of refugees?*
 - % of inclusion of refugees in implementation process.
 - % of direct funding to RLO.
 - Reports from county government on engagement with refugees.
 - Reports from national government on engagement.
 - No of refugees accessing documents.
 - Presence of refugees in governance structure of Shirika Plan.
 - Integration of refugees in government services delivery programmes.
2. *Identify the potential risks or limitations in the M&E process*
 - Change of government after elections.
 - Language barriers and fear from community.
 - Lack of data on documentation
 - Lack of resources.
 - Corruption.
 - Theory of implementation vis a vis reality.
3. *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?*
 - Empower RLOs to play a role in communication.
 - Shirika Plan team to deliver information directly to the community
 - Mainstream media and social media.
 - Meeting with key stakeholders.
 - Monthly communication.
 - Radios.
 - Brochure.

Group 5:

Implementation and Service Delivery

1. *What are some of the challenges related to recruitment of refugees?*
 - Proper Documentation
 - Language barrier
 - Employers not willing to hire refugees
 - Accreditation of refugee certification from country origin

2. *How can these challenges be mitigated?*

- Recognition of refugee certificates
- Communication campaigns to encourage refugee employment targeting private sector
- Recognition of refugee documents
- English language training for refugees

3. *Develop a concept for a formal feedback mechanisms and describe the role of different stakeholders.*

- Shareholders should report on impact and quality of Shirika Plan delivery plan
- Government will report on impact
- NGOs will report on resources for implementation

Closing session

Jean Marie Ishimwe the East Africa Regional Lead, R-SEAT, thanked the Department of Refugees Service, refugees and refugees' leadership and all partners for their support and participation in the forum. He called for an intentional approach to work with various partners in exploring pathways and modalities for refugee participation in the Shirika Plan's development and implementation. Such participation should not be treated as an afterthought, but rather positioned as a central element, recognizing refugees as key partners in realizing the plan. This intentionality is not just about structured engagement with refugees in Kenya, but also how refugee participation becomes a means and tool to enhance the Plan's overall effectiveness and efficiency. This aligns with commitments under paragraph 35 of the Global Compact on Refugees on meaningful refugee participation.

He welcomed goodwill demonstrated by the government in enhancing refugee participation and called on stakeholders to build on this goodwill noting that continued support and allyship from other partners will be critical. Lastly, while acknowledging the positive potential of intentional refugee participation, he noted that significant challenges still exist. These require collaborative efforts from all actors — including refugees and RLOs — to bring about meaningful and sustained change.

Gideon Mwawasi, Policy Coordinator at ReDSS thanked the government for its open hand and open-door policy and demonstration of good will in refugee management. He expressed ReDSS commitment to support institutionalization of meaningful participation of refugees in Shirika plan.

Appendix: RLO Consultation on Shirika Plan

On 26th March 2025, RSEAT reconvened RLOs from Kakuma, Dadaab and Nairobi for a reflection and strategy session on Shirika Plan. The participants noted that Shirika Plan has created spaces for refugee inclusion. The challenge is on RLOs to seize the opportunity that has presented itself and develop concrete and practical ways to ensure institutionalization of meaningful participation of refugees in the Shirika Plan.

While lauding the commitment by government to create space for refugees in the decision-making table, Mustafa, Co-Managing Director at R-SEAT noted that there is still a long way to go to ensure meaningful participation of refugees in Shirika plan. He underscored the need for refugees and RLOs to convene refugees and RLOs and not government, INGOs and UNHCR convening RLOs. He noted that in terms of stakeholder collaboration, there is no strong language of refugee led organizations in the Shirika Plan. This is a critical omission, as the Shirika Plan is not only a roadmap for Kenya's new approach but also an accountability tool. Therefore, there is a need for strong language that recognizes refugee participation and empowers RLOs and refugees to hold the government accountable for delivering the promised inclusivity in the Shirika Plan.

Review of Research Presentation and Presentation of the Conceptual Framework

Subsequently R-SEAT guided participants through a discussion on avenues for refugee participation in Shirika Plan stemming from the proposals concerning governance structures of Shirika Plan outlined in the conceptual framework.

This session provides a summary of plenary discussions

Reflections on the research on the Politics and Process of Refugee Leadership: A Comparative Analysis of Factors Conditioning Refugee Leadership in the Global South Report East Africa

Dr Ronald Kalyongo, Pascal Sigachane, and Andrew Sajja revisited the research findings and elaborated further on the specific findings from the two study sites namely Kakuma camp and Nakivale settlement. The plenary feedback is summarized below:

- Refugee leaders played a critical role in covid response in Nakivale settlement. Their role included community awareness on covid 19 and the need for isolation. They filled the gaps left by humanitarian agencies.
- In Uganda, the government has maintained an open door policy when addressing refugee issues concerning economic inclusion livelihood support. Refugees are able to get trading licenses and pay taxes. In Kenya, when Kenya Revenue Authority began engaging some refugees on tax matters, some refugees in Kakuma were reluctant to pay taxes because they perceived government has neglected refugees in terms of service delivery in the camps. Dr. Kalyongo advised RLOs to take note of the incremental efforts that Uganda went through to reach a point where economic inclusion and livelihood support for refugees received government support. He advised that when advocating for economic inclusion, this comes with responsibility to pay taxes.
- In Uganda, refugees are able to use refugee IDs to acquire assets, obtain trading licenses, apply for driving license and apply for bank loans. It is not possible for refugees in Kenya

to own land. Ownership of other assets such as motor vehicles is hampered by lack of interoperability of other government database such as iTax and e-citizen database with the refugee database.

- The recognition refugee ID enables them to move freely within Uganda. The process of acquiring documents is clear and streamlined.
- Refugees in Uganda are able to seek employment. However, they are unable to secure high ranking employment positions in an organization. They are mainly engaged in operational level work. Most of them are employed by NGOs. Some of them may be employment in government funded facilities such as schools and health centres.
- Participation of RLOs in formal structures of leadership does not ensure diversity in inclusion of refugees in decision making platforms. Invitation to participate in such forums is based on interests of organization sending the invitation hence elected leaders at community level may miss out as leaders of RLOs are invited. There is need to ensure voices of elected leaders at community level is heard within the formal structures of leadership.
- To address resource mobilization challenges, RLOs should consider applying for funds as a consortium rather than as individual RLOs. They could also collaborate on project implementation.
- Women voices are not adequately represented in Kakuma.
- In Uganda RLOs are able to received direct funding due to practice by government to encourage donor to directly work with RLOs. Government of Uganda registers RLOs and community led organization enabling them to access funds.
- In Kenya there is no express government support for direct funding for RLOs. With Shirika Plan there may be a change to the status quo.
- One of the mechanisms for facilitating refugee participation at county level is KISEDEP that is coordinated by the county government of Turkana and UNHCR. However some county governments and municipalities are still grappling with the question of refugee engagement but some have begun to reach out to refugees.
- To ensure representation and inclusion at the national and district levels, refugees in Uganda work in a consortium called RLO Network (RELON). Uganda has refugee engagement forums from district to national levels. These changes were realized incrementally from 1990s through advocacy for the reform of the Control of Refugee Act to the Refugee Act of 2006 that is responsive to refugee management. Refugees in Kenya should take note of the fact that in Uganda changes did not come overnight but incrementally over a period of 10 to 20 years.

Reflections on the Conceptual Framework

Participants explored concrete recommendations on refugee engagement guided by the governance structure of Shirika plan explained in the conceptual framework. The aim was to ensure that refugees are included in the Shirika plan from ideation stage to implementation and monitoring and reporting stage.

1. Where is refugee engagement to be in the SP governance structure?

Group 1:

- Shirika Steering Committee
 - Rationale: this is a state led committee with broad state representation.
 - It needs to have expert refugees advising government at state level
- DRS Shirika Coordination Committee
 - Democratically elected leaders to work with DRS
 - The leaders are under DRS not UNHCR
- Shirika Joint Secretariat
 - Representation not of individuals but a council of RLOs/network or national representation of RLOs
 - The council of RLOs to be represented here will delegate power to all the different parallel body at the same level
- Areas based frameworks: e.g. GISDEP
 - County based representation of council of RLOs at county level
- Technical Working Groups
 - Expert level representation of RLOS in all TWGs
- Potential challenges with the proposal:
 - It envisages three refugee entities including a democratically elected steering committee and a council of RLOs.
 - It may not be workable due to resource constraints. The entities will need their own structures to engage with government and for coordination. There is potential challenge of unnecessary bureaucracy.

Group 2:

- Joint Shirika Plan Secretariat
 - This is the mediator body and the mother of Shirika Plan
 - It provides linkages between top level and bottom level of Shirika Plan governance structures.
 - Key players include DRS and UNCHR.
- Potential challenge with the proposal:
 - The mandate of DRS and UNCHR in the secretariat is likely to focus on strategic policy matters rather than service or programme delivery.
 - If the refugee entity is to be represented at the secretariat, its representation will be at the strategic level. Other entities need to remain on the ground or at the technical working group level to engage with implementation.

Group 3:

- Shirika Joint Secretariat:
 - The refugee advisory board to join the secretariat
 - The development and operationalization of Shirika Plan happens at this level

- This is where refugee voices can be heard and have influence
- Refugees work with UNHCR and DRS
- DRS provides services to refugees
- Refugees will be represented in the technical committees as experts
- In the Secretariat, refugees will sit as representative of the board

Group 4:

- Shirika Joint Secretariat
 - DRS/UNHCR and refugees
 - Refugee will be able to get information concerning Shirika Plan
- Technical Working Group on durable solutions
 - Refugees should be part of durable solutions
- There shall be one entity at secretariat with a subcommittee at TWG 6

Group 5:

- Shirika Joint Secretariat
 - This is where decision affecting refugees are made.
 - There shall be an elected body of refugees to sit in the secretariat. The body shall be elected by the refugee community.
- Technical Working Group on M&E
 - Representation shall include RLO leaders based on their specific expertise represented in the pillars
 - The technical team will focus on risk management.

Conclusion on refugee representation

Majority recommended representation at the **Shirika Plan Joint Secretariat** and presence in the technical working group No. 5 through a sub-committee. Based on comparative perspective, R-SEAT recommended as follows:

- The should be a refugee entity which will sit at the Joint Secretariat”
 - The joint secretariat provides inward and outward linkages with all other levels of governance structure. It provides coordination and influence on strategy, policy and information and influence implementation.
 - Other higher level may have authority but they have no power.
 - R SEAT believes in building engagement of refugees with bureaucrats in the system not the politician. Bureaucrats are stable while politicians change.
- The refugee entity should have a subcommittee at TWG on M&E.
- Refugee presence at these two level ensures control of the plan and implementation.

2. Discuss what model will you choose and why?

R-SEAT explained the following three models of refugee engagement. Refugees in Kenya could consider and adopt one model:

- Model 1: Council of RLOs
 - RLOs with expertise participate

- *E.g. Advisory body of UNCHR*
- Model 2: Refugee engagement forum
 - An example of this model exists in Uganda through the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF)
 - Refugees vote in an election and select a number of people to participate in the forum.
 - The downside with the model is the participation is built on popularity of a refugee not on his or her technical experience.
 - The ideal scenario is to have one with experience as well as expertise.
- Model 3: Refugee advisory body Mechanism
 - A call for applications is released, inviting refugees with technical expertise—including but not limited to policy processes, advocacy in global and regional forums, and refugee programming—to submit their applications.
 - The selection process involves a selection committee representing stakeholders in the refugee regime in the country, i.e. government, UNHCR, other humanitarian organizations, RLOs, and academia.
 - The selection committee vets and interviews nominees to be part of the advisory body, based on their lived experience and technical expertise.
 - The selection committee selects 7–12 refugees with technical expertise to be part of the advisory mechanism. These individuals will act as Refugee Advisors/Experts. Subsequently, the advisory will nominate their representative to various international fora as part of the national delegations. (The representative may change depending on the nature of the event and required expertise.)
 - The selection committee subjects the vetted nominees to an open and transparent application process.
 - Members of the advisory body may be affiliated with an RLO or may serve as refugee experts in their individual capacity.

Conclusion

Among the models that emerged beyond the three initially mentioned was the combination of Model 2 and Model 3, that is, the election-type model and the advisory model. This presents an opportunity for further engagement, although it requires significant cooperation, adequate resources, and broad multisectoral involvement. It could allow for a blended approach that uses elections to form an advisory structure. As a result, Terms of Reference (ToRs) would need to be developed to define the technical expertise required for candidates seeking to serve as refugee advisors.

R-SEAT intends to support the model that best fits the Kenyan context, especially one that aligns with our theory of change and emphasizes strong technical and expertise-driven elements. This could be either the blended approach or a fully advisory model, building on guidelines that R-SEAT has supported in other countries and regions.

One of the next steps in this process will involve R-SEAT, through its East Africa Regional Lead, conducting further consultations with refugees and leaders of Refugee-Led Organizations in Kakuma, Dadaab, and Nairobi. These consultations will help gather additional insights. A final presentation will be prepared and shared with the Shirika Plan Secretariat, which includes the Department of Refugee Services (DRS) and UNHCR Kenya leadership. Based on all the findings from the two-day interactive workshop and subsequent consultations, this will form the revised conceptual framework on refugee participation in the Shirika Plan. This framework will serve as a key guide for formally integrating refugee participation in the Shirika process, particularly now that the Plan has been officially launched by the President of Kenya, H.E. Dr. William Ruto.

Although R-SEAT will continue to offer support by mobilizing the necessary resources and providing technical guidance on the model that works best for Kenya, the success of this initiative will ultimately depend on the leadership and commitment of the Government of Kenya. Support from UNHCR Kenya and other key partners will also be essential in making this vision a reality.

If implemented, the conceptual framework and the establishment of a Refugee Advisory Body in Kenya would position the country as one of the first in the Global South to adopt such a mechanism. It would place Kenya alongside countries where R-SEAT has supported similar processes, including the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and most recently, Germany.

The advisory body would also enhance Kenya's engagement with donor countries that use similar structures, especially during negotiations for support and resources related to refugee management and response under the Shirika Plan. Most importantly, it would place the advisory body and refugee communities at the heart of implementation, acting as a vital link to ensure more inclusive, informed, and impactful responses.