Executive Summary

This study was motivated by emerging evidence that refugee-led organisations (RLOs) in East Africa play a vital role in meeting community needs. As there was no available information about RLOs and the forms that they take in Tanzania prior to this study, the results fill an important knowledge gap by exploring the nature, scope, and practices of RLOs in Tanzania; the perceptions that communities and stakeholders have of RLOs and their impact; and the factors that condition RLOs’ responses and impact. This study was led by a person with a displacement background from the start to finish.

The RLO landscape

- In Nyarugusu camp, many RLOs are small grassroots community-based groups that operate informally. Only two RLOs are considered large by the community members because they have permanent buildings, more than ten volunteers each working on a full-time basis, and operate freely. These are IBIEN, with 30 full-time volunteers, and Group MISA, with four permanent centres. In this report, RLOs without permanent premises and with fewer than five full-time volunteers are considered small. RLOs are
either created by Congolese or Burundian refugees, and they mostly focus on English language training. Other activities include sexual and reproductive health, rehabilitation of houses, civic education, assistance to orphans and widows, soap-making, beading, and tailoring.

- In Dar es Salaam, RLOs are also small. Former Congolese refugees register RLOs as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with the support of host community members who facilitate the registration process. Another RLO was registered and known by the government as an organisation formed by immigrants and foreigners from the Democratic Republic of the Congo living legally with resident permits. Nationality-based groups (Congolese and Malawian associations) focus on advocating for those living illegally in town to be given permits. Others focus on self-reliance.

- Although there are a few exceptions, most RLOs were created between 2015 and 2020. In Nyarugusu, the creation of these organisations is partly influenced by refugees who were resettled to third countries of asylum (USA, Australia and across Europe).

- In terms of gender, the team only identified one organisation led by a woman, located in Nyarugusu. Two other organisations, led by men, were found to support the empowerment of women in leadership positions.

- Most RLO leaders are educated (in our sample, ten leaders have bachelor’s degrees, two have diplomas, and three have completed secondary education). All RLO leaders in our sample are above 30 years of age.

- In Nyarugusu, RLOs depend on member contributions, membership fees, income-generating activities, the diaspora, individual sponsors, and in-kind support from humanitarian organisations. In Dar es Salaam, all RLOs depend on member contributions and membership fees as the main source of funding.

- RLOs do not have formal partnerships with external actors and there is no RLO network in Tanzania. There is some cooperation between RLOs, such as the sharing of information, premises, and material resources.

- Refugees are motivated to create RLOs in order to fill gaps in service provision, become self-reliant, elevate personal status, apply skills as former aid workers, or create self-employment.

**Perceived impact of RLOs**

- In Nyarugusu, community members, the camp commandant, and humanitarian organisations that provide services are knowledgeable of RLOs and the types of activities they engage in. Community members who do not directly benefit from RLOs know of their activities but cannot name RLOs directly.

- In Dar es Salaam, only direct beneficiaries are knowledgeable of RLOs. Non-beneficiaries do not see any impact of RLOs on the well-being and safety of their community, arguing that those groups serve their members only.

- In Nyarugusu, community members consider the impact of RLOs to be positive in terms of education, particularly with regard to English language classes. As the camp-based education system follows the francophone Congolese curriculum, English language
skills enable members to access higher education and opportunities within aid organisations. Community members also state that village savings and loan associations help beneficiaries start income-generating activities that empower them financially and in terms of skills.

- RLO activities have not yet influenced changes in humanitarian organisations’ policies and/or operations.

**Variations in impact**

- RLO impact is determined by many factors, namely access to diaspora networks, human resources and leadership, and the regulatory framework. For instance, RLO camp leaders network with fellow resettled refugees and obtain financial support. Conversely, government policies preventing RLOs from registering limit their fundraising efforts and hence the expansion of their activities.

- RLOs face many challenges, including lack of registration and few resources (e.g., qualified human resources, financial and physical resources). However, development partners want qualified leaders in terms of experience and education for fund management.

- RLOs claim the need for support from an institution to help them register, funds to increase their reach, and capacity building in terms of financial management, proposal development, and operations.

**Recommendations**

- Donors should consider funding RLOs that have not yet registered through flexible cooperation arrangements, advocate for policy change at the government level, and make space for RLOs to take part in the humanitarian sector.

- The government should allow RLOs to register as CBOs or NGOs and continue to give them land to set up their offices.

- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should recognise the work of RLOs, implement policies developed at the regional level, and advocate for policy change at the government level.

- Aid organisations should involve RLOs in decision-making through equal-partner consortia, fund RLOs to provide meaningful peer-to-peer capacity building, promote the ideas of refugees, and combine partnerships with capacity building.

- RLOs should set up an RLO network to coordinate their advocacy efforts for registration and recognition.

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