

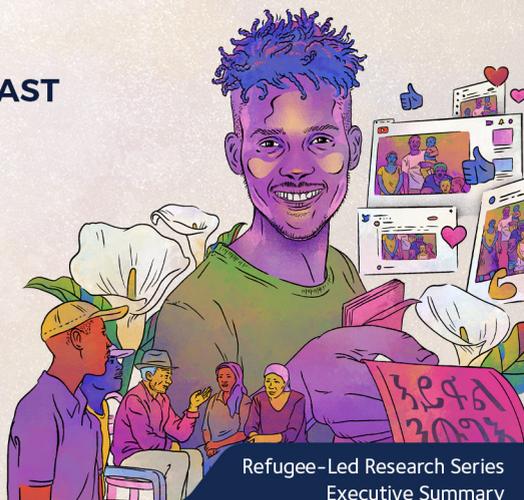
# REFUGEE-LED ORGANISATIONS IN EAST AFRICA: COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS IN ETHIOPIA

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Executive Summary

## 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. Because there was no available information about RLOs and the forms that they take in Ethiopia prior to this study, the results fill an important knowledge gap by exploring the nature, scope, and practices of RLOs in Ethiopia, 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

- RLOs in Ethiopia vary in terms of size, nature, leadership, and legal status. In Addis Ababa, RLOs are not registered, mostly target youth, and are dependent on their members' monthly contributions and support from the diaspora community. RLOs in Addis Ababa are largely community-based and faith-based, while most RLOs in Nguenyiel are clan-based. In Melkadida, some RLOs are engaged in profit-oriented activities while providing humanitarian and livelihood services to their community. Other groups are organised

into savings and loan groups that provide support to their members.

- In Addis Ababa, RLOs are mostly engaged in livelihood support, awareness raising, and emergency response. In Nguenyiel, RLOs are mainly engaged in conflict resolution and awareness raising. In Melkadida, RLOs tend to focus on awareness raising and livelihood support in the form of savings and loan associations.
- Networking is crucial for effective RLO responses to humanitarian action, and RLOs with a good diasporic network respond well to the community. Internet access, which is more available in urban areas, is critical in facilitating networking. Hence, RLOs in Addis Ababa are more effective in reaching their communities than those operating in camp settings.
- RLOs that involve host communities are very limited in number. Out of the 15 RLOs researched in Ethiopia, only two of them are co-led. Co-led RLOs form due to mutual interests and experiences, which enables integration otherwise not seen in other communities. For example, one Addis Ababa-based RLO is co-led with Yemenis, whose refugees share similar experiences with Ethiopian returnees who fled the war in Yemen.
- The main motivation for RLOs is to fill gaps in the communities. In Nguenyiel, due to the high frequency of conflicts between clans, RLOs seek to create peaceful co-existence. In Addis Ababa, RLOs seek to support community members during cases of emergency and more generally to create a means for living.
- Some aid agencies provide in-kind contributions to RLOs in camp settings. For example, in Nguenyiel, Oxfam supports RLOs to register and develop their internal structures. In Melkadida, there is support from the International Medical Corps and the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- Unlike RLOs in the camps, RLOs in Addis Ababa do not receive any support from aid organisations. They instead receive most of their support from the diaspora. RLOs that do not receive support from the diaspora or aid organisations struggle to provide continuous services.
- There are no networks of RLOs in Ethiopia. There is also no coordination between the RLOs in Ethiopia.

### Perceived impact of RLOs

- Refugee communities do not know much about RLOs, especially in Melkadida and Addis Ababa. In Melkadida, community members are not aware of the activities of RLOs in their communities, with the exception of savings and loan associations. However, in Nguenyiel, RLOs are well known by community members as they are established based on existing clans.
- Government agencies are more knowledgeable about the Refugee Central Committees (RCCs) than other RLOs. RCCs are established mainly by the involvement of UNHCR and the Ethiopian government's Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS). RCCs in the camps are responsible for the registration of RLOs. However, RCCs in Addis Ababa do not have such administrative power except for mobilising community members. RCCs are not considered RLOs in this study because they lack independence and transparency in the election of their leaders, and because they have external influences in their activities

and scope.

- RLOs in Addis Ababa meet the needs of their communities more effectively than aid organisations. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may provide services such as education, but RLOs provide services such as food and transport, which are deemed a higher priority by many beneficiaries. RLOs in Melkadida provide close support to the community especially in training, advocacy, and awareness creation. In Nguenyiel, RLOs focus on emergency support and peaceful co-existence.
- RLOs are perceived by both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries as creating a positive impact on the community. RLO activities include rescuing vulnerable members of the refugee community during conflict; responding to the emergency needs of their community members; creating awareness on COVID-19; girls' education and youth empowerment; and facilitating peaceful co-existence between different South Sudanese sub-clans in Nguenyiel refugee camp. However, external stakeholders are sceptical of the activities of the RLOs.
- For community members, a successful RLO is one that regularly provides support, serves the community with impartiality, is proactive in looking for networks, and is independent from aid. However, most community members from Melkadida note that successful RLOs tend to secure support from NGOs.

### Variations in impact

- RLOs face financial and registration-related difficulties that reduce their ability to play a more significant role. Some RLOs plan to register abroad and thus become an international organisation; others intend to obtain registration via local faith-based organisations.

The main obstacle in RLO registration is the mismatch between the Refugee Proclamation 1110/2019 and the Civic Society Proclamation. According to the Refugee Proclamation, refugees are permitted to associate and organise, but the Civic Society Proclamation designates that organisations register either as local or international organisations.

- External stakeholders have partnership plans with the RLOs. These include capacity-building programmes in Nguenyiel and increasing the financial capacity of RLOs in Melkadida. However, aid organisations do not have clear partnership plans with RLOs based in Addis Ababa. This is because many RLOs in the capital are not registered and aid organisations do not want to work with unregistered RLOs.

### Recommendations

- The government should allow RLOs to register as CBOs or NGOs. RLOs need support on registration, financial support, and capacity development. Registration would allow RLOs to create direct connections with the RRS and aid organisations, and to fundraise.

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