

# Challenges and Prospects of Implementing the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in Ethiopia: A Case Study on Refugee Camps in Gambella

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## ABSTRACT

This study has explored the challenges and prospects of the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in Ethiopia: A case study of refugee camps in Gambella. To this end, the researcher employed a qualitative research methodology and used different techniques to collect the required data, such as focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Informants were selected through purposive, convincing and snowballing and were taken to enrich the empirical data from Gambella regional and local authorities, refugee residences and NGOs. On top of this, secondary data were also collected from various published journals and institutional documents related to the implementation of CRRF and the practice of the new refugee law or policy. Likewise, thematic data analysis, content analysis and qualitative analysis strategies have been employed in this study. The findings of the study show that the implementation of CRRF in Gambella refugee camps is almost aborted because of the numerous constraints. A lack of knowledge about the new refugee approach/CRRF among government institutions, service provider institutions and local authorities is one of the notable challenges that the research boldly explored. Other challenges include a lack of coordination and commitment among stakeholders to push the implementation process, a lack of financial resources to operationalize and a lack of stability and civil war in the nation, which may force the government to prioritize domestic issues over the implementation of the CRRF and improve the effectiveness of the new refugee law. Hence, inclusive participation and a whole-of-society approach require bringing together diverse stakeholders and building a shared understanding. Moreover, leadership and political commitment from the highest levels of government, openness to policy reform and international and multilateral agencies' commitment to new ways of working all contribute to a contextually appropriate realization of CRRF.

**Keywords:** Challenges; Opportunities; Comprehensive refugee response framework; Pledges

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the study

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Ethiopia hosts one of the largest refugee populations in Africa, with over 850,000 refugees from various

countries, including South Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia. In an effort to enhance the protection and assistance provided to refugees, Ethiopia adopted the comprehensive refugee response framework. The CRRF is a global framework aimed at transforming the way the international community responds to refugee situations, focusing on self-reliance, inclusion and shared responsibility.

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In Africa, the issue of refugees was seeking attention, starting with the 1951 convention, which provides a wider definition of refugees and serves as a base for national refugee laws. The convention includes people who leave their country "owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of their country of origin or nationality as refugees. Complementary to the 1951 convention, the 1969 OAU convention governing specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa is an important instrument for the African refugee protection system [1].

Ethiopia has a long history of hosting refugees, with millions of people seeking refuge within its borders. Also, Ethiopia is one of the second-largest refugee-hosting countries in Africa, with a significant number of refugees originating from neighboring countries such as South Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Yemen and other countries where they have lived in urban areas and settlement areas. The refugees are located in four emerging regions of Ethiopia, which are: (i) Afar regional state; (ii) Benishangul-Gumuz regional state; (iii) Gambella regional state and (iv) The Somali regional state. Emerging regions are the least developed regions of the country and are characterized by difficult climatic conditions, poor infrastructure, extremely low productivity, high poverty and poor development indicators. At the end of June 2020, there were 342,765 south Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia, of whom 319,130 were housed in seven camps in Gambella regional state. These include 83,616 refugees in Nguenyiel camp, 64,898 refugees in Tierkidi camp, 58,935 refugees in Jewi camp, 45,399 refugees in Kule camp, 43,433 and 9,313 refugees in Pugnido 1 and 2 camps and 11,806 refugees in Okugo camp. Another 1,730 refugees are being accommodated in the host community of Akula. The majority of new arrivals in Gambella are expected to be relocated to the Benishangul-Gumuz region, in line with government policy issued in January 2019 requiring such relocations.

Ethiopia is a signatory to both the 1951 convention and its 1967 protocol, which define the rights and obligations of refugees and the responsibilities of states in providing protection to them and a party to the African charter on human and peoples' rights, which guarantees the rights and freedoms of individuals. The 2004 refugee proclamation is the primary legal instrument governing the treatment of refugees in Ethiopia. It defines who qualifies as a refugee, their rights and obligations and the procedures for asylum application and recognition. The recently adopted Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) 2016: The CRRF is a regional approach developed by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to address forced displacement in the region. Ethiopia has adopted the CRRF as a guiding framework for its refugee response, however. As the migration policy framework for Africa describes protracted displacement the term includes both refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as having "adverse consequences for the lives of refugees and IDPs who are at risk of suffering and vulnerable to struggling material, social and cultural deprivation in camp settings for extended intervals of time" [2].

Since Ethiopia is a member of the above-mentioned refugee conventions and declarations, Ethiopia agreed to be a CRRF

destination country in February 2017. Ethiopia's decision to participate in the CRRF was quickly supported by a joint World bank-UNHCR mission to examine support for refugees and host communities under the IDA-18 refugee sub-window. The implementation roadmap was finalized and the CRRF was officially launched in Ethiopia on November 28, 2017. In April and May 2018, regional inductions also took place in five refugee hosting regions, including Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Tigray, Afar and Somalia. For this reason, the government presented the national comprehensive refugee response strategy for consultation in May 2018. The strategy encompasses the government's vision of making all refugees and host communities socioeconomically active and self-sufficient by 2027 and commits to transforming the primary response model from refugee camps to development-oriented settlements within 10 years. Ethiopia's experience in hosting refugees for decades has also created a positive environment for the implementation of the CRRF. The World bank notes the social cohesion and integration within host communities, which can be leveraged to create an enabling environment for the framework. The inclusion of refugees in national development plans and providing them with access to livelihood opportunities showcases Ethiopia's innovative approach to implementing the CRRF.

Actually, implementing the CRRF in Ethiopia presents both challenges and prospects. The scale of the refugee population poses a significant challenge. Limited resources, including funding and infrastructure, can make it difficult to provide essential services and ensure the well-being of refugees. The World bank highlights the strain on Ethiopia's existing social and economic systems due to the large number of refugees.

Coordination among multiple stakeholders is another challenge. Effective collaboration and harmonization of efforts are crucial but can be complex. The involvement of government agencies, humanitarian organizations and host communities requires strong leadership and coordination mechanisms. The refugee council USA emphasizes the need for coordination and coherence in implementing the CRRF.

In summary, the comprehensive framework provides a holistic approach to refugee response, encompassing protection, assistance and durable solutions. However, the implementation of this framework poses numerous challenges that need to be addressed effectively. This study explores the challenges faced in implementing the comprehensive refugee response program framework in Ethiopia and highlights the prospects for overcoming these hurdles [3].

## Statements of the problem

It is usual to see people fleeing brutality and they are exposed to exploitation and detention in horrific conditions as a result of civil war, drought, hunger, prosecution, conflicts, human rights violations and other political-related tensions. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), introduced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, aims to enhance the protection and self-reliance of refugees while also fostering better social and economic integration within host communities. Ethiopia, known for its

significant refugee population, has embraced this framework to address the needs and rights of refugees effectively. However, the successful implementation of the CRRF in Ethiopia faces several challenges that need to be addressed to ensure positive outcomes.

One challenge is the limited financial resources available for accomplishing the goals of the CRRF. With a steadily increasing refugee population, Ethiopia struggles to secure sufficient funds to provide essential services like education, healthcare and livelihood opportunities to both refugees and host communities. This financial constraint hampers the effective implementation of the CRRF and may hinder its potential impact on the lives of refugees and host communities.

Another challenge lies in the coordination and collaboration among different stakeholders involved in the CRRF implementation. The framework requires the active participation of various governmental ministries, non-governmental organizations and international partners. Ensuring effective communication, cooperation and harmonization of efforts among these actors is crucial for the successful implementation of the CRRF. However, bureaucratic hurdles, conflicting priorities and inadequate information sharing can impede the collective response and compromise the achievement of desired outcomes [4].

Though, in September 2016, the Ethiopian government introduced a comprehensive refugee response framework and presented nine commitments. This led to the country adopting a new refugee law in early 2019 to provide lasting solutions for refugees in the country. Ethiopia is one of the first countries to implement the CRRF and receive funding. Great progress has been made since the IDA-18 sub-window and since the beginning of 2017. However, the pace of progress is still relatively slow and accountability mechanisms are not yet in place to ensure that throughout the process, policy reforms and best practices are used in decision-making related to program development and implementation. Furthermore, the commitments made under the CRRF reflect a shift in the Ethiopian government's policy and response towards refugees, from a camp-only policy to a mixed camp policy, without camps and on-site integration. However, the reality on the ground is unknown and progress is not monitored.

Furthermore, social and cultural barriers pose challenges to the integration of refugees into host communities. Pre-existing tensions, competition over scarce resources and cultural differences can create obstacles to social cohesion and hinder the refugees' ability to achieve self-reliance. The CRRF aims to foster social harmony and inclusivity, but addressing these barriers necessitates comprehensive strategies that promote dialogue, mutual understanding and shared benefits between refugees and host communities.

Furthermore, the issue of CRRF is under researched because the issue is new and some scholars focused on the refugee policy and roles of CRRF, but they did not give more attention to the new approach (CRRF) and its implementation. Hence, the driving force behind this research is to fill the gap where

scholars give little attention to the implementation of CRRF in integrating refugees with the host community.

The aim of the study is to explore "the challenges and prospects of implementing the comprehensive refugee response program framework in Ethiopia": A case study of Gambella refugee camps and the specific objective of the study is [5].

- To identify and analyze the factors that are challenging the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in Ethiopia's Gambella region refugee camps.
- To identify the prospects and opportunities for improving the implementation of the framework in Ethiopia, in Gambella region refugee camps.
- To propose recommendations and strategies for enhancing the comprehensive refugee response program framework in Ethiopia in Gambella region refugee camps.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The theoretical frameworks

**Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF):** The task force was made up of UNHCR employees as well as team members from the development community, the commercial sector and civil society. Consequently, the CRRF is a model for multi-stakeholder coordination on refugee issues that focuses on the humanitarian and development needs of refugees and host communities and the CRRF is the result of the New York refugee declaration, which was adopted by all 193 members.

In the New York declaration, member states recognize that refugee camps should constitute "an exception" and a temporary emergency measure. At the same time, member states agreed to increase their support for countries hosting refugees. In December 2018, UN member states adopted a new global compact on refugees that will hold on to guide the CRRF process.

This declaration is not a legally binding document but represents a historic moral and political statement aimed at improving the way the international community responds to large flows of refugees and migrants, as well as to protracted refugee situations.

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) is a more inclusive approach to refugee response, further strengthened globally by the adoption of the new Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) by United Nations member states in December 2018. The declaration is seen as an important step in global solidarity to improve the protection of people on the move, refugees and migrants. Moreover, the CRRF can therefore be seen as a model for implementing the commitments made in the New York declaration by ensuring a more comprehensive, predictable and sustainable response to large refugee flows and protracted refugee situations. The key CRRF has four basic objectives. These are: (a) Ease pressure on host countries through a whole-of-society approach, including development partners; (b) Increase the self-reliance of refugees and host communities; (c) Increase third-party solutions, including resettlement and family

reunification and (d) support countries of origin to create conducive conditions for sustainable voluntary repatriation.

**National and international legal frame works:** The legal framework of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in Ethiopia is based on international and national legal instruments. These include:

**The international legal instruments:** The 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees: Ethiopia is a signatory to this convention, which defines who is a refugee and outlines their rights and obligations and the 1967 protocol relating to the status of refugees: Ethiopia has also acceded to this protocol, which extends the scope of refugee protection beyond the original 1951 convention. Moreover, Ethiopia incorporates various human treaties and conventions into its framework, which provide protection for refugees and other populations, including refugees. **Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF):** The CRRF is a regional approach developed by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to address forced displacement in the region. Ethiopia has adopted the CRRF as a guiding framework for its refugee response [6].

**National legal instruments:** Ethiopia is a party to the African charter on human and peoples' rights, which guarantees the rights and freedoms of individuals; likewise, the 2004 refugee proclamation is the primary legal instrument governing the treatment of refugees in Ethiopia. It defines who qualifies as a refugee, their rights and obligations and the procedures for asylum application and recognition. On January 17, 2019, Ethiopia passed a new law that allows refugees to obtain work permits and other legal documents. Refugees can now work legally, formally register births and marriages and access financial services such as bank accounts. In addition to the refugee proclamation, Ethiopia has developed various national laws, policies and strategies to govern its refugee response and ensure the protection of refugees, including access to education, healthcare and livelihood opportunities.

## Ethiopia history on hosting refugee and the new refugee approach

Ethiopia is an open-door policy and thus has the second-largest refugee population in Africa, most of whom come from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan. Despite growing challenges, including a prolonged and severe drought in many regions hosting refugees with serious socio-economic consequences as well as political and social tensions, the Ethiopian government is keeping its borders open to the growing number of refugees seeking protection in the country. The crises in Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia continue and refugees are expected to remain in Ethiopia for a long time. The continued influx of refugees into Ethiopia is putting pressure on local communities, particularly with regard to resource sharing, environmental impacts and the provision of basic services. This situation is particularly urgent in Gambella, where at the beginning of the year the number of refugees exceeded the local population.

In November 2017, Ethiopia became a pilot country for the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response

Framework (CRRF). The CRRF involves numerous stakeholders, including ARRA, the government administration for refugee and return affairs, federal ministries and regional offices, UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, as well as humanitarian and development actors, donor organizations, the private sector and host communities and refugees themselves.

## Strategies and programs enabling CRRF in Ethiopia

The action plan for the implementation of the government of the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia's commitments and the practical application of the CRRF in Ethiopia was published in November 2017. This is a government-led collective response to implement the nine commitments, developed through participatory consultations with stakeholders at various levels, such as donors, relevant ministries, partners, NGOs, ARRA and UNHCR [7].

The Ethiopian government has implemented the Comprehensive Refugee Response (CRRF) to strengthen refugee assistance and improve access to basic services and rights. The document covers areas such as legal and political reforms, needs assessment, capacity building, targeted interventions, crisis response and governance structure. The roadmap and action plan guide the implementation of the CRRF commitments and enforcement in Ethiopia. The National Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy (NCRRS) 2018-2022 aims to provide a common perspective on refugee aid, define pillars, identify cooperation mechanisms and identify success factors. The CRRF pledge could potentially transform Ethiopia's refugee policy, with the proclamation at the heart of this process. The government signed the nine pledges promises at the refugee summit in New York in 2016, committing to improve basic social services and provide birth certificates for refugees.

The commitments made by the Ethiopian prime minister reflect the objectives of the international community with the CRRF and provide opportunities for greater freedom of movement, explicit recognition of refugees' right to work and opportunities for local integration. These liens differ from the field liens: Commitment to education, commitment to work and livelihood, commitment to documentation, commitment to social and basic services and commitment to local integration. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) can be viewed as a complementary tool to implement Ethiopia's nine commitments.

This approach combines greater support for host communities, support for peaceful coexistence and greater inclusion of refugees in national development plans. It is an innovative approach needed to improve the quality of protection and expand refugee protection arrangements across the country. This approach is going to be addressed through a four-step approach: (1) Implementation of commitments; (2) Strengthening the legal and policy elements; (3) Supporting host populations and (4) Strengthening coordination mechanisms. Furthermore, in July 2017, legal reforms of proclamation 760/2012 allowed the documentation of the marital status of refugees; the first birth certificates for refugees were issued in October 2017. Though Ethiopia drafted an action plan and organized a task force led by the prime minister, the practical



implementation of CRRF was aborted, as Angenendt and Boehlert criticized the new approach of CRRF as the “zero draft”: A positive but not yet sufficient step [8].

## Challenges of CRRF

Implementing the CRRF in Ethiopia presents both challenges and prospects. On the one hand, the challenges include:

**Limited resources:** Ethiopia faces resource constraints in adequately meeting the needs of both refugees and host communities. This includes access to basic services such as healthcare, education and livelihood opportunities.

**Social tensions:** The presence of a large refugee population in certain regions of Ethiopia can strain social cohesion and lead to conflicts between refugees and host communities. Addressing these tensions requires effective communication, conflict resolution mechanisms and community engagement.

**Legal and policy frameworks:** Ensuring the legal and policy frameworks align with the principles of the CRRF can be complex. This includes aspects such as legal recognition of refugees, access to work permits and integration policies.

According to the FDRE development policy of the CRRF of Ethiopia, the following conditions may affect the new approach of the CRRF: These are: Humanitarian response is severely stretched by the further large influx of refugees due to insecurity and natural disasters; the coordination structure might not be effectively run and managed; Ethiopia's policy regarding out-of-camp, right to work and possibility for local integration might change, thus limiting opportunities for durable solutions. Likewise, lack of job creation, low wages, conflict among refugee and host communities, lack of strong public outreach and lack of strong coordination mechanisms among different stakeholders are big challenges for the implementation of CRRF in Ethiopia.

## Opportunities of CRRF

Despite these challenges, there are also significant prospects for implementing the CRRF in Ethiopia:

**Regional collaboration:** The CRRF emphasizes regional cooperation and burden-sharing. Ethiopia has been actively engaged in regional initiatives such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU), which provide platforms for collaboration, resource sharing and knowledge exchange.

**Economic opportunities:** By adopting a comprehensive approach, the CRRF promotes the inclusion of refugees in national development plans and economic activities. Leveraging the skills and potential of refugees can contribute to economic growth, job creation and poverty reduction in Ethiopia.

**Donor support:** The international community recognizes the importance of supporting countries hosting large refugee populations. Donors and development partners have shown commitment to providing financial and technical assistance to Ethiopia to help implement the CRRF.

One of the core principles of the CRRF is to bring together diverse actors in a multilateral approach to respond more effectively to large and protracted refugee situations. The CRRF offers numerous benefits to both refugees and host countries.

This exploratory research study uses a survey research design and a cross-sectional method to gather preliminary data on the recent phenomenon of CRRF. Data sources include questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Secondary sources include journals, research articles, policies and reports. Participants include international NGO organizations, national organizations and host and refugee community leaders. The researcher employs qualitative data, using non-probability sampling methods like purposive, snowball and convenience sampling. The sample size depends on the population's heterogeneity and the sample size continues until theoretical saturation is reached. Thematic data analysis and content analysis qualitative analysis strategies are employed in this study [9].

## DISCUSSION

### Meanings of CRRF

So as to know their level of understanding, the researcher questioned different informants about the meaning and objectives of the new program, CRRF. Thus, regarding the meaning, some interviewees and FGD discussants generalized by reflecting as follows.

"We do not know in detail, but as information, we heard the CRRF is a new program that aims to connect host and refugee by creating job opportunities, freedom to work and sharing basic services such as schools and hospitals to increase interaction that facilitates and consolidates integration."

Whereas the ordinary members of the refugee and host communities did not have awareness and information regarding the concept of CRRF. Most of them said, "I heard people talking about it, but I did not know the purpose."

Perceptions of host community and refugee on the new refugee policy: Due to the protracted refugee situations, tackling the root causes of displacement and finding durable and realistic solutions for those displaced who have spent much of their entire lives in exile searching for peace and safety is a boiling issue and requires an extensive and inclusive engagement.

The new proclamation (No. 1110/2019) has 5 parts, 47 articles and 140 sub-articles. The new refugee declaration contains progressive provisions on the freedom of movement and the right to work of refugees. It also allows for a more comprehensive understanding of family, a broader definition of identity documents, improved access to and expansion of prima facie recognition for non-African refugees and rules and procedures for Determining Refugee Status (RSD) adapted to international standards. Regarding access to social services, the proclamation details refugees' rights to education.

In support of this FGD, discussants highlighted that: The new policy for refugees, I hope, is vital for us because it helps the refugee community to work based on their profession outside of

camp; it allows refugees to move everywhere in the region and to engage in business activities with the host community, but I am in doubt about whether it can be applied on the ground because nothing has been seen in action. We heard information about the policy before three years, but yet no implementation.

One interviewee enlightens that: The new approach gives freedom to the refugee community: When refugees are engaged in private and business activities, either service provision, agriculture or labor work in public industry, they are going to be self-reliant and if integration is realized, refugees can develop their skills and develop new financing sources and economic opportunities that make them independent.

Likewise, the proclamation and the supplementary directive on refugees' right to work have limited the interpretation of the obligations relating to the conditions under which refugees can exercise their right to work. Since 2019, only a few residence permits have been issued, mainly to refugees receiving shared livelihood and economic integration projects.

### Exploring the implementations of the pledges

**Out of camp pledge:** The Out-of-Camp Policy (OCP) of the Ethiopian government, introduced in 2010, has provided Eritrean refugees with opportunities to live in Addis Ababa and other non-camp locations of their choice. The eligibility criteria include that you have the necessary means to financially support yourself and those of your relatives or friends who undertake to support you, as well as that you have no criminal record during your stay in the camp. The OCP is in line with UNHCR's global policy on alternatives to camps, which recommends that refugees around the world be kept out of refugee camps and live close to host communities.

On the OCP, one respondent from the interviewee stated that: Out of camp policy is very important and almost all the refugee communities that existed in the Gambella region are happy with this policy because it allows the refugees to work, freely move everywhere they want out of the camps, and creates an opportunity to live together with the host community. This is a very vital policy considered as an option for repatriation, but only university students benefit from it, yet it has not addressed the mass.

In reverse of this, another respondent from the interviewee stated that: As far as I knew, at the beginning of 2019, ARRA higher officials, including the country director, have come to all refugee camps to create awareness for ARRA staff, refugee representatives, host community members, local authorities and regional administrations. The refugee community was very excited by the program; however, there was strong resistance from the host community and even they made public protests before the policy was applied.

Other respondents from the focus group discussed stated that: The out-of-camp policy is supposed to give a benefit by shifting 10% of the total population out of camp to live with the host community, which means it creates an opportunity for 34,765 from the total refugee population. But, as far as I knew, in Kule refugee camp, no one benefitted from this policy, even though I think it was similar in all other camps in Gambella. As

information, I don't know how many refugees got benefit from this policy, but I heard out of camp policy a little bit has been practiced in Somali and Tigray refugee camps, yet this policy is nominal on the ground in Gambella refugee camps.

Some NGOs, like the Inter-Church Development and Assistance Commission (DICAC), offer limited training, such as training in beauty salons, handicrafts, sewing, shoemaking, cooking, construction and agriculture-related training through the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), but not engaged outside the fields.

The government of Ethiopia acknowledges the relative success of the OCP for Eritrean refugees, but not in other refugee camps. On this issue, one interviewee enlightened that: I heard that the out-of-camp policy benefits only Eritrean, Yemeni and Somalia refugee peoples, which allowed them to live in rural areas and towns of the country; they can move freely where they want; they can engage in different business activities and the UNHCR also supported them for rent, housing, food and other allowances that helped them to survive in the cities. In our camp, only students who joined the university and those who get pass permits from the camp have protection for visiting families and health issues that allow them to move out of the camp; there are no other cases that make the refugee community move out of the camp; it is highly restricted. We need this opportunity eagerly because it gives us the freedom to do what we want and need, freedom of movement and the ability to realize our dreams. The out-of-camp policy as a South Sudan refugee was something we hoped for and expected more of, but we are far from this benefit; even as refugees, we are excluded from being treated equally like the Eritrean refugees.

**Education pledge:** An interviewee explicitly elaborated that: The education policy in relation to CRRF is not applied in Gambella refugee camps; actually, education in the camps has progressed; the number of schools has increased, starting from primary school up to preparatory school, but no single school has opened to deliver a service for both the host and the refugee community [10].

**Other social and basic services:** GIZ collaborates with the Ethiopian ministry of science and higher education to create inclusive vocational training and work opportunities for refugees and Ethiopians in various regions. The program, co-financed by the Norwegian development cooperation agency, improves education quality, teaching conditions and employment opportunities, strengthening key actors for refugee declaration implementation. The program is therefore considered a flagship project for the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in Ethiopia. The government's intent is to strengthen, expand and enhance basic and essential social services such as health, nutrition, immunization and other medical services provided for refugees within the bounds of national law.

Some respondents jointly stated that: Though there are doctors without borders (MSF) and ARRA health, no health center has been built to provide services to both the host community and refugees. But by default, the refugees get referred to health services, especially in the host community in Gambella and

Metu hospital, when they face serious disease. In the long run, this may contribute to the integration process.

One of the focus groups also reported that: In Gambella refugee camps, there are huge lands for agriculture; we need to engage in livestock production and farming activities since the policy provided 10,000 hectares of irrigable land available to enable 20,000 refugees and host community households of 100,000 people to grow crops, but yet it has not been applied.

**Work and livelihood pledge:** Ethiopia pledges to provide work permits to refugees with permanent residence IDs and refugee graduates, with priority given to qualified refugees. The country also pledges 10,000 hectares of irrigable land for crop production, benefiting 20,000 households or 100,000 people, subject to external financial assistance. The government of Ethiopia has shown its commitment to realizing the involvement of refugees in self-reliance schemes.

Likewise, respondents to the FGD jointly stated that: The work and livelihood policy basically initiates to allocate irrigable and cultivable lands, designing agricultural development projects, formulate self-help groups, expand irrigation infrastructures includes detailed study and preparing the design and irrigation scheme, mobilization and collection of construction materials, construction work of the masonry irrigation canals, improve access to business finance and start-up capital, provide agricultural inputs and facilitate technical assistance and develop a legal and a policy framework outlining the terms and conditions for access to land by the refugees and sign a MoU on the implementation of the policy as somewhat tried to exercise in Somali refugee camps but still not tried to implement this policy rather than accepting as a matter of principle.

One of the focus groups also added that: In Gambella, there is fertile land for agriculture that attracts national and foreign investors. The main intention of this policy is to benefit both the host and refugee communities and side by side, consolidate cooperation and interactions; thus, in progress, it may facilitate local integration, but till now, no single household has this advantage.

One respondent from the FGD explained that: Some NGOs helped some refugee members engage in horticultural activities such as mango and papaya and rearing animals like sheep and goats funded by concern in Pugnido and NRC in Jawi refugee camps; this may contribute to CRRF, but it is not enough and has not started in all refugee camps in Gambella.

One respondent from the interviewee also noted that: Opportunities for refugees to enter other areas and projects are limited given that there are parts of the Ethiopian markets and jobs that are only reserved for nationals and that the conditions under which refugees can engage in wage-employment or self-employment are very restrictive, as the same requirements as for foreign nationals apply, yet, in most cases, refugees are not compliant.

In addition, refugees still encounter challenges to fully enjoying Ethiopian financial services due to their inability to open bank accounts, hence making it difficult to open or sustain their microbusinesses. Moreover, agricultural initiatives have been

hindered in the past due to the inaccessibility of farmland outside of the camps. ARRA continues to advocate with the regional government to provide farmland to refugees. In 2020, UNHCR and its implementing partners aim to provide support to 10% (9,000+) of the target population, focusing on crop production, livestock development and entrepreneurship training for youth. Only 25% of the plan has been achieved as of June 2020 because partners are either scaling down or suspending planned activities due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Meanwhile, UNHCR is piloting a large-scale crop production initiative with 150 households in three camps: Nguenyiel, Pugnido and Okugo. A Socioeconomic Assessment (SEA) is underway to gain a better understanding of the refugee context, which is hoped to inform the development of the livelihoods and economic inclusion strategy.

An interviewee explicitly elaborated that: In terms of the work and livelihood pledge in some situations, it is difficult to say always they tried to collect, analyze and utilize data on graduate refugees (external certification and graduates from Ethiopian universities), but the problem is creating linkage with national and international organizations to hire as normal staff workers. Still, a lot of professionals who graduated from Ethiopian universities were recruited as incentive workers with very low salaries, which affected the morality of the professionals.

One respondent from the interviewee also noted that: There are a number of refugees who have licenses in driving, mechanics, dressmaking, shoemaking, beauty salons and barbary, but they cannot work outside of the camp because the policy is like a cloud in the air and I have never observed any progress in the refugee camp where I lived. Of course, the right to work, which was unthinkable before some years, is now something that has changed. Informally, people are engaged in work in the towns around them, but its implementation is not radical. Freedom of movement, which is essential for refugees, is very restrictive; to move somewhere, you have to have convincing evidence to get a pass permit from ARRA protection.

The host community undoubtedly benefits from the presence of refugees, promoting economic development and improved service delivery. However, there is widespread hostility towards NGOs and organizations that focus exclusively on refugees, while the host community faces significant challenges in terms of livelihoods and access to basic services. Another source of tension is the division of labor. Although the legal framework prevents refugees from accessing formal work, they engage in trade, work as day laborers and fill qualified positions, including as teachers. This is supposed to be a threat to host communities. Moreover, given the limited economic opportunities in the region, increased competition in the labor market, both formal and informal, may lead to tensions.

Moreover, other respondents in the FGD jointly stated that: The new policy gives hope to adults who expected to join the industrial parks as workers because, as a policy and as a plan, it creates opportunity for 100,000 people and 30% of the jobs reserved for refugees to engross in industrial parks. This will help the refugee adults and youngsters adapt new technological knowledge, skills and attitudes, learn new working cultures and

share the values, norms, work ethics and cultures of other Ethiopian peoples. In parallel with these prospects, they will earn money and skills that helped them improve their personal lives and standards of living (the economy) and this will create a comfortable opportunity to transfer the skills to the refugee camps. Thus, this makes them self-reliant and contributes to the facilitation of local integration; however, I don't know the reason why the implementation of this activity is aborted; even though I have not seen initiatives to start the construction of industrial parks, I heard a lack of funding from international organizations and that the continued civil war in the country may halt the program.

The Ethiopian government's 2019-2020 country refugee response plan focuses on expanding access to education, integrating refugees into the national educational system, integrating 13,000 refugees, expanding energy access, protecting the environment, improving food and nutrition security and implementing WASH programs. The plan focuses on self-reliance and livelihoods for refugees through skills development, job matching and private sector participation. A memorandum of understanding between ARRA and the Somali regional government has allowed 500 hectares of land to be irrigated along the Genale river, benefiting 1,500 people. However, many of these initiatives have not been implemented due to delays in planning and donor organizations' procedures. Even such attempts and initiatives to implement the new policy are not visible.

**Documentation pledge:** Ethiopia also pledges to issue birth certificates to children of refugees born in Ethiopia. However, in practice except the registrations of birth certificate to children refugees, even they did not registered death because they afraid the reductions of food allowance.

One focus group participant explained that: When we heard the new refugee approach, we were glad and we hopped a lot, but it is too late and too delayed for application. As a precondition, more activities are expected to be performed by ARRA, UNHCR and other partners, like training for ARRA staff on vital event registration, data collection and management, use of registration books and certificates and providing access to an open bank account as any foreigner with a legal permanent residence is entitled to use the refugee identification documents and provide access for refugees who meet the requirements to acquire a driving license. However, there are plenty of refugee members who have skills, but yet they are licensed.

**Local integration pledge:** An interviewee explicitly elaborated that: The local integration is crucial, especially for us/South Sudan refugees, because there is no peace in our country due to the civil war. So we preferred integration rather than repatriation.

Though the ways that lead to the applications of local integration have started in Somali and Tigray refugee camps, ARRA tried to draft the outlines of local integration following a workshop with key actors, sensitize eligible refugees about local integration and its benefits, issue relevant documents to eligible refugees who opt for local integration and the socio-economic

components are like that of facilitating and supporting the use of land for eligible refugees for a longer term, providing support for shelter, facilitating skills and entrepreneurial training with certification and providing start-ups, but yet it does not show real progress.

Likewise, other respondents in the FGD noted that: To be honest, the new refugee approach is almost dead; there is no hope; we are looking for repatriation if peace reigns in our country."

## Challenges and prospects of CRRF

**The challenges for implementations of CRRF:** Ethiopia is taken as a pilot test next Uganda to implement the 2016 New York declaration for refugees and migrants and as soon as it accepts the declaration, it devises nine pledges to implement the CRRF. However, implementing CRRF is complex, depending on local, national and international contextual factors.

One discussant from the interviewee also asserted the following idea: The CRRF process in Ethiopia faces challenges due to unclear goals and timelines, causing anxiety among government authorities, especially local authorities and being exacerbated by the increasing number of programming approaches pursued by international donors without a clear accountability framework, particularly in sensitive policy areas.

One focus group participant explained that: Refugees do not respect the local order; refugees acknowledge that idleness among youth is clashing with the local way of life; they disturb and put pressure on the host society. This may affect the interaction of the host and refugee communities.

During a focus group, one Refugee Central Committee (RCC) member explained: The government has its own urgent priorities that makes slowdown and creates a real on the implementations challenges, this may have headed international donors to an overall withdrawal in support for the agenda.

In support of this, political instability and ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia are major challenges for implementing the CRRF as a new refugee policy. These issues have shifted government focus from development to peace pacification. The COVID-19 pandemic has also posed unexpected obstacles, including devastating health issues for refugees.

One focus group participant explained that: The lack of international funding for infrastructure and services for both host and refugee communities, as well as a lack of experience in integrating them, weak government commitment and awareness training, contribute to the delay in implementing the Comprehensive Refugee Resettlement Policy (CRRF). Moreover, the country's instability and increasing refugee population worldwide also hinder progress in implementing these policies, potentially leading to the termination of the undergoing implementation process of the new approach.

One interview participant explained that, poor coordination among partners, donors and agencies and a lack of monitoring of CRRF-related initiatives undermine the new policy.



## Opportunities and prospects of CRRF

One focus group participant explained that: Ethiopia needs industrialization and job opportunities due to its large unemployed adult population. CRRF implementation fosters country development by integrating refugees with the host community, minimizing burdens for the host country and providing opportunities for refugees, local communities and governments. So, it is a win-win scenario, which is an opportunity for both refugees and the local community and government.

The CRRF aims to improve the lives of refugees and migrants and address the need to move from a humanitarian "care and support system" to comprehensive and effective development responses to refugee crises.

## CONCLUSION

To better support refugees and the communities that host them, the New York declaration calls on humanitarian and development actors supporting refugees to work together to develop a more coherent and predictable approach to responding to refugees. These actors include the government, UN organizations, the World bank and NGOs. The common objective set out in the CRRF is to reduce pressure on host countries, strengthen refugee self-sufficiency and expand access to third-country resettlement and other complementary opportunities like security and dignity.

- Therefore, the study has explored the following constraints that affected the practical application of the CRRF in Ethiopia's Gambella refugee camps.
- The new refugee law and CRRF are not widely understood by various stakeholders, including government institutions, service providers, refugee communities, local authorities and refugee leaders.
- The government prioritized other national engagements over CRRF implementation due to financial constraints, instability and civil war, resulting in a large number of internally displaced people.
- The implementation of the CRRF has been hindered by a lack of effective leadership, coordination and commitment, resulting in weak knowledge sharing and cooperation among stakeholders.
- Strengthening local emergency service capacity is a key priority for preparedness, but implementation is hindered by the Ethiopian CRRF implementation roadmap, which does not inspire local governments and authorities, despite their significant role in integration.

Due to the above-mentioned factors, CRRF implementation in the region has not met expected objectives, despite the immense hope and optimism of the refugee community.

## RECOMMENDATION

The New York declaration is a crucial program for integrating refugees and migrants into host communities, aiming to reduce pressure, build self-reliance and provide services like schools and

health centers. Thus, the following points are suggested for effective implementation of CRRF. These are:

- The political instability of the country needs to be addressed to get concentration from the government and for the smooth implementation of the CRRF.
- The international donor community should share responsibility and fund CRRF-based initiatives in an extensive way.
- Raising awareness among service providers, Woredas' and Kebeles' officers, agencies and institutions is crucial.
- The policy requires investment in time and leadership by host governments, including local authorities, to bring together diverse stakeholders and build shared understanding.
- The policy's inclusive approach requires host governments to invest time and leadership to unite diverse stakeholders, build shared understanding and improve coordination. However, it lacks common guidelines and joint assessment in practice; this implies the policy demands strong interaction and collaboration.

As I tried to understand from the respondent, though the refugee community is happy and hopes to benefit more from the new policy, which we called CRRF, the host communities strongly oppose the application of CRRF. Therefore, further research should be conducted to determine whether integration or repatriation is the solution for the refugee populations existing in the Gambella region.

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