

BETTER LIVES NOW: **Self-Reliance Innovation Lab** **Learning Briefer**

November 2022

Refugee
SELF-RELIANCE
Initiative



PRM

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

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Background

At a time of unprecedented global forced displacement, self-reliance models need to be the norm, rather than the exception, when planning assistance and response to ongoing crises.

The [*Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative*](#) and the United States Department of State, [*Bureau of Population Refugees and Migration*](#) co-convened an innovation lab focused on refugee self-reliance. The lab included thematic discussions on: (i) Measuring the Impacts of Self-reliance: Data, Evidence, and Research; (ii) Supporting Programming and Practices to Advance Refugee Self-Reliance; and (iii) Fostering Policies to Promote an Enabling Environment

in which Refugees and Host Communities Can Thrive. Each discussion convened representatives from academia, foundations, NGOs, research organizations, refugee-led organizations, multilateral institutions, governments (host countries and donors), and the private sector to produce recommendations informing pledging around self-reliance at the [*2023 Global Refugee Forum*](#).



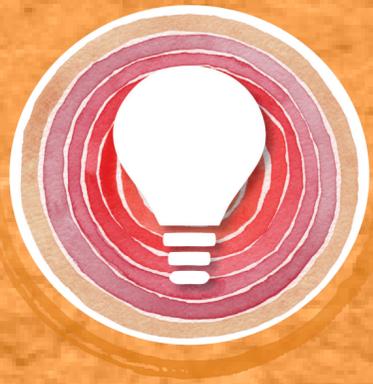
Why Focus on Refugee Self-Reliance?

We face a time of unprecedented global forced displacement, driven by dwindling access to durable solutions and both new and increasingly protracted crises. In this context, indefinite cycles of “emergency” humanitarian aid are increasingly obsolete, inadequate, and unsustainable.

Self-reliance – the social and economic ability of an individual, household, or community to meet its essential needs in a sustainable manner – is recognized as a key solution to the global displacement crisis. Most refugees say they want the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families – to work, use their skills, and make decisions about their finances, lives, and futures in their new homes, whether their stay is temporary or permanent. Self-reliance – a core objective of the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) and aligned with the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) – lays the foundation for durable solutions and promotes resilience against future shocks.

A focus on self-reliance does not mean leaving refugees on their own to manage for themselves. It means actively designing equitable policies and programs that empower refugees to make voluntary and informed choices that enable them to rebuild their lives, support themselves and their families, and contribute to their communities.

Despite broad agreement on the importance of self-reliance, practices have proven insufficient in moving the needle on the issue for several reasons: poor linkages between research, data, and policy and practice; limited collaboration outside of the humanitarian space; and restrictive host government policies. In response, the Better Lives Now innovation lab explored challenges, alongside best practices and emerging approaches, and articulated recommendations to inform commitments and new approaches to promote self-reliance outcomes for refugees. This learning brief shares high-level outcomes from each discussion and outlines recommendations to inform a pledging roadmap.



LAB 1 | Measuring the Impacts of Self-Reliance: Data, Evidence, and Research

There is limited cohesive data and evidence on the effectiveness and impact of different types of self-reliance programs in different displacement settings and for specific displaced groups, and existing data and research in the academic field remains siloed from policymakers. This hinders practitioners' and policymakers' ability to make data-driven decisions about refugee response programs and policies. This discussion focused on measuring the impacts of self-reliance and addressed the following questions:

If we had better evidence, what could we do with it?

- What opportunities would it bring?
- Where are the biggest evidence gaps?

What can we do to promote gathering and use of self-reliance evidence?

- How can we make evidence more accessible, known and user-friendly?
- What opportunities exist to collaborate around a shared learning agenda?

What does effective collaboration look like?

- How can we practically expand refugee participation in research and learning?

MEASURING the IMPACTS of DATA, EVIDENCE and RESEARCH

INNOVATION LAB

OUR CORE QUESTION:
HOW CAN WE MEASURE
the IMPACT of SELF-RELIANCE?*

ONE COOL IDEA!
REFUGEE-LED RESEARCH



“SELF-RELIANCE is a
HOLISTIC MEASURE”



THE OUTCOME:
LIVED EXPERIENCE
INTEGRATED into
RESEARCH on
FORCED MIGRATION

1

FABULOUS
FAILURES
ARE GREAT FOR
LEARNING!



5

to BRIDGE the GAP
BETWEEN
EVIDENCE and PRACTICE
ALL RESEARCH GRANTS
CAN HAVE a "POLICY/
PRACTITIONER PARTNER"
TO ENSURE USE!

2

WE NEED MORE
CONVENING SPACES
for RESEARCHERS,
POLICYMAKERS and
PRACTITIONERS

4

COLLABORATING
with REFUGEES
into PROGRAM/RESEARCH
MUST BE BUILT INTO PROGRAM
DESIGN FROM the START!
IT'S NOT an "ADD ON"

6

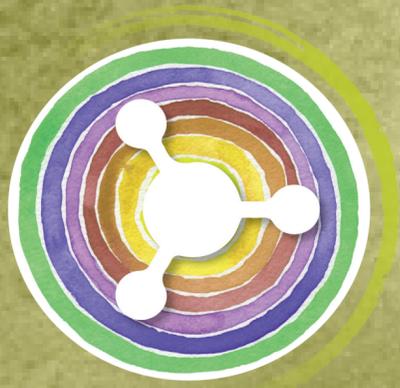
LONGITUDINAL DATA
is SO IMPORTANT
AND NEEDS MORE FUNDING

7

WE HAVE TO BETTER STUDY
the IMPACT of
GOV POLICIES
on SELF-RELIANCE

KEY THEMES

UNINTENDED
BENEFITS ARE OFTEN
MISSED WHEN WE FOCUS
RIGIDLY on OUTCOMES



LAB 2 | Supporting Programming and Practices to Advance Refugee Self-Reliance

There are few opportunities for stakeholders, and particularly refugees themselves, to collaborate and share learning, perspectives, and best practices on self-reliance. Stakeholders often operate in isolation – split geographically, technically, and by type of actor (e.g. humanitarian, development, national, international, and refugee-led). This discussion focused on programming, practices, and new models of collaboration that can promote self-reliance and addressed the following questions:

Where can we expand opportunities for collaboration so that programming addresses the holistic aspects of household self-reliance?

How can we better engage the private sector in refugee self-reliance?

- What are good models for private sector engagement with humanitarian and development actors, donors, and host governments?

How do we expand the reach and scale of self-reliance programming?

- How do we reach a broader range of marginalized populations?
- How do we expand engagement of frontline responders and Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs)?



KEY THEMES

1 **REMOTE WORK**
is an **OPPORTUNITY**
FOR REFUGEES

example:
COMPANIES
IN NORWAY HIRING
REFUGEES in LEBANON

ONE COOL IDEA!

2 **MATCHING
COMPANY NEEDS
and
REFUGEE SKILLS**
is HELPFUL

3 **DE-RISKING
PRIVATE SECTOR
ENGAGEMENT**
is IMPORTANT

SHARING RISK
WITH PUBLIC PRIVATE
PARTNERSHIPS

FLEXIBILITY in
DEPLOYMENT
of CAPITAL

PUBLIC PRIVATE

4 **ALIGNING
TIMEFRAMING
and FUNDING**
FOR DEVELOPMENT and
HUMANITARIAN
INITIATIVES

PROMOTES COMPOUNDED VALUE!

2 YEARS 10 YEARS

5 **AVOID
DUPLICATION**
THROUGH BETTER
COMMUNICATION

WE NEED to BE FOCUSING
HEAVILY on SOCIAL COHESION,
PREJUDICE REDUCTION and
OVERALL ACCEPTANCE of REFUGEES

“ BOLDLY
INFLUENCING
AGENDAS ”

PROGRAMMING and PRACTICE

INNOVATION LAB



ILLUSTRATED BY
THE CONVIVE COLLECTIVE



LAB 3 | Fostering Policies to Promote an Enabling Environment in which Refugees and Host Communities Can Thrive

The vast majority of existing policies in refugee-hosting countries do not fully support an enabling environment for self-reliance outcomes, and local approaches are often disconnected from national and regional strategies. Yet, the evidence that host countries need to shift policies and test out new approaches is also limited, and in many cases nonexistent. Underlying, and contributing to entrenchment of restrictive policies, are limitations of absorptive capacity in countries hosting large numbers of refugees, resulting in strain on host community resources. This discussion focused on policies supporting self-reliance, while benefiting refugees and host communities, and addressed the following questions:

- What evidence and support do hosting governments need to promote a more enabling environment for refugee self-reliance?
- How can we create useful convening spaces for evidence to inform policy?
- What is needed from the donor community, practitioners, and development stakeholders to facilitate movement in this direction?

REFUGEES are NOT DISPLACED FOR A SHORT PERIOD of TIME

74% OF REFUGEES WORLDWIDE HAVE LIVED IN EXILE FOR MORE THAN 5 YEARS
-2021 UNHCR GLOBAL TRENDS REPORT-



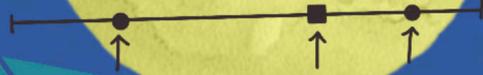
RESTRICTIVE HOST COUNTRY POLICIES



1

DIFFERENT TYPES of DATA are NEEDED

AT DIFFERENT DECISION-MAKING MOMENTS WITHIN GOVERNMENTS



KEY THEMES

2

INCLUDING HOST COMMUNITY MEMBERS

in SOLUTIONS IS IMPORTANT

IMF REPORT SHOWS the COST OF NOT ALLOWING REFUGEES to WORK at THEIR LEVEL of EDUCATION



in ETHIOPIA: PLEDGE to IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE OF BOTH REFUGEES and HOST COMMUNITY DECREASED XENOPHOBIA!

3

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS MAKE POLICIES REAL!

BANKACCOUNT

DRIVERS' LICENCE

4

NEED to CREATE REFUGEE JOURNEY MAPS



HUMANITARIAN GROUPS

REFUGEE-LED GROUPS

POLICY and ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

OUR CORE QUESTION
HOW CAN WE SHAPE POLICIES to BE RESPONSIVE to REFUGEE NEEDS?

INNOVATION LAB

5

DONORS CAN ELEVATE COUNTRIES

DOING IT WELL (and WALK their TALK)

6

PARTNERSHIP is CRITICAL

GOVERNMENTS

UN AGENCIES

PRIVATE SECTOR



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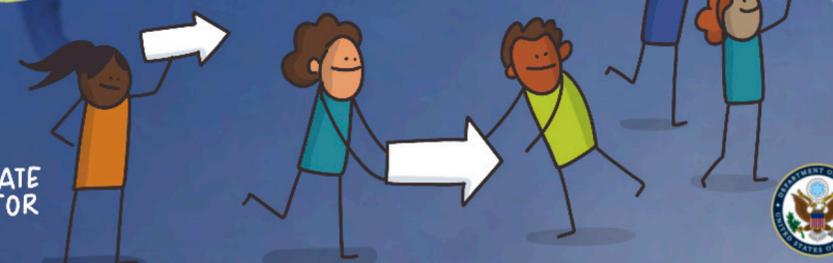
FEMSA in MEXICO



CREATES ECONOMIC + SOCIAL VALUE + JOB OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH COMPANIES

ONE COOL STORY

“ WE ARE MORE CONNECTED WITH COMMUNITY and SOCIETAL NEEDS BECAUSE REFUGEES OFFER a UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ”

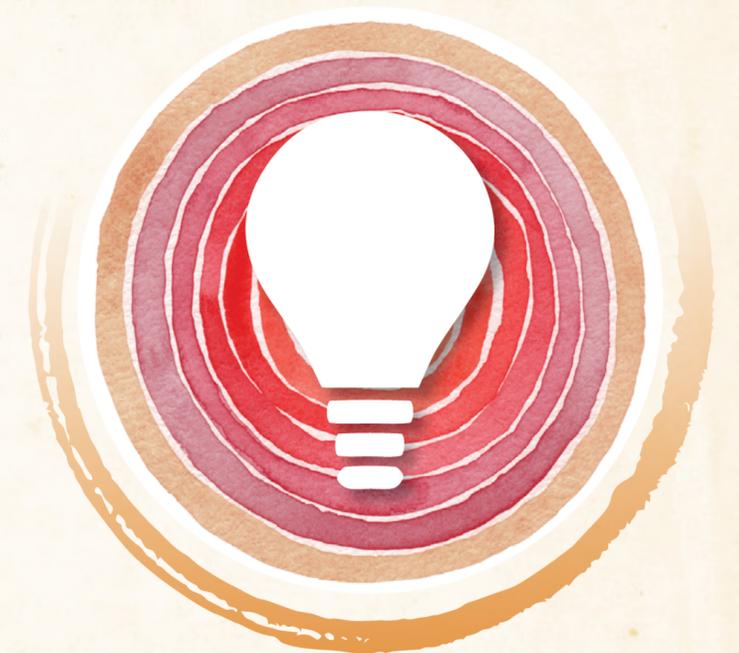


KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Measuring the Impacts of Self-Reliance: Data, Evidence, and Research

There are many challenges facing researchers seeking to generate data, evidence, and research around self-reliance and in communicating data, evidence, and research to practitioners and policymakers. This includes pressures to demonstrate positive outcomes of programs – hindering learning around what doesn't work – and limited funding for longitudinal research, research on the impacts of different policies, and studies that examine interplay between the multidimensional aspects of self-reliance. While statistics, data, and evidence should form the cornerstones of policymaking and practice, decision-makers often don't have access to it, and policies are developed with limited information.

Moreover, few existing resources meaningfully include refugee voices and perspectives, and refugees are often excluded from national survey data. This lack of diversity in perspectives and limitations in data impacts how the international community understands and promotes self-reliance.



KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Expand investment in funds** that promote refugee-led research, evaluation of host country policies, longitudinal evaluation of interventions, and experimental design approaches - including emerging uses of *technology to inform policy*.
- **Support platforms for researchers to connect with policymakers and implementers** in a systematic way to promote use of evidence while supporting universal inclusion of refugees and forcibly displaced populations in national surveys.
- **Center self-reliance research around local knowledge and perspectives**, including use of local advisory councils comprised of refugees and host community members, to help guide programmatic design, implementation, and dissemination of information.
- **Invest in refugee-led research and mentorship opportunities** in partnership with local and international institutions.
- **Expand use of grant models that build partnerships** between researchers, policymakers, and implementing agencies.
- **Align common, multi-sector indicators to chart global progress on self-reliance, diminish duplication of efforts, and inform pledging processes around the 2023 Global Refugee Forum.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Supporting Programming and Practices to Advance Refugee Self-Reliance

While there are many potential opportunities for engagement of development actors and the private sector in self-reliance programming, a number of factors hinder collaboration. Notably, the time frames of development interventions often don't align with humanitarian funding horizons and many development actors have not yet articulated how refugee inclusion advances their poverty alleviation objectives and mandates. In the private sector, investors frequently perceive significant risks to investing in refugee-owned businesses or in fragile contexts. Solutions promoting self-reliance for host communities and refugees have the best chance of being sustainable and scalable when they engage local market

actors to respond to context-specific market ecosystem needs and present viable opportunities for local and international investment. However, the use of market systems approaches in refugee response efforts is nascent.



KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strengthen or create platforms for humanitarian and development actors to jointly plan** refugee responses, cutting across silos between the humanitarian and development fields and across traditional sectors.
- **Facilitate opportunities for private sector engagement via funds that de-risk investments** and allow for the deployment of capital. This includes matching or co-funding to test proof-of-concept ideas, which are critical for investors seeking to enter new or emerging markets; funding that guarantees and allows for long-term investments beyond the time frames of typical humanitarian funding horizons; and engaging humanitarian actors in advisory roles to transfer knowledge about the local operating environment of refugee contexts to private sector actors and investors.
- **Engage existing multi-stakeholder platforms to share lessons learned** around deployment of capital, market systems approaches in refugee contexts, and refugee-led interventions to triangulate and share knowledge between private sector, government, humanitarian, and development actors.
- **Secure commitments from private sector actors *to support best practices for refugee economic integration***, including refugee hiring activities (including internships, part-time, full-time, and remote positions), entrepreneur support, education and skills development (including language, job-readiness, and technical skills), provision of products and services to refugees, philanthropy to refugee-focused organizations and programs, and advocacy toward hosting governments on regulatory policies related to employment of refugees.
- **Support knowledge exchange opportunities** between global private sector actors and private sector firms in the global south in countries or regions with large refugee populations to strengthen exchange of best practices.
- **Seek opportunities to better leverage investments of local private sector actors and high-net-worth individuals** who may be more risk-tolerant due to local contextual knowledge.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fostering Policies that Promote an Enabling Environment in which Refugees and Host Communities Can Thrive

Collaboration between local, provincial, and national governments is critical for self-reliance outcomes, alongside joint planning and alignment with other stakeholders such as the private sector, development actors, and humanitarian actors. While many hosting governments have tested a variety of approaches to refugee self-reliance, learning is not often disseminated beyond the country and region, nor is it used to inform preparedness for countries anticipating future population movements or refugee inflows. While

many countries have the right policies in place, their approaches are not often elevated or recognized and many host governments need additional funding to implement inclusive refugee policies.



KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Engage host governments across local, provincial, and national levels.** Structures such as the [*regional support platforms*](#) (e.g. MIRPS, SSAR, IGAD) supporting government actors at all levels and facilitating collaboration and connection between government and other stakeholders including refugees, implementing agencies, the private sector, and donors are promising examples and should be expanded in other contexts.
- **Develop local development plans for areas hosting large numbers of refugees and for refugee camps** using models such as Kenya's [*KISED*](#), to align local planning and programming with national and regional development plans, and designate a national focal point to liaise between governmental departments to promote policy coherence
- **Support peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge, experience and good practice among hosting governments.** This includes sharing positive examples of budget planning, funding facility models, and impacts of host country policies that support the multi-dimensional aspects of self-reliance at different stages of displacement, and the ecosystem of rights that can unlock contributions from refugees to their host communities and countries (e.g. freedom of movement, financial inclusion, the right to work).
- **Invest in preparedness funds** that help countries better plan for future population movements and put contingency plans and policies in place.
- **Elevate best practices and meet funding gaps in countries that show progress or promise toward self-reliance outcomes while also (re)committing to [*good humanitarian donorship principles*](#)** on the 20th anniversary of the initiative.

Next Steps

During the first quarter of 2023, initial recommendations and outcomes of the Better Lives Now: Self-Reliance Innovation Lab will be disseminated and shared via a series of regional consultations to obtain buy-in and input from frontline response agencies. Out of those conversations, the RSRI will **use the outcomes of the innovation lab to forge concrete action on self-reliance in**

advance of the GRF, with input from UNHCR, PRM and other stakeholders, to guide and inform pledges and identify focal points for various initiatives in the lead-up to the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. If you would like to get involved, please contact RSRI at info@refugeeselfreliance.org.



List of Participating Organizations

Amazon, Banesco, Center for Global Development, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), EU-UNOPS Lives in Dignity Grant Facility, Fomento Económico Mexicano (FEMSA), Georgetown University, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Global Refugee Youth Network, Government of Nuevo Leon - Mexico, HIAS, Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), ICVA, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Ikea Foundation, International Labour Organization (ILO), InterAction, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Kiva, Loughborough University, Mercy Corps, MIRPS, Oxford University - Refugee Studies Center, Poverty Alleviation Coalition,

RAIC Indonesia, Refugee Entrepreneurship Network, Refugee Integration Insights, Refugees International, Refugee-Led Research Hub, RefugePoint, Regional Durable Solutions Platform, R-Seat, Samuel Hall, Sharqi Shop, Stanford University - Immigration Policy Lab, Teleperformance, Thabyay Education Foundation, Tufts University - Feinstein International Center, Umbrella 500, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Washington University in St. Louis, Women's Refugee Commission, World Bank, World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement

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