Preliminary Assessment Findings: Participation of Persons of Concern in Humanitarian Action

Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement in Uganda, July 2018

Acknowledgements

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK
Danida

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Acronyms

AAP
Accountability for Affected Populations

AGD
Age, Gender and Diversity

ALNAP
Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance

CBO
Community Based Organisation

CBT
Community Based Targeting

CCCM
Camp Coordination and Camp Management

CDW
Community Development Worker

CFW
Cash-for-Work

CHS
Core Humanitarian Standards

CM
Camp Management

CO
Country Office

CRI
Core Relief Item

CRRF
Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

CS
Community Services

DC
District Commissioner

DFID
UK Department for International Development

DRC
Danish Refugee Council

FGD
Focus Group Discussion

GFD
General Food Distribution

HDW
Help Desk Worker

HQ
Headquarters

IGA
Income Generation Activity

INGO
International Non-Governmental Organisation

LC
Local Council

M&E
Monitoring and Evaluation

MEL
Monitoring Evaluation and Learning

NFI
Non-Food Item

NNGO
National Non-Governmental Organisation

NRC
Norwegian Refugee Council

OPM
Office of the Prime Minister

PAR
Participatory Action Research

PoC
Persons of Concern

PSN
Persons with Special Need

ReDSS
Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat

RFL
Restoring Family Links

RRP
Regional Response Plan

RWC
Refugee Welfare Committee

SGBV
Sexual and Gender Based Violence

UNHCR
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

VSLA
Village Savings and Loans Association

WFP
World Food Program

Terminology

People of Concern (PoC)
This term will be used to refer to the people in the context of Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement who benefit or are supposed to benefit from humanitarian services provided by the humanitarian agencies. Aspects relating to participation of the nearby host communities will be mentioned, but the refugees inhabiting Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement are the main target group for the assessment.

Frontline staff
This term will be used to refer to the field staff who have daily face-to-face contact with the People of Concern, such as case workers, field assistants etc.

Incentive worker
This term will be used to refer to the group of people working for the humanitarian agencies who are paid a monthly allowance and offered a work agreement of a maximum of three months. Most incentive workers are refugees themselves or are Ugandan nationals.

Participation
The definition for participation used in this report is: "Participation is establishing and maintaining a relevant representative dialogue with crisis-affected populations and key stakeholders at every opportunity throughout the humanitarian programme to enable those affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them" (Barry et al. 2012). Find more information in Chapter 1: Introduction.

Agencies and organisations
Agencies and organisations are used interchangeably to describe the NGOs, UN agencies and other stakeholders who are implementing services in Rhino Camp. However, in some specific incidences there will be a distinction between implementing organisations and others.

Content

1. Introduction

This report on preliminary findings from Uganda, is part of a greater global initiative investigating the participation of Persons of Concern (PoC) in humanitarian action. This is not a review nor an evaluation of Danish Refugee Council (DRC)'s activities in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement. It is not the mandate or purpose of this assessment to give recommendations or advice. However, on the request of field staff, reflections for improving participation efforts are available in Annex 1. These reflections should not be perceived as requirements in any manner and the implementation of the suggestions will not be monitored or reviewed.

The overall aim of the global assessment is to investigate and analyse when, where, and how participation takes place on the ground currently and where the opportunities to improve participation are. The analysis will be based on nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in two of DRC's key operations: The South Sudan crisis response in Uganda and the Syrian crisis response in Jordan. Find more information of the overall assessment in Chapter 5: Objectives and background.

The assessment findings presented in the following chapters were presented and validated by representatives from key stakeholders present at Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement in six validation workshops in June 2018. This report includes many of the comments and recommendations discussed and provided by the participants in the workshops. The key stakeholders who attended the workshops included representatives from:

➔ Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)

➔ Local Council representatives (LC1 and LC2s)

➔ Host community members including women representatives

➔ Refugee Welfare Committee (RWC) chair people, cabinet members and women representatives

➔ Regular refugee community members

➔ South Sudanese Community Based Organisations (CBOs)

➔ National NGOs

➔ International NGOs and research institutions

➔ DRC in Uganda: management, technical programme advisors, programme managers, M&E staff, project staff, case workers, incentive workers etc.

An online article in Humanitarian Exchange summarising the key findings from this report was published in February 2019. You may find the article here: https://odihpn.org/magazine/attention-detail-matters-participation-revolution/.

**Third time resident
in Rhino Camp
Refugee Settlement**

1.1. What is the purpose of this report?

The specific purpose of this report on preliminary findings is to:

➔ Present an overview of some of the patterns and tendencies observed in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement.

➔ Give a brief introduction to participation and why it is considered to be important.

1.2. Report limitations

The overall purpose of this report, and the assessment in general, is to learn how participation efforts are happening on the ground, from the point of view of the users/ receivers of humanitarian service, with the aim of feeding into the development of tools and guidelines improving or fine-tuning DRC's current efforts.

The report reflects three months of ethnographic fieldwork in specific corners of Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement with a specific objective in mind. It is therefore not - and is not trying to be – an exhaustive list of enablers, challenges and rationalities for why situations occur. There are many contextual specific conditions such as attitudes, traditions, culture and operational limitations (staff gaps, budget limitation, compliance restrictions etc.), that are part of shaping the events and choices described in the report. These conditions critically influence agencies' and individuals' room to manoeuvre as well as their ability to influence participation. As this report aims to describe the context from the perspective of the PoC, the rationalities of agencies' operational limitation are not the focus of the report. This does not mean, however, that they do not exist and are not important. They would most likely have been the centre of attention had this been an organisational analysis.

The report highlights some practices in the field which are particularly interesting to the issue of participation observed in the context of the settlement. It will refer to these practices as 'tendencies' when they emerge multible times throughout the assessment period. To validate whether these practices were indeed recurring (and not just one-off peculiarities), key stakeholders were consulted and requested to specify if they recognized them, which they did. The six validation workshops are therefore key in validating the observed findings even though they are not necessarily quantifiable.

To avoid any 'finger pointing' and to create a better space for collective learning of crosscutting tendencies in Rhino Camp Settlement, all organizations, agencies and individuals are anonymized.

As mentioned above, this is not a review or an evaluation of DRC activities in Rhino Camp. It is entirely the choice of the DRC management in Uganda if and how they will use the observations and reflections provided.

The inclusion of the host community is part of the assessment objective and findings. However, as the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) is publishing a comprehensive report specifically on host community integration in Rhino Camp simultaniously, the author has decided to narrow the focus to practices relating to refugees for this report (see ReDSS 2018).

1.3. Who is the audience?

This report has been developed on the request of the field-based staff with DRC, other organisations and OPM in Rhino Camp Settlement, who asked to receive a more in-depth report on the findings and suggestions presented in the validation workshops in June 2018. It is meant to be a brief report for field staff to read and for DRC management in DRC Headquarters to stay informed about the progress of the project. That said, it has inevitably become more detailed than expected but it is constructed in a way that the reader may skip sections and chapters that are not relevant to her or him.

It is important to note that, refugee community members' perception of participation is not restricted to one specific implementing partner's work. Conditions for participation - and life in general in refugee settings - are influenced by a number of structures, actors and institutions. Accordingly, although this report takes its point of departure in the work conducted by DRC - the observations and suggestions outlined below go beyond the specific activities implemented by DRC. The findings are therefore relevant to most actors in Rhino Camp and the reader is invited to share the report with any organisation or agency in the response who might benefit from it.

1.4. What is meant with 'participation' in this report?

One of the core dilemmas in the work and assessment of participation is that a common global definition remains elusive. So, what do humanitarian actors mean by 'participation'? Some of the most common definitions can be found in Box 2 below. For the purpose of this report, the definition developed in an EU commissioned report by Barry and Barham (2012) will be used, as it most accurately describes the aim of the

Definitions of participation

The World Bank, Participation Sourcebook (1996)
Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them.

ALNAP, Participation Handbook (2009)
Participation is understood as the involvement of crisis-affected people in one or more phases of a humanitarian project or programme: assessment, design, implementation, monitoring or evaluation. The degree of involvement will vary depending on the circumstances, and there will always be debate about what constitutes 'real' or 'meaningful' participation.

IASC AAP Commitments (2011)
PARTICIPATION: Enable affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them through the establishment of clear guidelines and practices to engage them appropriately and ensure that the most marginalised and affected are represented and have influence.

European Commission (2012)
Participation is establishing and maintaining a relevant representative dialogue with crisis-affected populations and key stakeholders at every opportunity throughout the humanitarian programme to enable those affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them.

report: It clarifies that participation needs to be a representative process and requires that PoCs have an active role in decision making processes at all stages and opportunities in a given project:

> Participation is establishing and maintaining a relevant representative dialogue with crisis-affected populations and key stakeholders at every opportunity throughout the humanitarian programme to enable those affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them. (Barry et al. 2012:10)

1.5. Why is participation and community engagement important?

It is first and foremost important to acknowledge people affected by crisis have a right to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives according to the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) and the IASC standards on Accountability of Affected Populations (AAP), which DRC and other leading humanitarian agencies are committed to (particularly the CHS Commitment 4, AAP[1]). The sector literature divides the importance of participation into three main categories: 1) Value-based benefits – or normative rationales, 2) Instrumental benefits, and 3) Emancipatory rationales (Brookings Institution 2008; Brown and Donini 2014). These three benefits – or rationales – should not be perceived as mutually exclusive but can in fact reinforce each other.

According to the Brookings Institution (2008) and ALNAP (2014), the value-based benefits - or normative rationales - argue that humanitarian actors should support participation because it is basically the right thing to do, as it:

➔   Fulfils a moral duty and enables empowerment

➔   Respects the fundamental rights and dignity of affected groups

➔   Acts in solidarity with those who have been affected by crisis or disaster

➔   Fulfils written obligations (as for example the CHS, the Grand Bargain and the AAP)

1 - See CHS Commitment 4 here (https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/resources/chs-guidance-notes-and-indicators) and the AAP commitments here (https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/product-categories/accountability-affected-populations

According to the Brookings Institute, the instrumental benefits can be broken down into five headlines:

➔ Better assessments of needs and capacities: Consultation and quality information provision by humanitarian agencies and information transfer from PoC to agencies will provide information that can better tailor the activities to fit the needs on the ground (Brookings Institution 2008:7).

➔ Efficiency (minimise cost, waste, fraud, and delays): Understanding and using local knowledge, skills and capacities directly impact the effectiveness and relevance of assistance programs (Ibid:8).

➔ Improve implementation and sustainability: Involving PoC directly from the beginning leads to better community commitments even after the withdrawal of support (Ibid: 8).

➔ Greater relevance and impact, improved quality of decisions and planning: When PoC are involved in the decision-making for the activity, designs are often more culturally appropriate and relevant (Ibid:9).

➔ Build understanding and credibility among parties: Participation enforce advantages of creating a climate for dialogue and mutual trust between PoC and stakeholders (Ibid:10).

According to ALNAP (2014), the emancipatory rationales argue that agencies should support engagement with affected communities because it:

➔ Addresses underlying vulnerabilities and inequalities in the society

➔ Gives voice and agency to marginalised groups

➔ Increases citizens' demands for accountability and enables them to make informed decisions

> **When we involve people in designing aid interventions and listen to their feedback - and then act on it - our projects are better quality and more likely to be of real assistance to communities.**
>
> **I'll never forget the shocking statistic collected for the World Humanitarian Summit: nine out of ten Syrian refugees in Jordan received aid assistance, but only three in ten found that assistance useful.**
>
> Blog post by Sharon Reader, Community Engagement and Accountability Senior Advisor with IFRC Africa, Source: http://www.cdacnetwork.org/i/20180521141742-49hgm

2. Summary of findings

Please find a summary of the findings below, which will be elaborated on further in the later chapters of the report and in Annex 1.

2.1. Existing opportunities and enablers

According to the findings, a number of key preconditions and a broad variety of opportunities to strengthen participation efforts exist in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement. Some of the highlights are:

Refugee communities are well organised internally
The refugee community seemed to have a powerful governance structure – along with many informal structures and organisations - and high willingness within these structures to share information and include the voices/concerns/viewpoints of the community.

This creates great entry points for implementing organisations to share information, conduct consultations and ultimately include communities in decision-making.

Close communication between local authorities and refugee leaders
Confidence and approachability between the settlement commandant's office and the refugee leadership creates good grounds for mutual information sharing and emerging participation improvements.

High level of skills and capacities among refugees
Many refugees have skills and capacities which are highly useful to improving their participation, such as advanced languages skills and technical knowledge about humanitarian work from being refugees multible times and/or from working within the humanitarian response inside South Sudan.

This is a great vantage point for including refugees in technical programmatic discussions and using existing capacities to translate sector language and convey complex information to fellow community members.

Willingness to participate and capacity for ownership
Several South Sudanese Community Based Organisations (CBOs), about 12 to date, operate in Rhino Camp Settlement implementing a variety of community-based projects. Besides the official CBOs many refugees are organised in informal associations and clubs to serve the development of their local communities and assist the most vulnerable community members.

This creates an entry point for diverting more ownership to the community and can be seen as an indicator that some refugee communities possess the capacity to initiate and take ownership over their own development.

Brick construction in Livelihoods project implementation, Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement.

2.2. Challenges to meaningful participation

A common understanding of: 1) what participation is, 2) why it is important, 3) a common goal for where and what the overall response and individual organisations want to reach and 4) a common strategy on how to arrive at this final destination seems to remain elusive in the humanitarian response in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement. In general, it seemed difficult for the organisations working in Rhino Camp to find a common ground on how the many global commitments regarding participation should be translated into concrete actions in the field. However, these two observations are not expected to be unique to the activity implementation in Rhino Camp, but rather a common challenge in humanitarian settings and hence the reason why this global participation project exists.

Most of the stakeholders, including the PoC, consulted during the assessment did not seem informed about the rights of the PoC to take part in decision-making in the activities that influences their lives. In the activities and processes observed during the assessment, free and meaningful participation did not appear to be a high priority at all phases of the project cycle. The fact that participation efforts were competing with most other priorities on a daily basis, seemed to be the most significant hindrance to foster and nurture the existing opportunities for participation in the field. However, a great room for improvement exists with the potential to foster positive changes – some of them in a short period of time.

2.2.1. Immediate challenges

Awareness
Few staff and PoC knew the 'what, why and how' of participation. One of the consequences of this was that the affected communities were usually consulted relatively late in the project cycles, when most of the important decisions had already been made or indeed only by end of the project.

Raising awareness on the topic and methodology might be a first step to approaching the challenges involved with the implementation of participation efforts. Again, this is not unique to the location of Rhino Camp and prioritisation from all levels in organisations and the sector might be a precondition for change.

Accurate, timely, targeted information
It appeared to be a challenge for PoC to receive accurate, timely, targeted information from the actors in the settlement. Currently, a significant amount of information is only delivered verbally, and many organisations tend to inform the PoC solely through one channel (the chairperson usually). This led to many unfortunate misunderstandings and involved the risk of favouring opportunistic individuals on the ground who would receive personal gains from holding back information or only sharing it with selected individuals. The participation efforts might benefit from ensuring that information provisions are more diversified and delivered in various forms to ensure all sections of the population have equal (or more equal) access to information about activities and platforms for decision-making.

Presence

Many frontline staff had trustful and productive relations in the communities they worked in. Several frontline staff were South Sudanese themselves, which was a great advantage and made context understanding and language barriers easier to overcome. However, it was often a challenge for the PoC, including incentive workers, to reach programme staff, which led to high levels of frustration within the communities. The limited physical presence of staff in the refugee communities meant that staff often did not know some of the important context specific details in the different locations of the camp. These contextual particularities were therefore rarely considered in the implementation of activities, despite their importance. At times, this had negative impacts on how activities were conducted and PoC consulted.

Along the same lines, there seemed to be limited knowledge of - and attention to - the meaning of ethnicity and local power dynamics in the various locations of the camp. Closer contact with the communities could potentially help staff to gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics.

The assessment confirmed that close relationships between frontline staff and beneficiaries are preconditions for understanding the context, and thereby the PoC's perspective, and to create the level of trust needed to have productive discussions on decision-making, activity modification, fraud, etc. Limiting the hours spent in the offices and encouraging more daily informal communication with PoC might be a way to approach this challenge in the future.

The devil in the detail

The assessment confirmed that meaningful participation requires comprehensive planning and logistic arrangements. Despite good intentions, the findings show that operational challenges relating to planning of transport, timely provision of notice of meetings, poor translation quality and other such issues often had considerable impact on communities' attendance at higher level discussions. As a result, these operational details turned out to have significant impact on PoC's access to free and meaningful participation in decision-making. This highlights that meaningful participation is closely linked with operational priorities in terms of the inclusion of extra time and finance in the activity plans and in the execution of these plans.

Transparency

PoC often received poor, wrong or inadequate information in meetings and consultations regarding issues such as: activity modifications, activity planning and operational challenges. Whereas absence of (timely) information often fuelled development of

> **It is like… The project is just designed somewhere there… They don't know if the project is OK or not! What can we do? We need it [assistance] here. Us in the ground we don't know what is decided at higher level we are just on ground.**
>
> 38-year-old South Sudanese refugee, Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement April 2018

vicious rumours in the communities, inadequate or wrong information led to high levels of frustrations among the community members, who were often aware of it - if the explanations provided were unrealistic. The findings therefore confirm that absence of accurate and timely information involves a high risk of rumour development which at times harmed the activity implementation and the trust between staff and PoC. At the same, findings showed that when staff had open and transparent dialogues regarding activity modifications and challenges, communities appeared understanding and a constructive space for dialogues on solutions would emerge. However this depended highly on the skills and capacities among the individual staff.

These findings highlight the important link between transparency, information provision and meaningful participation. It also confirms that organisations might need to pay more attention to frontline staff's capacity, skills and comfortability with information provision (particularly on sensitive issues) and facilitation of inclusive dialogues, meetings and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). As highlighted in much of the literature on participation, good skills in facilitating participatory processes such as facilitating dialogues, community meetings and active listening, is not necessarily something everyone is born to do, it takes training, skills and experience (Brown and Donini 2014:35; Anderson, Brown, and Jean 2012:130).

Managing expectations

In consultative processes with communities during activity implementation and as part of assessments prior to new activities, expectations were rarely clarified with PoC. This led to confusion and constant disappointments among the community members who were not aware if and how their opinions expressed had potential to influence decisions for current or future activities. Ensuring recurring, open, and explicit dialogues with communities on which decisions they can influence and which decisions have already been made (including the limitations of assessments) might minimize the level of disappointment in the communities and create more informed and constructive conversations about activity challenges.

Representation

In most of the official decision-making forums in the settlement, the refugee community was represented by the same 10-15 people from the same (or similar) ethnic background and largely with the same gender. The findings show that women and marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities, the elderly, and people living with a disability did not feel adequately included in the formal decision-making forums. In addition, agendas were very rarely shared beforehand and in no instance, observed or known by the author, did representatives from the communities take part in deciding the agenda. This meant that the representatives were rarely well-prepared for the meetings and had very limited opportunities to consult the communities they represented prior to the meetings.

Finding out who may represent the voice of marginalised groups and building their capacity to represent a larger group might take time and dedicated efforts. However, as adequate representation is paramount to reach meaningful participation, the response might benefit from looking further into diversifying the representation to include marginalised and influential informal groups.

2.2.2. Core challenges

Result-oriented participation
In many of the consultative processes in Rhino Camp participation often seemed to become a token or a compliance issue, such as when non-English speaking women representatives were invited to English speaking review meetings to represent the voice of women, or when agencies skipped the agenda item of community input in community review meetings. This and similar practices led to discouragement among communities.

Shifting into a more result-oriented mindset for community participation processes might clear the road for more free and meaningful participation. This would include discussing questions such as which decisions need to be ceded to communities in the short and long term to ensure meaningful participation, as well as dialogue and consideration concerning the issue of power. A first step in this direction might be to increase the support of community owned initiatives, which seemed to be highly valued and supported by staff but limited by current budget restrictions.

Challenge mindset
Along the same lines, the high levels of skills and capacities among the refugees in Rhino poses a range of opportunities for diverting more ownership to communities. Trusting that PoC make informed decisions based on their expertise in 'being a refugee' (sometimes including 2-3 periods of displacement) might be valuable in this process as well as challenging occasional perceptions of 'superior knowledge'. This might also involve re-assessing the recurring 'implementation mode' on an overall level and instead consider a mode of community engagement and integrated response.

Coordination
The cross-cutting/inter-sectoral approach to participation, and activity implementation in general, seemed to have various limitations in the context of Rhino Camp. As a consequence, activities were often overlapping or implemented simultaneously requiring the attendance of the same people at various locations at the same time. The same happened for community consultations, activity reviews and FGDs which were rarely called for in advance and therefore often clashed. In practice this meant that even well-planned activities or community consultation meetings might be interrupted by competing spontaneous activities with higher priority such as distributions or FGDs with donors.

Systematisation
Due to the many implementing organisations in Rhino Camp hundreds of assessments, surveys and reviews were undertaken yearly. These were bearing witness, in their own right, to community members' concerns, opinions, preferences, interests, complaints, feedback. However, the sharing and the use of this knowledge across agencies and organisations seemed to have room for improvements.

Another issue for further discussion is the systems related to the complaints and feedback mechanisms. It had been decided that one organisation is the official manager of all complaints and feedback between communities and agencies. However, the mandate and systems supported in this setup seemed weak. In short, the process for feedback was complicated, lengthy and consequently few people used this service.

All-in-all there seemed to be room for improvement in terms of ensuring that all positive and negative feedback from communities are shared with managers, reflected in current and future implementation and fed back to the communities. Ideally all feedback from communities might benefit from being shared between agencies to avoid duplication of mistakes and assessments.

Balancing the upwards accountability

The findings in the assessment show that it can be difficult for staff to find time for - and to prioritise- comprehensive participation processes in the myriad of obligations related to implementation speed and compliance in the field. In the heat of the moment and to avoid disappointments from PoC, it was not unusual that agency staff would give promises to PoC about arrangements or 'follow-ups' which were never kept (or even intended to be kept). In contrast, 'promises' and compliance to donors seemed to carry a heavier weight.

To reach a better foundation for participation processes, the response in Rhino Camp (and the humanitarian sector in general) might need to discuss how to balance the magnitude of 'upwards accountability' in contrast to 'downwards accountability'. From this perspective, a verbal promise to follow-up on a community member's concern should become just as binding as the correct use of attendance lists or a movement request form.

Women who run a small restaurant in Rhino Camp refugee settlement, for new arrivals share some leftover food.

Put our money where our mouth is [2]

As the findings suggest, along with much literature on the topic, meaningful participation takes time, efforts, planning and financing. Most of the activities observed during the assessments did not appear to be designed in close collaboration with the PoC or, as mentioned by a refugee in the quote above, it is designed: somewhere there. What can we do, we need it here.

Projects in Rhino Camp (and beyond) might benefit from being designed together with users of the activities to better reflect their needs right from the start. To do that it is paramount to plan appropriate time for community engagement and for activity modifications to reflect the feedback from the PoC. As most of the important humanitarian donors have signed the Grand Bargain commitments, this could and should be used to hold donors to account for allowing enough time for proposal development and activity inception phases, as they are key in allowing beneficiaries to participate in the decisions.

In Rhino Camp (and globally), more adaptive funding environments with adequate time to adapt to potential changes which impact time schedules and financing, might be a way to approach some of the above challenges. Along the same lines, buy-in on participation and prioritization of beneficiary feedback from all levels of management across all agencies and organisations might be necessary to allow for change.

2 - The wording of this suggestion is inspired by this newly published and highly recommended CDA article (https://www.cdacollaborative.org/blog/feedback-to-action)

3. Methodology

The assessment is based on a qualitative methodology design. Anthropological approaches, participant observation in particular, were used to explore the interests, concerns, conditions and drivers for choices in the field. Understanding these motivations are paramount to acquire close familiarity with the context and the opportunities for participation provided in the context of Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement. Practically, this means that the analyst has been taking part in all sorts of daily activities with the refugee community and the staff. This has allowed the analyst to better grasp the premises for navigating potentials, uncertainties and risks rooted in the contexts and during interaction between staff and community members. This approach has also allowed the analyst to observe situations where decisions were produced and exercised and where interests and concerns were shaped into action.

In semi-structured interviews, the analyst followed up on patterns and puzzles observed during the activities. Conversations and semi-structured interviews with key stake holders (including: local authorities, implementing partners, CBOs, local government officials, local radio stations and other actors involved in information provision and communication with refugee communities) has been used to gain a better understanding of contextual, historical, financial, ethnical and social structures and how they might influence opinions, choices and room for manoeuvring in the field.

Visual methods, where community members photographed and mapped events or phenomena relating to participation were used as points of departure for individual and group discussions about key themes. As such, methods inspired by Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Action Anthropology were also a core element of the assessment methodology.

3.1. Data

Participant observation
Participating in - and observing humanitarian activities are one of the key methodological approaches in the project. In about 300 pages of field notes, the analyst has gathered observations from about 100 situations where humanitarian activities have been implemented such as listed below with all types of humanitarian actors such as:

> **We are just enduring. If we suffer, we will suffer. If we die we will die. Now we are just here waiting to go home. Some people are dying from this.**
> _____
> Refugee, Rhino Camp Settlement, May 2018

UN agencies, INGOs, NNGOs, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs) faith based organisations and charities, research institutions, media institutions, governmental organisations and others, implementing a range of activities such as:

➔ Protection activities including psychosocial activities (individual and community-based) and legal aid

➔ Livelihoods and Cash for Work (CfW) activities

➔ Information awareness activities and campaigns for individuals or communities – Communicating with Communities activities (such as social media communication, radio shows and phone/help lines)

➔ Health care activities and referral services

➔ Food distributions and multi-purpose cash distributions

➔ Refugee registration, verification and resettlement programmes (UNHCR)

➔ Consultations, assessments, Monitoring and Evaluation exercises, surveys etc.

➔ Feedback and complaints activities: e.g. handling of fraud and misconduct

➔ Coordination meetings (high and low), staff meetings, conferences and more.

Moreover, the analyst has participated in range of activities with the local refugee communities such as:

Dinners, lunches, weddings, baby-sitting, doctors' appointments, hospitalizations, games, drama and music performances, community election campaigns, TV-watching, dancing, eating, praying, arguing and funerals - to mention some.

Semi structured interviews
Most semi-structured interviews in the field conducted with refugees, host communities and frontline humanitarian staff (including local authorities) were completed with the purpose of following up on situations and events experienced with the interviewees. These conversations and semi structured interviews were very useful to solve and investigate puzzles and particularities in the field and to include the interlocutors' own reflections on specific situations or processes while trying to gain a better understanding of practices, statements etc. from their point of view. Most of these conversations were not recorded, only approximately 20.

Long (1-3 hours of) semi-structured interviews were also conducted with selected members of the refugee communities.

Volunteers
The analyst conducted a training programme for 10 refugees in Uganda over the course of three weekends. Following the trainings and the submission of this report, they have submitted short field reports/diaries and photos about the participation initiatives which will be used to inform future analysis.

Social media
Social media, facebook and WhatsApp in particular, were a central source of information provision and communication for some refugees and by some agencies and for communication between refugees and humanitarian actors themselves. Accordingly,

following and recording the content in certain WhatsApp and facebook groups have been central to learn how the two groups communicate and what types of questions and answers are provided in specific forums.

Survey data

In the preliminary months of the fieldwork the analyst conducted three small online surveys among DRC staff in Copenhagen and the field offices (Jordan and Uganda). These surveys provided a glimpse into how participation is understood among staff at different levels of the organization.

Written material

In the process of understanding the activity practices on the ground – and how they are related to (or disconnected from) the official processes – piles documents describing internal and external procedures, best practices, strategic priorities etc. have been collected and reviewed. Moreover, a large number of assessments, evaluations, surveys, policy positioning papers etc. relevant to issues of community engagement, participation, communication, and durable solutions in the sector, has also been collected and reviewed. In addition, newspaper and online articles about relevant situations and episodes in the specific field where the research took place have been reviewed. The material includes several emails, letters and speeches performed by refugees to humanitarian actors.

3.2. Ethics and confidentiality

The ethical challenges of working with refugees are considerable as refugee settlements consist of a mixture of people who are seeking protection because they are victims of war crimes or may have been involved in war crimes themselves. The data collected included identifying information and intimate details of peoples' lives and past. This information is kept confidential and safeguarded and was collected according to international protection protocols (Kuner and Marelli 2017).

After hours domino playing at one of the junctions in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement.
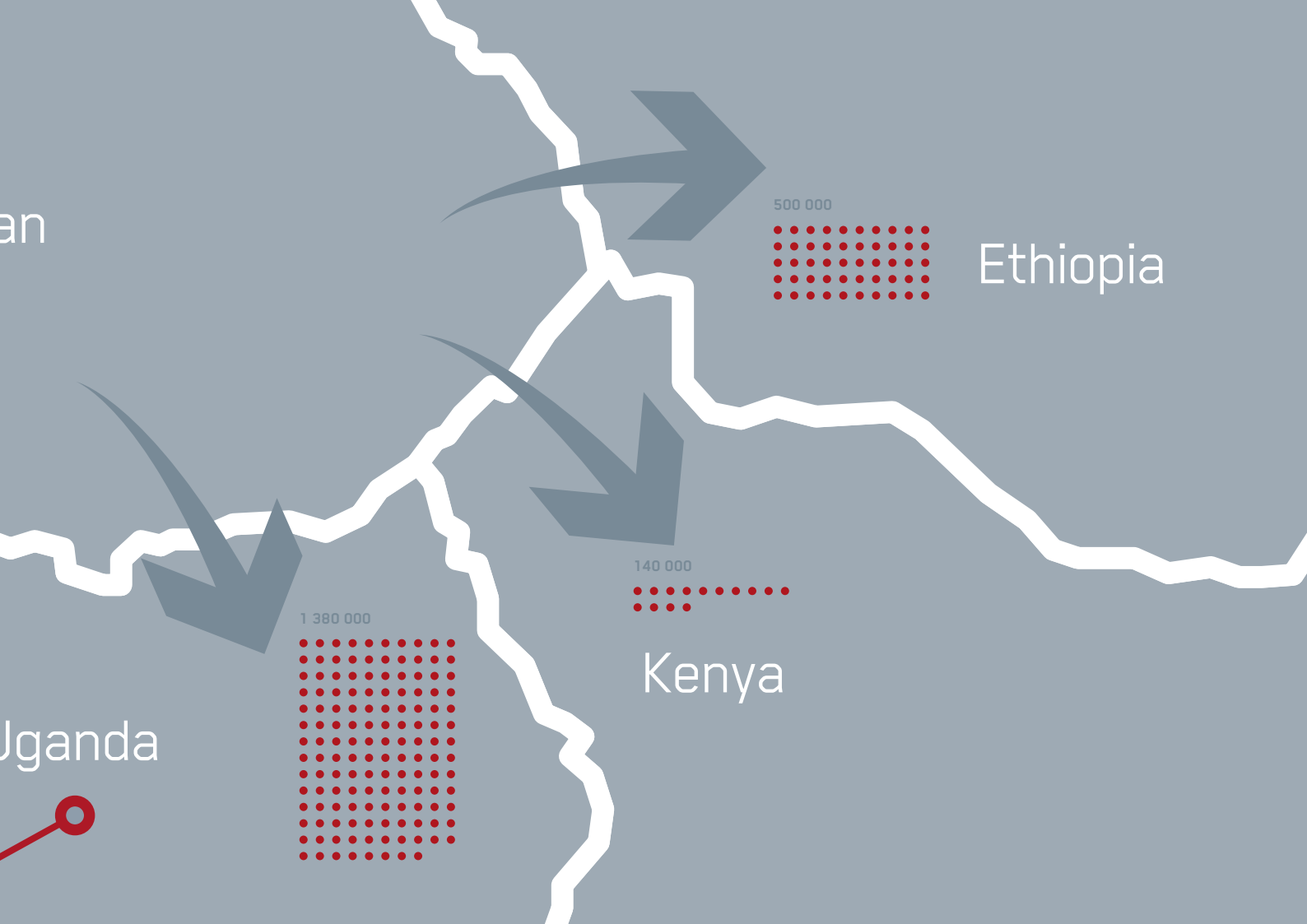
CAR

3 000
· · ·

South Suda

DR Congo

120 000
· · · · · · · · · · · ·

U

an

500 000

Ethiopia

Uganda

1 380 000

140 000

Kenya

Camp Rhino

● Refugee Settlements

● Water / Swamp

— Main Roads

10 km

4. The context and the people

4.1. Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement

Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement has been hosting South Sudanese refugees since 1980 responding to the influx of refugees from three civil wars. Currently, Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement is hosting about 125,000 [3] South Sudanese refugees. The majority arrived in two large waves during the onset of the current civil war in late 2013 and in the relation to the eruption of fighting in Juba in 2016 following the compromised peace agreement. It should be noted that the country-wide refugee verification exercise managed by UNHCR and OPM is currently ongoing and therefore more accurate population numbers will be available soon.

Rhino Camp is a sub-county next to the Nile river in Arua District, West Nile Region that according to the locals used to be full of rhinos. Due to continued refugee influx from South Sudan the settlement is constantly expanding and one of the most populated zones in the settlement, Ofua, is based in the neighbouring sub-county Uriama. The settlement is placed on land owned by local landowners (clan land) across a large area reaching about 80 kilometres from one end to the other.

Logistically and in terms of internal governance, the refugee settlement is divided into three sub sections:

➔ Blocks: The smallest entity which covers approximately 200-1000 households. The block's internal governance structure comprises of a block leader and advisors. Additionally, the block typically has one, or a shared, DRC Community Development Worker (CDW), an incentive worker who is usually a resident in that same block.

➔ Villages: Covering 4-8 blocks, villages are the central part of the local governance structure equivalent to the Local Council 1 (LC1) structure in the host villages. Every village has a Refugee Welfare Council 1 (RWC1) chairperson (equivalent to the LC1 chairperson), who is representing the population in the village and has a direct reporting line to OPM.

➔ Zones: The largest entities in the settlement are the zones. The local governance structure in the zones are the RWC2 and 3. The largest agencies and organisations who implement across the camp, have typically divided the workforce into zones. Along the same lines the OPM has Assistant Settlement Commandants covering one or two zones and UNHCR has field officers covering a few zones each.

3 - UNHCR Settlement Fact Sheet: Rhino Camp: January 2018 (https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reach_uga_factsheet_rhino_settlement_gap_analysis_29may2018.pdf)

4.2. Socio-economic conditions

As part of the Refugee Act of 2006 [4], refugees in Uganda have the right to work and to equality before the law. Refugees also have the right to access basic services on the same terms as Ugandan citizens, such as primary education and healthcare. However, even though the Ugandan government generously allows refugees to work, the high unemployment rates in Uganda makes it difficult for refugees to find their way into the job market. A job market which, according to various people interviewed in Uganda over the past eight years, is increasingly influenced by midlevel managers recruiting staff from their own network. Accessing the job market for refugees who have no, or limited, network in Uganda therefore becomes even more difficult. In addition, many educated refugees have lost their diplomas and certificates. Most importantly however, as numerous Ugandan and South Sudanese respondents explained during interviews, diplomas from South Sudan are generally not taken seriously, when it comes to recruitment processes.

As most refugees in Rhino Camp are from the Equatorian region of South Sudan, farming is traditionally a substantial part of their livelihood. However, most parts of the settlement are placed on a rocky surface making farming very difficult. There have been instances where refugees have been able to borrow or rent more fertile farm land from local landlords. However these instances are few and far between and most refugees are not able to obtain more than limited backyard farming.

Basic services are available in the camp. However, most of them are scarce and access to health care, education, food and shelter are limited. This is aggravated by the serious funding gap in the refugee response. By the end of the assessment period in June 2018, Uganda's 2018 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) was only funded with 6% and faced critical shortfalls [5]. This situation is taking place despite Uganda's participation in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) where long-term funding and coordinated planning is supposed to ease the burden on the world largest refugee receiving countries. This complex funding crisis in the South Sudanese response in Uganda is highlighted in a recent report published by Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS [6]):

> **Donors are caught between two contradictory positions. On the one hand, they have a keen interest to promote and support Uganda as a positive success story in refugee hosting, as this bolsters western efforts to contain refugees and migrants in regions of origin. On the other, donors lack the ability and financial means to support this approach in practice. (ReDSS 2018:30)**

All refugees consulted for this assessment indicated that they perceived their lives in the settlement as temporary. All of them were grateful for the Ugandan Government's generous hospitality, but they were all looking forward to returning to South Sudan and starting to re-build their lives and livelihoods. Many refugees described their lives as 'enduring' or 'suffering' while awaiting to return, which also reflects the serious limitations of services which comes with the funding gap.

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4 - Find the Ugandan Refugee Act of 2006, and other useful legal documents relating to refugees in Uganda at the Refugee Law Project website: https://www.refugeelawproject.org/files/legal_resources/refugeesact.pdf
5 - https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/funding-gaps-threaten-critical-aid-refugees-uganda
6 - Are integrated services a step towards integration? Uganda case study
2018. Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS), hosted by DRC.

4.3. The people

Rhino Camp is situated around rural host community villages inhabited mainly by the Lugbara ethnic group who are also the ethnic majority among staff working in the camp. According to the many interviews in an around the settlement, the host community living in and around Rhino Camp have welcomed the refugees with great hospitality. As opposed to other refugee locations the relationship between hosts and refugees seemed positive with examples of the two groups: supporting each other with food and security during periods of crisis, sharing businesses, sharing farm land and even several examples of mixed marriages were observed.

The refugee population in Rhino camp are from a variety of districts and ethnic groups within South Sudan. However, the largest populated zones are inhabited with people arriving from the Equatorian Regions, primarily Central Equatoria, and therefore Bari speaking tribes such as Kakwa, Mundari, Kuku, Kelico, Mundo etc. By the time of the assessment, the reception centre in Rhino Camp primarily received people from the regions in South Sudan inhabited by the Dinka and Nuer tribes, whereas most of the newly arrived Equatorians were located in Rhino extension sites such as Imvepi and Omugo.

Below is UNHCR's overview of the past displacement trends and expected numbers of South Sudanese refugees needing protection throughout 2018.

4.4. The agencies working in the response

Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement hosts a large amount of International NGOs (INGOs), National NGOs (NNGOs) and new organisations are continuously arriving. In UNHCR's Regional Response Plan for South Sudan alone, 84 organisations are registered and

A participation revolution: Include people receiving aid in making the decisions that affect their lives

Organisations and donors commit to:

Improve leadership and governance mechanisms at the level of the humanitarian country team and cluster/sector mechanisms to ensure engagement with and accountability to people and communities affected by crises.

Develop common standards and a coordinated approach for community engagement and participation, with the emphasis on inclusion of the most vulnerable, supported by a common platform for sharing and analysing data to strengthen decision-making, transparency, accountability and limit duplication.

Strengthen local dialogue and harness technologies to support more agile, transparent but appropriately secure feedback.

Build systematic links between feedback and corrective action to adjust programming.

Donors commit to:

Fund flexibly to facilitate programme adaptation in response to community feedback.

Invest time and resources to fund these activities.

Ensure that, by the end of 2017, all humanitarian response plans – and strategic monitoring of them - demonstrate analysis and consideration of inputs from affected communities.

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Grand Bargain Goal #6

Accountability and participation

The relation between accountability and participation is expressed by in the IASC AAP publication from 2012, 'Introduction to the Indicators – why do we need to look at AAP?', as:

"Evaluations of humanitarian response frequently highlight insufficient accountability […] such as failure to provide communities with even the most basic information on which programs are being implemented and why; beneficiary selection criteria; program duration; etc. Country offices often lack clearly defined accountability frameworks and related tools […] In particular evaluations of agencies' response highlight insufficient or non-existent feedback mechanisms, participation and transparency – with regard to communicating decisions made about programmes, involving participants in decision-making processes and supplying enough information for participants to make informed decisions about that programme."

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/Guidance%20on%20Transparency%20Indicators%20for%20Indicator%20Registry%20-%20Apr%2023.pdf

most of them have regular - or periodic- activities in Rhino Camp (UNHCR 2018b). Traditionally, many faith-based organisations operate in Uganda and these are highly influential in driving agendas in the settlement.

Access to employment in the humanitarian response is a constant conflict trigger in the context, reinforced by the unemployment in Uganda. The impression by many locals is that organisations are not sufficiently prioritising labour force from the local areas where the settlements are located, a perspective which is largely reinforced (or even fuelled) by the Ugandan media and some local politicians [7].

However, as part of the assessment (and to investigate this perspective): the origin of national staff and incentive workers employed by DRC was analysed. The numbers revealed that more than 75% of the staff working in Rhino Camp are, in fact, from West Nile Sub-Region where the settlement is located or from South Sudan. Moreover, almost 75% of these staff are from the actual district (Arua) where the settlement is placed. Along the same lines, Ugandans were also given the opportunity to work as incentive workers in the camp. In fact, 38% of all incentive staff working with DRC were Ugandan citizens at the time of the assessment. Even though the above numbers are only portraying one out of the many organisations working in Rhino Camp, it still questions the validity of the presumptions that locals are not sufficiently benefitting from the job opportunities arising from the refugee response. With this in mind, one might argue that a more transparent approach to this issue could alleviate some of the tension on this matter.

7 - See e.g.: https://allafrica.com/stories/201710240088.html

5. Objective and background of the assessment

5.1. Why do we need increased attention on participation right now?

As earlier emphasised, numerous publications underline the importance of consulting PoC and (more recently) ensuring their participation in decision-making, but good practices for how to do so in the specific contexts of humanitarian action are not well researched or understood. Despite decades of efforts, particularly in the development sector (and bookshelves full of guidelines) the humanitarian sector is struggling to establish meaningful participation of communities and individuals (Brown and Donini 2014; Anderson 1999; Brookings Institution 2008).

Moreover, rapidly escalating numbers of refugees world-wide have led to a series of global commitments to re-assess and improve humanitarian assistance where better participatory efforts are one of the key crosscutting themes such as: The Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) 2014, The Agenda for Humanity 2015 and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Accountability for Affected Populations (AAPs) in 2010 coming out of the Transformative Agenda.

As part of this momentum for change, the Grand Bargain [8], a commitment under the Agenda for Humanity from 2017 between the 32 largest aid donors and agencies in the world, commits to goal number 6, which highly relevant to this assessment:

Table 3: Key deliverables in Grand Bargain, Goal #4.

8 - See commitments explained here: https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3861

Local community based initiative where young men dig latrines for People with Specific Needs in the their local area.
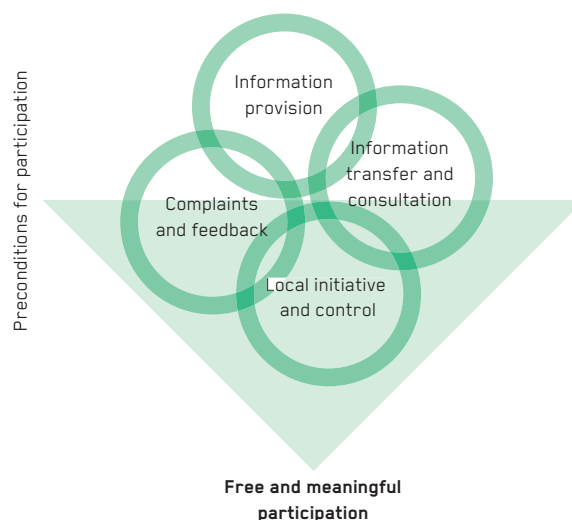
All in all, there is consensus in the international community that: 1) Moral imperatives and protection considerations demand increased participation of PoC and, 2) Smarter participation approaches create better results ⁻ **9** ⁻ , 3) yet, despite decades of efforts, the humanitarian sector faces a substantial 'participation deficit'.

Along the same lines, in DRC's 2020 Strategy, the organisation is committed to: **… put people at the centre of the response… [which] can only be done, if DRC's programming is based on thorough involvement and consultation with the people we provide assistance to** (Danish Refugee Council 2017: 16)

To do this, DRC has committed to this 3-year assessment with the focus of improving the understanding of participation from the beneficiaries' point of view and thereby explore the 'how, what and when' of the persistent dilemma – or paradox -that surrounds participation: despite a consensus that participation is crucial to ensure accountability, uphold beneficiaries rights and reach better results (through more relevant programmes), it remains extremely difficult to implement meaningful participation in humanitarian response.

5.2. Objective

This assessment seeks to address the global demand for a new methodology to better understand what hinders and facilitates participation efforts in humanitarian response. It will allow improved understandings of how participation unfolds - and opinions are shaped - in situations of interaction between PoC and the humanitarian services. This approach distinguishes itself from most of the existing research in the field (e.g. Anderson 1999; Jansen 2016) by offering a multi-angled view on the aid industry and its services: taking viewpoints from within the machinery of aid provision and from among the PoC themselves.

The wider global assessment is guided by the following objective:

Develop a better understanding of the key conditions for improving participation in humanitarian response.

The assessment will explore these conditions in two diverse refugee settings: 1) the South Sudan response in Uganda (6 months), and 2) the Syrian response in Jordan (3 months), where the analyst will compare the findings from Uganda to examine their translatability across geographic, urban/rural, religious and ethnic differences.

The assessment will focus on conditions in these settings that affect participation efforts including dimensions such as: funding, infrastructure, livelihood arrangements, legislation, regulatory procedures, operational restrictions on staff, resources and time, internal conflicts, communication channels and opportunities.

9 - Although this could always be debated, current research and prominent actors in the humanitarian sectors are publicly claiming a correlation between the two: better integration of the voices of beneficiaries leads to more tailored, more appropriate and ultimately more efficient humanitarian aid (see e.g. IFRC: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-affected-populations-including-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content-4).

In relation to UNHCR's verification exercise in Rhino Camp, all refugees needed to receive new documents including new ration cards. Without these documents they were not able to access core services such as collecting their food rations. However, the processes relating to accessing these new documents was rather complicated and the information on how to follow the procedures was therefore important to the community members.

As in many other situations, the RWC1 chairperson became the focal point for disseminating this information. However, for one particular village, the RWC1 chairperson was only informed late in the evening on phone of the following days' events and misunderstood the information he was meant to convey. The following day a woman from the local community explained:

The chairman picked the information wrongly. He mobilised and people were waiting in vain. For him he picked the information wrong it was for RWCs to go for an information meeting, but instead he gathered the community for a meeting and no one turned up to the meeting he was supposed to attend on our behalf. So, if you don't go and ask yourself, you will remain green [ignorant] about the information, as we missed that information meeting.

When we went for verification before, in that old times. They [leading coordination agencies] went for the cluster we could ask inform people about the verification exercise, how would it take place. They would go to the cluster and talk to the people. So they [the community] could ask questions.

Refugee community member in Rhino Camp, June 2018

Communication and coping mechanisms

Communicating with Disaster Affected Community Network (CDAC) defines the relation between information provision, communication with PoC and their coping mechanisms as: "…information and communication are critical forms of aid, without which disaster survivors cannot effectively engage in their own recovery. When people are given the opportunity to voice their opinions and provide feedback, this enhances their sense of well-being and can help them adapt to the challenges they face. Communication, whether through new information and communications technologies or more traditional means, is therefore essential for the engagement of disaster affected people in humanitarian action – as well as in their own efforts to help themselves.

Within the last five months a village in the settlement had experienced the introduction of three additional protection partners on top of the two existing ones. This had created some confusion in the community as most of the partners provided overlapping services and had duplications in the receivers of the services. The RWC chairperson had, in vain, tried to gain a clarification on the roles and responsibilities of the many organisations to know where to refer which cases etc.

The community therefore chose to take the issue into their own hands and invited the incentive worker from the respective organisations for a meeting on a Saturday to gain an overview of all services provided and the variation in the organisations' mandates.

This example illustrates first and foremost the poor information provision delivered by the implementing organisations and that coordination efforts might have some room for improvement. More importantly however, it illustrates w the community has the initiative to try bridging this information gap by finding solutions and answers to complex questions.

A very desired scholarship opportunity with tailored individual support to an extremely limited number of youths was announced in the settlement (in fact, only 0,00008% of the refugee population ended up benefitting from the activity). A few young community members who lived up to the criteria were asked to list their names with RWC chairperson and no other information about the further process were announced. A community member who had applied later commented:

They [the agency] did not communicate clear. The information is just flat. When you announce like that, people will expect. When they come for meeting they will ask: "Now you registered our names, what will you give us?"

Refugee, Rhino Camp Settlement June 2018

Local community based drama group preparing for their performance for refugees who have just arrived in the settlement. The specific performance this day focused on raising awareness on the problems and rights' abuse of forced marriage.

6. Participation in Rhino Camp: Opportunities and challenges

With the purpose of structuring the key findings in this early report, the observations will be divided into four larger categories illustrated in the below figure: 1) Information provision, 2) Information transfer & consultation, 3) Complaints and feedback, 4) Local initiative & control. Crosscutting elements such as accountability and transparency will be discussed throughout this section.

Figure 1 below is inspired by existing categorisations for analysing participation, citizen power and engagement of affected population (Arnstein 1969; Brookings Institution 2008; Brown and Donini 2014). The following analysis of the findings will also include discussions of how formal and informal, enforced and unenforced power structures shape the space for decision-making in the settlement through these four categories.

These four categories are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually reinforcing. In fact, one of the arguments of this report is that the three first categories are preconditions for approaching free and meaningful participation. The distinctions and boundaries of the individual categories are fluid in nature when it comes to practice on the ground. However, in order to make the findings more tangible, this is how the 'cake has been cut' for the purpose of approaching these preliminary findings. The categories are defined as follows:

Information provision
Is defined as one-way information provision by organisations to the affected population. This could in practice take the shape of: public announcements, flyers etc.

Information transfer & consultation
Is defined as the opportunities where the affected population supply (or transfer) information in response to questions posed by agencies. For example, when PoC are asked to offer their opinions, perspectives and suggestions. In practice this can take the shape of: activity review meetings at community level, FGDs, surveys, needs assessments etc.

Complaints and feedback: Is defined as the way the agencies actively seek the views of communities to improve - and react to breaches – in policy and practice during programming. In practice, this can take the shape of formal complaints and feedback mechanisms including instruments for reporting and responding to misconduct.

Local initiative and control
Is defined as the way the affected population take the initiative: activities are conceived and run by the community or an organisation originating from within the community.

6.1. Information provision

Several advantages and opportunities for providing information to PoC and for having a meaningful communication exist in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement. At the same time, several challenges and weaknesses seem to be holding-back the level of information provision required to approach meaningful participation. In short, the findings reveal continuous examples of PoC (and to some extent frontline staff) who did not have adequate access to timely, accurate and transparent information.

This lack of information often resulted in negative consequences. As mentioned in the above, information provision is central to participation as you will only be in position to participate in decision-making if you are informed about the issues at stake – and the platforms, meetings and forums where decisions are shaped and made.

As mentioned by a refugee: **Information is power here, but here in the camp we are green [ignorant/not informed].** Findings from this assessment also suggest that PoC are often uninformed, receive information too late or are intentionally or unintentionally misinformed. Either way, a few examples of too much information sharing - or poorly targeted information also took place during the months of the assessment:

A new organisation was recruiting a large amount of incentive workers when it arrived in the settlement. The organisation had selected 150 candidates and displayed their names, contact information and category (host/refugee) on lists that were distributed across the camp. One morning, these lists where taped to all the Help Desk walls in the northern part of the camp, where no candidates had been selected for the work (or even given the chance to apply). The 10 selected refugee candidates on the lists were residents in an area 40-50 km from where the lists were posted.

Moreover, these lists did not adhere to the 70:30 principle. The 70:30 principle - [10] - is a guideline for implementing agencies ensuring that host communities receive 30% of the humanitarian assistance, including incentive jobs in the response. This principle was also known among refugee communities. It became a great frustration for the people gathered in front of these lists in the morning to learn that the organisation in question had not only forgotten to advertise the incentive jobs in this part of the camp, but also decided to recruit approximately 95% Ugandans for the labour in the camp without further explanation. A male refugee, who had struggled to find a job for several months added: **OK we also want our fellow Ugandans to get jobs. But they are putting 95% Ugandan when we know they should put 30:70. Why?** As this episode exemplifies, poorly targeted information was common in Rhino Camp. These lists might have been posted to adhere to transparency principles within the organisation to ensure accountability. However, it seemed to have had the opposite effect in this case triggering the community's annoyance with the organisation because of its lack of contextual consideration.

The following sections will – through examples from the field - present and discuss some of the key opportunities and challenges observed in terms of information provision.

10 - This principle was mentioned in several conversations with authorities visited during the assessment, especially district authorities. However, the author has not been able to find the source of this policy. In the recently published ReDSS report, the origin of this policy is discussed: "Although the precise genesis of this principle and the rationale for the 70:30 split are unknown, it is intended to cover all areas of assistance to refugees, except food assistance, which is only provided only to refugees" (ReDDS 2018:29).

Violet, a smiling woman in her late 60s has been a refugee in Uganda during all three wars in South Sudan. In three out of four displacements, she has lived in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement. She has therefore also experienced various methods, structures and partners in the settlement. According to her (and many other 2nd, 3rd and 4th -time displaced South Sudanese consulted during this assessment) her biggest concern and observation on changed modality were the methods relating to food distribution that had changed during the years.

[A specific agency] were responsible for facilitating the distribution [in the 1990s]. The Refugee Council [equal to what is now the RWC] would be responsible to distribute per block. At that point the block know each other. We would distribute amongst ourselves. And the block leader or neighbor would keep the ration if someone was not there.

Now they are doing group distribution: You will be paired with 10 people [strangers] in your own category. So I would every time be paired with 10 different elderly single persons. We don't know each other and if you are not there it [the food ration] would just be lost. Every distribution it is a different group. Some who are there will receive and some who are not there will not receive. First you have to queue and then wait in the sun for several hours. Then the group will divide [the food].

It would be better if we could just do it in block. We know who we are! They could just ask us and we will come up with a system to avoid cheating.

We raised this complaint at the evaluation meeting: but we got no response.

[a specific agency responsible] don't ask a lot of questions: they just say that this is what they discussed with [a coordinating agency] and this is what they came up with.

Refugee community member, April 2018

The perceived 'assessment fatigue' in parts of Rhino Camp had many faces, one of them was that a few community members were becoming aware that they have the right to turn down enumerators, e.g. if they could not prove their identity:

This week there was one more who came to ask questions. I told him 'no', he did not wear visibility. I told him unless if he can show me some ID.

Refugee community member, July 2018

6.1.1. Information gatekeepers and verbal information

According to the observations conducted in Rhino Camp, most of the information provided by partners was channelled through the RWC1s on to the community. Using the RWC1s as information gate keepers had many advantages: 1) The RWC1 is the official representative of the community and often in position to question the information they are asked to convey - as the RWCs want to prepare for the questions that this information will trigger within his or her community – questions they themselves have to answer. 2) The RWC1 typically has a mutually committed and close relation to OPM. Information flows within this governance structure therefore seem tight. This seemed to be a strong advantage in Rhino Camp and a critical element in promoting that misconduct from organisations are reported and handled. In fact, RWCs often seemed better informed about organisations' activities by OPM than by the humanitarian partners themselves at least in some cases concerning time and location.

Generally, the observations show a large group of committed RWC1s in the settlement who seems to care and take responsibility over the well-being, concerns and opinions of their community members. Many episodes reveal that RWCs have central roles to play in terms of advocating for the needs and rights of their communities.

Nevertheless, the amount of information that is solely provided to RWC chairpersons and expected to reach the entire community does not seem ideal nor fair to the RWCs and their workload as un-paid volunteers. Most RWCs who were consulted during the assessment, were constantly in meetings, helping at activities, assisting the identifications of residents at verification exercises and distribution points or with their own words: **I am ever walking up and down.**

The way that activities and coordination were currently handled in the settlement required so much physical presence from the RWCs that it often became impossible for them to pay equal attention to - and dedicate adequate time to - proper information dissemination of the many daily messages that needed to be delivered from organisations and agencies to the community.

Moreover, the infrastructure in place for internal information dissemination within the community present many opportunities for improvements. While a community-elected information secretary in every village is responsible for sharing key messages such as time/location for distributions, this community volunteer would not necessarily receive batteries for the megaphone he/she was using. While this might appear to be a simple detail it was often the reason why messages were not delivered in a timely manner in the community. In more than three meetings that the analyst attended at community level this issue was brought to the attention of implementing partners who were repeatedly referring to other agencies for financial support to purchase batteries.

As a result of the poor information infrastructure and the high pressure on RWCs, much information never arrived with the end users – the community members. Examples of this were observed during the verification exercise in Rhino Camp in June 2018 and for the food distributions in the same period where community members across the camp showed up at the wrong locations with incorrect documentation.

In addition, the accuracy and quality of the messages were still highly influenced by the fact that they were transferred through several different people verbally. Naturally details– and even facts- would be lost on the way. See an example of such episode in the text box.

In summary, there are some serious risks which are inherent in the current practices for information provision in the camp. One reason why this might occur is that agencies rely too heavily on RWC1 chairpersons for much of their information provision. RWC1s easily become the bottle necks for this information as the task competes with all their other duties.

More importantly, most information was shared verbally through a chain of many links where details were often lost. When so much responsibility is put on the shoulders of one or few persons there is a very real risk of the entire system falling apart. The Analyst observed that in some locations there were RWC1 chairpersons who did not enjoy disseminating information. In short, this setup risks leaving much of the information provision to chance: as a refugee, if you live in a village with an RWC chairperson who is engaged and very attentive to detail - you might receive high quality information but if you live in a village where the RWC chairperson does not prioritise the sharing of information – you might miss out on many essential information points.

6.1.2. Existing skills, capacities and institutional knowledge

Rhino Camp holds a large amount refugees who are displaced for the 2nd and 3rd time (if not in the same settlement then nearby settlements). A fair amount of people have lived in camps in nearby countries, most have received aid from the same or similar agencies within South Sudan and a few have worked for these agencies while in South Sudan.

Many people, therefore, have a high level of institutional knowledge about: the humanitarian system, the key stakeholders and organisations present, how they work and to some degree what their mandate – or area of expertise – is. More importantly, most adults in the settlement have decades of experience in how to make ends meet and cope with the daily challenges in a refugee context.

This means that many refugees know which agency is responsible for which issues and therefore – to some degree - where to direct questions and concerns. An example being that most refugee leaders (formal and informal) could differentiate between coordinating agencies and implementing agencies e.g. they would know that WFP is distributing food through World Vision, and therefore that high-level decisions about the food pipeline are managed by WFP.

When consulted, most refugees also seemed aware of the basics on how the Ugandan governance structure relating to the settlement and host communities work, such as: what OPM is and what their core areas of expertise are, what and who the LC1 is etc. This is not always the case in other refugee settings and it is an advantage in terms of providing information, as: 1) many people know the basic organisational structure upon arrival in the settlement and 2) several people with specific skills and knowledge are able to function as gatekeepers of information to the broader community.

The refugees' institutional knowledge about agencies and service provision in the South Sudan refugee response for up to four decades, also makes it easier for them to critically reflect on how services are currently delivered. In other words, service delivery, setup and coordination have changed over time. Having witnessed these changes - and therefore to alternatives the present situation - meant that some refugees could more easily point out issues that could be handled better.

Help Desk Worker covering the reception in one of the community help desks in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement where residents can walk in with concerns or issues for clarification.

HELP DESK WORKER
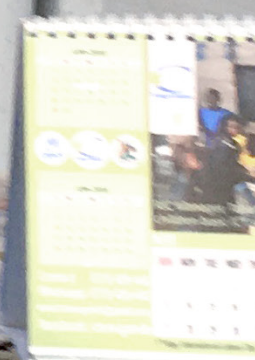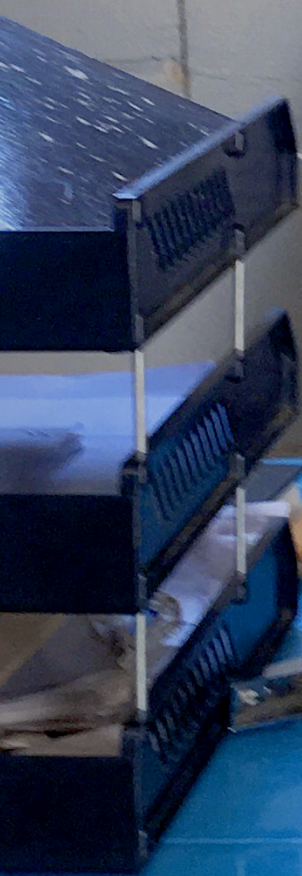
This institutional knowledge – about the present and the past- is valuable from the point of view of information provision because it sets a good point of departure for demanding clarifications on information delivery.

At the same time, most refugees are bilingual and there are usually a number of educated refugees in every block that would know English, Arabic and several local languages. These language skills along with the high levels of institutional knowledge that seemed to exist in all corners of the settlement was a unique and valuable asset for channelling information to the wider community. The people possessing these skills played a central role in translating information from the agencies to their fellow community members, which often happened informally. They would translate not only messages into local languages but also translate sector specific language and procedures into phenomena and terminology understood by the average non-educated refugee population.

A good example of this happened during a relocation exercise of 25 refugees from the reception centre into the settlement. Simon, who had previously lived in refugee camps in Kenya and Uganda, and recently left his position as a national humanitarian aid staff in South Sudan arrived in the settlement in a lorry filled with uneducated women, families from the country side and unaccompanied youths. None of his fellow passengers seemed to have sufficient levels of English, which was the language in which they received instructions about the relocation exercise from the Ugandan staff. The crowd therefore quickly appointed Simon to be their 'representative' and he translated the information to his fellow community members into several different local languages. Based on his institutional knowledge from working in a refugee camp himself (and being a refugee earlier) he even supplemented some information on the relocation process. In another lorry one year earlier, Peter, a former Head Master from the Equatorian Region, had taken the same role and comforted a group of local women in the lorry, who thought the lorry was going to take them back into South Sudan, because they were not informed about the relocation procedure before embarking the lorry at the reception centre.

The high level of institutional knowledge and language capacity in the camp seemed to be a valuable asset that the community constantly made informal use of for information provision. However, building on, or maybe even systematising and training people with these capacities might benefit the information provision further. A South Sudanese CBO made this skill their service delivery. They operated out of their camp-based information provision centre, where they ran information campaigns on several languages about core services being delivered in the settlement. Read more about this CBO in the section 6.4 on local initiative and control.

Why is open dialogues important to the implementation of humanitarian projects?

This is how ALNAP explains the relation of the two: Information provision and two-way communication are not simply an asset, but crucial when it comes to the effectiveness of humanitarian responses. Dialogue – as opposed to one-directional communication – increases people's readiness to provide information themselves; tangibly augments the effectiveness of responses and programmes; and raises the feeling of ownership and the satisfaction/degree of identification with the action taken.

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ALNAP 2014:39

6.1.3. Physical infrastructures for information provision

Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement has approximately one physical help desk structure for every two villages. The help desk is similar to a community hall/centre: spacious wooden structures with two rooms and a meeting hall. All help desks have two help desk workers (HDW) and two guards, who are incentive workers. Additionally, several smaller activity-related help desks are also available in the zones, such as the pop-up food distribution help desks, the restoring family links (RFL) help desks and various protection help desks. At first glance, the settlement therefore seems well equipped with physical and social structures where information can be provided.

These structures, particularly the large help desks, have a great potential to engage much more actively and structurally in information provision. Their primary function is currently to handle complaints and feedback, which will be discussed in the next section. The help desks visited during the assessment were mostly used by the organisation that set them up, even though they were supposed to be involved in information provision for - and contact to - all partners working in the settlement.

None of the help desks visited for the assessment had functioning information boards, suggestion boxes or regular scheduled information meetings. Some had a makeshift space for public announcements, but as there were no actual boards, the announcements often fell down or were removed because of conflicting interests. In fact, it was rather common that announcements relating to specific benefits were removed from the public space such as: scholarship opportunities, incentive employment opportunities, livelihoods opportunities etc. As such, the lack of a proper infrastructure with a lockable board where agencies could share information easily became an accountability issue:

➔ Firstly, central information about distributions, time and location of activities and announcements of beneficiary selections were often lost due to rain or simply because the incentive staff at the help desks didn't have access to tools for fastening this information to the walls. Several unfortunate situations unfolded because of that: at least one episode was observed where a final candidate for an incentive job never received the invitation for interview because the notice was lost.

➔ Secondly, the fact that announcements could easily be removed, created a space for opportunistic individuals and community leaders to remove the announcements and make sure that only their relatives would be allowed to hand-in applications for scholarships, jobs, semi-permanent shelters or other opportunities that would 'sweeten' life in the settlement. Another observed tendency was that these

announcements could be used as 'collateral' - in that the community leader would charge a fee for letting people apply. As portrayed in these examples the access to information could at times become a type of alternative livelihoods support for the people who had access to information directly from the implementing agencies. This issue might be taken into consideration for the improvement of information provision, in the sense that RWC1 might need some incentive to work so many hours a day voluntarily on providing information from the organisations in the camp.

All-in-all, there seems to be great opportunities for improved information provision via the structures which are already in place. However, currently there is no secure space to share written information which is resulting in an accountability issue. The unequal access to information has been taken advantage of by the opportunistic tendencies of some people in positions of power. Given the high rate of poverty in the settlement, this could be considered fairly unavoidable, however it is also something that could be turned into a positive opportunity with relatively little effort and resources.

6.1.4. Timeliness and inclusion

The timeliness of information provision from partners was an explicit concern among the community members in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement. It was common that partners did not announce their activities in advance - or the specifics of the activities. According to the observations, PoC were often requested to mobilize for discussions or FGDs, but rarely informed about the topic and setup. They would therefore rarely know if it was a FGD with a donor representative, a review meeting with a local case worker, a meeting clarifying changes or modifications to existing activities or something entirely different. This lack of timely information made it difficult for the PoC to prepare for - and prioritize - the many daily meetings taking place. Along the same lines, when activities or pre-announced FGDs were cancelled it was rarely communicated and people waited in vain.

Some examples of the operational challenges which led to frequent delay and cancellation of activities were: poor road networks which sometimes collapsed, limited access to vehicles and long distances inside the camp. Moreover, poor phone network undermined the agencies' ability to inform the communities about these changes.

Activities such as distributions (except for the cyclic food distributions) appeared to be rarely pre-announced because it was thought (by several staff) that it was inappropriate to announce the distributions before the supply trucks had arrived: to avoid the PoC waiting in vain. However, this approach, involved the risk that people who were not physically present in their blocks (such as: hospitalised community members, high school students, incentive workers etc.) would miss out on the un-announced distributions.

One afternoon during the assessment this practice resulted in three unannounced distributions happening at the exact same time for the exact same target group. This created some chaotic moments in the location where it took place. The heat was escalating, there was no shade to be found, pregnant women, mothers with infants, the elderly and disabled were waiting in lines from morning to sunset. Fortunately, the three organisations eventually moved their distributions closer to one another so the physical proximity was doable for the physically challenged community members. However, it was a serious issue for the community leaders who were requested to stay and identify community members at all three locations simultaneously. Whereas two of the distributions were routine activities, the third one was a one-off distribution by an organisation that was new to the community. They had told the refugee leaders that they

were trying a new modality where they filled a truck with commodities and food in the capital city and drove it directly into the settlement (without prior consultation or planning with the local refugee community). Most significantly, the truck did not carry enough items for everyone and no selection criteria or distribution strategy had been decided or agreed prior to arrival. Moreover, this specific community had arrived recently but not received food rations yet and they were therefore hungry at this point in time. Strong efforts from OPM personnel and local refugee leaders meant a distribution strategy and selection criteria took shape after some hours. However, as it was soon getting dark and the organisation had to remove its personnel and vehicles, the strongest and fastest community members ended up running away with the remaining food leading to several disagreements in the community.

Six months earlier a similar distribution had taken place in the other end of the camp where people are not new arrivals and had had a few years to organise themselves. Here, the refugee community asked the NGO to pack-up and return once they had a strategy for how the distribution should take place and once they had informed the community leaders prior to prepare for it. These two episodes exemplifies the different capacities in place at different locations of the settlement, which might need to be taken more into consideration in the implementation design of activities.

The episodes brought forward in this section show that despite unforeseen circumstances and other operational challenges, better coordination and planning might encourage more engagement from the PoC and more timely appearance at the pre-announced activities. Refugees might also arrive to meetings better prepared if they had been informed about the setup and agenda ahead of time. Along the same lines, they might be better prepared and more engaged if they took part in planning the meetings, inviting the participants and setting the agenda themselves.

Edgar, a community member who was previously a refugee in Rhino Camp during his high school years, had the following comment to the issue of the many tasks involved in the voluntary position as RWC1 chairperson:

In those days when we were refugees before: when there was remaining balances from food, this was given to the chairperson. People in Yoro* don't think that that they [the RWCs] should be able to work. The former chairperson applied for being a teacher with [name of INGO] and then he had to step down.

When he applies for teacher he was taken off, because he was a cluster leader. The refugees don't consider that the pen he is using to write your name is paid by himself. This system will encourage bribe. Because if you are not allowed to have incentive work.

_____

Rhino Camp Settlement, June 2018
*Yoro refers to the basecamp area where management in the agencies' field offices are located.

6.2. Information transfer and consultation

The observations in the assessment reveal that the setting in Rhino camp entails a myriad of options, structures and platforms designed to ensure information transfer from PoC to agencies and consultation in general. The communities in the more populated areas of the settlement were hosting daily review meetings, information sessions, sensitisation workshops etc. Moreover, the RWC chairpersons were invited for review, coordination and planning meetings in the basecamp almost weekly. In addition, needs assessments, M&E surveys and FGDs were conducted daily in the camp by the many organisations working there. All-in-all, at first sight, the settlement seemed to have numerous structures and methods ensuring consultation with communities throughout the project cycle. As well as platforms facilitating two-way communication: methods and structures based on guidelines, tools and best-practices that build on decades of learnings in the humanitarian sector.

This section will describe a few key tendencies observed in the practices constituting the structures that were in place to ensure information transfer and consultation with PoC in Rhino Camp.

6.2.1. Assessing the needs and the progress

The large number of implementing organisations in Rhino Camp and the fact that new NNGOs and INGOs are still arriving, meant that the population's needs were assessed and measured daily by agencies to inform their activity designs (and live up to donor requirements). These numerous exercises particularly took place in the locations of the camp with a more homogeneous population group, which seemed to be more popular among organisations to operate and assess in.

Nevertheless, during the assessment period no agency seemed to feedback results from surveys or assessments to the refugee community (these actual findings excluded). Moreover, many community members reported that they felt they provided information into the void. According to them, not only did enumerators and FGD facilitators often ask the same questions – and continuously got the same answers - but the concerns raised were also rarely acted upon. A community leader summarised this concern at an activity review meeting that had just finished:

Community leader: **Now, this week we had three assessments. They come here and go house to house to ask questions - is water available, how do you earn your living?**

Participation analyst: **Are they wearing a logo? And do they tell you what they are using the information for?**

Community leaders: **They are not wearing logo, we don't know where this information goes.**

The communities generally reported having many opportunities to voice concerns, needs and opinions. While at the same time they were not informed: where the information was going, what it was used for, and what the findings were. This tendency seemed to discourage many community members from fully engaging in assessment processes and

Livelihood project supporting small business owners in the Settlement.

some started to decline taking part in them all together, as illustrated by the quote in the text box. In general, several parts of Ofua Zone, seemed to experience what is commonly known as 'assessment fatigue'.

In addition, humanitarian staff across the board had a rather confusing use of visibility. Many implementing partner staff wore t-shirts with three or five different logos of the same size and these t-shirts were often shared with PoC and government authorities. Moreover, almost no one wore visible IDs. This practice, combined with the increasing assessment fatigue and poor quality of basic information provision, influenced the quality of information transfer to agencies as PoCs did not know where their input was going and if it would make a difference. An example of this was seen in an FGD on a quite specific topic with women. After two hours of discussions an elderly woman raised her hand and asked a specific question about the partner who was responsible for food distribution. The participation analyst asked if she has raised this issue with the organisation delivering food. A younger woman sitting next to her translated the woman's answer into English: **She doesn't know who the partner is. She is not educated. So she is just raising the issue to anyone. Last year very many people have been here doing FGDs. Instead of all of these people coming here, they should go and make peace in South Sudan.** All the women started laughing and showed their consensus with applause.

This statement does not only testify to the PoC's exhaustion with raising the same issues repeatedly in FGDs with agencies (without knowing if the information is used for anything), it also highlights that a woman who lived in the settlement for over a year did not know who the organisation delivering food was, and how to contact this organisation with her concerns. For her, as a non-Arabic and non-English speaker (and most likely illiterate), the poor quality of basic information provision would indisputably lead to poor levels of information transfer to the partner. Or put differently, if you, as a refugee, do not know where to direct your questions you may direct them to all humanitarian staff who visits the Block and end up never reaching the actual organisation who needs to receive this feedback.

Another related issue, which repeatedly came up in conversations with various agencies in this context is that assessments were typically not coordinated and shared internally among humanitarian actors. Having a central system for sharing assessments and surveys might be worth looking into, as it might limit the assessments being conducted.

6.2.2. Staff communication and transparency

Generally, caseworkers and other frontline staff seemed to have a close and productive relationship with communities. Whether this was the case or not, the assessment confirmed that field staff play a very central role when it comes to information transfer, as they are the ones who have direct contact with the PoC. The findings also confirm that it is of utmost importance that these frontline staff are well-briefed, well-trained and comfortable with what and how they are communicating with PoC.

Provision of wrong or inaccurate information was often observed in community information meetings, where frontline staff shared incomplete explanations to community representatives leading to confusion and frustration with the agencies. An episode relating to this tendency played out in a community-based activity review meeting where the incentive worker asked why their payment was continuously delayed by several weeks. The staff replied that this was due to the late delivery of time sheets by the

incentive workers themselves. The issue of late delivery of time sheets was, indeed, brought up at an internal staff meeting earlier that same week, but never portrayed as the primary reason for why incentive workers' payments were constantly late. All the incentive workers present at the community meeting knew that they had handed in their timesheets on time and they were therefore puzzled and annoyed by the response but did not demand another explanation.

Another example of ineffective information dissemination took place in a meeting about a project that had been running for several years, but was in it's final stage due to lack of funding, which was known to the frontline staff. During the review meeting, the activity participants were asked if they knew how long the activity would continue to run, to which they answered: **The current project would finish by end of 2019 (1.5 years from the current date).** This was not corrected by the frontline staff.

It was later confirmed by the frontline staff that the activities would in fact close in just two weeks time. Accordingly, not informing the activity participants of this very significant difference in timelines, was not due to the fact that frontline staff themselves were not aware of it. The fact that this was not corrected during the review meeting signals that the field staff either: did not consider this information relevant for the activity participants, or it suggests that they didn't want to be the 'bearers of bad news'. In a conversation with the frontline staff after the review meeting, one of them explained that they did not think of correcting this piece of information.

Another similar episode unfolded during the inception phase of a project. The number of items that the benefitting community groups were supposed to receive as part of an IGA were decided by the organisation and announced early in the project implementation. However, at a later stage, the total number of items reduced by about 30%; the organisation had decided to reduce the number of items per group and merge some of the existing groups to maintain the number of participants that had already been selected. The benefitting groups were not made aware why the number of items had dropped and found this sudden reduction in the expected number of items both concerning and confusing. In a later activity review meeting, a refugee community leader expressed his concern: **My worry is, that the … [items] of the two groups that were merged into the other groups were lost! It was reduced from 13 to 10 items. Where are the remaining?**

In fact, many community members were concerned and frustrated with the reduction in items made available since the first introduction of the activity in the community. However, in the meetings that took place after the announcement of the activity, the community were not given a reason and eventually stopped asking for an explanation. Eventually, this and other similar episodes gave rise to rumours of corruption. That said, it was not clear, from the interaction with the frontline staff, whether they themselves knew the full explanation for why the list of items for the activity was reduced. However, according to conversations with managers the reason was relatively simple: exchange rate losses and the fact that the organisation had been requested by the donor to move around their budgets to allow for an additional activity for vulnerable youths after the inception phase, had reduced the total budget and thus caused an activity modification.

The examples above portray situations in the settlement where information is inaccurate due to misunderstandings, poor briefing of the frontline staff, or due to a tendency where frontline staff prefer to avoid giving negative feedback. Either way, the above example also reveals three other tendencies which are worth noting. According to the observations conducted:

➜ It was rare for staff to have open and transparent discussions with community members about operational challenges or modifications, such as continuous delay in incentive salaries or reduction in activity items.

➜ Staff members - and other people in position of power – would often find it difficult to admit if they did not have the answer to a question or if they needed to deliver non-outcome-related feedback. Sometimes, staff would invent explanations which was free 'modification of the truth' to avoid the embarrassment of not knowing the correct answer. A common strategy to avoid giving negative feedback would also be to say "we will look into it", often in these circumstances the answer was decisively 'no'.

➜ Along the same lines, it was also rare to see staff openly admitting that mistakes were made or apologise for obvious pitfalls or errors created by the organisation they work for or within the coordination system.

These mentioned practices in the communication between staff and PoC would sometimes be the source of triggering rumours. It also seemed to harm the trust building and 'rapport' between the affected population and staff and thus the quality of the communication and consultation in place.

It would be a mistake however, to reduce these three practices to power positioning. To fully understand where information is lost and who is restraining it at which point - a proper investigation of information flows within each implementing organisation is required. However, numerous episodes strongly indicated that some essential activity information was not reaching the frontline staff and several programmatic decisions were taken without their consultation, much less the PoC. Obviously, tight donor deadlines and other operational restrictions have a part to play in the understandings of these practices.

6.2.3. Representation and translation

The question of representation is a crucial – but a very difficult one – when it comes to consultation with PoC, and participation at large: who is representing the interest of a larger group? Who can speak on whose behalf? And how do humanitarian organisations ensure that the voices of the marginalized groups are heard and included in the decision-making processes?

In Rhino Camp Settlement, the formal representation of the refugee community seemed primarily embodied in the RWC structure, practically through the chairpersons' presence in meetings. As described earlier, the RWC chairpersons were, for the most part, very dedicated, capable and engaged in voicing the concerns and opinions of their communities. However, the circumstances to voice concerns varied and many opportunities for participation in higher level decisions seemed unexplored.

During the period of the assessment numerous staff at all levels and from various agencies and organisations were asked to mention challenges and ways to ensure a representative voice from communities. In interviews and conversations across all

12 young teenagers sharing accommodation in Rhino Camp.

agencies the Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) assessment approach came up as a frequent response to ensure meaningful representation of the PoC in decision-making. These responses are not surprising, as many staff in the settlement are trained in this methodology given that it is mandatory in the largest coordination agency in the settlement. This approach is a modality accessing the needs of the diverse population groups to ensure that their diverse needs are reflected in the analysis informing next year's programmatic and financial priorities (see more information box below).

Accordingly, the findings show that many staff believed representation of diverse marginalised groups in decision-making forums is ensured by an annual AGD assessment. This more instrumental approach to ensuring marginalised groups - including female representation - is also present in the latest UNHCR policy paper on the use of AGD approach, stating that women and girls' inclusion in decision-making is now 'mainstreamed':

> **Of note, UNHCR has mainstreamed the inclusion of women and girls in decision-making processes, ensured individual registration for females, and worked to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Yet challenges and barriers to achieving equality remain, especially societal attitudes that are often difficult to change. (UNHCR 2018:4)**

Besides the annual AGD assessment, the AGD approach also includes elements such as ensuring 50% female representation in all decision-making meetings, committees, leadership structures etc. However, in the interviews with staff they mostly mentioned the annual AGD assessment. In general, approaches to ensure representation of marginalised groups in the settlement seemed to be more of an obligatory instrumental exercise than a tool to explore and ensure meaningful representation. An example is the lack of meaningful involvement of refugee representatives in meetings: in most meetings attended in the basecamp, input from refugees was the last point on the agenda and often only assigned a short time.

Moreover, women representatives were often invited to review and coordinate meetings and their presence was noted down on attendance lists for accountability and compliance concerns. However, only in one of the meetings attended during the assessment period were the women representatives explicitly consulted in the meeting and their presence thereby actively used to diversify the opinions given by their male counterparts.

It would often take courage by women representatives to contradict the formal refugee leadership in meetings. However, in the meetings attended, when a trustful space was created, and women were encouraged to comment on the topics presented - they would do so. This was particularly visible in the feedback sessions where the findings of this assessment were presented. Unfortunately, in several review and coordination meetings the participating women had no or very low levels of English so that they did not understand the discussions taking place, much less were they able to participate actively in them. In these incidents, the representation of women seemed more like an expression of tokenism from the part of the agencies.

This said, several strong and well-articulated women were part of the refugee leadership in the settlement. A handful of women persistently showed up at meetings with agencies and many more willing and engaged women looked for opportunities to engage in

After a donor-led community FGD with a visiting high-level manager, a group of community members explain their views:

Community member: "The meeting was very very good! We feel happy.

Participation Analyst: "Why?"

Community member: "Because it has been so long since anyone has asked us these questions."

Participation analyst: "But he was not giving you any concrete responses to your concerns?"

Community member: "No, but we are not having this platform to raise our views. We are so happy. This one of having the high people come to the field and ask us."

Numerous evaluations highlight that introducing meaningful participatory methodology are not necessarily something that frontline staff wake-up one morning and can do perfectly. It takes understanding, training and experience. The below example is one of the key learnings from a pilot project named: User-Centred Community Engagement implemented in Bangladesh and Iraq in 2018*:

The co-creation sessions generated valuable design changes, but required a level of abstraction and rigour that the field teams were not used to:

Most of the temporary or junior field staff in both field teams were not used to this type of participatory approach. Even though some had guided focus groups or children sessions before, it took a while for them to grasp the activities and to feel comfortable facilitating them with the affected community. However, once they felt more comfortable and understood the activities, they led them well.

Despite successful training sessions, the Iraq field team first conducted the sessions incorrectly and had to repeat them as intended.

Http://www.eclipse-experience.com/user-centred-community-engagement
*The project is constructed in partnership between Save the Children UK and Eclipse Experience

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Everything comes abrupt here. They think, because we are refugees we don't have anything we need to do.

Refugee, Rhino Camp Settlement April 2018

decision-making. The context of Rhino Camp seemed to comprise of a great opportunity for building on the women's willingness and capacities for being equally included in decision-making processes.

The fact that about 95% of the RWC chairpersons were men, could be understood as an effect of – and was indeed explained by staff as – having free election processes where democratic procedures decided on the male candidate. According to staff it would be a delicate matter for to interfere in this current democratic system, that happened to elect men 95% of the time.

That said, the disproportionately low number of women holding incentive worker positions must be perceived as the responsibility of the humanitarian sector. An example is that none of the help desks visited during the assessment had female help desk incentive workers. Ensuring an equal amount of men and women incentive workers in central positions such as help desks might encourage more women to use the desks and would ensure more female voices in the activity review meetings – which incentive workers are part of. Giving preference to men in recruitment situations might risk reinforcing existing power and economic inequalities locally.

Within the official cabinet in the RWC1 structure various diverse groups are officially represented: youths, elderly, disabled, women etc. However, the RWC1 chairperson often ends up representing all these groups at external meetings. The representation of voices from the various groups in the communities and cabinet therefore comes down to having a RWC1 chairperson who is genuinely interested in the aspects, opinions, needs, concerns and challenges of women/elderly/disabled etc. If these individual groups were better formally organised in the coordination structure, their voices might be stronger and they might have better options for participating at the same levels: e.g. whereas several independent women associations exist locally in the blocks they do not seem to have a common forum to voice their concerns and formally engage in debates on higher levels.

An organisation specialising in people living with disability, highlighted this as a priority for their work in the settlement. They mentioned that for this group to fully raise their voice they need to be organised and formally recognised as representatives as well as having equal access to decision-making forums such as the high-level meetings in the basecamp. This idea could easily be transferred to other marginalised groups in the camp such as ethnic minorities, women and youth.

Again, hundreds of FGDs with women seem to take place monthly, but are they contributing to ensure meaningful representation of female voices on the issues that matter? Organisations might benefit from re-assessing these women FGDs and critically examine if they meaningfully contribute to improved representation of women to avoid that they become 'tokens' or a 'tick-off' box in a gender mainstream compliance exercises.

Women are the majority in the settlement. The marginalised majority, one might argue. At the same time, women are less educated, have lower levels of English and are therefore excluded from much of the information provision and even more from taking part in dialogues. From this perspective, language barriers easily reinforce existing power dynamics between men and women and quality translation becomes more urgent than ever. In this light, translation could be perceived as a protection concern.

Specific for Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement – and other contexts responding to the South Sudan crisis – is the large number of diverse ethnic groups living side-by-side. Few refugee leaders and very few incentive workers appeared to be from the ethnic minority groups. One organisation that allowed the participation analyst to gain access to staff information revealed that all of the South Sudanese paid staff and incentive workers, were from similar ethnic groups. As the conflict in South Sudan is progressing along ethnic lines, ethnicity is indeed a sensitive issue. However, actively or passively excluding certain ethnicities from gaining access work and to the decision-making forums risks reproducing existing inequalities and reinforcing tensions. Assessment findings did indeed reveal that certain ethnicities appeared to be less included in information provision and that there seemed to be a quality divide in service provision potentially reinforcing existing conflict drivers.

In community-level meetings, workshops and FGDs where translators were used, they were usually appointed on the spot. This meant that they did not necessarily know the terminology used, which could be rather sensitive such as in protection activities or conflict mediation. This meant that some misunderstandings often seemed to occur, which occasionally led to development of rumours. As language can be a prestige symbol, and some translators may not admit it if they did not understand the English sentences that they were asked to translate.

Often translation in meetings seemed to reduce the substance or narrow the content if the translator was not skilled. In meetings and other interactions where translators were used, it might be beneficial to acknowledge that it is actually the translator who is communicating with the PoC and not the meeting facilitator. This emphasises the importance of them being adequately suited for the task. It was observed that messages needed to be precise to avoid misunderstandings. This worked out better when the translators knew the information that they were translating ahead of time, along with the exact terms and definitions used. Despite high numbers of skilled and educated community members in Rhino Camp, there did not seem to be any attempt to train translators to improve the level and quality of translation.

In summary, there are many opportunities and some room for improvement when it comes to representation of PoC. Thorough representation efforts need priority, time, planning and good power dynamic analysis to ensure that the voices representing a larger group are indeed able to represent the group.

6.3. Feedback and Complaints

Complaints and feedback were constantly shared between different stakeholders at various levels in Rhino Camp Settlement and feedback can be considered as a core component in communication, information transfer, consultation and information provision. However, in this chapter the report will focus specifically on the feedback which is provided as response to specific complaints from the community or individuals such as is formulated in the CHS Commitment 5: Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.

In Rhino Camp Settlement the official field-level inter-agency feedback and complaints mechanisms are anchored with an implementing partner to UNHCR and physically collected through the help desks. Whereas most community members seemed to know the location of the help desk and whereas the community seemed to benefit from having a centrally located staffed structure hosting community meetings (and community members in times of crisis) the amount of complaints handled did not seem to live up to the expectations of the organisation or the PoC.

The help desks visited during the period of the assessment received between zero and two complaints weekly through the official intake forms. In fact, some of the help desk incentive workers kept handwritten statistics on the wall of one of the help desks, maybe as a silent comment to the small number. There seemed to be room for improvement on the process and speed of the current feedback system. Moreover, most ordinary community members consulted through the assessment expressed that they believed the help desks exclusively served complaints from the organisation running it. It is understandable why community members might think so, as timelines (and efficiency) for complaints to other organisations and agencies handed in at the help desks seemed more tiresome. From an outside perspective the help desk setup seemed to suffer from not having the proper mandate (or be empowered) to demand responses to complaints from other organisations. It seemed the system was not fully developed yet, as it did not come with software, agreed response delivery times, roles and responsibilities or the empowered mandate as described above, making it difficult for this one organisation to efficiently take on the role.

Unfortunately, none of the community members consulted about the help desks were satisfied or happy with it. The same seemed to be the case for stakeholders, agencies and authorities consulted. The incentive workers who worked at the help desks expressed frustration over the fact that they were not well informed, trained or empowered to handle any parts of the complaints except for the intake forms. An example of this was a complaint made about a central street light (solar light) that had stopped working. According to the processes in place, an SGBV caseworker had to schedule a time to check and confirm that the street light was not functioning, even though the solar light was placed across from the help desk and the help desk incentive workers could have easily confirmed whether it was working by simply looking across the road. According to the help desks workers, these and other similar instances were discouraging, as they felt they should and could have more responsibility over the processes.

Moreover, the tools and resources they were equipped with, did not seem efficient to fully conduct their work. They were expected to report urgent protection cases immediately to the protection staff, but they were not equipped with phones or airtime to do so. In addition, the network at the help desk locations was often out of order. Accordingly, the

Fraud awareness raising poster distributed in specific areas of the settlement in April 2018. The absence of prominent languages that the poster is translated into and absence of concrete contact details might caught your awareness.

BEWARE OF FRAUD

All humanitarian services are free

↻ All Assistance and Protection services offered for Refugees/Asylum Seekers, Registration, information and documentations are **FREE of Charge**

↻ In case any Humanitarian staff offers assistance or service to you in Return for money or other forms of compensation is **FRAUD**.

↻ Report to UNHCR and OPM in case the above incident(s) happens.

↻ Any kind of Fraud is unacceptable and is subject to criminal Prosecution.

Arabic Version

- جميع المساعدات وخدمات الحماية التي تقدم إلى اللاجئين/طالبي اللجوء، التسجيل، المعلومات والوثائق هي مجانية.
- في حال قيام اي موظف في مجال العمل الإنساني بتقديم اي مساعدة و/أو خدمة لك مقابل المال أو اي شكل من أشكال التعويض فإنك تتعرض للأحتيال.
- بلغ موظفي المفوضية السامية للأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين UNHCR وموظفي مكتب رئيس الوزراء OPM في حال وقوع اي حادثة/حادثات احتيال تتعرض لك.
- اي نوع من عمليات الاحتيال هي غير مقبولة وتخضع للإدعاء الجنائي.

Juba-Arabic Version

Kutu balaak!!-Jlan le kulu lagiin.

- Kulu musaadat wa taafizat al wadi le kulu lagiin, ilan wa musanadat biwadi majanan.
- Jge kan ai muwazif min al munazamat al insania nadi ai aja min ita je gurus le shokol al wuo amulu le ita wu haja mamnuu.
- Tuwali balagu al kalam al hasil de le umam el mumtehida (UNHCR) wa OPM fi hala ije kan kalam dak gistemir hasil.
- Ai haja al mamnuu ma gi rudu wa bishilu fi mahakama al ganunia.

Bari Dialect (Kakwa, Kuku, Pojulu, Bari, Nyagbara, Mundari)

GWE TA MADAD YIDGA KUNE KULYA- LOηE I ηutu liη logwon a wökun kogwons kulya ti mörö lo dena parik a REFUGEES ADI!

- Geleη – ηariesi liη nagwon ηarakini REFUGEES kega parik waragalan na kuleya ADI, do a REFUGEE kune tiki kana bak gurut.
- Murek – ku lele kakitani kata logwon kode nagklon tindu ηariesi ai mukök luηgi guruti kine aku miyelo köti a iηo naron.
- Musala - nyena ko iηutu kata lo kondya iηo gwoso kinε ti roro sonyoni dεde ko UNHCR gwe ku OPM ko kine ηo a puru.
- ηwan – ηutu lo kondya iηo gwoso kine lo, saret lo kulya adi ηina naron köti ηilo ηutu kode ηina ηutu ri riηηa

Nuer

Pälε RƆ Pin!!- Ruact mi Wä Kä Däak Dial

- Tin dial luạkε ni naath kεηε nyin gang dial tin kạ mkε dạak tin ca gɔɔr kenε tin ngot guath in la g ɔr kε baang ε thil kök.
- Mi cε tuck εn Yöö tεkε läät kä lạạt manädhämeni, mi käm yε luäk ke Yöö bε yiɔw jek kiε biε je cuɔljε, ε duen.
- Mi cε tuck iηɔ, kε kɔc puạ nydun lạrεjε UNHCR kεnε kumε Uganda, min la OPM.
- Kε Yöö tin dial tin lạtkε kε duɔp mi duer mi cetkε nɔ ca kε gɔɔr, ca kε kuεth duirä mi dit ni jen

Help Desk incentive workers would occasionally send a handwritten note with any vehicle passing by the desk to request assistance, hoping that the note would find its' way to the protection officer in charge at the basecamp (some help desks were situated as far as four hours walk from the basecamp).

The process at the help desk was: 1) the complaint was noted down by the incentive worker on the intake form, 2) the form was then picked-up by the community services assistant and 3) registered by the data entry officer in the data sheet, 4) depending on the complaint a caseworker would go to the field to verify the complaint: e.g. if a household had lost their Core Relief Items (CRI) in a fire, a protection caseworker would visit the household to verify if there had been a fire, 5) following that, a report would be raised to the field based manager 6) who would then reach out to the organisation in charge of delivering/redistributing CRI. However, depending on the 3rd party's interest, capacity and willingness to respond, the complaint might rest at this level for some time.

6.3.1. Individual versus communal complaints

One aspect of the debates regarding complaints which seemed important in the context of Rhino Camp Settlement and needs further analysis, is the preferences when it comes to the individual versus the community. Observations and conversations largely shows that many community members preferred that complaints were handled by community leaders, except for sensitive cases such as SGBV issues. According to the community members consulted, they felt more comfortable having community leaders handling common or individual complaints on their behalf, even including some code of conduct issues. They were of the belief that the leaders were better equipped to communicate with the organisations and they also felt it was important to make the leaders aware of their complaints alongside the organisations knowledge of it. In a FGD where an agency consulted the community on the upcoming inter-agency complaint and feedback modality, the community simply did not seem to like the idea that any individual could call a hotline and open their individual case. After four attempts to introduce the advantages of an individual free hotline, the facilitator received the following answer from a community member:

> **That hotline that would be fine. But now it needs to go through the right channel. The first person who is supposed to get the information is the chairman. If the information is to go somewhere there, without the chairman's knowledge he cannot follow up. If there is no reply the chairman should need to have a place to follow up. (Refugee community member June 2018)**

In the consultation above, the community ended up suggesting that the help desk could be equipped with a phone booth that only the chairperson should use. Accordingly, it did not seem to be a priority for the community to report individually to agencies but rather it was more important for them to have the RWCs as a representative – or a gate keeper. The community suggested an alternative of having more frequent face-to-face meetings with organisations and agencies in the field, such as the quarterly review meetings. According to many community members consulted during the assessment, more community based inter-sector meetings seemed to be a much desired method to interact with agencies and bring up recurring complaints. Here, community members highlighted the importance of having staff at management levels take part in the field level meetings, to make sure they are well informed about the challenges on the ground.

What was becoming more and more noticeable in the findings was, that there effectively existed two parallel systems in the settlement for reporting complaints to agencies: the help desks and the RWC1 structure through OPM. The latter seemed to be the most effective according to the community members. As mentioned earlier, the communication line between RWCs and OPM seemed stable and closer than most other lines of information in the settlement.

6.3.2. Reporting misconduct

Though all agencies consulted seemed to have some sort of misconduct reporting system in place, they did not seem well rolled out beyond the national staff. In several organisations consulted, none of the incentive workers seemed to have received training. More importantly however, none of the community members consulted, knew the official structures for reporting misconduct. None of the help desks or the reception centre seemed to have visible information on how to report misconduct. That said, misconduct was still reported in the settlement, sometimes via RWCs through the police and OPM, and other times through the mobile and permanent protection help desks in the settlement.

The strong engagement, capacity and willingness to share concerns with organisations was visible in many occasions. The below remark was expressed at a review meeting where the community representatives were invited to talk at the very end of a meeting. None of the partners at the meeting had touched upon the pressing issue for the community: that a number of new partners had arrived recently and the coordination between them seemed poor:

Dear partners, I know you are so much in competition over the funding. I know you all want to have this [mentions the sector]. But please we need this coordination. Coordination is very important.

For [mentions a specific partner] please... you are taking all these numbers. But you are not really looking at the concerns. OK so we can have our stomachs filled but our minds are still with South Sudan. Our Country is split and we are all traumatized.

Bless Uganda, bless our leaders who are struggling to serve.

_____

Refugee leader Rhino Camp Settlement April 2018

In a FGD a refugee leader explained to an agency representative what he perceived as one of the largest challenges in terms of the community's communication with the agencies:

What we have been seeing on ground: My community they know who is doing what. But communication with the different NGOs - it is difficult. There is an NGO who is doing feeding. But we don't know what is even the name. It is supposed to be refugees who are employed as incentive workers, but now they only take Ugandans to be incentive workers and they don't speak Arabic and we don't know what they say.

Refugee leader, June 2018

A community member is sitting at the help desk and waiting. He explains with an example why he is not satisfied with the services being delivered:

A partner ruined his solar with the vehicle when the passed here. They took the blame and promised to pay. It happened in January, we are now June.

Community member translating for a local business man, June 2018

Rebecca, a woman in her mid-40s stands-up at the end of a meeting at the base camp. The meeting was presented as a review meeting but four hours into the meeting, the community members had still not been invited to talk. The meeting was now almost an hour overdue and the chairperson, a staff from a leading agency, decides that the refugee representatives should combine all their comments and concerns in one 5-minute presentation for time optimisation purposes. The refugee leaders are 15 people from very far and different places in the settlement with diverse challenges, concerns and needs. After this message is given, Rebecca stands up from her chair and says:

You cannot squeeze us like that. You need to build us into the programme.

Her male colleague agrees:

You need to give us enough time!

Refugee leaders, Rhino Camp Settlement, April 2018

6.4. Local initiative and control

Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement contains a myriad of community-based initiatives: most adult refugees who have been in the settlement for a while seemed to be part of several different committees, groups, clubs and associations working to improve the conditions and welfare of certain (often vulnerable) community members. Several of these initiatives were followed closely during the course of the three-months assessment. The initiatives varied significantly in size and setup but had one thing in common: they were established and run by energetic refugees, working voluntarily to improve the conditions for their fellow community members. The initiative, energy and optimism observed in these groups appeared to be higher than most places, possibly because it was based on voluntary and personal interests and initiative.

Some, were small associations with no access to external funding, such as:

➔ Women associations with a hand-written constitution and a small communal loans-box where vulnerable women could go and apply for small scale loans to cover emergency expenses such as medical bills.

➔ Independent parent and teachers' associations focusing on improving the conditions for children at primary school level.

➔ Associations of young physically fit men who were conducting hard-labour tasks in their local community for fellow community members such as people with disabilities who needed assistance in digging their latrines and common communal areas needing cleaning.

Others, were CBOs, officially registered at the District Commissioner's office and who would receive occasional in-kind or financial contributions from external stakeholders such as NGOs:

➔ Some of the CBOs were working and advocating for rights and access to livelihood opportunities for specific groups such as: elderly, women or youths.

➔ Others were working with participatory drama, music and public debates with the aim of disseminating messages and initiating dialogues on sensitive topics such as: the importance of reporting SGBV, preventing adolescent pregnancies, avoiding forced marriages etc.

➔ Others were working with peaceful coexistence, advocating for preventing revenge and improving peacebuilding mechanisms etc.

➔ One CBO had even reached the national registration of being an NNGO and receives funding directly under UNHCR and WFP. This CBO focuses on information provision and communication in general. The founders had gradually raised funding through private donations, loans etc. to establish an IT centre with internet access in the settlement. Eventually, the centre provided youths with IT lessons and the local community was able to access the news online etc.

6.4.1. Ownership over resources

The community members behind CBOs and other community-led initiatives were constantly looking for opportunities to receive resources that would support their work: such as financing, in-kind donations or training/capacity building. Building on

observations from numerous interactions, agency staff seemed very supportive of these contributions, but their support was limited by the room in the activity budgets in place. In fact, it was noticeable that agencies across the board saw opportunities and value in working with and consulting CBOs.

Either way, there did not seem to be much consistency across organisations on how CBOs or communities should be trusted with material support. Whereas one organisation arrived in the evening with a truck full of sanitary items for the community to keep and distribute according to their own preferences. Another organisation who had distributed broadcasting materials to a CBO insisted on keeping the loudspeakers in their custody even though all the other items were handed over to the CBO. This practically meant, that the CBO had to arrange for transport (20 kilometres) to a warehouse every time they needed to conduct their activities. Even though CBOs seemed very pleased to receive support in conducting their activities it seemed discouraging to them when agencies did not fully trust them to manage the ownership over those same resources.

6.4.2. Ownership over decisions

In many aspects, the support to CBOs and other community initiatives was an important step in the direction towards meaningful participation in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement's as most of the decision-making was done at community level including: the assessment of needs, the idea, the design, the target group, the goal, the methodology, the setup, the beneficiary selection and criteria. Common for the activities however was that they were very small in scale and operationally limited and often became a side-event/activity in larger organisation's agenda. As such, the music and drama CBOs would more easily be able to receive resources and support when they performed in relation to large events such as World Refugee Day etc. It seemed more difficult for the CBOs to receive support and recognition when it came to activities and events they had initiated themselves.

On a general level, the assessment also aimed at investigating which types of decisions within the project activities were delegated to - or taken by - the communities/community members themselves. Ironically, it became more and more clear that much of the beneficiary selection in practice was done by communities themselves in a wide range of sectors and activities, whereas none of the activities observed involved community developed selection criteria.

On one hand, this meant that the selection and verification of beneficiaries in many cases (except severe protection cases) were conducted by the community leaders. As such, leaders such as block leaders was often requested to not only suggest community members who should receive specific services, but also select and verify them. According to the refugee leaders consulted, this would often put them in an odd position as they would feel pressured to select certain community members. According to the ones consulted, they would prefer that the actual selection was undertaken by a third party with less stakes in the local power dynamic. In short, current approach involved a high risk of bribes, nepotism and general misuse of power, which at times put the refugee leaders in an uncomfortable position.

On the other hand, the findings suggest that none of the activities observed, appeared to be developed with selection criteria decided by the community themselves. All targeting and selection criteria seemed to be pre-defined by agencies. As one community member puts it: **It seems all the projects are ready made, we don't know who is targeted and why.**

A female community member decided to demonstrate the state of the information provision in the settlement by picking up a small transparent plastic lid from a toothpick holder (with her one hand) and a tall pink plastic mug from the table (with her other hand):

Listen, if you receive this [grabbing the small plastic lid]. But this [holding the large pink mug] is what you are really supposed to receive how do you know? And, also, what do you do if you know that you are supposed to receive this [holding the large pink mug] there is no platform to voice our concerns. So you just stay like that and receive what is there…

Refugee in Rhino Camp, June 2018

A group of refugee leaders had just received the opportunity to meet and consult a donor representative about their concerns in a FGD. After saying that this was their first time in a long time to voice their opinions they were asked why:

But you have many FGDs here right?

Yes, but it is low level staff. We don't trust it.

You don't trust the staff?

Yes, we trust the staff…. But we don't trust the information is travelling up to higher levels: That the collection of information is shared, as we are not receiving any response.

Informal talk with refugee leaders, May 2018

7. Reflections on assessment findings

The findings in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement demonstrate many opportunities for - and strengths fostering -participation efforts. High capacity and high initiative among the refugee population have led to several locally owned initiatives which seem to be a key component in leading the road towards free and meaningful participation in Rhino Camp. The agencies' support of the CBOs and locally developed initiatives seem strong and at the same time an integral part of the mindset for building on positive opportunities. As highlighted by the Brookings Institution, participation processes are so closely linked to issues of power that: **…truly effective participation demands that some power be ceded to communities** (Brookings Institution 2008:31). Accordingly, if the decision-making exercises become more of a 'token' where the power actually remains exclusively with the agencies in Rhino Camp it will eventually lose its' value. In this case the community might experience what is commonly known as 'over-participation' or 'participation fatigue', especially if it comes with a myriad of FGD, surveys and assessments.

The Ugandan Government's generous opportunity for allowing employment of South Sudanese in permanent positions in the sector seems important. This possibility makes it possible for DRC to employ native speakers who can foster information translation into local languages and who can provide in-house input into activity designs and assessments ensuring that they become more culturally appropriate.

The strong connection between OPM and the refugee leadership seems to ensure that important information and complaints are shared on a higher level. These existing reporting lines for complaints might be an important to factor into future complaint and feedback systems.

However, having a more thorough understanding of social, cultural, political, economic power dynamics (and disparities) in the context might be needed to move closer to bridging the participation gap. More explicit analysis of the latter might enforce a more focused perspective on the issue of representation, rather than using the RWC1 chairpersons as the exclusive voice of the refugee community in most decision-making forums. As pointed out in the previous section, so much knowledge already exists within the group of frontline staff (South Sudanese and Ugandan) and incentive workers so using them more actively in mapping the informal power holders and diverse voices in the community may pave the way for understanding the voices that need inclusion in decision-making. In this regard, the response might benefit from more efforts into ensuring the inclusion of host community stakeholders who often did not seem present at meetings simply because of transport issues and because meetings often took place in the middle of the workday.

Moreover, the response might benefit from seeing the facilitation of participation methods as a specific skill. According to the Brookings Institution, some argue that: **...not all staff would be personally or professionally fit to carry out the task** (2008:35). Either way, organisations might benefit from seeing participation processes as something not all are not necessarily born to facilitate: seeing it as a skill would allow the response to

Food distribution in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement.

have more coordinated, streamlined and systematic practices for participation activities. This would also allow organisations to better analyse and zoom in on the specific needs within communities, which are likely to be diverse as outlined in the previous section, the population in Rhino Camp is itself quite diverse. Approaches to participation in this context may therefore require multiple techniques and focus on both formal and informal settings to ensure inclusion of all voices, concerns and interests.

If a mindset change is to take place, the organisations might need to invite PoC into the machinery of the programmes, which would require new ways of working where transparency is the centre of the response. This could include that PoC themselves take part in developing and deciding on how participation efforts should look and thereby: co-create information provision, co-facilitate consultations, co-design complaints and feedback structures etc. This change might benefit from recognising that PoC are experts in their own lives and that they (for the most part), make informed decisions. However, informed decisions are better taken when comprehensive information from the humanitarian actors is available to inform choices. To fully do that it might require a skillset change from current the 'implementation mode' into a mode of engagement and an integrated response building on local capacities and preferences. This change however, might need full buy-in from donors who need to fully support it financially and allow modifications to happen rapidly according to community and implementers' feedback.

> **This is where our feedback has come to rest. Here, they are sitting on it the complaints.**
>
> Community member describing the help desks, April 2018

> **… if we don't […] trust the sources of information, even the most vital messages can miss their mark.**
>
> CDAC Network 2014 What is #commisaid?: http://www.cdacnetwork.org/i/20140106201815-wdtf0/)

Appendix: Reflections on how to approach current challenges

The assessment findings suggest that the current efforts could benefit from improvements on all levels of the proposed categories leading to more free and meaningful participation: 1) information provision, 2) information transfer & consultation, 3) complaints and feedback 4) local initiative and control.

As earlier explained, the primary purpose of this assessment is to investigate the practices related to participation on the ground and not to give explicit recommendations for improvements. Therefore, please read the below reflections as broad non-conclusive, non-exclusive, non-required collection of ideas in areas that organisations working in Rhino Camp might look into.

Reflections on improved information provision

To meet the current information provision challenges and the way they are being handled in the settlement and to ensure accountability, agencies might improve how they take responsibility over their own information provision. If activity/initiative information does not reach the end-user, one might argue that it is the responsibility of the organisation and not the community. Currently, the responsibility seems to rely on the community itself, or rather on one or a few individuals belonging to the community. A possible way to ensure that information has reached the end user might be to reach out and test the quality and accuracy of the information received by the end-user.

Moreover, the 'devil might be in the detail' when it comes to supporting the local structures for information provision. Building a strong body of information disseminators who are: 1) trained and 2) have all necessary resources available, including batteries for megaphones, might be necessary to improve the existing information flows. According to interviews in several villages, secretaries for information (the local term for information volunteers elected by the community) would typically only last one or two months, as the role is so tiresome and unrewarding. Some focus might need to be put into making this central role more 'attractive'.

Most importantly however, would be to discuss if the entire way of handling information needs to be re-assessed to better reflect the preferences of the people who are supposed to be in the centre of the response – the affected population. Along these lines, agencies might benefit from letting communities decide on which the information provision practices would work best for their specific needs. Keeping in mind that preferences for receiving information, might vary from location to location depending on the population living there: e.g. a very ethnically diverse village might have other needs

and preferences than a more ethnically homogeneous village. Letting the community have ownership over how they want to engage in information provision could be a first step on the road to a participation revolution.

Additionally, the information provision might benefit from being delivered in more diversified manner: relying on verbal information entails many risks, as earlier explained. On the contrary, information in writing and broadcasted information might ensure that everyone would receive the exact same message. Moreover, information might reach more people if organisations made sure to always use various methods and settings to distribute the same information – formal and informal. A step in this direction might be to ensure dissemination of information in places where women and marginalised groups, such as ethnic minorities and people living with disabilities spend their time and are better able to access it.

Fortunately, in the context of Rhino Camp, there have been several opportunities and 'easy fixes' for diversifying information provision. These opportunities might benefit from being considered early on when budgets are being developed to ensure that specific budget lines are in place to prioritise information provision. Some of the alternative dissemination opportunities worth looking into might be:

➔ More use of offline broadcasting at communal places in the camp (similar to 'boda-boda talk-talk' – where information relevant to the community is disseminated on mobile or stationary devices at a public place such as the local market place). These setups could also be used for broadcasting offline radio shows where common concerns are discussed.

➔ Engage more in radio broadcasting: Currently, Arua has two radio channels covering Rhino Camp. These could be used more actively for simple information provision as well as for dialogues and discussions. If mobile sound systems are setup in public places, broadcasted in local languages (and owned by the community) the shows would reach many.

➔ Information boards which are securely locked-up to avoiding opportunistic community members from removing vacancy announcements, scholarship opportunities etc.

➔ Frequent use of flyers with written information in several languages (information on flyers and posters seemed rather limited in Rhino Camp as compared to other refugee/IDP settlements).

➔ Free phone lines pre-loaded with basic information that could be accessed 24-7 (not to be confused with a help line).

➔ Increased priority and coordination of inter-sectoral quarterly meetings at the community level, allowing refugees to have a quarterly platform to consult and give feedback to partners.

➔ Ensure an option for individuals who are immobile or less mobile, such as: elderly, people living with a disability, single caregivers with large amounts of children.

➔ Another issue worth looking into would be to ensure options for community members to raise anonymous questions to agencies. This might be a step to ensure that a more diverse group of community members would dare to seek clarifications for the information provided. It also might encourage more women to ask clarifying questions. These anonymous options might be through radio shows, on notes at

community meetings or by having representatives (whose voice would represent the views of others) to present questions at meetings. This might be a step towards more equal access to information.

The high level of institutional knowledge and language capacity in the camp is a unique and valuable asset and there seems to be room for capitalising more on this. One way of using these capacities could be to make more active use of the skills present by having a board/committee/group of 'information-brokers' in the local communities who are trained in information provision, translation etc. These people/committees might also be used as advisory boards on how agencies should disseminate their information to PoC in a culturally sensitive manner. And, they could function as platforms to simply double-check translated flyers and posters for language misunderstandings and cultural sensitivity.

Involving the PoCs more in setting up systems and processes for improved information provision might also increase their ownership and therefore increase their level of engagement and accountability in general. Moreover, it might be valuable to look further into the sea of information and experiences about past activities and their enablers and challenges existing in the context of Rhino Camp among long-term staff and refugees themselves. To use these informal but valuable experiences in the project cycle might allow for better feedback from a more diverse group of people during the development of the project and activity design.

Better physical access to information provision could be facilitated in the current help desk structures, allowing ordinary community members better access to written information. This could involve discussions at community level on how they want organisations to share essential information with them. Several refugees approached the participation analyst with ideas about village-driven information centres where residents could seek all sorts of information and maybe even have access to news. This might be an idea worth looking into if this initiative could be hosted by the physical structures of the existing help desks.

According to the findings, there seem to be some room for improving current inter-agency information coordination. An option might be to put procedures in place that ensure refugee leaders (at the very least) are always informed a few days prior to an activity taking place. This would also enable them to alert organisations about conflicting activity locations/times, if the internal communication between organisations are not efficient.

Reflections on improved information transfer and consultation

Feeding back findings to the community from all types of surveys and assessments is important. In the operations in Rhino Camp there is some room for improvements in terms of sharing assessment and M&E findings with the population. Sharing findings might be an empowering tool for the population to promote their own rights and advocate for improvements on their own behalf in coordination meetings. If findings were shared more continuously with the community, assessment fatigue might be avoided because the outcomes of the (many) assessments being done would be seen more regularly. Feeding back results and findings might benefit from having a shared inter-agency strategy and channel where they are available in public spaces such as information boards or radio programmes.

Nevertheless, it would be interesting to introduce more user-driven data collection and co-created assessments. Recent years have shown an increased interest in facilitating and using numbers and statistics produced by local people themselves, such as this initiative using local people's own data: 'Who Counts? The Power of Participatory Statistics'. Another recent initiative where users report their own data is the 'What Went Wrong Project' where users report failed humanitarian programmes which will be collected on a common website.

There might also be room for improvements in terms of re-using existing assessments. To do this a catalogue/overview of past assessments would need to be put in place. This might reduce the number of overlapping assessments taking place. On a higher level, the sector might also need to re-assess if it is necessary (or advisable) for donors to request tailored assessments for almost all proposals submitted.

As a step to reduce 'assessment fatigue', all organisations might benefit from being a bit more economic with questions posed in surveys, making sure that only that information which is actively used is collected to reduce the respondents time spent. In Rhino Camp it seemed difficult for ordinary refugees to decline responding to surveys, even though it sometimes interfered with other important daily tasks that they needed to attend to. The only community members who seemed comfortable in rejecting the recurring surveys (when they collided with other daily tasks) were refugees with a higher level of education.

Transparency seemed to be paramount for improving the communication between staff and PoC in Rhino Camp. A way to approach this might be to ensure that information provision, consultation and dialogues are grounded in honest, concrete and accurate messages from the side of organisations. Inaccurate information sharing -such as the example of the late activity modification which resulted in a reduction of items delivered - can easily lead to rumours that may increase the divide between staff and PoC. Findings suggest that PoC are capable of understanding the operational challenges that organisations work under. If explained well, most beneficiaries might understand and sympathise with the reduction of a project budget if it is due to a non-misconduct issues, such as exchange rate losses.

In fact, it might be interesting to let representation of PoC into the machinery of the operation in a more substantial manner such as: having PoC represented at annual and sector strategy discussions, as well as having PoC representatives participate in setting the agendas and co-chairing review and coordination meetings at field level.

In the cases where frontline staff were poorly briefed and poorly equipped to handle the critical and difficult questions asked by the PoC, the communication often ended up being inaccurate and opaque. Or put differently, in the cases where staff did not understand the logic behind an activity modification, beneficiary selection criteria etc., the communication about this to the PoC happened to be equally poor. That said, local power dynamics in the workplace might also impact the reason why frontline staff might not ask clarifying questions about the activity modifications to their superiors. Explicitly ensuring that frontline staff are informed about the details of the activities they are conducting and encouraging those staff to ask for clarifications at all levels of the organisations might meet some of these challenges. If the work culture is inclusive in terms of decision-making processes at all levels, it will be a good basis for introducing inclusive dialogues and shared decision-making with PoC.

The staff's approachability and physical presence in the field seemed imminent to improve the communication between staff and PoC and thus facilitate an easy and inclusive flow of information. Understanding each other's point of view seemed essential to fully engage in constructive dialogues on operational challenges and building the trust needed to voice honest concerns that might yield creative solutions to challenges.

In order to fully understand the PoC's point of view, the findings show that the frontline staff needed to listen to the perceptions, opinions and experiences of the PoC, - beyond the sector or agency of their own activities. As the PoC's lived lives are holistic and full of diverse components influencing each other, present perceptions and choices might build on past experiences. This was in fact the case in the settlement when an organisation introduced a new activity component that had been implemented by other organisations earlier. Earlier, this component had been poorly managed leading to a number of conflicts between the community and the implementing organisations. These recent episodes had a high impact on the community's level of engagement when this new (large scale) activity was introduced by a different organisation. The past may have impacted the community's patience with the new organisation when the activity started showing many of the same negative signs as the previous conflict-ridden ones.

The lack of engagement from the side of the community made the staff extremely frustrated and several individuals swiftly concluded that the PoC were 'lazy' and 'not willing lift a finger'. In fact, the community implemented various voluntary community-managed activities of the same character. Therefore, reducing their lack of engagement to laziness might have been too hasty. The community's reaction might rather have been an expression of having experienced similar poorly managed activities earlier. Accordingly, one good reason to use sufficient time in the field is to better know the collective experiences of the inhabitants– as these experiences might play a central part in how activities are welcomed, perceived and approached by the communities. Nevertheless, the above frictions may also have been avoided if the community was consulted and had been part in designing the activity.

In terms of representation, it might be a good idea to pay more dedicated attention to how organisations can ensure that the voice of women and the voice of other marginalised groups are represented better in decision-making processes. To do this, organisations might need to gain better overview over the power dynamics and who is currently representing the marginalised groups informally. As suggested earlier, this might involve capacity building of some informal groups to ensure they are better organised.

One organisation implementing in Rhino Camp was consciously separating refugee leaders and non-leaders in FGD for their assessments to triangulate the information received from leaders. This would be an interesting way forward. In terms of transferring this idea to participation on a broader level, an option would be to make sure that the voice of the "average" community member is taken more into consideration for activity reviews by introducing a group of non-leadership community members who would give their feedback in parallel to the more formal RWC structure. The setup for this modality could be to exclude people in power from the review group and thereby allow the "average" groups' views/concerns/opinions to carry the same weight as other reviews. This would potentially balance some of the existing power disparities in the communities. However, it would take good insights into the power relations in the local community to fully identifying who are informal powerful local leaders and who are not.

In terms of translation, organisations might benefit from using trained individuals (male and female) who are well informed about the topic and terminology used in the meetings, dialogues and reviews that they are translating. High quality translations seem to be essential for good communication and there seems to be room for improvement in this area. Another option would be to locally develop a glossary explaining the most central terms in various languages to ensure consistency between sectors and organisations.

Reflections on improved feedback and complaints

There seems to be room for further analysis on finding the best solution to the current gap in complaint handling mechanisms, where the informal system through the RWC structure might need to be featured. The overall response in Rhino Camp might benefit from aligning systems and processes with community preferences or even design them with the community. Based on the current situation with limited use of the help desk function, there seems to be a high risk that communities will simply not use the systems if mechanisms are not aligned with their needs and preferences. The issue of translation and female representation might need to be embedded in these discussions.

The upcoming complaint and feedback mechanisms seem to be dependant on high level technology and several third parties who are not based in the settlement and therefore have a limited understanding of the context, structures and terminology in which the complaints will exist. All experiences from the current system indicates tight inter-agency coordination, commitment and resources are central to making a common complaint and feedback systems function well, which one can hope is featured into the design. An option introduced by a DRC field staff was to have at least one person in each organisation who is responsible and accountable for giving timely feedback to the common entry point for the complaint handling.

Frequent physical inter-sectoral meetings with organisations (with the presence of managers) seem to be a high priority to PoC. To the community members interviewed, these meetings seemed to be the most efficient manner to receive meaningful feedback from organisations. It might be an option to conduct these community meetings more frequently and imbed them in an accountability commitment, where organisations need to deliver feedback to the community within a certain time frame. In order to better respond to issues relating to internal power relations and representation, these meetings may also benefit from having an 'anonymous' option. For community members who don't like the attention of asking questions in public meetings, or for those who have sensitive questions: they could deliver their questions in writing or with a representative before the meetings.

Reflections on local initiative and control

CBOs and community-initiated activities seemed to be key components in approaching meaningful participation: as they had decision-making power over all aspects of their activities and because they could tailor their interventions to specific cultural contexts

and languages. It might be an option to prioritise more support and resources to these initiatives. This could also be done by introducing (more) community managed funding with few conditionalities.

In general, with the high human capacity in Rhino Camp, more tasks might be able to be outsourced to the community than currently. If the serious funding gaps in the South Sudan response where discussed more explicitly with the refugee population. PoC might have useful input on which tasks could successfully be outsourced to the communities to better prioritise the limited funding.

Another essential issue, which is worth looking into, is setting community-based targeting criteria. Committing to community-based targeting criteria would potentially be a fast step to giving the communities a sense of ownership as they would have the influence which type of individuals/groups who would benefit from activities.

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