

Bridging the Gap Between Development and Humanitarian Action: The Role of Local Women's Organizations

Case Study



NUWODU representative, Rose Achayo Obol (2nd from left), with other women leaders and their staff at World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul

Local organizations of women, including those with disabilities, can play a critical role in bridging the development - humanitarian divide, representing the rights of refugee women and girls with humanitarian organizations, government departments, and in human rights mechanisms. The National Union of Women with Disabilities in Uganda (NUWODU) is one such organization advocating for the rights of refugee women with disabilities since 2011.

Recognizing that refugee women and girls with disabilities were largely excluded from their networking and advocacy on the rights of women with disabilities, NUWODU reached out this group, consulting with them on their needs, skills, and capacities, and inviting them to join NUWODU activities. Following assessments with urban refugees in Kampala and

in Uruchinga and Nakivale refugee settlements, they started group activities, teaching refugee women with disabilities about their rights in Uganda, supporting them to develop self-advocacy skills, and linking them with service providers from both the humanitarian and development sectors, as well as to national programs for persons with disabilities.

Trainings with service providers raised awareness that refugee women and girls with disabilities should have the same access to services as others. NUWODU has been highlighting the needs of refugee women with disabilities when engaging with government agencies and ministries, health workers, and other authorities (e.g. the police). They have expanded partnerships from the Office of the Prime Minister, the primary government body responsible

¹National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU), *Alternative report to the UN Committee of Experts on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, December, 2014.

²CRPD/C/SR.248

³CRPD/C/UGA/CO/1

for refugees, to the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, and even the Kampala Capital City Authority, which is now including refugee women with disabilities in community-based livelihoods programs. As Jolly Acen, Executive Director of NUWODU, describes *“we are now hearing from refugees that attitudes are changing.”*

Host country organizations of persons with disabilities also play a critical role in monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As a state party to the CRPD, Uganda submitted a report for review at the 15th Session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in April 2016. NUWODU contributed to the alternative report submitted by the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda, which called for greater attention the inclusion of refugees with disabilities in national surveys and assessments. NUWODU representatives were also members of a civil society group engaged in the review process in Geneva, where they met with the Country Rapporteur to raise awareness about refugee issues.



NUWODU spoke alongside Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General at WHS

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities subsequently raised questions to the delegation of Uganda about this group. Concluding Ob-

servations called upon Uganda to ensure information is provided in accessible formats in all languages, including refugee languages, and to include refugees in the implementation of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan. NUWODU is now participating in the consultations being led by the Ugandan government to develop a national action for implementation of these Concluding Observations, advocating for the intersection between gender, disability, and refugee rights to be reflected across the action plan.

“Civil society must continue to bring attention the specific needs of refugee with disabilities. We must ensure protection from wherever they are, to wherever they go. Organizations of persons with disabilities should take note that they are advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities irrespective of their citizenship; that refugee women with disabilities are much more vulnerable, and we should mainstream issues across our advocacy, as well as targeting them. Including refugee women with disabilities strengthens our mandate as a human rights group. It adds to our diversity when we make them part of us in our work – This makes us a unique organization.”

– Jolly Acen
Executive Director, NUWODU

NUWODU is currently engaged in national level consultations being conducted by UNHCR, as a pilot country in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. For more information, please contact: **Jolly Acen, Executive Director, NUWODU at jollyacen@gmail.com.**

The Women’s Refugee Commission has been partnering with networks of women with disabilities across Africa to advocate on refugee and humanitarian issues. For more information, please contact: **Christine Bloch, Geneva Representative, Women’s Refugee Commission at christineb@wrcommission.org.**

Women’s Refugee Commission works to improve the lives and protects the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis by researching their needs, identifying solutions, and advocating for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.