



The Development of the Sustainable Energy Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (SERP)

Lessons Learned in Uganda

The Sustainable Energy Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (SERP) envisions that refugee and host communities attain universal access to affordable, reliable, and clean energy for socio-economic transformation in an environmentally sustainable manner. **GIZ's Energy Solutions for Displacement Settings (ESDS)** – a component of the global programme **Support to UNHCR in facilitating the operationalisation of the Global Compact on Refugees in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus** – provides advisory services to the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD) and actively participated in the SERP task team within MEMD, in cooperation with UNHCR, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the CRRF Secretariat, the Rural Electrification Agency and the World Bank. This paper aims to solidify learnings gained – lessons learned (LL) – throughout the development of this policy, with main themes identified as general processes, modes of cooperation and partnership, and unexpected factors.

General processes

The SERP with funding from the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) was developed over 4 phases: 1. inception; 2. evaluation; 3. drafting; and 4. completion. Phase 1 involved a comprehensive situational analysis, including a review of existing National Development Plans, district development plans and refugee response plans, to achieve a common understanding among key partners and stakeholders on the

vision, strategic objectives, and outline of the SERP. During phase 2 multiple consultations were held across 12 refugee-hosting districts taking place from November 2020 to March 2021 to gather invaluable inputs from multiple stakeholders including refugee and host community representatives, District Local Governments (DLGs), town councils, Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), humanitarian agencies and partners, electricity service providers, traders, local vendors, and suppliers. Phase 3 comprised of a reiterative process of providing a full SERP draft for discussion and revision. The SERP was endorsed by the CRRF Steering Group (SG) in December 2021. Consequently, phase 4 involved the finalisation, publication, dissemination, and advocacy of the SERP, which started with an official launch event on the 25th of August 2022 supported by the BMZ commissioned GIZ project ESDS.

The SERP greatly benefitted from a **conducive environment** of previously established integrated refugee sector response plans. These included the Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities in Uganda (2019), the Health Sector Integrated Refugee Response Plan (2019-2024), the Water and Environment Sector Response Plan (2019-2022) and the Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (2020 to 2025). Discussions with key stakeholders involved in developing these plans informed the structure of the SERP. However, **coordination and implementation follow-through after launch were found to be lacking in all sector response plans**, except for the education response plan.



Photos: GIZ Uganda



In general, willingness to share and contributions made to the development of the SERP were high. Thus, the final document reflects and incorporates the inputs of stakeholders and aligns with national programmes and policies. It is the first of its kind in the humanitarian energy space, making comparisons difficult. Processes for planning, funding, evaluating, and learning from energy initiatives in humanitarian settings were found to be poor. Lack of energy specific expertise, short timelines, biased evaluations, and inadequate resources were common issues. Despite these challenges, MEMD expressed satisfaction with the final product of the policy document and **allocated a budget line for refugee projects** in their programming for the first time, demonstrating **success in refugee-inclusive planning**.

Modes of cooperation and partnership

A learning from previous plans and a recommendation from the CRRF Secretariat was to have a **task team** in place. The establishment of the SERP task team itself represented no issues, according to its members. The CRRF Secretariat, MEMD, UNHCR and GIZ (due to ongoing work in refugee settings) decided on team members and MEMD contacted and had meetings to invite team members closely with UNHCR. It was said that everyone was looking forward to this. The task team then brought a consultant on board, who was commissioned by BMZ through GIZ, and who then also became a member of the task team. Meetings were taken regularly, however a **decrease in momentum and lack of pro-activity was observed in later stages**. Due to administrative delays, CRRF processes, multiple layers of review, revision, and validation in different levels and with COVID19 generally affecting processes it became difficult to find appropriate time and availabilities for the policy launch. Moreover, following the launch there has not been an official communication on further coordination and collaboration for implementation by the leading ministry.

SERP task team meetings **proved useful in identifying stakeholders, opportunities and risks, and organising consultations** which due to COVID19 were majorly held virtually. Some field visits included: local government officers (energy persons of district heads), electricity companies,

businesses, OPM and UNHCR and (humanitarian) implementing partners. Field visits and meetings with various local offices were arranged especially through UNHCR who had contacts to local governments and refugee overseeing partners. Not only did UNHCR arrange these meetings, but they also actively took part in consultations, with support from GIZ. MEMD took part in initial stages, however elections, COVID19 and budget restrictions made it hard for government officials to travel for further consultations. In general, it was agreed to travel with less people due to COVID19. During field visits it became apparent **that local government felt disconnected from line ministries of Kampala and experienced staffing and budgetary issues for energy** in settlement areas. Though very time-consuming, small groups and one-on-one consultations were found to be significantly more successful compared to large workshops. In the latter the most vocal individuals tend to overpower the conversation, leaving limited room for engaging with broader community groups. Additionally, large workshops fail to provide an opportunity to directly observe and understand the **ground-level reality**, relying instead on presentations delivered by individuals who may not have direct experience with the locations being discussed.

Meeting physically, especially with refugee and host community groups – business owners or briquette making, or sellers of charcoal and wood – really helped, and they requested to be kept involved. Bear in mind that in consultation those who are considered to be beneficiaries sometimes **say what they think humanitarian/development actors (i.e., donors) want to hear**, but some are honest. In some cases, refugees had very rehearsed answers, trying to re-iterate what implementing partners say about some energy technologies and fuels, especially briquettes. In some settlements, the local leaders for nationals were met separately from refugee leaders to facilitate proper dialogue. During these discussions some members of the host community felt that refugees are more attended to with various community development initiatives. Most meetings took place in form of focus group discussions with end users within settlements and for some government bodies such as the utility distributors. Overall, **open discussions** with refugees and nationals **went well**, members **freely shared their energy access challenges**.



Photos: GIZ Uganda

Markets were visited to **gauge prices of different energy products** as well as to observe **electricity connection**. These visits confirmed that not all refugees are poor, with some running strong businesses in the settlements e.g., selling LPG, owning and running restaurants, mobile banking, etc. **Challenges** appeared when some of the government leaders in certain areas were dominating the discussions, sometimes influencing the input of others. Additionally, some meetings with utility companies did not go well because the responsible leaders were not present to be part of the discussions.

MEMD facilitated connections and arranged meetings with various line Ministries and the National Planning Authority (NPA). **However, the extent of discussions with other line ministries was constrained**, and there was a noticeable deficiency in consultations regarding verification. It would have been advantageous to foster more extensive involvement, especially with the Ministry of Water and Environment, as there are numerous interrelated project activities. Nevertheless, the level of engagement was limited to concise email exchanges and minimal feedback on preliminary documents. Additionally, Uganda's whole of government approach to hosting refugees, the principles of CRRF and the vast refugee context remain unknown within various Line Ministries and District Local Government, understandably as each department have their own area of focus and responsibilities. Hence many suggested creating projects specific to refugees only, which would have been separate from any local district or national plans.

In the initial phases of SERP development, MEMD demonstrated hesitancy in assuming a leading role, instead relying on support from development partners, such as GIZ. The extent of discussion and promotion of SERP within MEMD at different hierarchical levels **remained unclear, raising concerns about the level of support available for effective implementation**. Communication and involvement from higher-level MEMD officials appeared to be lacking throughout the process. On a positive note, day-to-day discussions and direct assistance from MEMD's counterpart were commendable, as they were consistently available and helpful in all instances. In the course of proceedings there was a realisation that MEMD needed to

participate in the whole of government approach and has a new role to play in the refugee response: not an issue but an opportunity.

The CRRF Secretariat proved highly instrumental in offering valuable guidance and counsel at every stage of the process. They effectively drew upon insights garnered from the formulation of analogous sector response plans, aligning them with the latest CRRF strategies and engaging with essential stakeholders. Despite extending numerous invitations to the task team and MEMD for comprehensive consultations with the government, including efforts to enhance awareness of the overarching CRRF framework and support its promotion at higher echelons, these invitations were not actively responded to. Consequently, this lack of responsiveness resulted in **limited endorsement at the leadership level**.

At the field level, a lack of communication between OPM Kampala and settlement commandants led to some irritation. There were instances where settlement commandants at specific settlements expressed they were not being notified by OPM Kampala about visits, despite repeated requests to OPM for such notifications. Additionally, certain individuals within OPM at the settlement level anticipated receiving the same compensation from GIZ as that provided to refugees and host community members for travel and subsistence expenses.

Thanks to the active participation of various stakeholders in consultation processes, vastly different perspectives were gathered. The latter partially also posed a challenge when priorities and objectives were diverging or even conflicting. Some stakeholders sought to **promote activities that aligned with their own programmes, despite their limited success** thus far. Others lacked a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors, rendering their recommendations unsuitable for the specific situation. Certain stakeholders advocated for particular technologies or approaches without possessing the necessary expertise or experience in those areas, while others failed to grasp the comparative advantages and broader perspective required for identifying the most suitable and sustainable project activities for specific



Photo: GIZ Uganda

populations and locations. Despite these complexities, significant efforts were invested in ensuring transparency, balance, and objectivity during the development SERP. An **earlier discussion regarding funding allocation and delineation of responsibilities within the government** for refugee response would have been beneficial. This issue **primarily poses challenges for the implementation phase** rather than the development of the SERP itself.

Unexpected factors

The constraints imposed by COVID-19, such as travel restrictions and the associated bureaucratic complexities, hindered the ability to organise centralised or regional workshops. However, an unintended positive consequence was the emergence of stronger engagement at the local level. Nevertheless, the impact of COVID-19 was further compounded by the suspension of activities in Kiryandongo at the end of 2021 and the seasonal challenges posed by rainfall.

The delay in the project timeline was exacerbated by the NPA failing to communicate earlier about their requirements in the policy structure. This necessitated the modification of the schedule, **leading to dissatisfaction among task team members who had agreed upon a roadmap.** Specifically, the rescheduling of a final validation with development partners to meet the deadline of a CRRF SG meeting, deviated from the original plan.

NPA's new structure was perceived as inflexible and pushed through a top-down approach with elements that appeared redundant. It deviated from the formatting and content approach employed in previous integrated sector

response plans. These changes were not replicated in other documents or revisions of response plans, rendering the NPA's requirements inconsistent. Adjustments were also made to the policy and strategy of the MEMD to align with the Sustainable Energy Programme Investment Plan. These modifications, along with the restructuring of MEMD, which incorporated the Rural Electrification Agency and the reduced funding availability for previously planned interventions, such as the electricity household connections policy, had an impact on the content of the SERP and its proposed project activities and coordination structure. Consequently, plans such as the Renewable Energy Subsidy Programme became obsolete.

The original objective of finalising a draft by February 2021 and launching the policy in June 2021 was delayed due to the combined effects of COVID-19 and the elections. Furthermore, the sudden announcement of NPA's restructuring in April/May 2021 pushed the deadline for the final draft to October 2021, approval by CRRF SG in December 2021, and the official policy launch to August

"We need a clear plan for SERP coordination, otherwise it will be hard to measure progress and financial commitments which feeds back towards its implementation achievements on the National Development Plan III. There is uncertainty on who is in charge or who is steering its implementation. We need an official communication on this."

Recommendations for others aiming to develop Sustainable Energy Response Plans for Refugees and Host Communities in other countries:

- Take adequate time to engage meaningfully and regularly with all stakeholders throughout the entire journey, so that it becomes a roadmap, not just a document for occasional reference.
 - » Stakeholders have access to reports, data and information combined with an understanding of context both at local, national and international levels.
 - » Stakeholders will validate findings, cost estimates and recommendations.
 - » Engage with donors early in the process.
 - » Ensure plenty of local level engagement.
 - » Involve NGO community early in the process.
 - » Meaningful involvement of refugee and host communities is needed so that programmes do not simply reflect the interest of donors or the organisations who receive funds from those donors.
 - » Some stakeholders must be consulted separately, especially government to ensure their opinions do not skew the opinions of other stakeholders.
- A task team comprised of cross-sectoral expertise and experience, and representing major stakeholders is key, ideally led by the Ministry of Energy.
 - » Advise on strategic direction, ensure higher level support, and provide political and technical expertise.
- Consult those who have already completed other sector response plans, including in other countries, to learn from the process, understand potential pitfalls, politics, and coordination structures and to prepare for possible challenges which are likely to arise.
- Governance, coordination, and monitoring are key to the successful support and implementation of the response plan and should be considered from an early stage.
 - » Ideally have a person in place for a secretariat before launching the policy.
 - » Fostering sense of ownership within the leading Ministry.
 - » Leading Ministry should be clear on how to implement the plan.
- Accept the lack of data, limited resources, poor coordination, and lack of capacity as part of the whole challenge, energy is seriously under-funded and is not a priority sector in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus—and the reason why a response plan is needed.
- Be realistic about what has worked in the past and what is feasible within the resource and timeframe, focus on those projects and approaches which have proven effective and impactful over time.
- No single solution to address the multiple issues with increasing energy access.
- Challenges for refugees are very similar to those faced by the surrounding population.

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On behalf of

