Understanding RLO Impact

A metasynthesis of five external impact evaluations covering programs run by Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs)

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Cover photo: Parade celebrating World Refugee Day in Kampala, Uganda. © YARID, 2022

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Abstract

This study synthesizes and analyzes available data in order to answer two key research questions: *What impact trends can be observed across five externally evaluated refugee-led organizations (RLOs)? To what extent can observations be generalized across organizations or geographies?*

In order to answer the first question, between January and May of 2022, five RLOs (Basmeh & Zeitooneh in Lebanon and Iraq, Refugiados Unidos in Colombia, Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Center in Indonesia, Saint Andrew's Refugee Services in Egypt, and Young Africans for Integral Development in Uganda) underwent an external impact evaluation. The first section of this report uses conceptual content analysis to present impact trends across their evaluation reports.

The impact trends show that the five evaluated RLOs play crucial roles in improving the daily lives of people who live in their communities. The evaluated RLOs are uncovering or providing sustained access to services and revealing or facilitating long-term solutions. Importantly, the report finds that RLOs are doing so with the trust and respect of their community members, including for those who experience significant and intersecting access barriers. The report also synthesizes findings from evaluations that recommend increased investment in each RLO in order to deepen impact.

The second section of this report finds that the impact trends present across the five RLOs cannot be assumed to be true of other RLOs simply because they are also refugee-led. However, an exploration of commonalities between the five evaluated organizations reveals that they share several inputs that may underpin their impact: functional international partnerships including with donors, access to flexible funding, community embeddedness, and leadership by people of forced displacement.

The research concludes that this list of shared inputs is likely worth promoting within any and all institutions who are responding to refugee situations around the world. Given their respective strengths and weaknesses, the findings suggest RLOs need greater access to international partnerships and flexible funding, while international actors need to reflect on the ways in which
their responses can be community embedded and led by those with lived experience of forced displacement.

1. Background and Purpose

The preexisting research on RLOs has made many valuable contributions, including by showing that RLOs are pervasive, operating across the many diverse contexts where refugee populations are found; that locally-run RLOs may be more cost-efficient than internationally-run projects; and that RLOs often fill gaps left by international service providers (see for example Pincock et al. 2020a, Pincock et al. 2020b, and Griffiths et al. 2006). Available research also highlights the complexities and inequities embedded within humanitarianism that make it difficult for RLOs to access basic financing or for refugees to generally participate in the strategizing and decisionmaking that influences the direction of their lives, despite these truths (see also Clarke, 2016).

Though this body of research is useful and growing, it lacks the specific consideration of RLO impact, that is, the extent to which RLOs are succeeding at supporting their communities to address the many social, economic, and political consequences of being displaced. This report contributes to closing this knowledge gap by investigating the specific impact of five RLOs (Basmeh & Zeitooneh in Lebanon and Iraq, Refugiados Unidos in Colombia, Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Center in Indonesia, Saint Andrew's Refugee Services in Egypt, and Young African Refugees for Integral Development in Uganda), and to what extent their impact is indicative of RLO impact more generally.

The primary research question answered by this report is: *What impact trends can be observed across the five refugee-led organizations?* In order to generate the data necessary to answer this question, RRLI provided funding to the five RLOs to hire external evaluators to assess the impact of one or more of their programs on the lives of community members.[1]

RRLI chose these organizations to evaluate for two reasons. First, they operate across regions (Latin America, East Africa, North Africa, Middle East and Southeast Asia). This provides the basis for a global analysis. Second, there is a high degree of trust between RRLI and

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1 Individual evaluations, upon which this metasynthesis is based, were conducted between January 2022 and May 2022. The evaluations on the work of Basmeh & Zeitooneh, Refugiados Unidos, RAIC and YARID can be accessed at www.refugeeslead.org. Please reach out to the RRLI team at info@refugeeslead.org to request access to StARS' evaluation report.

the participating RLOs, born of their history of working together as founding members of the RRLI coalition. This trust provided the RLOs a safe space to receive the scrutiny and feedback inherent within external evaluations and this subsequent metasynthesis. The imperative of safety and trust for success within partnerships is articulated within Asylum Access's position paper, *Building Equitable Partnerships: Shifting Power in Forced Displacement*, found on the Asylum Access website.

While an examination of the five independent evaluations was used to address knowledge gaps on RLO impact, this research also aims to examine RLO impact more generally, prompting a second research question: ***To what extent can the observed impact trends be generalized across organizations or geographies?*** Through this second research question, this report contributes to the growing literature on what factors condition organizational impact, especially of RLOs.

This study was funded by the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative (RRLI), which was launched in 2020 to combat what its founding members identified as a systemic exclusion of refugees and refugee-led organizations (RLOs) in international funding streams.[2] Its four strategies are direct financing through its RLO-to-RLO Fund, support for RLOs through its Strengthening Program, advocacy to powerful institutions to promote refugee inclusion, and evidence generation on the role and impact of RLOs.[3] This research is one aspect of its evidence generation strategy and a recognition of the importance of evidence and analysis in advancing policy and practice relating to RLOs.

2. About the Evaluated Organizations

Between January 2022 and May of 2022, the following RLOs underwent an external impact evaluation: Basmeh & Zeitooneh in Iraq and Lebanon, Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Center (RAIC) in Indonesia, Refugiados Unidos in Colombia, Saint Andrew's

Refugee Services (StARS) in Egypt, and Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID) in Uganda.

Each of these organizations is refugee-led according to the definition provided by RRLI. RRLI defines RLO as "any formal or informal initiative/organization that is founded and run by people of forced displacement background and/or any formal or informal initiative/organization where people of forced displacement are in major leadership positions and able to influence the work of the organization."[4]

More information about each of the organizations, including their founding year, website, countries of operation, and organizational description can be found in Table 1.

3. About the Impact Evaluations

RRLI did not prescribe a particular methodology or select external evaluators for the evaluations. Instead, RRLI invited each of the RLOs to select an evaluator with local expertise, a track record of high-quality work products, and with the guidance of S.D. Betchel Foundation's 2018 *Hiring an External Evaluator* guide.[5] While a single evaluation methodology may have made the process of identifying trends across the reports easier and/or more methodologically sound, RRLI understands the imposition of international standards for evaluation to be inherently hegemonic (Dighe and Sarode 2019). Localizing the research design and implementation process ensured that the resulting products would utilize contextually appropriate methods and definitions of impact, and therefore be most useful to the organizations.

RRLI also did not require the impact evaluations to cover any specific program or programs. Rather, RRLI invited the RLOs to select a program or programs that would support their respective learning and understanding, while also contributing to a growing body of research regarding the role and impact of RLOs in the ecosystem

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2   The known issue of RLO exclusion from funding streams is articulated within the literature on the Grand Bargain (which has named the importance of localizing funding), and by organizations that identify as members of the movement for refugee leadership (which further contextualizes the localization of funding for the specific population of refugees). See Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2022 for recent breakdowns between local and international actors, and The Grand Bargain Independent assessment, which shows that the proportion of direct funding to local actors halved from 4% in 2020 to 2% in 2021.

3   See https://www.refugeeslead.org/what-we-do for more information about RRLI strategies.
4   The definition can be found at the RRLI website at https://www.refugeeslead.org/apply.
5   The guide can be found at: https://www.ncfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Hiring-an-External-Evaluator-Bechtel-2018.pdf

Table 1: Organization and External Evaluations Summary Table			
Organization name	*Organization Website*	*Countries of Operation*	*Organizational Description (Provided by the organizations)*
Basmeh & Zeitooneh (B&Z)	https://www.basmeh-zeitooneh.org/	Lebanon and Iraq	Basmeh & Zeitooneh is a refugee-led organization in Lebanon and Iraq reaching over 100,000 refugees per year with protection, livelihoods, education and peace-building programs. B&Z restores refugees' power by giving them the voice and the right to make decisions about their own lives. B&Z's holistic services are aimed at lifting up the entire family. If a mother visits one of their community centers looking for work, they offer her training in an embroidery workshop (for example), her baby can be cared for in their nursery, her middle child registers at their school, her oldest can receive vocational training and her husband can apply for a small business grant. B&Z was founded by four Syrian activists in 2012 to do what all community leaders do: put their hearts and heads into helping their fellow citizens.
Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Center (RAIC)	http://raicindonesia.org/	Indonesia	Mozhgan Moarefizadeh founded RAIC Indonesia to help refugees survive in an environment where refugees do not have rights. As a refugee from Iran, Mozhgan understands these challenges because she and her family have experienced them firsthand. RAIC provides a wide-range of services including legal aid that protects refugees against trafficking/smuggling, arrest for immigration infractions, and indefinite detention; eye and dental care; deep mental health support, enabling refugees to be active contributors in their communities; humanitarian aid (which includes the distribution of food and hygiene products), and private sponsorship, which helps refugees in Indonesia access a pathway to Canada.
Refugiados Unidos	https://www.refugiadosunidos.org/	Colombia	At Refugiados Unidos, Venezuelan families find solutions. Refugiados Unidos' General Manager, Lublanc Prieto, understands the barriers that her community faces and uses the power of the law and community to overcome them. In their first year, Refugiados Unidos has reached 1,400 people directly with humanitarian aid, legal support and community services designed to help families rebuild. Refugiados Unidos couples these direct services with engagement with the Colombian government to create a more permissive legal environment.
St. Andrew›s Refugee Services (StARS)	http://stars-egypt.org/	Egypt	StARS is a community fixture in the greater Cairo area, providing wraparound services to over 67,000 refugees annually. StARS responds to the needs of refugees holistically, providing immediate humanitarian support to stabilize their situation, but also focusing on mental and physical health, professional skills, legal rights, access to resettlement and education to achieve long term wellbeing. Their approach is particularly critical for the large numbers of unaccompanied children and youth who have recently been coming to Egypt.
Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID)	https://www.yarid.org/	Uganda	Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID) is a registered NGO based in Kampala, founded in 2007 by young Congolese refugees living in Uganda. YARID uses the strategic combination of vocational training, education, and protection services to help refugees integrate successfully and safely into Ugandan society. YARID also supports the broader RLO community through RELON (Refugee Led Organization Network), a network that advocates for refugees' access to education and health, among other priorities. Last year, YARID reached 5,485 people with key services and support, including by helping over 1,800 children to enroll in Ugandan schools.

of refugee responses. As a result, not all selected programs for evaluation were funded by RRLI.

Table 2 provides a contextual summary of the chosen evaluated programs and identifies the selected evaluators. Four of the five organizations chose an independent consultant or team of consultants. One, Basmeh & Zeitooneh, chose a university (American University in Beirut). Evaluators commonly relied on a combination of methodologies including Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and document review to evaluate programs. While the criteria to evaluate impact was not identical across the studies, in several cases evaluators looked at relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness. Some also considered cultural sensitivity, accessibility, and sustainability. All discussed "impact" without defining it; it can be observed that most of the evaluators considered impact as some combination of the aforementioned criteria, while also considering whether or not a program achieved its stated goals (to resettle, to gain legal status, to receive food or cash assistance, to earn a living, etc.).

In two cases (Refugiados Unidos, and RAIC) the organizations chose to holistically review their programs. In one case, YARID, the organization chose to review several of its programs. In two cases (Basmeh & Zeitooneh and StARS), the organizations chose to review a specific program. This may be because of differences in organizational size. Given the budget and timeline, it would have been difficult for StARS and Basmeh & Zeitooneh (who respectively reach 67,000 and 105,000 people annually through dozens of programs) to comprehensively evaluate the impact of their organizations given their larger programmatic reach and footprint.

4. Methodology

The two research questions were chosen in order to support RRLI in responding to inquiries from influential actors regarding the role and impact of RLOs. The first question, *What impact trends can be observed across five externally evaluated RLOs?*, seeks to take an in-depth look at a subset of RLOs and the roles they play in their communities. While this is useful on its own, RRLI is often asked to generalize the role and impact of RLOs beyond specific groups. The second question, *To what extent can observations be generalized across organizations or geographies?*, is therefore meant to consider the role and impact of RLOs beyond the five evaluated RLOs. RRLI views its investment in these two research questions as a piece of its evidence generation strategy.

As noted above, the five evaluative studies used different research methods in order to recognize the importance of localized research design and implementation, making them not readily comparable. However in order to push forward the discourse on refugee-led organizations, this study makes a good faith effort to identify trends across.

In order to identify trends, conceptual content analysis was used to find patterns across the written reports. Specifically, this paper used selective reduction to identify positive or negative concepts/themes in RLO impact. Initial themes were hypothesized (including accessibility, reach, and solutions) while others were flexibly added and explored as they emerged, with the intention of uncovering unanticipated insights about RLOs.

This paper did not rely on a specific definition of 'impact,' opting instead to consider impact broadly as any way in which RLOs have value, uniquely contribute or perform their work, or make a difference in people›s lives, sometimes in comparison to other entities. 'Impact trends' could be positive or negative, meaning, findings could trend toward or away from impact. Where questions arose regarding the content of the evaluations, the author clarified directly with the evaluated organizations. RRLI's monitoring and evaluation team also provided information and data. Trends were analyzed and presented as long as they were identified in at least four out of the five reports.

The evaluated organizations were not selected at random; together, they sit on the Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative coalition, and each is a pilot phase recipient of the RLO-to-RLO fund. These organizations were chosen because of their collective geographic presence (they operate in five different regions, allowing for a global analysis), and because they have a high degree of trust with RRLI — a trust which made it possible to undergo the inherent scrutiny of an external evaluation and this metasynthesis.

In order to answer the question of to what extent the observed impact trends can be generalized across organizations or geographies, this research relied on a literature review, data from the evaluated RLOs, and support from RRLI's monitoring and evaluation team to draw conclusions.

Table 2: External Evaluations Summary Table			
Org Name	*Evaluator*	*Evaluated Program Details*	*Methodology*
Basmeh & Zeitooneh (B&Z)	The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/)	*Program*: Promoting Socio-Economic Recovery (Shabake) *Location(s)*: Beirut and Mount Lebanon *Evaluation Time Period*: March 2021–March 2022 *Program Description*: This project is designed to promote the economic well being of both current business owners as well as women entrepreneurs. The two-piece project focuses on (1) cash and in-kind equipment support for current business owners to relaunch businesses after the Port Blast of 2020, and (2) support for 30 Syrian and Lebanese women to launch three dairy production businesses. This project supports B&Z's goals of economic recovery and sustainable livelihoods.	**Key Informant Interviews** with the B&Z team, external stakeholders, business owners and participants in the production businesses. Exact numbers are not reported in the evaluation. **2 Focus Group Discussions** were held with dairy production business participants. This was supplemented with a **desk review of project documents** and **gray and academic literature.** Sampling was targeted to get multiple perspectives.
Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Center (RAIC)	Realisa Masardi, lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Gadjah Mada	*Program*: Holistic evaluation of all programs. *Location(s)*: Jakarta and Cisarua, Indonesia *Evaluation Time Period*: 2017–Spring 2022. *Program Description(s)*: 1. *Basic Needs Program*: Delivers food and hygiene boxes on a monthly basis. 2. *Medical Program*: Supports community access to dental and eye care, and health care access for those with chronic health issues. 3. *Cope Mental Health Program*: Mulitpronged approach to mental health through community intervention and access to psychologists. 4. *Legal Aid and Advice Program*: Provides legal advice and makes referrals for both UNHCR Refugee Status Determination processes and cases related to domestic law. 5. *Solutions Program*: Facilitates resettlement via private sponsorship to Canada.	**Key Informant Interviews**: 12 with Directors, Program Managers, Staff and Volunteers; 7 with program users. **Online survey** reaching 91 respondents widely distributed across program types, nationalities and age ranges.

Refugiados Unidos	Jose Roberto Calcetero Gutier-rez, PhD. in Local Development, and Program Evalua-tor for International Projects	*Program*: Holistic evaluation of all programs *Location(s)*: Engativa, Bosa, and Usme in Bogota *Time period*: June 2021–June 2022 *Program description(s)*: 1. *Legal Empowerment*: Support to access legal status and work authorization. Includes use of strategic litigation and advocacy when necessary. 2. *Humanitarian Aid*: Provides emergency support for food, hygiene shelter and clothing needs; support for accessing health care 3. *Community Strengthening*: Services aimed at integration and inclusion, as identified by communities themselves. This program often includes support to access education, health and work.	**9 Focus Groups Discussions** with 84 par-ticipants, 95% women. This was supplemented with a desk review of Refugiados Unidos' program-matic materials.
St Andrew›s Refugee Ser-vices (StARS)	Emma Goldie, inde-pendent researcher and organizational evaluator	*Location(s)*: The Greater Cairo Metropolitan Area *Time period*: June 2020–June 2021. *Program*: COVID-19 Quick Impact Project: The StARS COVID-19 Quick Impact Project worked together with five other refugee-led orga-nizations to deliver food and health boxes, multi-purpose cash grants, and to make referrals to comprehensive support services (including legal aid and psychosocial support) as a way to respond to community needs during the COVID pandemic.	**Key Informant Interviews**: 81 with pro-gram users, 34 with other stakeholders including 10 with StARS staff, 4 with key partners and 2 funders. **7 Focus Group Discussions** with 81 participants. This was supplemented with **StARS monitoring and evaluation team and data**, and **a literature review**. Evaluator used OECD-DAC[1] evaluation criteria.
Young African Refugees for Integral Devel-opment (YARID)	Bisimwa Mulemangabo, Researcher and International Development Practitioner; and Bizimana David, Program Manage-ment Consultant at DEEBEEZ	*Program*: Selection of programs (education, women's empowerment and protection) *Location(s)*: Kayak 2 Refugee Settlement and Kampala *Time period*: Program description(s): 1. *Education Program:* The program has five components: the Bridge to Formal School program, English for Adults, Information Communications Technology, Soccer, and Job Readiness classes. 2. *Women Empowerment and Livelihood Program*: Supports women to take on income-gen-erating projects including Tailoring, Business Management, and Arts and Crafts Projects. 3. *Protection program*: Supports community members with emergency financial assistance and medical care, referrals for case management for victims of domestic violence, and home vis-its for people with disabilities, seniors and those bedridden.	**Key Informant Interviews**: 35 with YARID staff and 7 with external stakeholders. **3 Focus Group Discussions** with partic-ipants from tailoring training, arts and craft learners, and English for Adults learners. This was supplemented with a **document review, and classroom visitations at 6 out of 8 school sites.**

1 Standard Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC) reviews individually the Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability of a program or project. For more information on this methodology, visit the OECD website at https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm.

5. Summary of Findings

This study considered two key research questions: *What impact trends can be observed across five externally evaluated refugee-led organizations (RLOs)? To what extent can observations be generalized across organizations or geographies?*

In response to the first question, a conceptual content analysis of five external impact evaluations was undertaken. Through the analysis, six trends were identified:

1. **RLO services are accessible to community members, including those who typically face significant access challenges.** Across all five evaluations, accessibility is upheld as a key element of RLO programming, and often presented as an advantage over international organizations. The evaluated RLOs achieve accessibility through neighborhood-level service delivery methods, intentional targeting of specific populations, and interpretation and language programming. In contrast to many service providers, COVID-19 has largely increased the accessibility of RLO programming.

2. **RLOs demonstrate high community connectedness, responsiveness, availability, and cultural awareness, characteristics which promote respect and trust, and facilitate programming seen as responsive to needs by community members.** Four of the five evaluations highlighted in some fashion that the RLOs are highly connected to, available to, and culturally in tune with the communities they work with, promoting responsive programming, as well as respect, trust and the feeling of safety.

3. **RLO services tend to be holistic and mutually reinforcing in order to respond to community needs.** Each of the five organizations provide holistic and mutually-reinforcing services and case management. Each organization specializes in at least seven programmatic areas. In many cases, RLOs add on services year-over-year that emerge as critical but unavailable to community members.

4. **RLO services are providing immediate life-saving support and access to life changing solutions alike.** Four of the five organizations were found to have made a significant difference within their communities, including by helping them access key services (mental health care, health care and education), long-term solutions (legal services and resettlement), protection, and receive important humanitarian support (cash, food and hygiene box deliveries).

5. **Resource constraints mean the development of adequate compensation packages, policies and infrastructure is constrained, emergency community needs are not met, and the full potential of RLOs is limited.** In all cases, evaluators note that funding is a crucial need to address organizational capacity gaps and grow impact.

6. **RLOs have demonstrated capacity to navigate and often overcome legal, political and economic challenges.** All five organizations were found to overcome complex barriers. Some examples include helping people access income in the face of struggling economies, supporting people to access their human rights despite restrictive laws, and running organizations despite discrimination.

Due to the limited sample size of this analysis, it is difficult to generalize these findings to other RLOs simply because they are also refugee-led. However, an exploration of commonalities between the five evaluated organizations identified several areas where their impact was found to have been enabled due to common inputs. Those inputs are:

1. **International partnerships, including with donors.** All five of the evaluated organizations have regular or semiregular engagement with international actors including UNHCR, iNGOs, donors and foreign governments as a means to promote their organizations, advocate for policy changes and solicit funding.

2. **Access to flexible funding.** All five of the organizations have access to at least some flexible funding, which has supported their ability to do

things like move from volunteer-run to staff-run, pay for rent and utilities, build systems and policies, and initiate crucial programs that did not fit into available project funding.

3. **Embeddedness within the communities they work with.** As articulated within impact trends one and two, all five of the organizations operate in close proximity to the communities they serve, in many cases through community centers and other central localities.

4. **Significant leadership by people with lived experience of forced displacement.** All of the organizations are composed of at least 50% people of forced displacement. All of the top executives are people of forced displacement. The fact that the majority of staff are members of the community they work with significantly enhances their understanding of the approaches that would have the greatest impact.

The evidence would suggest that enabling and uplifting more organizations to access or achieve all four of these common inputs may lead to greater impacts for refugee communities. However, in practice, this may not be easy. RLOs often have difficulty accessing the first two inputs (international partnerships and flexible funding) due to systemic inequities manifesting as access barriers. Meanwhile, international institutions (namely iNGOs and UN agencies) often do not have (and rarely seek to gain) the other two inputs (embeddedness within the communities they work with and significant leadership of people of forced displacement on their staff).

That said, it is important to note that in contrast to claims found in available literature, this research does not support hypotheses that RLOs with specific "capacities" (the often discussed organizational and operational elements viewed as necessary for success) are more impactful than others, or that those operating in specific environments (e.g. those hardest to reach) are more relevant than those operating in any other environment. These sentiments may be born of the international community's widespread underestimation of the skills and strengths of local responders including RLOs.

On the basis of these findings, the research concludes by identifying two areas for future focus of research,

policy and practice: How might the humanitarian sector at large support RLOs to access greater flexible funding and forge equitable partnerships with international institutions? And, how might the international community reflect on how it ensures refugee responses are community embedded and driven by those with lived experience of forced displacement? Together, answers to these questions can arguably help drive forward improved responses for refugees.

6. Findings

What impact trends can be observed across the five impact evaluations?

Six impact trends were identified across the evaluation studies. They are:

1. Services are highly accessible to community members, including those with significant access challenges.

2. RLOs demonstrate high community connectedness, responsiveness, availability, and cultural awareness, characteristics which promote respect and trust, and facilitate programming deemed valuable by community members.

3. Services provided tend to be holistic and mutually reinforcing in order to respond to community needs.

4. Services are providing immediate life-saving support and access to life changing solutions alike.

5. Resource constraints mean the development of adequate compensation packages, policies and infrastructure is stymied, emergency community needs are not met, and transformative impact is unnecessarily limited.

6. RLOs navigate and often overcome legal, political and economic challenges.

Across all five evaluations, accessibility is upheld as a key element of RLO programming, and often presented as a comparative advantage. Evidenced by program user feedback, the RLOs evaluated are shown to use neighborhood-level service delivery methods, intentional targeting of specific populations, and interpretation and language programming to ensure refugee communities, especially those with intersecting access challenges, or who may be ineligible for support from other service providers, can access benefit from RLO programs. Of note, and in contrast to many service providers, COVID-19 appears to have increased the accessibility of RLO programming.

Neighborhood Service-Delivery Models

Within StARS' COVID Quick Impact project, the goal of accessibility was woven into the fabric of the project. The project aimed to provide widespread access to food and cash support, and referrals to other services and displacement communities across the Greater Cairo Area. By distributing services through five neighborhood-level RLOs (rather than solely through their own sites in downtown Cairo), a greater diversity of program users accessed StARS services.

This neighborhood service-delivery model increased the diversity of nationalities who accessed services. As Chart 1 shows, StARS' reach (shown in the pink bars) was highest with Sudanese, Eritrean, South Sudanese and Ethiopian populations. Through their partners (in the blue bars), other nationalities were reached, especially Syrian and Yemeni communities – populations who were previously not accessing StARS services.

The neighborhood-level service delivery model also ensured those with significant and presumably intersectional accessibility issues – arguably those most in need of the support – would benefit from the program. Among the program users, 41% had a chronic disease, 38% were single mothers, 14% had a disability, 30% were survivors of torture, 23% were survivors of gender-based violence, and 2% were victims of trafficking.

Through their neighborhood-level service delivery model, StARS helped program users avoid costly travel to central Cairo, where most services and support can

be found. For those with the greatest accessibility challenges, that travel may be impossible. That proximity also created a feeling of safety: 89% of surveyed program users reported "feeling safe" when traveling to their most relevant site, presumably due to traveling without proper documentation, and/or risks of contracting COVID-19 (Goldie 2022, 16).

A form of neighborhood-level mode of service delivery is also used by YARID (whose schools are either attached to formal primary schools or are operating in other community centers) (David and Mulemangabo 2011, 22), Basmeh & Zeitooneh (who delivers many of its programs through community centers), and by Refugiados Unidos (Calcetero Gutierrez 2022, 3), who uses other established community facilities to deliver their services to community members.

Intentional targeting of those with intersectional access challenges:

Across the evaluations, the RLOs are found to specifically target those who they know need the support, and often can't get it elsewhere. For example:

- StARS' COVID-19 Quick Impact Project used flexible, needs-based criteria (rather than criteria based on formal recognition as a refugee) to determine who could access support. Evaluation informants confirmed this is rare in Cairo, and that other service providers often require UNHCR-issued legal status in order to qualify for support (Goldie 2022, 18).

- Refugiados Unidos focuses on locating and supporting female refugees with intersectional access challenges, including children and senior populations, those that identify as LGBTQ+, and females with disabilities, health conditions, or from marginalized ethnic or racial groups (Indigenous and Black) (Cacetero Gutierrez 2022, 5).

- Within RAIC's highly impactful private sponsorship program (which helped 19 people last year apply and fund their applications to move from Indonesia, where they do not have legal status, to Canada, where they can access a full spectrum of rights), they target those who will never have a chance of resettlement through other channels,

including vulnerable and single men, and people of nationalities summarily rejected within the UNHCR Refugee Status Determination processes (Masardi 2022, 52).

- YARID's Bridge to Formal School program intentionally finds and supports children who have never been in or are entirely out of school by going into the camp "zones" (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 21). Often the students entering YARID's program cannot read, write or count at the time of enrollment.

- Finally, within Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Shabake project, which aims to support economic recovery even in a failing economy, the vast majority of participants in the dairy product production component were low-income, women heads-of-household who were not receiving support from any other organization (IFI 2022, 10).

Language and accessibility

Three of the evaluations note RLO usage of interpretation and translation, and/or language acquisition programming as a means to promote service accessibility. RAIC uses interpreters for nearly all of their services, including legal services, medical programs, the solutions program and mental health services. One example from RAIC highlights the imperative of interpreter use: a woman was misdiagnosed by an Indonesian doctor because there was no interpretation during consultations. RAIC returned her to the hospital with an advocate and interpreter, who properly diagnosed a dangerous cyst (Masardi 2022, 29). RAIC has information about its mental health program online in English, Farsi, Arabic and Somali, and posted highly desirable information about private sponsorship on YouTube in both English and Farsi. That video had been viewed over 25,000 times at the time of evaluation (Masardi 2022, 52).

In the case of Cairo, the StARS' evaluator also found that service access is hindered by language barriers; in particular, language is noted as a significant barrier when trying to access health care and vaccinations. The

Nationalities served by COVID-19 Quick Impact Project: Phase 1 and Phase 2
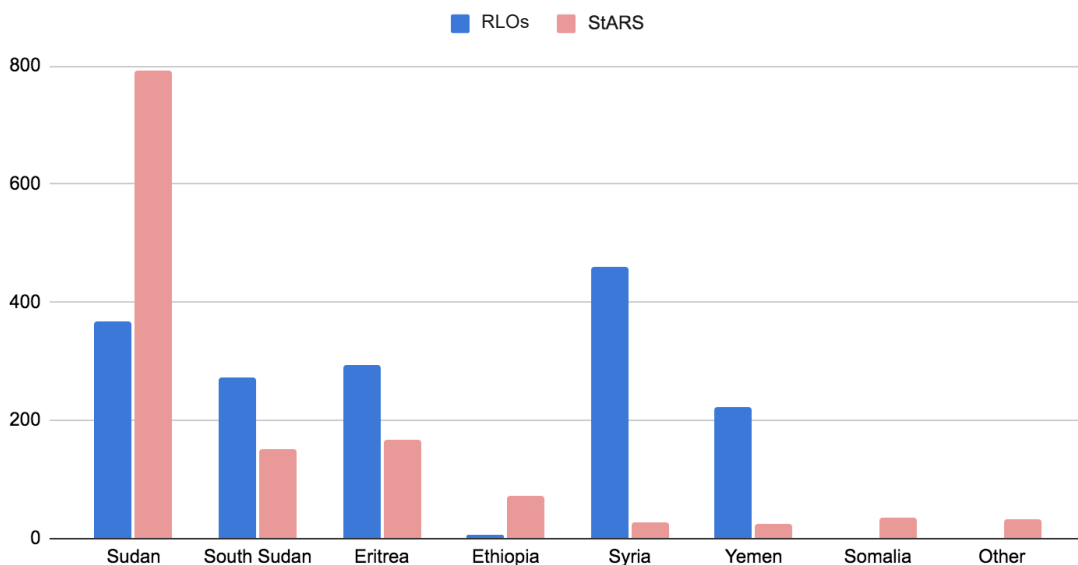

Chart 1: *This chart demonstrates how collaboration with neighborhood-level RLOs (CBOs) increased StARS' reach to specific populations, especially Syrian and Yemeni people of forced displacement (Goldie 2022, 18).*

COVID-19 Quick Impact project, in contrast, ran language-relevant campaigns to get people vaccinated, and provided support with filling in the registration forms in the right language (Goldie 2022, 25).

YARID has a well attended English for Adults (EFA) program which focuses on helping people gain the language skills they need to access services from other providers (in addition to other benefits like increasing the likelihood of finding work) (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 19). This case study presents the importance of language acquisition as a form of promoting access to services:

> "A 75 year old refugee attended YARID EFA training at Lubaga Centre. He graduated and learnt how to speak English. One day he went to look for food during Covid 19 from an organization that was providing food support to the community during lockdown. He was requested to return the day after at 9.00am by the organization. The man was able to understand the message in English and went back as instructed and got his share. This would not have been possible if he had no English language communication ability" (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 20).

YARID's Bridge to Formal school program, a multifaceted program which helps children enroll in formal Ugandan schools, recognizes language acquisition as a crucial prerequisite to enrollment. While Ugandan schools teach in English, most of YARID's target population speak Kinyabwisha and Kiswahili at home. Without learning sufficient English prior to enrollment, learning outcomes would be stymied. Because of this, YARID's programming teaches a catch-up curriculum first in known languages, then known languages coupled with English, and then transitions fully to English in order to both prepare students academically and linguistically to join the Ugandan school system. In 2021 alone, the program successfully enrolled 1,419 students into Ugandan schools (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 23).

Multi-layered communication strategies

All of the evaluations mentioned the use of multi-layers communications strategies including communications campaigns, WhatsApp, social media and/or community organizers/liaisons/volunteers as a way to promote awareness about services and options. Some have specialized communication channels, like YARID, whose mobilizers create two-way information channels by attending community meetings and bringing information back to YARID offices to inform its next steps (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 39).

Accessibility during COVID-19

In most cases, RLO accessibility appears to have increased during COVID. In contrast (and as pointed out in the StARS and RAIC evaluations), many international service providers shut their doors or limited service provision during COVID (Goldie 2022, 4; Masardi 2022, 46), exacerbating a challenging moment for refugees in these locations.

For example, YARID positioned their tailoring students to make masks for UNHCR at a unit cost of 1,000 UGX. 23 people earned approximately 1 million UGX (~262 USD) during this time period – crucial income used to pay rent, food and meet other basic needs during a time when the economy was halted due to lockdowns (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 33). YARID also adapted their Bridge to Formal School Program (usually run at schools at community centers) to go door-to-door, following quickly built Standard Operating Procedures where teachers reached 5–8 learners per day. After three months, YARID resumed education at its school sites (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 23).

RAIC continued to hold their dental clinics during COVID-19 by using rapid tests to promote safety (Masardi 2022, 27). RAIC paused its eye clinics, however, due to its history of drawing crowds (Masardi 2022, 23).

StARS' COVID-19 Quick Impact project was built to respond to the far-reaching negative impacts of COVID-19. Their program users expressed that StARS and their RLO partners were the "first and only place" for some groups to access support during COVID-19, and that this support was provided at a time "when UNHCR was not accessible and other services were closed" (Goldie 2022, 17). As one program user further shared:

> "Last year, I had a huge problem with my housing and paying my rent. I tried to approach many organizations, but no one responded to me or helped me. When I approached the CBO [RLO], someone helped me immediately, and they gave me a cash grant for my rent. Also, they went with me to the place I rented and supported me in talking to the landlord. They were very effective and efficient and helped me stay in my house; otherwise, I could have been homeless'–RLO service user" (Goldie 2022, 17).

Four of the five evaluations highlighted in some fashion that the RLOs are highly connected to, available to, and culturally in tune with the communities they work with, promoting responsive programming, as well as respect, trust and safety. These attributes are often tied to the success of the program, and/or the legitimacy of the program in the eyes of program users.

Community Connectedness, Availability and Responsiveness

The evaluator found that Basmeh & Zeitooneh had strong connections with the communities they worked with for the Shabake project, a connection born of B&Z's rapid response to the Beirut Port Blast. The Basmeh & Zeitooneh evaluation found that they were among the first organizations on the ground following the Beirut Port Blast of 2020 that killed over 200 and devastated local businesses and housing units. In those immediate days and weeks, B&Z "implemented rehabilitation projects, and provided protection services and relief such as food baskets, and small in-kind cash grants" (IFI 2022, 11). Within this effort, they also conducted an impact report on the 1,600 businesses within a five km-radius of the blast site. This study became the foundation for the Shabake project, which has attempted to rapidly respond to the needs of businesses and communities profiled within that study, with an emphasis on women-owned businesses and female entrepreneurs.

According to the evaluation, B&Z's presence in the community, and staff dedication created an overall sense of "credibility and honesty," and a feeling of being respected among those who participated in the Shabake project (IFI 18). B&Z held training as early as 7am and as late as 7pm to accommodate participants, used their own cars to transport those who could not afford public transportation, and called on personal networks to speed up processes, such as identifying locations for the dairy production businesses. Staff also delivered crucial equipment during the holidays in order to ensure the

business owners would be prepared for high-season (IFI 2022, 17).

Their connectedness – and the resulting communication flows – may have also supported B&Z to quickly respond to project concerns. Within the evaluation, some focus group participants expressed concern about their ongoing participation due to childcare responsibilities, safety concerns, and odd working hours (imposed by government restrictions on use of electricity during the day); in some cases this led to people dropping out of the project (IFI 2022, 20). At the time of writing, just 3 months after receiving their report in which some of these concerns were documented, Basmeh & Zeitooneh have already added childcare (in order that women with young children may bring them onsite), protection services (promoting safety when onsite or in transport), and solar panels (which overcome restrictions on day-time energy use) to the project as a way to address the concerns of women's participation.

The evaluated Quick Impact Project from StARS is another example of building a program in response to emergent community needs. At the outset of the pandemic, UNHCR closed for six months, leaving a backlog of tens of thousands of unregistered people and 60,000 people with expired UN-issued documentation. UNHCR's winterization program (which is designed to help people prepare to cope for the upcoming winter) reached only 55% of its intended targets. Though UNHCR established a hotline to address service interruptions, many reported it being hard to get through on these lines; many others had their phone lines cut off due to expired documentation (Goldie 2022, 4). In response, StARS established and rolled out the far-reaching COVID-19 Quick Impact Project alongside partners, overcoming the accessibility challenges of other actors to reach 2,985 families (10,808 individuals) with 2,004 multipurpose cash grants for food and rent and 1,785 food and hygiene boxes (Goldie 2022, 15).

The success of this project is determined to be caused by many things; two of those factors were community connectedness and responsiveness. Among other comments that reflect the sentiment, focus group participants within StARS' evaluation expressed that being at the local RLO felt "like home" and the services they received from the RLO made one feel "less like a victim." A staff person from one of StARS' partner RLOs discussed what underpins this connectedness: «We are refugees. We feel what

they feel. We are from the community. We are the community» (Goldie 2022, 12). The staff person appears to be noting that staff who have experienced forced displacement themselves have an intrinsic understanding of community needs and preferences.

The evaluator for StARS also found a connection between program user satisfaction (94%) and the timeliness and responsiveness of staff. Informants shared with the evaluator that staff "followed up when they said they would, kept them updated through calls and text messages, and provided direct assistance within an appropriate time frame" (Goldie 2022, 26).

YARID's Bridge to Formal Schools evaluation also shows a strong connection between community connectedness and programmatic outcomes. The mentors on staff are from the community, and they do more than teach. They visit home learners, report physical illness and mental health struggles to the relevant YARID protection team colleagues, and personally promote attendance. Focus group participants noted the "uniqueness of the model" because YARID's staff "get on the same level" with the students and use more practical and less theoretical models to reach kids where they are at (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 24).

More generally, an interviewee within the YARID evaluation also highlighted their availability, sharing that YARID does not require appointments, and that their doors are always open. One staff person highlighted this availability in comparison to many of the other larger organizations, who are harder to reach (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 40).

Finally, within a survey conducted by RAIC's evaluator on their medical program (which helps refugees access eye care, dental care and/or emergency health support), respondents described RAIC's staff as "friendly and helpful." The evaluator explains this sentiment by articulating RAIC's embeddedness within the community, as the organizers and staff are also from members of the refugee community (Masardi 2022, 29).

Cultural Awareness

In two cases, evaluators draw connections between cultural competency and successful programming. Within the design of the Shabake project, Basmeh & Zeitooneh noted that women carry the burden of food security for their families and communities, so by identifying an entrepreneurial endeavor thematically tied to food

security (dairy production), they created a program that was considered a natural fit by program users. Focus group participants confirmed the cultural appropriateness of this project (IFI 2022, 13).

RAIC's evaluation of its basic needs program also highlighted cultural awareness. In contrast to standard modes of food distribution, RAIC builds food and hygiene packages that are customized for family, culture and gender. One focus group participant explains:

> *"The package from RAIC is always really nice and in good quality. But other organization didn't care. For example, they gave a pair of sandals for you. They didn't care whether you could wear it or not, whether it fits for you or not. Some food materials, they gave ingredients like Chinese food. Afghan people do not use it and they don't know how to use it. It is like that they don't throw it, so they give it to refugees. RAIC is not like that. They gave what we use and important for us"* (Masardi 2022, 20).

RAIC's mental health program, COPE, was also highlighted within the evaluation as particularly culturally aware and gender sensitive. They achieve this sensitivity by separating men and women who may be more willing to discuss psychological struggles openly; this also leaves more room to uncover and address domestic violence (Masardi 2022, 40).

The evaluation of Refugiados Unidos did not make reference to availability, connectedness or cultural competence. However, this should not signal a lack of programmatic success or legitimacy; it is more likely these factors were not considered during the evaluation. The vast majority of those surveyed (100% of those who participated in their community programming, 83% of those who participated in the legal assistance program) expressed high satisfaction (Calcetero Gutierrez 2022; 7, 11).

TREND 3: SERVICES PROVIDED TEND TO BE HOLISTIC AND MUTUALLY REINFORCING IN ORDER TO RESPOND TO COMMUNITY NEEDS.

Each of the five organizations provide holistic and mutually-reinforcing services in order to more fully respond to community needs. Although not all services were evaluated, each evaluation highlighted the breath of options available to community members. In some cases,

additional information was collected from the evaluated organizations in order to develop this services chart.

In some of the evaluations, it was clear that services reinforce one another, filling emerging gaps as they are discovered with crucial, additional services. In other cases, evaluations highlighted where engagement with program users in a single case provided the RLO with an opportunity to share opportunities for other services. In this way, the RLOs appear to be creating comprehensive safety net programs through case management. In several cases, this approach was upheld as novel and in contrast to other places where services are piecemeal or a la carte, creating accessibility issues.

For example, within YARID's Bridge to Formal Schools program, the evaluation found that one of the major reasons children can't stay in school following their integration into the Ugandan school system is school fees (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 26). Among other reasons, this is why YARID also has a set of livelihoods and economic empowerment programs designed to support parents' income generation; with income generation, parents can afford to keep their children in school.

RAIC's evaluation also draws connections between programs. The evaluation shares that Refugee Status Determinations processes in Indonesia are significantly delayed, and there is often very little that RAIC (through its legal aid program) or its partner organizations can do to expedite UNHCR's decisions. In practice, this means that many people cannot access resettlement, that mental wellbeing has deteriorated within the community, and that suicide rates are high. In response, RAIC both began a mental health program (COPE) that includes "psychological first aid" as a method to respond to people in crisis, and a private sponsorship program that helps refugees access a long-term solution in Canada (Masardi 2022; 40, 46, 52).

The evaluation of Refugiados Unidos also helps to demonstrate the interconnectedness of their programs. Refugiados Unidos humanitarian action program is focused on covering basic needs where people are most vulnerable and without legal protection or opportunity. In order to move beyond this state, RU also provides robust wraparound legal services designed to support access to legal status and rights and support for entrepreneurs and other workers as they engage with the economy.

Within StARS' evaluation, the evaluator notes that while the COVID-19 Quick Impact project focused on

Strategies	Sustained or enhanced access to services (education, health care, mental health)	Community Organizing and Community Action	Humanitarian Aid (Food, hygiene and cash assistance)	Livelihoods and economic wellbeing	Delivering Legal Services, KYOs and/or other "protection" programs	Facilitating Resettlement / Private Sponsorship	Advocating/litigating for enhanced national governance frameworks	Supporting other RLOs through programming and network management
RAIC	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔
Basmeh & Zeitooneh	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔
StARS	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Refugiados Unidos	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔
YARID	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔

Chart 2: Services provided by evaluated RLOs

the delivery of direct assistance (including food and health boxes) and multi-purpose grants, its rollout also provided an opportunity to holistically support community members. The refugee-led community-based partners conducted holistic needs assessments that resulted in referrals to other services including specialized legal support, psychological services and economic empowerment. The evaluation found that the holistic nature of these services, and the strength of the referral pathways, upheld core humanitarian standards (Goldie 2022, 1).

TREND 4: SERVICES PROVIDE IMMEDIATE LIFE-SAVING SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO LIFE CHANGING SOLUTIONS ALIKE.

Evaluators found that 4 of the 5 organizations[6] were found to have made a profound difference within their communities, including by helping them access key services (mental health care, health care and education), gain long-term solutions (legal services and resettlement), access protection, and receive important humanitarian support (cash, food and hygiene box deliveries). The following is not exhaustive, but rather a sample of the types of life improvements highlighted across the external evaluations.

As previously noted, StARS' COVID-19 Quick Impact program (1 year duration between June 2020 and June 2021), reached high numbers of people with key services. 94% expressed satisfaction. The evaluation attempts to consider data from other rapid response humanitarian aid distribution projects and draws a soft conclusion that this project was significantly more cost efficient than alternatives; they also note that the data is difficult to compare (Goldie 2022, 32).

The evaluator also found that the impacts of the project stretched beyond weathering the pandemic, as their model and methods also increased social and community cohesion through referral services and community centers, and supported the overall development, financial stability, staff motivations and sustainability of StARS' community-based RLO partners. As one partner who was interviewed cites:

"I have seen the CBOs (RLOs) band together in ways I didn't notice when I first arrived in Cairo a few years ago. Especially over the last year, I have seen so much unity and a genuine drive to want to work together and support each other" (Goldie 2022, 36).

At Refugiados Unidos, 97% of interviewed program users stated that Refugiados Unidos positively influenced their pursuit of legal status; 73% said that RU made a lawyer available to them to accompany them during their legal process. All who had access to a lawyer said that the resulting legal status had a positive impact on their lives and the lives of their family, given that it allowed them to access their rights to stay, work and access health care (Calcetero Gutierrez 2022, 7). Satisfaction across programs ranged from 83% to 100% depending on the program (Calcetero Gutierrez 2022; 7, 11).

Between 2020 and 2022, YARID supported the enrollment of 3,260 children into Ugandan schools through the Bridge to Formal School program. In most cases, the evaluation found that the children who attended would not have otherwise had a way to access education. YARID also reached 500 adults with English classes, graduated 38 from its tailoring program; the evaluation finds that many of the graduates of YARID's tailoring training program have successfully started businesses (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 33). YARID also prepared 117 people to train their communities in Information Communications Technology – a set of skills that supports employability and entrepreneurship. YARID did all of this (and beyond) on less than 450,000 USD annually, suggesting a cost-efficient delivery of services.

The RAIC evaluation found four of its programs (Medical, COPE, Legal Aid, and Solutions) very impactful, and its fifth program, basic needs, impactful.[7] Of note, RAIC's mental health program and private sponsorship programs standout as highly transformative. RAIC started COPE in 2020 in order to respond to a growing mental health crisis amongst the refugee community. RAIC has been working with 10 refugees from Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan to run two group therapy sessions. Sessions are held online weekly for 22 weeks, for two hours per session. The goal of this is first to support participants in

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6   Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Shabake project is still in its nascent stages, and could not be analyzed for operating for or against this trend at the time of analysis.

7   The distinction between "impactful" and "very impactful" appears to be derivative of program user feedback. Regarding the basic needs program, the evaluator notes that more people wished for more frequent distribution of food and hygiene box distribution; a frequency limited by available funding.

their own mental health journeys, and then to prepare them as community wellness facilitators. In the summer of 2022 the training ended and the next batch will begin soon. At the time of writing the report, RAIC had already received 56 applications from people desiring access to the program.

Though a pilot, one participant called the project "life-saving." Another stated:

> "After joining the program, I started building trust to other people, to be able to share my pain to others. I mean like scars, sorrow, and [the facilitator] suggested that I should give myself some time. I should start loving myself. COPE group has given me opportunity to find myself. Today I know that it's only me who matters. If I am not okay, I cannot help anyone. If I am okay, at least, I can help one person. I should be the first I care" (female participant, 25-year-old, interview on March 4th, 2022)" (Mausadi 2022, 38).

The private sponsorship program has raised and allocated 158,000 USD to sponsor 19 refugees to apply for private sponsorship to Canada. RAIC is managing this process, coordinating with partners in Indonesia and Canada to either connect refugees to sponsors, prepare applications for and/or financially sponsor the applications. In Indonesia, where resettlement is very difficult to access, RAIC's Private Sponsorship program is fundamentally changing lives. One program user explains:

> "It has been a totally a new life, and it's a new hope for us [their family]. Being refugee are so mentally tiring in Indonesia. Having that [resettlement] hope is reborn for me." (Male program user, 26 year old, interview on April 19th, 2022) (Masaudi 2022, 59).

Finally, RAIC distributes 327 food packages and 100 hygiene packages every month over the last year. Half of the programs users interviewed found the packages extremely helpful and a further 25% found them "a little helpful." Similarly, 80% of those interviewed regarding the medical program (eye care, dental care and emergency care) found the program highly impactful.

The evaluator for Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Shabake project notes that it is still in its nascent stages, and cannot yet be evaluated for impact. Nevertheless, the evaluator finds that the project is highly responsive to the current political and economic context, and is achieving interim benchmark goals. For example, regarding the women's dairy farming project component, equipment has been procured, a milk supplier has been identified, and production trials have produced good quality milk-based products (IFI 15). Furthermore, 40 business owners received training, networking opportunities, and significant in-kind support. The evaluator notes that the economic crisis in Lebanon (characterized as a combination of inflation, limited sales and electricity/generator issues) has limited the impact of this component of the project (IFI 2022, 17).

The evaluator found that the Shabake project promoted social cohesion and harmony between the Syrian and Lebanese participants, to have alleviated some financial and psychological burden on the business owners who received cash support, and to have promoted the sharing of ideas and solutions amongst business owners (IFI 2022, 26). Those who participated in the trainings for dairy farming, and business owners who received training and/or one-on-one coaching expressed satisfaction with the services they received (IFI 2022, 29).

Two evaluations – those for StARS and YARID – remarked that the hiring of community members is also a form of community impact. Within the COVID-19 Quick Impact project, StARS supported hiring within its five RLO partners. Coupled with the fact that StARS has over 400 staff and volunteers who have displacement backgrounds, their contribution to the workforce is significant. Similarly, YARID has hired more than 90 community members (most as teachers, mentors and teaching assistants).

TREND 5: RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS MEAN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADEQUATE COMPENSATION PACKAGES, POLICIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE IS STYMIED, EMERGENCY COMMUNITY NEEDS ARE NOT MET, AND TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT IS UNNECESSARILY LIMITED.

The greatest challenge and limitation found across the studies was funding gaps.

Four of the six key recommendations made by YARID's evaluator were related to resource mobilization, salary improvements and infrastructure investments that would enhance or grow impact. In some cases, this was based on the demonstrated impact of the project. For example, the evaluator recommends that YARID expand the Bridge to Formal Schools program to additional

settlements (Rwamwanja and Nakivale) due to the transformative and demonstrable impact of the project. In other cases the evaluator notes where resource constraints have limited impact. For example, funding gaps mean that children must learn in environments that lack basic accommodations and teacher compensation packages need to be increased in order to combat inflation.

Similarly, the evaluator of RAIC found that sustainability of the highly impactful private sponsorship program was at risk given that they did not have funding for the project beyond its first year. The evaluator also notes that the program user satisfaction is low for those who only receive food boxes intermittently as opposed to on a monthly basis – an issue born of resource constraints. Finally, the medical and dental program has limited capacity to meet community needs, at times only supporting 1-2 people per month. The evaluator recommended that RAIC build a robust fundraising plan with partner organizations in order to expand all these areas of work (Masardi 2022; 29, 61, 68).

StARs' evaluator mentions funding as a primary need of the RLO partners who supported the rollout of the COVID-19 Quick Impact project. The evaluator explains that while the organizations demonstrated capacity and skill to deliver "high efficient, reliable and accountable services to meet humanitarian standards," they also needed the financing to develop the systems and policies necessary to access international funding and partnerships, and therefore, to continue with their impactful work (Goldie 2022, 40).

Within Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Shabake project, the evaluator recommends a budget increase in order to secure the technical experts and/or procurement officers dedicated to managing equipment and other items necessary for program success, to manage donor compliance requirements, and to deal with licensing and certification with Lebanese government officials (IFI 2022, 23). While Basmeh & Zeitooneh's project is highly relevant to the current context, income generation with a stagnating economy is complex, and in-house technical expertise would assist in navigating economic realities as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The evaluator also makes note that the project may be better executed under the leadership of women, rather than the male team leaders. One informant from the project mentioned that despite multiple attempts to hire a female leader for the project, Basmeh & Zeitooneh's

salary scales couldn't compete with international NGO salaries, limiting a qualified pool of candidates for the role. Similarly, the evaluator notes the importance of securing funding for daycare, protection services and transportation allowances in order to promote participation (IFI 2022, 13).

Finally, Refugiados Unidos' evaluator notes that additional funding is important in order to expand legal and community services beyond their current locations. The evaluator also notes that given the extent of the humanitarian need, Refugiados Unidos should seek to partner with international organizations with greater resources in order to grow the scope of the program. Within the evaluation, program users primarily expressed dissatisfaction when they were unable to access an RU program – an issue born of resource constraints (Calcetero Gutierrez 2022, 8).

In several cases, evaluators named that policies need to be enhanced or reviewed. Within the case of RU and RAIC, evaluators identify places where Standard Operating Procedures or strategic or annual plans need to be developed. Similarly, StARS' evaluator identified that their RLO partners also needed their policies and structures to be enhanced or reviewed. Despite these policy gaps, the evaluators in each case found the program or programs each runs to be impactful.

TREND 6: RLOS NAVIGATE AND OFTEN OVERCOME LEGAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC OR OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN ORDER TO PROMOTE IMPACT.

Each of the five organizations' evaluations noted the RLO's ability to respond to, and sometimes overcome, legal, political and economic challenges. This positions the RLOs not just as service providers but also as savvy advocates and analysts who can maneuver politics and economic downturns.

For example, Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Shabake project has been developed and implemented amidst a severe financial crisis, during which local currency has lost nearly 90% of its value, and unemployment and inflation have skyrocketed. Their evaluator notes that the multidimensional poverty rate doubled from 42% to 82% between 2019 and 2021. These conditions were only amplified by the explosion at the Port of Beirut occuring on August 4,

2020, which killed 200, injured thousands, and destroyed the homes of over 300,000 people.[8]

Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Shabake project was arguably unlikely to succeed in this environment, given that its intention is to promote sustainable livelihoods and economic recovery. Indeed, environmental factors outside B&Z's control challenged its progress, including by increasing cost of milk for dairy product production, difficulty in finding suppliers when many production sites closed, limiting government-issued rules and stipulations with electricity, generator use, and the availability of fuel, the inaccessibility of public officials who were on strike or not going to work due to transportation issues which delayed death certification and licensing, and beyond (IFI 2022, 17). Participation was further challenged due to security concerns, and the lack of available onsite childcare.

Despite these challenges, the Shabake project has continued. The evaluator credits B&Z's resilience and adaptability to its "years of experience working on similar livelihoods projects," the staff's experience with the emergency response after the Beirut Port Blast, familiarity with the localities, and established connections to the project's survival. The team adjusted training times to meet guidelines for generator use, created an informal partnership with a large milk supplier for training purposes, purchased manual equipment to overcome fuel shortages, adjusted selection criteria to address participation challenges, and enhanced training methodology (IFI 2022, 18).

In a follow-up interview with Basmeh & Zeitooneh, since the evaluation, they've further navigated the challenging environment by offering onsite childcare, protection services for participants, and by securing the funding for solar panels in order to combat ongoing complexities with fuel shortages, and regulations on electricity and generator use.

Refugiados Unidos, Basmeh & Zeitooneh, and RAIC all faced challenges with discrimination as refugee-led organizations, and illuminated how each addresses and/or overcomes it. RAIC experiences challenges with locating key Indonesian partners "willing to partner with them," and/or that have the relevant skill sets for refugee response (Masardi 2022, 68). To overcome this challenge, RAIC has found American, Australian and Canadian partners who are providing key technical support for its legal, medical and mental health and solutions programs. Basmeh & Zeitooneh cited challenges with securing a site for the dairy product production because it was for an NGO or for a program for refugees (IFI 2022, 19). B&Z overcame this issue with time and diligence, eventually finding locations that would support the project.

In a follow-up interview with Refugiados Unidos, they also discussed its challenges with regards to securing both a premises for day-to-day service provision and access to financial services, including banking. In both cases, the systems of approval require access to paperwork and identification that is largely inaccessible to Venezuelans by design. Refugiados Unidos overcame this by developing a community-based service delivery model (which they claim has helped ensure connectedness with the community) and diligence in accessing banking. They have also recently found a facility that will accept Venezuelan tenants as long as they prepay for several months. Because the RLOs' have strong connections with other community members, these context-specific workarounds and solutions become knowledge assets that are shareable with other organizations, supporting the health of the broader civil society ecosystem.

Finally, programmatically, RAIC's investment in private sponsorship was born of the need for a long-term solution that the current legal environment was not providing. Despite the expectation of a durable solution for refugees, political realities mean that those in Indonesia are not permitted to stay legally in Indonesia or continue travel, nor will most access resettlement. RAIC worked with partners in Canada and in Indonesia to establish a new pathway from Indonesia to Canada through the G5 scheme,[9] which partners five families in Canada with one incoming refugee family (Masardi 2022, 53). Through this program, RAIC has uncovered solutions for people

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8   The evaluator cites three reports for this background information. all from the World Bank: Beirut Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA) at https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/beirut-rapid-damage-and-needs-assessment-rdna—–august-2020; (2) Decisive Action and Change Needed to Reform and Rebuild a Better Lebanon at https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/08/30/beirut-explosion-decisive-action-and-change-needed-to-reform-and-rebuild-a-better-lebanon; and The Great Denial at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36862. Full citations in Works Cited.

9   Details about the G5 scheme are available on the Government of Canada website at: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-outside-canada/private-sponsorship-program/groups-five.html. Full citation in Works Cited.

that likely would not have been provided from any other actor in the system.

To what extent can observations be generalized across organizations or geographies?

There are very few case studies available that analyze RLO impact; and perhaps none that attempt to analyze the impact of RLOs as a body of organizations. This is undoubtedly attributable to the fact that RLOs are largely excluded from international funding streams,[10] making it unlikely they would experience pressure from donors to produce external impact evaluations, nor would they have the resources to voluntarily participate in one. Furthermore, as LERRN (the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network)[11] at Carleton University has articulated, research agendas are largely driven by Global North-based universities, organizations, and governments. In fact, LERRN found that of the 305 articles published in the Journal of Refugee Studies between 2010 and 2019, 86% were written exclusively by Global North-based researchers; in comparison, just 5% were written exclusively by Global South-based researchers (Neang et al. 2022). This reality may explain why RLOs (who disproportionately operate in the Global South and often on the margins) have been a research area of historically low interest and/or resourcing.

By exploring impact trends across five RLO impact evaluations, the research presented here contributes to closing this gap. They show that the five evaluated RLOs are impactful in many of the same culturally-sensitive, far-reaching and holistic ways. However, given the relatively small sample size, the trends presented here cannot and should not be assumed to be true of other organizations simply because they are also refugee-led.

Yet, it is noteworthy that the conceptual content analysis produced strong and clear impact trends, and it therefore is worthwhile to understand why. What might the organizations have in common that could cause the similarities in impact? An awareness of these causal commonalities may help any and all organizations as they analyze their own preparedness to make a concrete difference in people's lives, and also help the broader refugee response sector to identify who and how to support high-impact organizations.

In order to understand where and how to look for causal commonalities, a literature review was conducted to reveal hypotheses of what preconditions RLO impact. Although the literature often lacks evidence, there is significant normative and anecdotal discussion on RLOs largely stemming from the localization, refugee leadership, and DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) movements. That literature review revealed three possible hypotheses that could explain the strength of the impact trends across the five evaluated RLOs:

1. The presence of key operational elements (such as structures, policies, and systems) that promote organizational success, also known as "capacity;"

2. Operating within specific environmental realities conducive to RLO impact;

3. The availability of key inputs – like financing, connections and community knowledge.

This section will explore the literature surrounding these hypotheses, and consider the extent to which the five impact evaluations substantiate it.

> ### HYPOTHESIS 1: THE PRESENCE OF KEY OPERATIONAL ELEMENTS (SUCH AS STRUCTURES, POLICIES, AND SYSTEMS) THAT PROMOTE ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS, ALSO KNOWN AS "CAPACITY."

The literature suggests that the impact of local organizations may be preconditioned by specific kinds of operational readiness, or 'capacity,' understood broadly within the global refugee response sector to signal some (often unclear (Barbelet 2018)) combination of adequate organizational structure, governance, decision making, program management, staffing, systems, ability to scale, ability to mitigate risks, technical expertise, and adherence to international standards. The literature would

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10   The known issue of RLO exclusion from funding streams is articulated within the literature on the Grand Bargain (which has named the importance of localizing funding), and by organizations that identify as members of the movement for refugee leadership (which further contextualizes the localization of funding for the specific population of refugees). See Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2022 for recent breakdowns between local and international actors, and *The Grand Bargain Independent assessment,* which shows that the proportion of direct funding to local actors halved from 4% in 2020 to 2% in 2021.

11   See LERRN website to learn more: https://carleton.ca/lerrn/about/,

suggest that some subset of these ‹capacities' must be in place for organizations to be impactful, and that training programs, often described as "capacity-building" are needed in order for these capacities to be gained. For example, the NGO statement prepared for the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Program in 2021 called for "greater support to the leadership, delivery and capacity of the local responders." This was framed as a crucial need for local organizations, including RLOs, to succeed in the delivery of responses.[12]

Nuance has emerged within the literature that highlights the importance of equity, solidarity and respect within capacity building efforts. For example, in some instances, there is new emphasis on the importance of training needs being identified by local organizations (as opposed to being identified by donors or international implementing partners). The distinction between capacity building and something more equitable is sometimes captured by use of the terms "capacity sharing"[13] or "capacity strengthening."[14] In these iterations of calls for capacity building, there is still a widespread assumption that local organizations need stronger institutions to

have far-reaching impact, and typically identifies international organizations as the trainer or capacity-builder.

This research has found that common "capacities" do not explain the strength of the impact trends across the five evaluated RLOs.

As Table 3 shows, operationally, the evaluated RLOs are extraordinarily diverse, taking on different organizational shapes, sizes and structures, and having operated for vastly different timeframes. For example, StARS has 463 staff while Refugiados Unidos has 16. Basmeh & Zeitooneh has an annual budget of 10.4 million USD, while YARID has a budget of 428,000 USD. Basmeh & Zeitooneh is reaching over 100,000 people annually, while RAIC is reaching 1619. StARS has been operating since 1979; Refugiados Unidos launched in 2020. RAIC, Basmeh & Zeitooneh and YARID use more traditional organizational hierarchies, while StARS and Refugiados Unidos use co-leadership/matrix style organizational charts. Indeed, the operational differences among these organizations, and likely any random grouping of RLOs, are vast.

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12   The 2021 NGO statement on the Grand Bargain, presented at UNHCR's annual ExCom meeting is available online at https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ngo-statement-grand-bargain
13   Capacity sharing is articulated within Oxfam's rhetoric: See The State of Local Humanitarian Leadership: A learning report on a series of LHL online convenings held in Asia, the Middle East and Northern Africa, the Pacific, and West Africa at https://reliefweb.int/report/world/state-local-humanitarian-leadership-learning-report-series-lhl-online-convenings-held-asia-middle-east-and-northern-africa-pacific-and-west-africa
14   Capacity strengthening and capacity sharing — discussed as part of a "partner-led change process" are both discussed as crucial elements of localization here within a CAFOD report entitled "Capacity-strengthening and localisation: perspectives from CAFOD and its local partners" within the *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*.

Table 3: Organizational Characteristics				
Organization Name	*Staff Size*	*Founding year (Years in Operation)*	*Annual Budget (from most recent fiscal year)*	*Annual Reach (program users and dependents)*
Basmeh & Zeitooneh	431 full-time	2012 (11 years)	10.4 million USD	105,000
Refugiados Unidos	7 full-time 9 contract for services	2020 (2 years)	437,000 USD	6,699
RAIC	4 full-time 9 part-time	2017 (6 years)	516,000 USD	1,659
StARS	380 full-time 83 part-time	1979 (43 years)	4.5 million USD	67,500
YARID	190 full-time	2007 (15 years)	428,000 USD	8,400

It can be deduced from these differences that the organizations have vastly different operational "capacities" as often articulated by various international institutions. Those with longer organizational life spans and larger budgets (e.g. StARS and Basmeh & Zeitooneh) are likely to have more and further-reaching programs, and also have more developed policies, procedures, technical expertise, risk mitigation procedures and beyond. Smaller and newer organizations (e.g. RAIC, Refugiados Unidos and StARS' RLO partners) are more likely to have gaps in policies and plans, and technical skills to learn. Further complicating the picture, regardless of organizational size and structure, all five of the evaluations have at least one recommendation related to policies, procedures and program management improvements.

Despite significant operational differences and the need for capacity development (small or large), all of the evaluators found that the RLOs were making a significant difference in the lives of those community members they work with. Interestingly, where rationale was provided for why some sort of capacity building was needed, it was not tied to enhanced impact. Instead, evaluators note the importance of capacity building as an end in and of itself (e.g. knowledge management is useful, so consider building a knowledge management system), to improve coordination with growing numbers of staff, to secure additional funding, and/or to partner with international agencies. Furthermore, where evaluators made note of how capacity was to be gained, financial resourcing and/or staff time, not training from outsiders, was raised as the necessary input.

Some researchers have pointed out that the emphasis on capacity building for local organizations may be born of something other than the pursuit of impact. As researcher Barbelet points out, the capacity of local entities is verifiably present in many circumstances, but international actors may not have the "skills to access, understand or harness it" (Barbalet 2018, pg 14). This is a sentiment held by at least some local organizations as well. For example, the ELNHA (the Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors) program

surveyed local actors in Uganda and Bangladesh on the challenges they face when working with international actors. Local actors reported that international actors "had a lack of capacity to adapt their role and function based on the capacity already on the ground" (Eyokia et al. 2021). This perspective may explain why the emphasis on local capacity building remains high, despite a lack of evidence substantiating it as a prerequisite for organizational impact.

HYPOTHESIS 2: OPERATING WITHIN SPECIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL REALITIES CONDUCIVE TO RLO IMPACT

The literature also suggests local organizations are crucially filling gaps left by international providers, especially within challenging or hard to reach environments or conflict zones, such as within parts of Syria,[15] Myanmar,[16] or globally during COVID-19. Many have argued that COVID-19 presented unprecedented pressure to acknowledge and uplift local action, given their proximity and access to affected communities.[17] Others have suggested that RLOs may be most impactful in environments that are especially permissive or open to change, making space for refugees themselves to succeed in pressuring their local and national authorities to respect the needs and interests of refugees.

The literature broadly assumes that local organizations (including RLOs) complement international responders where it is less feasible or less necessary for international organizations to operate.[18] Though the literature does not proactively limit RLO value-add to such environments, RLOs are often discussed as most relevant and important where international organizations are not present or where they don't need to be present.

This research has found that such environmental realities do not explain the strength of the impact trends across the five evaluated RLOs.

As Table 4 shows, there are few environmental similarities across the contexts the evaluated RLOs work in. The specific environmental factors considered were:

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15   See story of Syria Relief, a local organization born of need: Alhousseiny, M., 2021.
16   See case study of localization in Rakhine State: Myattun, S., Ignatiou, N., Berges, E., Shukla, Y., Muani, L. and Hla, T., 2021. This article highlights that Myanmar is a "testing ground" for locally-led humanitarian action given the difficulties with international access.
17   As CGD comments, "COVID-19 pandemic should have been a watershed moment" for putting localization into practice. See: Saez, P., Konyndyk, J. and Worden, R., 2022.
18   As Barbelet (2018) describes, the call for complementarity between local and international actors has grown significantly since the Grant Bargain of 2016, but like 'capacity-building' lacks a specific definition.

number of refugees numbers hosted, percentage of population who are refugees, the strength of legal protection frameworks (analyzed using the Refugee Work Rights scorecard[19]), the strength of the economic and political environment (analyzed with the Fragile States Index[20]), and the strength of the country's rule of law (analyzed with the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index[21]).

None of these explorations reveal patterns across the environments where the five RLO operate. Many of the RLOs operate in contexts that are objectively difficult: several have poor protection frameworks, struggling economies, and weak rule of law. Others have more permissive environments and growing economies. Several have strengths in some areas, and challenges in others.

Although there is no discernible pattern across the five environments, all five of the evaluations found that the RLOs were making a significant difference in the lives of those they worked with; this makes it unlikely the impact trends are explainable by environmental commonalities. More specifically, these RLOs are making a difference in people's lives outside of conflict zones, with or without the presence of COVID-19, and outside of particularly permissive environments, dispelling the notion that RLOs are mostly impactful in places the international community cannot reach or should not prioritize. On the contrary, in many instances, the RLOs were making a difference in places where international programming theoretically should have succeeded but wasn't for reasons outside the scope of this evaluation. This finding suggests that RLO impact and value cannot be predicted – or limited – based on the environments they work in.

The dominant narrative that RLOs and other local organizations are most impactful in hard to reach environments like conflict zones or during COVID-19, or in more permissive environments may be rooted in the assumptions of "complementarity:" that local organizations and international organizations all have a role to play, and that local organizations often "fill gaps" left by international efforts.

As researcher Barbelet explains in her 2019 paper *Rethinking capacity and complementarity for a more local humanitarian action*, the conceptualization of complementarity in any given context is tied to perceptions of who has what capacity. Because local capacity may not be readily understood by international actors, there is a presumption that international skills are generally needed (Barbalet 2019).This would permit the dominant discourse to assume local actors, including RLOs, are most necessary and/or important in the environments where the international humanitarian response sector already has an awareness that it struggles and/or doesn't wish to be present, but not elsewhere.

In such cases, the desire for additional local capacity building may be born of the international community's recognition of its own weaknesses or preferences, rather than an accurate assessment of local capacity gaps. A deeper and context-specific reflection on local capacity, rooted in the starting assumption that local organizations are crucial, would likely find many other places where RLOs are already making a significant difference, or have the potential to do so with greater resources.

HYPOTHESIS 3: THE AVAILABILITY OF KEY INPUTS – LIKE FINANCING, CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE.

The literature suggests that RLOs are impactful when they have access to specific inputs, including functional partnerships with international entities like donors, access to at least minimal flexible funding, community embeddedness, and leadership of those most affected.

On partnerships

Successful partnerships with international actors including donors are upheld in the literature as a crucial form of support for local organizations that enable their success. In some cases, such as the case of Uganda, Pincock et al. show that the RLOs who forged successful relationships with international partners, especially donors, were the ones able to scale their impact. The authors further

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19   The Refugee Work Rights scorecard is a joint project of Asylum Access, the Center for Global Development and Refugees International. It analyzes "de facto" considerations (the extent to which rights are protected by law) and "de jure" (the extent to which rights are respected in practice). To view the interactive scorecard visit www.refugeeworkrights.org.

20   The Fragile States Index is a project of Fund for Peace which uses content analysis, qualitative data and qualitative review to analyze nine different factors across four categories (cohesion, economic, political and social factors). To view the interactive index visit https://fragilestatesindex.org/.

21   The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index uses household surveys and interviews with legal practitioners globally to rank 139 countries across eight indicators of rule of law. To view the interactive index, visit https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/.

Table 4: Summary of Environmental Factors in RLO countries of operation					
Country	*Estimated no. of refugees hosted*	*Est. % of pop. are refugees*	*Strength of legal protection frameworks*	*Strength of economy/ political environment*	*Strength of rule of law*
Colombia	2.47 million[1]	4.97%	**Good**: Venezuelan refugees can access Temporary Protection, which affords 10 years of legal residency and work authorization; other populations can access Migrant M visa which provides residency and work rights for 3 years.	**Medium**: Colombia ranks 60 out of 179 on the Fragile States Index	**Medium**: Colombia ranks 86 out of 139 on the WJP Rule of Law Index
Egypt	270,000[2]	0.27%	**Poor**: Article 91 of the 2014 Egyptian Constitution provides the right to seek asylum and prevents deportation, but in practice refugees are not typically recognized by the government or gain formal work authorization.	**Medium**: Egypt ranks 42 out of 179 on the Fragile States Index	**Very Poor**: Egypt ranks 136 out of 139 on the WJP Rule of Law Index.
Indonesia	13,175[3]	0.005%	**Very Poor**: A Presidential Decree in 2016 adopts the definition of refugee presented in the 1951 Refugee Convention, but it does not confer rights or protection.	**Good**: Indonesia ranks 100 out of 179 on the Fragile States Index	**Medium**: Indonesia ranks 68 out of 139 on the WJP Rule of Law Index.
Lebanon	1.8 million[4]	26.63%	**Poor**: There is no national framework that broadly protects refugees. Some special programs exist (e.g. Lebanese sponsorship, labor for specific industries) but they are generally hard to access.	**Low**: Lebanon ranks 27 out of 179 on the Fragile States Index	**Poor**: Lebanon ranks 104 out of 139 on the WJP Rule of Law Index.
Uganda	1.58 million[5]	3.70%	**Good**: The Ugandan Act of 2006 supports refugee access to legal residency, right to work and freedom of movement.	**Low**: Uganda ranks 25 out of 179 on the Fragile States Index	**Poor**: Uganda ranks 125 out of 139 on the WJP Rule of Law Index.

1   Data retrieved from UNHCR Operational Data Portal on Colombia at https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/col
2   Data retrieved from UNHCR.org Egypt Context page: https://www.unhcr.org/eg/about-us/refugee-context-in-egypt
3   Data retrieved from: UNHCR.org Figures at a Glance page on Indonesia: https://www.unhcr.org/id/en/figures-at-a-glance
4   Data retrieved from UNHCR Lebanon July 2022 Factsheet: https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/2972 In addition to the numbers presented by UNHCR, this 1.8 million figure also includes approximately 300,000 Palestinian people.
5   Data retrieved from Uganda Refugee Response Portal at: https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/uga

articulate that this relationship development happened not through the national UNHCR, but instead by direct engagement with outside supporters (Pincock et al. 2020b, pg 14).

Similarly the organization CEDIER (Centre for the Integral Development of the Rural Child), located in Uvira Territory in South Kivu of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, showed how CEDIER identified their own areas of growth, and sought specific support from various international partners, including Mensen met een Missie (a Dutch Catholic missionary development organization) and Oxfam Great Britain, to develop organizational systems, meet international funding criteria, and build interagency implementation partnerships. CEDIER reports that because of those partnerships, it was able to access significant funding and grow their programmatic impact. Of note, CEDIER mentioned that the partnerships were most impactful when mutually beneficial (Titi Rutanuka & Rusake Rutebeza 2021).

Asylum Access has articulated the many benefits associated with equitable partnerships, like those articulated by CEDIER as "mutually beneficial," including that they intentionally transfer power and influence from international to local entities, or, in the case of donors, where there is a deference to the local entity's knowledge base and flexibility with deliverables. Asylum Access has claimed that these kinds of partnerships enable a more efficient and respectful route toward community well-being.[22] Researcher Barbelet believes that equitable partnerships are fundamental, arguing that the ability for all parties to identify who should play which roles requires the presence of equitable partnerships (Barbelet 2018). In other words, true complementarity can only come to pass if equitable partnerships are present, which is rare.

The content analysis on the five evaluated RLOs supports the hypothesis that successful partnerships with international entities, including donors, enable RLO impact.

Each of the five evaluated RLOs are all participating in functional partnerships connected to their programmatic success and impact. Each of the five RLOs have connections to key international bodies like UNHCR in Geneva, coordinate with international NGO implementing partners in their local environments, and dialog with international governments. These connections have supported their organizations' ability to fundraise, to spot opportunities for regional and international advocacy, to solicit support from international actors when seeking solutions for intractable local problems, and to build rapport and partnerships with like-minded organizations operating around the world. Without these connections, the RLOs impact may have been more limited.

More specifically, the success of RAIC's private sponsorship program is tied to their partnership with Northern Lights Canada. Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Shabake program benefited from a highly flexible partnership with Expertise France who recognized the complexity of the environment and supported adjustments in budget and timeline (IFI 2022, 15). YARID thanks several international partners and funding sources within its evaluation (David and Mulemangabo 2022, 9) including Street Child, which it notes has been particularly flexible and deferential to YARID with regard to the implementation of the highly-successful Bridge to Formal School program. Refugiados Unidos secured its first grant through the RLO-to-RLO Fund, and has used that initial funding to build further partnerships, like its current funding relationships with Hilton Foundation. Within the StARS evaluation, SCCF (Secours Catholique Caritas France), the donor for the project, expressed their appreciation for the specific kind of partnership they had with StARS and their RLO partners. Specifically, SCCF stated in a key informant interview:

> "They [StARS and their RLO partners] are incredibly well-structured organizations. They all have a code of conduct, human resources, safeguarding procedures, and support for their community. I was and continue to be extremely impressed. This is why I want a horizontal partnership with StARS, who work with the CBOs [RLOs] – this is how we want to work with other partners. We have so much to learn from them"–SCCF informant (Goldie 2022, 29).

The extent to which these partnerships could be considered equitable could not be determined with available data. However, there were some signs of trust and respect between the RLO and their named partners that may

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22   These claims are articulated within Asylum Access's 2021 paper *Building Equitable Partnerships: Shifting Power in Forced Displacement* online at https://asylumaccess.org/new-position-paper-building-equitable-partnerships/

signal an ability to communicate needs and challenges with transparency.

On funding

As previously mentioned, funding for RLOs is rare, however, looking at the impact of funding for local organizations more broadly, the literature suggests that financing, especially flexible financing, is another causal element of impact. One study conducted by Street Child, Save the Children Denmark, Foreign Affairs of Denmark and the Danish International Development Agency collected substantial evidence on the impact of flexible funding for local organizations within six countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, DRC, Mozambique and Nigeria). The study found that six organizations who each received flexible (in this case fully unrestricted) funding used it largely for key programmatic strategies, including emergency response to COVID-19, and on average, less than 10% on core costs. The six organizations reportedly allocated flexible funding in this way because they were aware of key community needs not being met by programs paid for with restricted funding (Munson et al. 2021). In this way, flexible funding may provide organizations an opportunity to finance crucial life-saving activities that might otherwise go unaddressed.

The content analysis on the five evaluated RLOs supports the hypothesis that flexible funding enables RLO impact.

Each of the five RLOs is a grant recipient of RRLI's RLO-to-RLO fund, which has highly flexible spending criteria for their grants.[23] The flexibility of the RRLI grant enabled each organization to fund key unresourced elements in their pursuit for impact: Refugiados Unidos and RAIC moved from volunteer-run to staff-run, StARS supported its reserves to promote sustainability of its 25 programs, Basmeh & Zeitooneh piloted a brand new programmatic intervention to support other RLOs, and YARID invested in its operational leadership, including for monitoring and evaluation. Each of these elements were deemed critical and missing by the RLOs, prior to the availability of flexible funding.

Flexible funding also positioned Refugiados Unidos and RAIC to overcome the "chicken and the egg

problem" faced by many others; as articulated by the authors of The Global Governed, many RLOs do not have the funding they need to build out their programming, but cannot get the funding without building out their programming (Pincock et al. 2020a, 13). Flexible funding built a pathway for these RLOs to build the infrastructure necessary to attract additional financing, enabling programmatic sustainability.

On community embeddedness

The literature reveals largely normative statements that RLOs are community-embedded and culturally aware, and that these characteristics inform their work in a manner that leads to profound access and a high quality of services. A blog post from Xavier Project (an RLO capacity strengthening organization based out of Kenya) suggests that RLOs are impactful because of their deep awareness of community needs (Adnan 2021). Amnesty International covered the RefugeesLead Campaign of 2020 which claimed that RLOs were trusted by the communities they work with, and created a feeling of safety for those seeking support (Amnesty International). Within The Global Governed, the authors describe RLOs as offering "social protection" and cited a study that suggested refugees prefer to seek support from RLOs as opposed to others: of the over 8,000 randomly selected sample of refugees and local community members across Kakuma, Nairobi, Nakivale and Kampala in East Africa, 90% said they'd turn to their own community for support during an emergency. These normative statements and study together paint a picture of RLOs as accessible, respected and legitimized by their communities (Pincock et al. 2020, 15).

The data collected through the impact evaluations supports the hypothesis that community-embeddedness leads to RLO impact. As articulated in impact trends 1 and 2, the RLOs' level of embeddedness in communities is extraordinarily high. The five RLOs use methods of operating that are of the community, as opposed to adjacent or outside of it. They use mobile clinics, community centers, neighborhood-level partners, word of mouth, WhatsApp chains and beyond to connect with and support community members. The evaluations suggest that this connectedness allows information, knowledge, and

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23   See RRLI's FAQs where they explain they support general funding for RLOs at https://www.refugeeslead.org/frequently-asked-questions

expertise from the community to reach and inform the RLOs' programs and ways of working organically, regularly and smoothly, even when the organizations do not yet have robust feedback tools. All of them hire within the community, creating local economies that reinforce organizational community embeddedness, and ensuring knowledge of community need, attitudes and perspectives become an institutional asset able to inform goals and strategies.

Leadership of those most affected

Calls for representation of those with lived experience within movements[24] have grown significantly in recent years, and the literature increasingly points to its impact imperative. For example, Leslie Crutchfield's book How Change Happens examines why some movements for change have succeeded and others have failed. By examining over ten winning and losing movements within the United States, Crutchfield concluded that winning movements had in common their ability to "let local activists lead" by having the system "invest their assets – money, time, know-how, and political clout – into ensuring the grassroots not only survive but thrive," as opposed to investing in sweeping top-down attempts at change. Also among the top indicators of movement success was "leaderfull" movements, meaning, many leaders with lived experience "shared power, authority, and limelight," and encouraged their partners at all levels to be part and parcel of the transformation, as opposed to the promotion of single and/or prominent change agents (Crutchfield 2018, 12-14). Within the refugee response sector, the calls for "refugee participation" and "refugee leadership" are also growing (for example within the Global Compact for Refugees), most often on the basis that it is the fair and equitable thing to do (as opposed to being crucial for impact).

The data collected through this research project is consistent with the hypothesis that leadership of those most affected enables RLO impact.

It has already been established that the five organizations are led by people of forced displacement. In fact, no organization's staff composition is less than 50% people of forced displacement; and for some, it is much more. For example, StARS' 463-person staff is 85% people of forced displacement.

When asked why this specific input matters so much for the resulting work, the RLOs raise several factors. They share that it means there is little time spent on cultural translation, there is an ease in identifying with their program users' experiences, a deep understanding of systemic barriers, and a built-in legitimacy with some donors. In this way, the RLOs are naming that internal inclusion of refugees facilitates more impactful programming.

As discussed in the Services Chart within Trend 3, all five RLOs are working closely with other RLOs in their communities. They are all supporting several RLOs in the global community to access funding and resources; with these in mind, the five evaluated RLOs are building a "leaderfull" movement, whereby they are increasing funding and support going to many grassroots efforts.

Each of the top executive leaders of the organizations are highly experienced and educated, having graduated from universities and managed large projects, often for many years. This means that each of the leaders is bringing to the table organizational management skills in addition to their lived experience with forced displacement. The important combination of lived experience of forced displacement, and relevant education and career experiences, may also be tied to deep and far-reaching impact. This finding should not signal that not having formal education or relevant career experiences would necessarily make an RLO unsuccessful, but it may require that the leaders find ways to gain organizational leadership skills through training, information sharing opportunities, and/or mutually beneficial capacity strengthening programs.

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In summary, the research presented here cannot corroborate common assertions that RLOs require capacity building to be impactful, or that they are most impactful in specific environments. These assertions may be born of the international community's lack of understanding of true local capacity, and therefore, creates an

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24   The language and literature of 'movements' may exist largely outside of established refugee response and humanitarianism worlds perhaps in part because it connotes political transformation. RLOs, who exist largely on the outside of nationally- or internationally-endorsed economic and political frameworks, are more likely to view their work as political and part of a movement for change, than their international counterparts who have been able to succeed within the established systems of response.

overestimation of required complementarity from international organizations.

In contrast, this research supports the hypothesis that specific inputs, namely functional international partnerships, flexible funding, embeddedness in the community and leadership by those most affected by displacement, are enablers of RLO impact. In order to further vet this hypothesis, RRLI has issued 12 new grants in July and August of 2023, and plans to collect and share additional case studies regarding their roles and impact.

This information may help any and all organizations as they analyze their own preparedness to make an impact, and also help the broader refugee response sector to identify who and how to support high-impact organizations.

7. Challenges and Limitations

Some of the individual evaluations named limitations ranging from concerns about selection bias, recall bias, delays in information collection, and in the case of Basmeh & Zeitooneh, incomplete information about programmatic impact due to delayed timelines. Limitations were not explicitly named in the evaluations for RAIC, Refugiados Unidos or YARID.

Because each of the studies used a different methodology, identifying trends across them presented challenges. Evaluators did not consider the same questions, or present a common definition of impact. This required the metasynthesis to rely on a loose and far-reaching definition of impact, which may have made it easier to identify trends across the reports.

RRLI's decision to decentralize evaluation research design was made with the intention of avoiding the imposition of international evaluation standards on local research, which studies have shown can result in evaluations that lack important political, social or economic context (Dighe & Sarode 2019). With this same rationale in mind, this study does not have the authority to assess the quality of the individual evaluation reports, as the quality of each is best determined by local evaluation experts.

Finally, because the sample size was low, the trends presented here cannot be extrapolated and applied to other refugee-led organizations. Although the findings

presented in this paper attempts to deal with this question through the identification of commonalities that could explain RLO impact trends, further research is necessary to verify the hypotheses presented here.

8. Conclusion

The impact trends across the five RLOs show that as a group they are providing life-improving and life-saving services and solutions to thousands of people. This is an interesting look at refugee-led organizations as they are often described as community-embedded, but not necessarily positioned to enact change, maneuver complex political and economic barriers, or to unlock long-term solutions (like legal status, resettlement and income stability). This research shows that the five evaluated RLOs – Refugiados Unidos, RAIC, Basmeh & Zeitooneh, YARID and StARS – are achieving these things.

The impact trends also highlight for *whom and how* the five RLOs are doing their work. The evaluated RLOs are building programming that reaches systemically and historically excluded people with intersectional access issues (e.g. people with disabilities, unaccompanied children, chronically ill., LGBTIQ+ and beyond), and supporting people in ways community members deem personal and authentic. These emphases on the *who and how* are not necessarily unique to RLOs, but within the evaluation reports they emerge as organic: Because the RLOs are composed of community members who have similarly managed the social, political and economic struggles born of forced displacement, there may be a greater foundational understanding of what services and approaches would be most useful and appreciated by community members.

Extrapolating the successes of the five evaluated organizations and applying it to the work of other RLOs is not recommended based on this research. Like at any other level and within any other sector, it should be assumed that quality of support and extent of impact will differ depending on many factors.

However, if we assume the five RLOs evaluated here are institutions whose impact should be emulated, how might the refugee response sector at large strive to do so? The evidence suggests that answering this question requires greater attention placed on enabling or uplifting their four common inputs (connections with international partners, flexible funding, embeddedness with the

community and lived experience with forced displacement) within other institutions.

Based on literature, two of these inputs (embeddedness with the community and lived experience of forced displacement) are often part and parcel of the RLO existence. However, the other two inputs (connections with international partners and flexible funding) are largely unavailable to RLOs, perhaps because the first two inputs are undervalued by influential international community institutions. The five evaluated organizations are perhaps an exception to this rule, having uncovered in small or large ways access to all four inputs prior to their evaluations.

It is worth noting that many international organizations rarely have all four inputs either. Because of their positioning, most have partnerships and flexible funding, but they often lack community embeddedness and significant lived experience of forced displacement on staff. Though international organizations can seek to gain these inputs, the journey toward securing them in a meaningful fashion requires a long and often arduous process of self-reflection and significantly changed ways of working.

This research therefore presents two questions in closing: How might we support RLOs to access greater flexible funding and equitable partnerships with international institutions? And how might the international community reflect on how it ensures refugee responses are community embedded and driven by those with lived experience of forced displacement? Together, the answers to these questions may help drive forward improved responses for refugees, and some important paradigm shifts toward equity that recognize and build upon the impact and potential of RLOs.

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