

PRESENT

THE 2025 KENYA EVIDENCE PLATFORM ANNUAL CONFERENCE

THEME

Advancing inclusion and accountability
in Kenya's refugee policy transitions



16TH & 17TH SEPTEMBER, 2025



MÖVENPICK HOTEL & RESIDENCES NAIROBI



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Acronyms

BIEA	British Institute in Eastern Africa
DRS	Department of Refugee Services
FOMREK	Forced Migration Research Network of Kenya
GOK	Government of Kenya
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IRP	Independent Refugee Paper
KEP	Kenya Evidence Platform
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RLO	Refugee-Led Organization
RLRH	Refugee-Led Research Hub
R - SEAT	Refugee Seeking Equal Access at the Table
SHA	Social Health Authority (Formerly NHIF)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
ReDSS	Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

This report summarises the key discussion points and lessons from the second Kenya Evidence Platform (KEP) Annual Conference, “Advancing Inclusion and Accountability in Kenya’s Policy Transitions”, which took place on 16–17 September 2025 at the Mövenpick Hotel, Nairobi.

Convened by the Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) in partnership with the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) and Maseno University, and supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the event gathered over 70 participants including representatives from the Department of Refugee Services (DRS), UNHCR, the World Bank, county and municipal governments, donors, academics, and 30 refugee researchers.

The conference examined how to center inclusion and accountability to affected communities in Kenya’s social, legal and financial refugee governance transitions from encampment to socio-economic inclusion, shaped by the Refugee Act (2021) and the Shirika Plan. The conference framed inclusion and accountability not as abstract ideals, but as practical principles that can guide Kenya’s evolving refugee system and strengthen trust between refugees, host communities, government, and partners. As one participant observed, **“Refugee integration must adopt a decolonized approach that values African traditions of hospitality and community-based solutions.”** This sentiment captured the conference’s broader ethos that Kenya’s inclusion agenda must draw from local and indigenous traditions rather than imported models. The central question was: how can we ensure that refugee governance transitions are accountable and grounded in lived experience?

Discussions revealed both progress and deep structural tensions, particularly the gap or disconnect between institutional actors’ commitments to inclusion and accountability and the lived experiences of refugees who continue to face uneven implementation and limited accountability from duty bearers. Participants agreed that while the policy environment is shifting towards inclusion, implementation remains uneven, and accountability frameworks often flow upward to donors rather than downward to communities.

Six key insights emerged during panel discussions, breakouts and research presentations:

- **Accountability** requires redefining mechanisms for answerability and redress at local levels.
- **Inclusion** remains constrained by tokenism and under-resourced participation of refugees.
- The **Shirika Plan** offers potential for durable solutions but suffers from a communication and legitimacy gap.
- **Collaboration** is the ecosystem's greatest strength but is undermined by power asymmetries in funding and agenda-setting.
- **Locally led research** continues to expand yet lacks sustainable financing and coordination. The nine research papers presented at the conference, available in the Research section of this report, illustrate this growing but under-resourced field
- **Gender gaps** in knowledge production and policy dialogue persist, reflected in both participation and authorship.

Together, these insights highlight the need for multi-directional accountability and inclusive governance that redistribute both authority and resources globally and locally.

Background & rationale

Kenya's refugee policy landscape is undergoing a fundamental transformation. The Refugee Act (2021) and the Shirika Plan, launched in March 2025, represent a deliberate shift from the humanitarian-led encampment model toward government-led socio-economic inclusion. This transition aims to integrate refugees into county systems through new municipal structures, while progressively reducing dependence on international aid. Yet this ambition unfolds amid declining humanitarian budgets¹ and administrative and resourcing challenges between the national Department of Refugee Services (DRS), responsible for refugee management, and county governments, tasked with implementing refugee integration on the ground.

The stakes are high. Kenya currently hosts over 850,000 refugees and asylum seekers, most of whom reside in Turkana and Garissa counties. Recent reforms, such as recognising refugee IDs for mobile money registration, expanding access to Class M work permits, and plans to integrate refugees into the national health insurance scheme (SHA) and the NYOTA youth programme signal a clear shift toward socio-economic inclusion. At the same time, the rollout of the differentiated assistance model aims to promote self-reliance but risks excluding vulnerable groups in the wake of reduced funding and impact on household economies. However, communities have questioned the participatory nature of some of these transitions. For instance, the introduction of the differentiated assistance model, which aims to promote self-reliance, could exclude vulnerable groups. Under this model, refugees are classified into four categories based on vulnerability. Only those in Category 1, who are deemed to be the most vulnerable, are eligible for full assistance, while those assessed as 'self-reliant' receive reduced or no food support². Misinformation and a lack of meaningful participation have further fuelled mistrust and, in some cases, protests, as was seen in Kakuma earlier this year in March 2025³.

Against this backdrop, the 2025 KEP Conference sought to interrogate what inclusion and accountability mean in practice, not as aspirational language, but as practical principles to guide Kenya's refugee policy transition.

The two-day convening built on the 2024 inaugural conference, which focused on localising knowledge production. This year's edition moved the discussion from "who produces knowledge" to "who holds power", examining how evidence, participation, and decision-making intersect within Kenya's evolving refugee governance framework. Through panels, breakout sessions, and nine research presentations (five by refugee scholars and four by Kenyan scholars), the conference offered a rare platform for dialogue across institutional and lived-experience divides.

¹ NGO Refugee Group (NRG) (2025) '[Kenya refugee response under strain: funding cuts, differentiated assistance and rising social-cohesion crisis](#)', ReliefWeb.

² Jojol Yahya (2025) '[Rethinking the refugee differentiated-assistance model: refugees struggle for survival in Kakuma refugee camp and Kalobeyi Integrated Settlement, Turkana County, Kenya](#)', Refugee Law Initiative Blog.

³ Kaamil Ahmed (2025) '[Refugees clash with police in Kakuma camp as food aid cuts spark protests](#)', The Guardian.

Objectives of the conference

The 2025 Kenya Evidence Platform (KEP) Annual Conference sought to advance inclusion and accountability in Kenya's refugee policy transitions by bringing together government, donors, practitioners, researchers, academics and refugee-led organizations to co-create practical pathways for inclusive and sustainable refugee governance. Specifically, the conference aimed:

- To elevate locally produced and refugee-led evidence by strengthening the visibility, credibility and use of research generated by Kenyan and refugee scholars, in order to inform inclusive and accountable refugee policy and programming.
- To advance accountability and inclusion in refugee governance by identifying and co-developing practical accountability models for refugee and host communities across sectors, including livelihoods, research, funding and service delivery. This will ensure that decision-making is participatory and grounded in lived experience.
- To break down silos and foster cross-sector collaboration by bringing together policymakers, refugee researchers, practitioners and academics to share insights and co-create evidence-driven solutions that bridge the gap between policy commitments and lived realities.
- To create an open space for dialogue on power relations and forms of accountability across stakeholders, including refugee-led actors.

Day 1: Accountability & inclusion in Kenya's policy transitions



Opening remarks

The 2nd Kenya Evidence Platform (KEP) Annual Conference opened with remarks from RLRH, ReDSS, UNHCR, the Netherlands Embassy, and the Department of Refugee Services (DRS), setting a strong tone on inclusion and accountability, and the use of locally generated evidence to inform the Kenya's refugee policy and practise.

Patience Kiara, ReDSS regional director, emphasized the need to rebalance whose evidence informs humanitarian and development practice in Kenya. She highlighted that much of the existing evidence and agenda-setting comes from external actors, and that KEP aims to “recalibrate the balance of voices” by centering those closer to displacement realities. She called for an “inclusive and credible evidence base that is useful for policy and practice.”

Suhail Awan, Head of Strategic Partnerships & Resource Mobilisation, UNHCR Kenya, underscored the importance of institutional change and efficiency amid shrinking resources and rising humanitarian needs. “There is nothing possible without evidence. Looking at Kenya in terms of inclusion, I cannot appreciate the government enough for hosting more than 850,000 refugees,” he said, commending Kenya's leadership in refugee inclusion and calling for actionable, collective outcomes.

Lilian Obiye, Policy Officer, Displacement and Durable Solutions, at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Kenya, reflected on Kenya's progress from humanitarian response to development-focused inclusion, noting that “with evidence, we can have meaningful participation and advocacy for refugees.” She reaffirmed the Embassy's support for locally driven solutions across trade, migration, and security programs. She also acknowledged the broader funding constraints shaping the displacement response and the need for adaptive, evidence-driven prioritisation.

Speaking on behalf of the Principal Secretary, Gladys Kiyapyap, from the Department of Refugee Services, reaffirmed the government’s commitment to the Shirika Plan as a “homegrown, inclusive roadmap for resilience.” She cited progress in education, youth employment, and WASH programs, stressing that “internal evidence should inform our policies.” She also noted that progress has taken time, with coordination and implementation challenges persisting, while reaffirming the government’s commitment to strengthening engagement with partners.

Mohamed Hassan, speaking on behalf of the RLRH, framed the conference around inclusion, and accountability in this critical juncture of Kenya’ refugee policy, stating that “transitions only succeed when they are trusted, and trust only comes from inclusion and accountability.” He described Kenya’s current shifts as three overlapping transitions; legal, financial, and social, each carrying both promise and risk. Mohamed cautioned that without transparency and participation, “these transitions can create more resistance than progress.”

Panel 1: Refugee leadership and accountability in transitions



This session explored what meaningful refugee leadership and accountability look like in practice. Panelists shared experiences and models of inclusion, highlighting opportunities and challenges in ensuring that refugee voices shape policy transitions.

Refugee presence in policy and advocacy spaces has increased, but influence over decisions and outcomes remains limited.

As Ishimwe Jean-Marie (R-SEAT) put it, “many times refugees find themselves in spaces as rubber stamps, not really being meaningfully engaged.” This distinction between visibility and genuine authority was a recurring concern. Participants warned that presence is too often treated as progress, while underlying power relations remain unchanged.

Speakers highlighted the conditions needed for refugee leadership to move beyond tokenism: intentionality in designing inclusive processes, ensuring participation is resourced (through translation, facilitation, and time), building structured decision-making roles, and creating safe spaces where contributions are valued. Jacob Bonyo (RefugePoint) emphasised that participation must be intentional and resourced if it is to be meaningful.

Despite these calls, the conference itself reflected ongoing inclusion challenges. Of the nine research paper presenters, only three were women, and just three of the fifteen panellists over the two days were women. Five of the six female presenters were from the refugee-led research hub. This imbalance reveals the gender disparities in research leadership and policy forums, and points to the need for more intentional planning to ensure equitable representation in future conferences.

Participants noted that inclusion must also extend to host communities. Participants noted that programming and policy discussions often overlook hosts, despite their central role in building trust and sustainability. Host engagement is important to ensure inclusion strengthens social cohesion rather than reinforcing divisions.

A participant from a refugee-led organisation emphasized that inclusion must be continuous, not symbolic: “Refugees must be part and parcel of decision-making, not only during the launch phase but throughout every stage of program implementation.” Another participant added, “Accountability is representation. Refugee leaders must be meaningfully included in political, social, and economic decision-making.” Overall, the discussions reinforced that meaningful refugee inclusion cannot be reduced to optics. More robust measuring mechanisms are needed. It requires deliberate design and adequate resources.

Panel 2: Resourcing and operationalising the Shirika Plan in a shifting funding landscape



This session discussed how the Shirika Plan's transition to a government-led, integrated settlement model can be resourced in a time of shrinking aid. Panelists reflected on how accountability and refugee inclusion can remain central while adapting to new governance and funding realities.

Kenya's solutions framework is ambitious in scope but faces challenges of design, funding, legitimacy, and implementation.

The Shirika Plan, promoted by UNHCR and the DRS as the future of refugee governance, illustrates the gap between policy commitments and the lived realities of refugee participants, as it faces both a communication and a legitimacy challenge. While agencies emphasise its promise, refugees, host communities and even county representatives highlighted a trust deficit and raised concerns over its practical design. Tensions between the national and county governments were repeatedly noted: DRS holds the mandate for refugee management, yet counties carry much of the burden of integration without adequate resourcing. As Ibrahim from the Department of Refugee Services acknowledged, "There is a lot of misinformation - we are developing a communication strategy to help us share information with communities."

Communities also pointed to limited consultation and participation, fuelling fears that Shirika may operate as an exit strategy rather than a framework for inclusion. UNHCR Kenya's Suhair Awan echoed these concerns, noting that, "When the shirika was approved, there were other conversations. In 2025, there were 50 consultations. They

can not be meaningful and there can always be room for improvement.” His remarks underscored the continuing gap between policy ambition and perceived ownership among refugees and host communities.

Alongside Shirika, participants discussed the shrinking space for resettlement.

With traditional pathways closing across many Western countries, resettlement can no longer be considered a viable large-scale solution. As Awan put it bluntly, *“Honestly speaking, resettlement is gone.”* For many, this deepens anxieties about the credibility of the broader solutions agenda in Kenya.

The differentiated assistance model was another focal point for discussion.

Refugee participants highlighted the dangers of creating tiers of deservingness within refugee populations, they argued that categorising refugees into four groups, with only the most vulnerable eligible for full rations, the model risks exacerbating inequality and fuelling resentment. Category 4, labelled “self-reliant,” translates into the withdrawal of food support without the necessary enabling conditions for self-reliance in place. UNHCR highlighted sharp funding declines, with WFP support falling from \$158 million to \$50 million.

Several participants reflected on the shifting funding landscape and the decline of resettlement opportunities. One refugee leader remarked that, *“The world is shifting to self-reliance, particularly in the refugee context, due to funding cuts and lack of resettlement opportunities. We must now work with realities and look for alternative ways of living, even when humanitarian support is not there.”*

The World Bank’s intervention stressed the importance of economic inclusion.

Greater access to Class M work permits and enhanced freedom of movement were presented as necessary conditions for any durable solution to be credible. Yet these remain politically sensitive and unevenly applied, leaving many refugees caught between policy ambition and lived reality.

The World Bank’s Miguel de Corral stressed that durable solutions must go hand in hand with investment in refugee-hosting areas: *“We need to continue to invest in Turkana and Garissa, the economically deprived areas, and think of investment policies that can develop both refugees and host communities.”* His comments reinforced the view that integration depends not only on refugee inclusion but also on equitable development for host populations.

Jean Paul from RELON offered a candid refugee-led perspective, cautioning that *“sometimes refugees are put in difficult positions—they are expected to say certain things in different spaces.”* He added that unless funding mechanisms are simplified, *“RLOs will remain excluded.”* His intervention captured ongoing tensions around accountability and the unequal power dynamics shaping the operationalisation of the Shirika Plan.

Overall, the discussion highlighted the ongoing disconnect between policy ambitions relating to inclusion and accountable and refugee community experiences.

Research presentations



A key feature of the conference was a dedicated research session showcasing nine papers from Kenyan and refugee scholars affiliated with the Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH), Maseno University, Moi University, and National Defence University. Three Independent Research Projects (IRPs) supported through the Kenya Evidence Platform (KEP) presented emerging findings. The IRP component of KEP provides early-career refugee scholars conducting independent research on displacement in Kenya with a monthly stipend of £500, a fieldwork grant of up to £3,000, and mentorship. Moderated by RLRH and Maseno University, the session reflected the conference's commitment to locally led knowledge production and the growing ecosystem of refugee and Kenyan researchers shaping policy debates from within Kenya.

Research presentations were organised into three thematic breakout rooms, allowing for focused exchange between researchers and participants. The papers ranged from completed academic studies to ongoing working papers. For additional details on the methodologies used in each study, including data sources and analytical approaches, readers can access the researchers' presentation slides [here](#).

1. Refugee governance and policy accountability

This theme interrogated how power and representation function within refugee governance structures.

- **Paul Opondo** (Moi University) examined the role of Indigenous Knowledge in decolonizing Euro-Western approaches to refugee management, arguing that traditional mechanisms of mediation and resource sharing offer practical tools for conflict resolution and community inclusion. His research suggests a broader reorientation toward local epistemologies relevant to the conference's focus on inclusion: questioning external framings and centering Kenyan and refugee perspectives on governance, culture, and livelihoods.
- **Mohamed Hassan** (RLRH) analysed the relationship between elected refugee leaders and humanitarian governance in Kakuma, showing how leadership elections both empower and constrain refugee representation within aid hierarchies. His study speaks directly to debates on accountability and participation in refugee governance, illustrating how locally elected structures can reshape aid decision-making toward more inclusive and legitimate forms of leadership.
- **Sarah Kide** (RLRH-IRP) explored refugee perspectives in Nairobi on shifts in U.S. resettlement policy, revealing how global policy decisions ripple through local aspirations and identity negotiations. Her findings connect macro-level policy shifts to micro-level experiences of uncertainty and adaptation, underscoring the need to view policy change through the lived realities of refugees.

2. Social cohesion and identity

Papers in this theme highlighted how belonging and integration are negotiated in everyday life.

- **Mulki Mohamed** (RLRH-IRP) discussed cultural preservation among South Sudanese refugees in Kakuma, showing how identity and heritage shape integration pathways. Her study reframes integration as a process of cultural exchange rather than assimilation, aligning with the conference's emphasis on inclusion through recognition of diversity.
- **Odhiambo Alphonse Kasera** (Maseno University) introduced the concept of "political well-being" as a fertile capability, based on research with Somali refugees in Eastleigh, emphasizing how participation and recognition form key aspects of psychosocial integration. By linking political agency to well-being, his analysis deepens the discussion on social cohesion, suggesting that empowerment and belonging are as political as they are social.
- **Dr. Bernard Musembi** (Maseno University) traced Kenya's historical evolution from encampment to integration, situating current reforms within decades of shifting national and international refugee politics. His study situates current inclusion debates within longer trajectories of state policy, highlighting how structural change requires rethinking Kenya's spatial and legal approach to refugee management.

3. Sustainable environments and livelihoods

This theme examined the intersection of environmental sustainability, technology, and refugee livelihoods.

- **Yuhana Luka** (RLRH-IRP) presented findings on clean cooking technology adoption in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, highlighting barriers linked to affordability and cultural methods of cooking. His research links sustainability initiatives to everyday practices, reminding policymakers that environmental solutions must align with social realities to be effective.
- **George Maangi** (National Defence University) assessed refugee governance and environmental sustainability, arguing that inclusion efforts must integrate climate resilience within county development frameworks. His paper bridges humanitarian and environmental governance, calling for locally integrated responses that position refugees and host communities as active participants in Kenya's green transition.
- **Fardosa Salah** (RLRH) offered a forward-looking paper on refugees' socio-digital futures, analyzing how digital access shapes livelihood and mobility in protracted displacement settings. Her study expands the inclusion agenda into the digital realm, illustrating how connectivity redefines opportunity and belonging in displacement contexts.



Synthesis & significance

While diverse in scope, the nine papers collectively highlighted three shifts in Kenya's refugee research landscape:

- A reorientation toward local epistemologies: questioning external framings and centring Kenyan and refugee perspectives on governance, culture, and livelihoods.
- An expanding network of research institutions: with the Refugee-Led Research Hub, Maseno University, Moi University, and others actively contributing to policy-relevant scholarship.
- A more nuanced understanding of the research-policy nexus: recognising that the link between evidence and policy is not linear but iterative; each study contributes to a growing body of knowledge that gradually reshaped practise and policy-making.
- A reassertion of refugee agency in knowledge production: advancing refugees as producers of knowledge and policy insights, whose lived experiences challenge extractive research models and demand more equitable forms of collaboration.

As one university-based participant reflected,

“There’s a need for research co-creation and collaboration, where refugees and hosts jointly design and publish work on displacement.”

This comment captured the shared commitment to collaborative and decolonized research practice expressed throughout the research presentation session.

Day 2: Building collective pathways for an inclusive transitions

Panel 3: Accountability and inclusion through knowledge production (led by the Forced Migration Network of Kenya - FOMREK)



Locally led research is growing in visibility and influence, but remains uneven and underfunded.

Refugee and Kenyan researchers presented high-quality, contextually grounded studies that demonstrated the unique value of local researchers. Maseno University and RLRH are expanding the pool of local researchers and diversifying the evidence base. As Winnie Makau explained, *“Traditionally, a lot of knowledge comes from people who haven't faced forced displacement but now we help ensure that this knowledge comes from people with lived experience.”* She described RLRH's mentorship model, which provides training “from start to finish” and creates pathways for displaced scholars to disseminate their findings. By producing evidence rooted in lived experience, refugee researchers ensure knowledge is not only generated but also trusted and used.

Gerawork Teferra, an independent refugee researcher on the panel, emphasized the epistemic value of lived experience: *“As refugees, the power we have is lived experience.”* For Teferra, confronting *“the issue of silence by bringing in our own experiences”* is essential to transforming forced migration research from extractive documentation to community-driven inquiry. He argued that accountability mechanisms often *“justify causes of failures”* and called instead for *“community research so that the process is documented.”* He added that locally led research is not

dependent on external funding but on community initiative: “When we do research by ourselves, we do not need big funds. We can just do it locally using local opportunities that are existing.”

However, structural gaps persist. Refugee researchers and RLOs continue to face constrained access to direct funding, mentorship, and institutional platforms. These gaps mirror wider trends in the sector, where refugee-led organisations continue to access only a small share of available funding⁴. Research production is also fragmented and sometimes duplicative; several participants urged the creation of a central repository to map studies and reduce duplication. However, existing initiatives such as the University of Nairobi’s Refugee Resource Centre, launched in 2024, and Strathmore University’s recently launched Forced Migration and Displacement Research Hub are promising platforms that can play this role. Dr. Allan Mukuki emphasized the need to “package information so that everyone can see how they can apply it in their daily lives,” while Dr. Paul Opondo called for “using African indigenous philosophies, in the spirit of egalitarianism,” as a foundation for truly localized and inclusive research practice. Gender imbalances also remain a concern as seen in the limited number of women presenters and panellists across the two days. Targeted support to women researchers, especially refugee women, is needed to shift who holds authority in knowledge production.

Priority actions identified by participants include: Embedding co-production standards in funding calls, delivering sustained mentorship and small-grant programmes for displacement-affected scholars, and ensuring dissemination budgets are built into all research proposals so findings reach policymakers and communities. Strengthening and connecting locally generated evidence through existing hubs is essential both for credible policy and for rebalancing authority in knowledge production.

Breakout groups on accountability

There is a broad agreement that accountability matters, but little consensus on what it means in practice or how it should be operationalised.

Participants joined small group discussions focused on translating conference themes into practice. Each group was asked to identify two-three concrete recommendations to strengthen accountability and inclusion around four thematic areas: Livelihoods, Local Governance, Knowledge Production, and Funding.

⁴ ODI - HPG (2023) ‘Failure to Fund Refugee-Led Organisations: Why the Current System Is Not Working and Potential Change’, ReliefWeb.

Across panel 2 and during the breakout discussions, accountability was described in different ways and directed at different actors. For humanitarian agencies and government actors, accountability was generally framed in terms of compliance with donor requirements and financial reporting. Several participants cautioned that if accountability is reduced to upward reporting alone, it risks sidelining the concerns of refugees and host communities. In contrast, refugees and hosts framed accountability as responsiveness and redress, ensuring decisions produce tangible benefits for their lives. Those participants noted that mechanisms to support this form of accountability remain limited, and without them, policies like Shirika Plan and socio-economic inclusion may struggle to gain legitimacy at the community level. For them, accountability meant the ability to influence programs and hold service providers to account⁵. As one humanitarian practitioner observed, “We all have our own understanding of what accountability and inclusion mean. Unless we define them clearly, it will be hard to achieve lasting solutions.”

During breakout sessions, participants offered alternative approaches to accountability: some participants described accountability as answerability, i.e. the ability of institutions to take feedback and offer redress where needed. Others defined it as the efficient use of resources for the communities they are intended to serve, and as representation, to ensure that both refugees and host communities can see tangible results from the decisions made on their behalf.

To operationalise accountability and inclusion in Kenya’s refugee policy transitions, the four thematic breakout groups proposed the following practical recommendations:

- **Local governance:** municipalities were seen as promising but underfunded structures. Participants suggested refugee representation on municipal boards, and even redefining “citizens’ forums” in municipal charters as “residents’ forums” to allow non-citizens to participate. However, many cautioned that this would not go far enough unless parallel humanitarian and government systems converge.
- **Livelihoods:** participants stressed that refugee input must be embedded from the start of programme design, not sought only at the end of project cycles.
- **Research:** recommendations included creating accessible repositories of refugee-related studies, intentional co-production of knowledge with displaced researchers, and mentorship to build the next generation of scholars.
- **Funding:** calls were made for greater transparency, clearer results frameworks, flexibility in funding, and stronger inclusion of host communities in allocation decisions.

⁵ This disconnect reflects what [Mohamud \(2025\)](#) has called a humanitarian “legitimacy crisis,” in which donor priorities may eclipse the needs of affected communities.

Taken together, these discussions illustrate that accountability in refugee governance should be multi-directional; flowing upward to donors, and also horizontally to government partners and downward to affected communities. Echoing this, a refugee participant stressed that, “Accountability should not be left to one organization. It must be shared by communities, donors, and all implementing partners.”

Ultimately, the extent to which the gap between these competing forms of accountability can be narrowed will shape Kenya’s refugee policy transitions. As the response shifts from a humanitarian-led encampment model to government-led integration, new forms of accountability will be required. Municipal and county officials must consider what accountability means beyond the ballot box, while humanitarian and development actors must move past donor reporting and adopt community-centred frameworks. The way these choices are made will carry significant risks and opportunities for the future of refugee governance in Kenya.

Participants also noted gaps such as limited follow-through on community feedback and insufficient inclusion in decision-making processes.

Conclusion: Plenary session on the way forward

Collaboration is the refugee ecosystem’s strongest asset, but unequal power dynamics undermine its potential.

During the plenary session after the breakout discussions, participants emphasised that progress depends less on isolated initiatives than on coordinated action between refugee-led organisations, municipal and county actors, NGOs, research institutions and donors. Partnerships were credited with enabling joint problem-solving and leveraging complementary resources.

But collaboration is shaped by asymmetry. Refugee-led organisations reported being positioned as junior partners or implementers rather than agenda-setters. Donors and INGOs sometimes framed collaboration mainly as a compliance tool rather than as a means to transfer influence or resources. These asymmetries risk replicating the very hierarchies that locally-led approaches seek to dismantle.

For collaboration to deliver durable outcomes it must be trust-based and equitable. Participants called for partnership models that share decision-making, provide direct and predictable funding to RLOs, include clear roles for municipalities, and institutionalise mechanisms for joint planning and accountability. The shift required is from short-term, transactional partnerships to long-term, co-designed relationships that redistribute both resources and authority.

Next steps

The 2025 conference reinforced the momentum of the Kenya Evidence Platform while surfacing new priorities linked to Kenya's evolving refugee policy environment. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen accountability and inclusion across governance, livelihoods, research, funding and policy implementation. Participants appreciated this session, with one humanitarian practitioner noting that, "The breakout sessions were insightful. We cannot talk about accountability without meaningful participation from affected communities. Accountability must be public and political." The following next steps draw directly from actionable recommendations developed in the breakout and plenary sessions.

1. Accountability at the local governance level

Municipal officials expressed readiness to pilot inclusive residents' forums that will serve as accountability platforms, bringing together refugees, host communities and local authorities. These forums will facilitate public participation and collaborative decision-making within devolved structures.

Next steps: In partnership with the Department of Refugee Services (DRS) and Turkana and Garissa county governments, ReDSS will document these pilots until 2026 and convene a learning exchange in 2026 to assess their effectiveness and scalability. Counties will be encouraged to integrate refugee representation within municipal boards, as discussed in the governance breakout session.

Participants also emphasised that accountability cannot exist without clear tools and structures, including transparent communication of the Shirika Plan. The counties and the DRS will explore ways to translate the Plan into local languages and disseminate summaries to ensure that communities understand their rights and responsibilities during the implementation process.

2. Accountability in livelihood programming

Participants emphasised that accountability in livelihoods requires the involvement of refugees and hosts from the outset of programme design, not just at the evaluation stage. They called for refugee qualifications and alien IDs to be recognised, in order to enable fair access to services and employment.

Next steps: Partner agencies will collaborate with the Refugee Affairs Secretariat and the Directorate of Immigration to review the process of recognising refugee skills and documentation. ReDSS and its partners will also pilot inclusive livelihood models in Turkana and Garissa, bringing host and refugee entrepreneurs together in shared

business ecosystems. This reflects the group's recommendation that 'hosts and refugees should work within the same system'.

3. Accountability in knowledge production

Participants called for the co-production of research and for refugee researchers to have greater visibility in the shaping of policy-relevant knowledge. The group proposed the creation of a national repository of refugee-related research to reduce duplication and improve dissemination.

Next steps: Maseno University will assess the feasibility of hosting a national research repository on displacement in collaboration with the Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) and the National Council for Science and Technology (NACOSTI). The RLRH will pilot mentorship schemes and independent research grants for early-career and displaced researchers, promoting their inclusion in authorship and dissemination. NACOSTI will be engaged to link research outputs to national policy formulation processes, as emphasised in plenary discussions. Participants underscored the need for better knowledge sharing platforms. One participant reflected, "There is a lot of information out there that could enrich ongoing processes in refugee management, we just need an easy way to share these lessons and avoid duplication in research."

4. Accountability in funding and resource allocation

The participants in this group emphasised that transparency and community engagement are essential for the responsible use of resources. Participants noted that, despite being directly affected by refugee programming, host communities remain underrepresented in funding decisions.

Next steps: Donors and implementing partners will be encouraged to publish results frameworks that demonstrate measurable community impact, and to include the perspectives of refugees and the host community when defining success indicators. As recommended by participants from Nairobi and Garissa, future KEP dialogues will include dedicated sessions on community-led budget tracking and host community participation in decision-making.

5. Policy dialogue and solutions based on panel two discussions

Participants agreed that the Shirika Plan is not well understood at community level due to limited consultation and a lack of translations. DRS and UNHCR committed to

limited consultation and a lack of translations. DRS and UNHCR committed to expanding consultation processes to include county governments, refugee-led organisations (RLOs) and representatives of the host community.

Next steps: DRS will convene county-level awareness forums in 2025 to clarify roles in the implementation of the Shirika Plan, while UNHCR will collaborate with partners to translate and simplify key sections to make them more accessible. The World Bank will continue its policy dialogue on Class M work permits and freedom of movement to ensure that these legal transitions align with Kenya's pledges to include refugees under the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).

Conclusion

Across the two days of the conference, participants recognized that accountability to affected communities is not a one-off event but a continuous process that requires time and sustained engagement between policy, program, and community actors. The Kenya Evidence Platform will continue to foster reflections and shared learning among partners, while monitoring how commitments made during this conference evolve within Kenya's refugee policy landscape.

While the conference helped bring accountability and inclusion to the centre of the national dialogue, turning these conversations into action will require persistence and structural change. Incorporating accountability into the fabric of Kenya's refugee governance is a long-term endeavour, and this conference marked an important yet initial step on that journey.

Speaker & panelist bios

Panel 1: Refugee leadership and accountability in transitions



Jacob Bonyo

Jacob Bonyo is the Chief Administrative Officer and Country Director of **RefugePoint Kenya**. He leads the Kenya office as its primary representative, overseeing all programs, partnerships, and operations, while also managing RefugePoint's global IT, administration, and procurement functions.

With over 14 years of experience in refugee resettlement across Sub-Saharan Africa, Jacob previously served at the Church World Service–operated Resettlement Support Center (RSC Africa). He holds a bachelor's degree in physics from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology and is an alumnus of the U.S. International Visitor Leadership Program on NGO management.



John Ewesit
Ebenyo

Mr. John Ewesit Ebenyo is the Chairperson of **Kakuma Municipality** and a social scientist with over 17 years of experience as a development expert and consultant. He has held leadership roles with UNHCR, Oxfam GB, and the Catholic Diocese of Lodwar, contributing to peacebuilding, governance, and climate change policy.

At the county level, he supported Turkana's transition to devolved government and co-developed the Turkana County Climate Change Act (2021). Regionally, he has worked on cross-border peace initiatives in Kenya and Ethiopia. John holds a BA in Social Sciences from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa and is pursuing an MA in Governance at Tangaza University.



Damaris
Bonareri

Damaris Bonareri is an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya and a Certified Professional Mediator. She is the Program Coordinator for Displacement and Migration (East and Horn of Africa) at the **Heinrich Böll Foundation**, where she leads initiatives on human rights, migration, and access to justice.

Damaris sits on the National Council of Administrative Justice and the Civil Justice Reforms Committee, among others, contributing to national, regional, and international policy discussions. She previously worked with the Refugee Consortium of Kenya, HIAS Refugee Trust of Kenya, and the Kenya Human Rights Commission. She is pursuing a Master's in Public Policy and Research at the University of Nairobi.



Jean-Marie
Ishimwe

Ishimwe's journey is deeply rooted in his own experiences as a refugee in Kenya. With over five years of experience in the humanitarian sector, Ishimwe has been actively promoting refugee leadership and advocating for inclusive refugee policies and systems. A journalist by training, he holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Nairobi.

Prior to joining **R-SEAT**, he served as the Executive Director of Youth Voices Community (YVC) from 2019, guiding the organization in advancing refugee advocacy, particularly in the areas of socio-economic inclusion and self-reliance in Kenya. He currently serves as the East Africa Regional Lead for R-SEAT (Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table), where he is responsible for promoting the institutionalization of meaningful refugee participation and leadership at the state level in the East Africa region.



Fardosa
Salah

Fardosa Salah is a published Research Officer at the **Refugee-Led Research Hub**, specializing in refugee advocacy and inclusion. With a background in Sociology and Social Work from the University of Nairobi, she is also an alumna of the University of Oxford's RSC-BIEA Fellowship.

Her extensive experience in the humanitarian sector includes roles as a Community Case Worker at HIAS Refugee Trust, focusing on SGBV prevention, and as a Paralegal Officer at Kituo cha Sheria, where she advocated for displaced individuals. Her recent publication on the challenges of repatriated Somali refugees highlights her expertise in migration and inclusion.

Panel 2: Resourcing and operationalising the Shirika Plan in a shifting funding landscape



Mohamed Hassan

Mohamed Hassan is a Research Officer at the **Refugee-Led Research Hub** in Nairobi with over 20 years of lived experience in Kakuma Refugee Camp. A former refugee leader and the first refugee UN Volunteer in East Africa, he has worked extensively on governance, inclusion, and durable solutions.

An Oxford-BIEA Fellow, Mohamed has shared his expertise on global platforms, including the African Union and the World Economic Forum.



Mercy
Mwasaru

Mercy Mwasaru is an accomplished public servant with over 20 years of experience in governance, security, and public administration. As the Acting Commissioner for Refugee Affairs, she is known for her evidence-based approach and ability to integrate academic research with practical solutions.

She holds a Master of Arts in Development Studies and has published scholarly work on community policing. A strategic leader and consensus builder, Ms. Mwasaru also serves as a civilian component member of the Eastern Africa Standby Force, contributing to regional peace and security mechanisms.



JeanPaul
Kasika

JeanPaul Kasika is a refugee advocate, human rights defender, and the Executive Director and co-founder of **RELON-KENYA**. With over 15 years of humanitarian experience and expertise in refugee legislation, he champions refugee inclusion in decision-making and policy at national and global levels.

He also oversees network affairs, project management, and technical support. JeanPaul has held leadership roles with the Africa Refugee-Led Network (ARN) and KISACCO, and previously worked with UNHCR Kenya and Kituo Cha Sheria.



Suhail Awan

Suhail Awan is the Strategic Partnership Advisor at **UNHCR Kenya**, with over 28 years of leadership experience across Africa, MENA, and South Asia. He leads UNHCR's engagement with governments, development banks, international partners, the private sector, academia, and UN agencies to advance protection and socio-economic inclusion of displaced populations.

Suhail has previously served as Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Chief Technical Advisor with UNDP, and Country Managing Director of Global Communities. A recipient of the Presidential Social Service Award, he holds advanced degrees in political science and finance and is an alumnus of Oxford's Senior Leadership Executive Programme.



Miguel de
Corral

Miguel de Corral is a Senior Operations Officer in the **World Bank's** Fragility, Conflict, and Violence Group, based in Nairobi. He specializes in providing strategic and analytical support to address the drivers and impacts of conflict, with a current focus on fragility dynamics and forced displacement in the Horn of Africa.

Previously, he was part of the core team that developed the World Bank Group's first Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence, and helped establish the Global Concessional Financing Facility to support countries affected by refugee crises. He holds a master's degree in public policy from Harvard Kennedy School.

Panel 3: Accountability and inclusion through knowledge production



Dr. Michael
Owiso

Dr. Michael is Dean of the School of Development and Strategic Studies at **Maseno University**, Kenya, where he also serves as Director of Odera Akang'o Campus. He is a Senior Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London and has taught political science, international relations, and development studies at universities in Kenya and abroad.

With over 17 years in the humanitarian sector, Michael has worked extensively on peacebuilding, displacement, and development across East Africa. He holds a PhD in Political Science from Aalborg University and his research focuses on migration, refugees, conflict resolution, and transformative leadership in Africa.



Dr. Allan
Mukuki

Allan M. Mukuki is an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, legal scholar, and consultant with expertise in international law, refugee law, and human rights. An LLM graduate of the University of Groningen and LLD candidate at Stellenbosch University, he has shaped key frameworks including IGAD's Regional Refugee Management Framework and Kenya's High Court Registry Manual.

Allan has served as a Visiting Fellow at Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre and is a Hague Academy scholar. At **Strathmore Law School**, he leads global partnerships, mentors students, and publishes widely. Recognized as a Top 40 Under 40 leader, he also chairs HIAS Kenya's Board.



Dr. Paul Abiero
Opondo

Dr. Paul Abiero Opondo is a Senior Lecturer in African History at **Moi University**, Kenya, and former Head of the Department of History and Political Science. He holds a PhD from UNISA, Pretoria, and degrees in African History from Moi University.

Dr. Opondo has taught in Rwanda, Mozambique, and Nigeria, including as a visiting lecturer at Eduardo Mondlane University and the University of Lagos. His teaching and research span African history, diplomacy, and foreign relations, with a focus on economic diplomacy.



Gerawork
Teferra

Gerawork Teferra is a refugee advocate and researcher with a Master's degree in Development Economics and a BSc in Conservation. With over a decade of experience as an academic coach and teacher at the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, he specializes in refugee education, mobility, and oral history.

His research on human relationships and systemic thinking earned him the 2024 Voltaire Prize for his contributions to social dialogue and international understanding. He is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Exeter and has completed research with Princeton University's Global History Lab.



Winnie
Makau

Winnie Makau is a Research Facilitator at the **Refugee-Led Research Hub** in Nairobi. In this role, she mentors displaced researchers and trains early-career scholars with lived experience of displacement.

With a Master's degree in International Relations from USIU Africa, she previously worked as a Policy Analyst at the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), where she co-authored policy research on youth and demographic dividends in Kenya. Her research interests include sustainable development, food security, and forced displacement.

Meet the researchers

During the conference, Kenyan and refugee researchers presented findings from studies they have conducted or are currently undertaking. If you would like to find out more about their work, you can contact them by email.



Sarah Kide Vuni

Sarah Kide Vuni is a communications professional with a Bachelor's degree in International Relations and Public Administration. Born and raised in Kenya to South Sudanese parents, her unique background informs her research work.

She has experience in the refugee sector, with a focus on forced migration and the intersection of technology and international affairs. Her work is also dedicated to exploring how women can leverage their leadership potential to drive transformative change.

During the conference, Sarah gave a presentation on her research project on Refugee Perspectives in Nairobi on the Shifts on Leadership and Resettlement Policies in the United States (supported by the RLRH through the Kenya Evidence Platform).

She will be publishing this research by December 2025 on the [RLRH website](#).
Email: kidevuni99@gmail.com



**Dr. Paul Abiero
Opondo**

Dr. Paul Abiero Opondo is a Senior Lecturer in African History at Moi University, Kenya, and former Head of the Department of History and Political Science. He holds a PhD from UNISA, Pretoria, and degrees in African History from Moi University.

Dr. Opondo has taught in Rwanda, Mozambique, and Nigeria, including as a visiting lecturer at Eduardo Mondlane University and the University of Lagos. His teaching and research span African history, diplomacy, and foreign relations, with a focus on economic diplomacy.

Dr Paul Opondo presented his research on Decolonizing Euro-Western Perspectives on Forced Migration: The Use and Application of Indigenous Knowledge to Manage Refugees and the Displaced in Kenya.
Email: opondepaul@gmail.com



**Dr. Alphonse
Kasera**

Dr. Alphonse Kasera is a PhD candidate in Political Science at Maseno University in Kenya, where his research focuses on sand governance and environmental policy. A first-generation scholar from rural Kenya, he has become a leading voice on African politics and governance.

With over seven years of research experience, he has contributed to numerous projects, including studies on forced migration, disability, and synthetic biology. He has published more than 16 peer-reviewed articles and is an adjunct lecturer in Political Science and International Relations. Kasera is a proud advocate for authentic African scholarship, dedicated to blending academic rigor with applied development policy work.

During the conference, Dr. Alphonse Kasera gave a presentation on his research project on Political Well-being as a “Fertile Capability”: Insights from Somali Refugees in Eastleigh, Nairobi.

You can see his publications on the [RSIS International](#) website.

Email: alphoncekasera@gmail.com



Fardosa Salah

Fardosa Salah is a graduate of the 2021-2022 RSC-BIEA fellowship and is currently a Research Officer at the Refugee-Led Research Hub. Before joining the Fellowship, she spent six years working as a community case worker and paralegal. She holds a double BA in Sociology & Social Work and Peace & Conflict Studies from the University of Nairobi.

During the conference, Fardosa gave a presentation on a research project she completed with Dr Godin at the University of Leicester on Refugees’ Socio-digital Futures In Protracted Displacement Settings In Kenya.

She will be publishing this research by December 2025 on the [RLRH website](#).

Email: fardosa.salah@refugeeledresearch.org



**Dr. Bernard
Musembi
Kilaka**

Dr. Bernard Musembi Kilaka is a Lecturer at Maseno University and a Researcher at the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA). Previously a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, his work examines the politics of sand in East Africa.

His research interests also include security studies, mega-infrastructure projects, and forced migration governance.

Dr. Musembi presented his research on Beyond the Camps: Kenya’s Long Road from Refugee Encampment to Integration .

You can see his publications on the [Maseno University’s website](#).

Email: bernard.musembi@gmail.com



Yuhana Luka

Yuhana Luka is a researcher and sustainable development practitioner focused on energy access and clean cooking solutions in displacement settings. With a Bachelor's degree in Sustainable Development, his work with the Refugee-Led Research Hub explores the barriers to adopting clean cooking technologies in the Kakuma refugee camp. He has served as a Local Capacity Builder for the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) and facilitated programs with Resilience Action International and Amala Education. A dedicated advocate, he is also the founder of Eco-Energy Voice and co-founder of Saidia Community Initiative.

During the conference, Yuhana gave a presentation on his research project on Exploring the Adoption of Clean Cooking Technologies in Kakuma Refugee Camp (supported by the RLRH through the Kenya Evidence Platform).

He will be publishing this research by December 2025 on the [RLRH website](#).

Email: yuhanaluka1998@gmail.com



**George
Moywaywa
Maangi**

George Moywaywa Maangi is a researcher and lecturer at the National Defence University– Kenya, specializing in national security, defence, and strategy. He holds an MA in Diplomacy from the University of Nairobi, where he is also pursuing a PhD in International Studies.

With eight years of university teaching experience, George has previously lectured at Riara and Daystar universities. His research interests span global and human security, migration and refugees, regional integration, and climate change. He is also the Founder and Director of GMurgor Consultants, which advises on diplomacy and international relations

Maangi was part of the “Meet the researchers” session where he talked about his research on Refugee Governance and Environmental Sustainability in Kenya

You can see his publications on the [Riara University School of International Relations & Diplomacy's website](#).

Email: gmaangi@ndu.ac.ke



Mulki Mohamed Ali

Mulki Mohamed Ali is a refugee researcher, filmmaker, and community facilitator based in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. She has worked extensively with community-based organizations and humanitarian projects in roles spanning interpretation, facilitation, research, and filmmaking.

Currently pursuing a BA in General Studies at Saint Louis University through Jesuit Worldwide Learning, Mulki focuses her research on cultural preservation, identity, and refugee experiences. Her work highlights how refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei navigate life with dignity, resilience, and belonging amid shifting integration policies.

During the conference, Mulki gave a presentation on his research project on Cultural preservation and identity of South Sudanese refugees in KKM in ongoing integration efforts (supported by the RLRH through the Kenya Evidence Platform).

She will be publishing this research by December 2025 on the [RLRH website](#).

Email: mulkm50@gmail.com



Mohamed Hassan

Mohamed Hassan is a Research Officer at the Refugee-Led Research Hub in Nairobi with over 20 years of lived experience in Kakuma Refugee Camp. A former refugee leader and the first refugee UN Volunteer in East Africa, he has worked extensively on governance, inclusion, and durable solutions.

An Oxford-BIEA Fellow, Mohamed has shared his expertise on global platforms, including the African Union and the World Economic Forum.

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