

READS Donor Engagement Workshop: Summary Report

Background

In February 2024 the READS Programme organised a one-day donor engagement workshop in Leiden, the Netherlands, co-hosted with the IKEA Foundation.

Participants from seven donor organisations discussed the findings of the READS Programme in Kenya, Rwanda,

and Uganda, and were informed about the new SOLCO Climate Action Partnership¹ as an example of a cross-sectoral partnership to scale up energy access in displacement settings. Workshop participants shared their recommendations for project implementation and their reflections for future work. •

Mapping donor priorities

Participants were asked to share their main geographic and thematic focus areas. Most existing engagement focuses on Uganda and Kenya, especially the Kakuma-Kalobeyei area, with fewer projects in Rwanda. They highlighted that their organisations had funded projects focusing on a wide range of issues, from supporting technical expertise to implementing energy interventions (such as using subsidies to build markets, providing support for local companies through results-based financing schemes, and solutions for the water-energy-health nexus). These projects had been implemented through funding for multilateral, humanitarian, development, and private sector organisations. Increasingly the focus is moving towards tangible results, financial support mechanisms, private sector engagement and collaboration with multilateral organisations.

local partners. Focusing on entrepreneurship, supporting self-reliance and livelihoods, and better ways to measure and understand disposable incomes as a key component of supporting market-based approaches were seen as core focus areas.

Participants shared how there is a need for organisations of different types to work

Building markets takes a long time, and staying committed to a project or region can pay dividends by building trust with

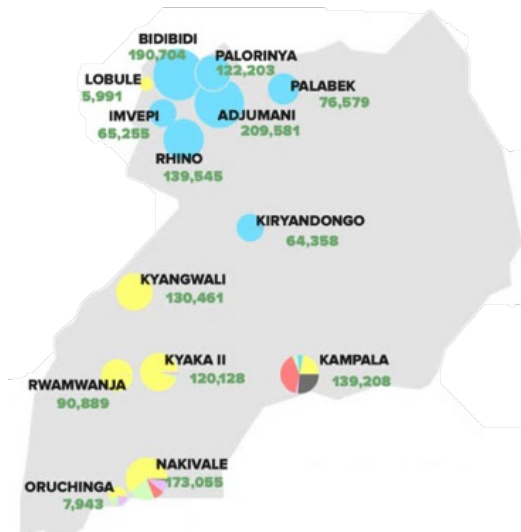


Figure 1: The number of displaced people in Uganda (June 2023). [Access the READS Uganda Report here.](#)

¹ The Solar Electric Cooking Partnership (SOLCO), led by Last Mile Climate, is a platform for partnerships to enable solar-electric cooking

in displacement settings in refugee-hosting countries. SOLCO has an initial focus on Uganda. [Learn more here.](#)

together – especially humanitarian agencies, development organisations, and the private sector – to break down silos between sectors and thematic areas, for example climate and energy access, and improve coordination. This can help to build markets (for example through private sector-led mechanisms) whilst also ensuring the protection of displaced people (though more traditional grant-funded models to provide essential services for vulnerable groups). Catalytic funding can help to explore new mechanisms which bridge any potential divide between humanitarian and development organisations. •

Spectrum of opinions

Workshop participants were shown two divergent statements and – for the purpose of the exercise – were asked to choose a side to explore potential differences of opinion towards the most effective routes for increasing sustainable energy access².

Participants were asked to decide between either focusing efforts on promoting **electric cooking or improved biomass stoves**. Arguments in favour of predominantly focusing on e-cooking included the greatly reduced impact on the environment (both climate change and local deforestation), health benefits, and opportunities for carbon finance. Arguments in favour of focusing on improving biomass solutions, as they are likely to remain the prevalent solution for the foreseeable future, were the benefits of enhancing a method that is already widespread and accepted, as well as the existence of tested methods to increase the efficiency of these solutions. Participants

² All participants acknowledged that the most appropriate solutions would always be context-dependent, there is no one-size-fits-all solution

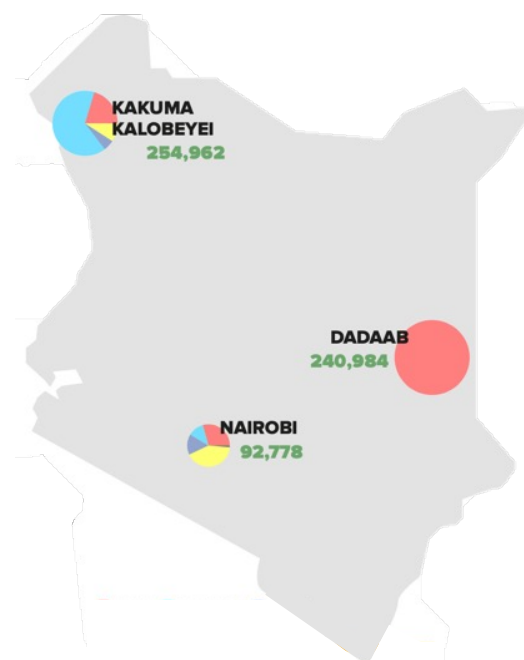


Figure 2: The number of displaced people in Kenya (March 2023). [Access the READS Kenya report here.](#)

recommended building markets for a variety of solutions and focusing on making each technology cleaner, more efficient, and more affordable, recognising that the “endgame” will likely not consist of one type of cooking but rather a mix. Various strategies to transition away from biomass within different timeframes were discussed, with mixed opinions on if LPG had a transitional role to play. Participants also said that good coordination of interventions promoting different technologies is key to avoiding disrupting market building efforts, that national policies often define which interventions are and are not possible, and that the involvement of communities in the design of interventions is essential.

For **household electricity**, participants were asked if they thought it would be better to focus on promoting either connections to the grid or mini-grids, or instead to promote solar off-grid solutions,

and should be selected on a case-by-case basis. A mix of solutions will be necessary to address these complex issues.

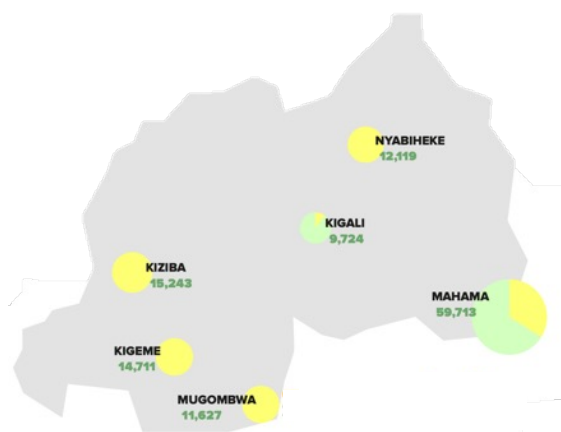


Figure 3: The number of displaced people in Rwanda (June 2023). [Access the READS Rwanda report here.](#)

such as solar home systems. Those who favoured **grid and mini-grid connections** highlighted the benefits of economies of scale, the ability to respond to different types of demand, and the benefits of integrating displaced people into national electrification policies. Those in favour of **off-grid solar solutions** mentioned the infrastructure and practical challenges associated with facilitating grid or mini-grid connections in remote settlements, problems with connecting shelters, and that mini-grids are typically highly subsidised to be cost-competitive. In either case, electrification should be through least-cost pathways and compatible with government priorities.

Participants were split across several key areas when asked if the main barrier to **productive uses of energy (PUE)**³ was the availability of the electricity source and appliances, or their affordability. Different issues that were raised included a lack of demand and the difficulties of stimulating it, the high upfront costs of PUE appliances,

³ Or productive uses of renewable energy (PURE), although this would depend on the energy source. The national grid, for example,

and the greater cost of repaying loans over the long term.

Participants were also asked if they thought private sector financing was viable to solarise community facilities or if it would remain necessary to fund these institutions through grant funding. Arguments in favour of supporting sustainable energy solutions for **community facilities through grant funding** include the remoteness of many displacement settings and scattered location of facilities making them unattractive for companies, and that this is the preferred mechanism for humanitarian organisations. In favour of **private sector financing**, however, were the incentives for long-term maintenance, opportunities for carbon finance, and the facts that grants cause market distortion and the scale of the issues are too large for grant funding alone. Participants also raised that governments could take the lead through either route, for example receiving and disbursing grant funding to facilities, or as parties and guarantors to power purchase agreements. These could be done on a case-by-case basis and, especially for the installation and maintenance of larger-scale standalone systems, there would be opportunities for co-benefits such as skills training and knowledge sharing. •



Figure 4: Examples of READS project concepts. [Access the READS Summary here.](#)

could be supplied by a mix of renewable and non-renewable energy.

Reflections and recommendations

Participants were asked to review the project concepts designed as part of the READS Programme and provide reflections on how these could move from ideas to reality. They also provided reflections on previous projects on sustainable energy in displacement settings and suggested actions to improve future work. •

Issue	Reflections	Actions
Pilot projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been many pilot projects which fail to replicate or scale, with some places suffering from “pilotitis” • Successful pilot projects with appropriate financing and delivery structures should be used as a blueprint for replication • Projects must align with government objectives • The best solutions come from local organisations and communities who understand the most important energy needs and priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop testing what does not need to be (or has already been) tested • Test scalability, determine responsibilities and establish a supportive ecosystem • Set a level playing field between technologies which addresses their externalities (such as health and nature implications of clean cooking vs. their perceived lower cost) between technologies • Plan for what happens after a project is completed to build on its success and have an exit strategy
Government support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is necessary for governments to provide a stable enabling environment on both the supply and demand sides • Government controls are a major barrier to private sector engagement for displaced people • There is a strong preference to work with local partners • High-level climate policy support can come from Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect government choices on approaches (e.g. market-based) and technologies (e.g. LPG) to support • Promote long-term relationships with local authorities to show commitment and build trust • Leverage entry points such as delegations and development offices for collaboration with governments • Align with government objectives across portfolios (displacement, energy, climate change, etc.)
Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a strong willingness to work with other donor organisations • There is often a lack of joined-up thinking when planning and implementing projects • A lack of alignment can result in duplication or competition • There is a lack of clarity on exit strategies and the long-term maintenance of systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design for sustainability from the project inception • Break down silos between humanitarian, development and private sector organisations and look for opportunities for complementarity • Strengthen and streamline coordination amongst donors and implementers at local, national, and global levels • Collaborate and co-design solutions with local communities

Markets & livelihoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market-based solutions are the future but need support, such as appropriate financing to bridge the affordability gap PUE is the priority to boost livelihoods opportunities and build self-reliance Effective market systems should address the needs of both displaced and host communities The economies of displacement settings and impacts of restrictions (e.g. the right to work) are not yet well understood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide active support for the private sector initiatives, especially in the early stages, including technical assistance and co-design of smart subsidies Shift the mindset from “beneficiaries” to “customers” Invest in market-building rather than single-technology projects Provide market entry support for several technologies in a coordinated manner and based on government priorities Conduct needs assessments which explore market size (including disposable income) and non-technical barriers (e.g. policy)
Other issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results have been modest so far Interest in humanitarian settings is growing, for example amongst development banks Historically, financing produced big impacts in development projects in Latin America and South Asia Displaced people have the knowledge and skills to take the lead on designing and implementing successful projects Climate change will increase the areas with significant needs in the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify gaps in policy and support governments to draft amendments to address them Seek opportunities for scaling from the outset Connect with development banks to address financing issues Foster collaboration between humanitarian and development actors Invest in data, especially to inform effective results-based financing

The **Roadmaps for Energy Access in Displacement Settings (READS) Programme**, implemented by the GPA, and funded by the IKEA Foundation, identifies viable implementation opportunities to increase sustainable energy in ten refugee-hosting countries and develops a “roadmap report” for each nation. [Learn more here](#) and read the READS Reports for [Kenya](#), [Rwanda](#), and [Uganda](#), and their [Summary Report](#).

The **Global Platform for Action on Sustainable Energy in Displacement Settings (GPA)** is the global initiative to promote actions that enable sustainable energy access and use in displacement settings. Hosted by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the GPA Coordination Unit galvanises collective action towards the GPA's realisation. [Learn more here](#).

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