

ELNHA HUMANITARIAN ACTION FUND (HAF) IN UGANDA:

LEARNING FROM LOCAL ACTORS ON THEIR EXPERIENCE STRENGTHENING LOCAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEMS

September 2020



BACKGROUND

Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA) is a five-year initiative implemented by Oxfam Novib and Oxfam Great Britain and funded by the Ikea Foundation, with a total budget of EUR 11,131,963. The project is implemented in two countries, Bangladesh and Uganda, which are at risk from humanitarian crises, and also includes a strong influencing component at global level.

ELNHA aims to promote a more equal sharing of power and resources in the humanitarian sector between international humanitarian actors and local and national ones. ELNHA assumes that empowering local and national humanitarian actors (LNHAs) to lead emergency preparedness and responses in their own context will positively influence vulnerable people living in disaster-prone areas so that they benefit more from well-coordinated humanitarian responses.

ELNHA is based on a theory of change which contains three complementary strategies:

- STRENGTH – organizational capacity development of LNHAs to design, lead and deliver humanitarian responses.
- VOICE – influencing the national humanitarian agenda through coordination, networking and advocacy by LNHAs.
- SPACE – influencing national governments and international humanitarian actors to create an enabling environment for local actors to lead emergency preparedness and response.

ELNHA has been implemented in two phases: the first phase (January 2016 – March 2019) entailed capacity development of LNHAs and testing of empowering modalities and mechanisms, while the second phase (April 2019 – March 2021) is to consolidate and build on the first phase by devolving more decision-making power to LNHAs. The second phase is an opportunity for local actors to put in practice the capacities built in the first phase, demonstrating that they have the required ability and knowledge to respond to humanitarian crises in their contexts.

The Humanitarian Action Fund (HAF) is a key instrument put in place during Phase II.¹

FOCUS OF THIS LEARNING BRIEF

Since 2016, LNHAs in each ELNHA district or region have been meeting once per year to prepare joint action plans (JAPs). Based on findings from a humanitarian country capacity analysis and their own knowledge, LNHAs set down in the JAPs the key areas to address to make the local humanitarian system more effective and inclusive. They then jointly prioritized capacity development and advocacy activities, contributing to STRENGTH and VOICE.

In April 2019, ELNHA established the HAF, a funding facility managed by LNHAs themselves to finance the activities they prioritized during the JAP process. HAFs have been established in two sub-regions of Northern Uganda (West Nile and Karamoja), as well as at national level with a quite different set-up:

- In the sub-regions, the fund is managed by a committee of local organizations which is also the steering committee for a local platform of LNHAs: the West Nile Humanitarian Platform (WNHP) and the Karamoja Local and National Humanitarian Actors Alliance (KALNHA). Each HAF is hosted by a local NGO with which Oxfam has a contractual relationship and that is also the secretary of the steering committee. LNHAs shaped the HAF with Oxfam's support, developing operational guidelines to define aspects such as governance and management modalities, compliance requirements for application to the HAF and implementation of HAF-funded activities. Shaping the HAF happened more or less in parallel with shaping and strengthening the WNHP and KALNHA.
- At national level, the HAF is managed by the Humanitarian Platform for Local and National Organisations in Uganda, which was launched in March 2018. The Uganda National NGO Forum hosts the platform and assigned it a designated focal point person. The platform steering committee, in consultation with its members, identifies activities to address priorities in the JAP and develops a workplan. The national HAF funds these activities, which are mostly about coordination and advocacy. The National NGO Forum reports directly to Oxfam on behalf of the platform.

This learning brief focuses on the two decentralized HAFs, describing their key features as shaped by LNHAs, what has been achieved during their first year, some challenges met and the way forward. This document is based on a review of HAF planning and monitoring documents, a learning review held in January 2020, interviews conducted with HAF steering committee members and observations from the ELNHA team.

¹ During Phase I, the project piloted the Humanitarian Capacity Development Fund (HCDF), a fund managed by Oxfam to which LNHAs would jointly submit proposals to fund their self-identified capacity development needs. The HAF, managed by LNHAs themselves, has replaced the HCDF.

² In Uganda, the plans were drawn up at district level during Phase I but regional and national levels in Phase II.

KEY FEATURES OF THE DECENTRALIZED HAFS IN NORTHERN UGANDA

LNHAs in both sub-regions started by establishing the mechanisms and governance structures of their respective HAFs, including the host and steering committees:

	West Nile HAF	Karamoja HAF
Host	Community Empowerment For Rural Development (CEFORD)	CARITAS Kotido
Steering committee composition	Same members as the steering committee of WNHP, chaired by Arua District NGO Network (ADINGON) 14 members – nine core members (for decision-making) and five members from different sectors for technical advice when necessary	Same members as the steering committee of KALNHA, chaired by Uganda Red Cross Nine members – chair, secretary, treasurer, sector leads, and District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC) as an observer

EUR 55,000 were allocated to each of the two decentralized HAFs for their first year of implementation.

Members of the two local platforms – WNHP in West Nile and KALNHA in Karamoja – can propose activities that contribute to the objectives set out in their respective regional JAPs.

The general objectives of the JAPs in both regions can be summarized as follows:

- Ensuring functional structures at all levels of local government for disaster management (DDMC, Sub-county Disaster Management Committee (SDMC), municipal council, village council) with up-to-date contingency plans and maps or assessments of hazards, risks and vulnerabilities.
- Improving coordination and collaboration among LNHAs.
- Increasing visibility and recognition of LNHAs and their regional platform.
- Sensitizing communities on disaster preparedness and management, and providing them opportunities to express their voices.
- LNHAs mobilizing resources – internal and external – to lead and deliver humanitarian preparedness and response.
- Establishing partnership models with other actors, promoting complementarity in programming and advocacy.
- Monitoring and documentation.

The process for allocating funding differs slightly between the two HAFs. In Karamoja, the KALNHA steering committee invites platform members to submit proposals for activities by sending documents including concept notes, a detailed budget and plan for monitoring and evaluation. Applications are reviewed by steering committee members, who also assess the applicant organization's humanitarian experience, expertise, and organisational and financial capacity using a database that tracks each platform member's different strengths.

In West Nile, the WNHP does not send out formal invitations for proposals; instead, platform members can submit a concept note to a focal point person, who forwards it to CEFORD. Funding is awarded by the steering committee on the basis of the applicant's capacity, as per a locally maintained database, and the added value of the proposed activities and their alignment with the JAP. In both regions, the proposals review process takes around three days to a week.

Once the steering committee has awarded HAF funding to a LNHA, the HAF host (CEFORD or CARITAS Kotido) draws up a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the recipient and transfers funds for implementation. Each funding recipient reports to the HAF host.

Annex 1 provides details on the key principles and procedures for HAF management, including the respective tasks and duties of the HAF steering committees and recipients of funding, as laid out in the operational guidelines of the two funds.

ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE FIRST YEAR

The joint development of HAF guidelines in both regions, with support from the ELNHA team, has been a significant achievement. When asked to reflect on these guidelines after about six months of putting them into practice, the steering committees of both HAFs felt that they were sufficiently clear and detailed.

Results	Activities implemented with HAF funding (Aug 2019 – Mar 2020)	Organization leading the activities
Functional local government structures in the district (DDMC, municipal council, sub-county, villages)	Launch of KALNHA at regional level.	CARITAS Kotido
	Facilitation of a learning visit for KALNHA platform members to exchange experiences with WNHP on HAF management.	CARITAS Kotido
	Quarterly coordination meetings and one review meeting for platform members.	CARITAS Kotido Kotido District Local Government
	HAF steering committee meetings.	CARITAS Kotido
Updated, resourced and activated district contingency plans in North Karamoja (Kotido and Kaabong)	Support to DDMC quarterly meetings and advocacy for them to fund future meetings.	CARITAS Kotido
	Three influencing meetings to advocate for councillors to commit 5% of district annual budgets to disaster management.	CARITAS Kotido
	Three meetings, one radio talk show and 17 radio spot messages to disseminate early warning information for community preparedness.	Uganda Red Cross Society and Manna Development Agency (an LNGO)
	Hazard mapping and vulnerability risk assessment to inform updating of contingency plans.	CARITAS Kotido
	Influencing meeting with DDMCs and DEC prior to the development of the district development plans.	CARITAS Kotido
LNHAs promote disaster preparedness and response through humanitarian and development interventions in vulnerable communities and influencing	One training and four coordination meetings to strengthen local structures (PDCs and the LCs) in the planning process.	Kotido District Local Government
	Training to support SDMCs to actively engage in the planning process and ensure their participation in the DDMC coordination meetings.	Kotido District Local Government
Increased visibility and recognition of local humanitarian actors in Karamoja among donors, communities and government	IEC materials developed on local actors' activities to promote localization of humanitarian aid.	CARITAS Kotido
LNHAs mobilize resources – internal and external – to lead and deliver humanitarian preparedness and response	Quality Assurance Certification Mechanism (QuAM) sensitization meeting and capacity assessment conducted for selected LNHAs.	CARITAS Kotido
	Training conducted for LNHAs on resource mobilization, including proactive response to call for proposals, financial management and resource utilization.	CARITAS Kotido
	Development of a leadership development trajectory on cash transfer programming to promote participatory and decentralized leadership skills.	CARITAS Kotido
	Joint humanitarian proposal development.	CARITAS Kotido
Monitoring	Monitoring of HAF implementation by the platform steering committee.	CARITAS Kotido
	General monitoring for ELNHA: key performance indicators and outcome harvesting.	CARITAS Kotido

In general, LNHAs stated that they appreciated the HAF concept as they felt it gave them more control and decision-making power to implement their own local agenda. Compared to the HCDF, the capacity development fund managed by Oxfam during the first phase of ELNHA, the HAF triggers more ownership of JAPs by LNHAs and fosters an attitude of prioritizing needs and looking more into planning

and coordination. In the words of the secretary of one of the two funds, ‘with the HAF, you get the serious organizations’, meaning the LNHAs that are most committed to implementing activities.

When asked whether they were concerned about HAF creating more competition between LNHAs, interviewed steering committee members stated that they saw more support than competition because ELNHA had fostered collaboration among local organizations, including the formation of consortia to respond to emergencies. Competition will always be there, but they consider that it is currently generally a healthy competition.

The JAP and HAF processes have continued to nurture a spirit of collaboration and coordination among LNHAs in the two sub-regions. For instance, when Uganda went into lockdown in March 2020 in response to Covid-19, members of the local platform continued to work together, setting up virtual communication channels including a WhatsApp group to share updates on their responses, challenges and learning, as well as the procedures to access settlements while responding to Covid-19. When restrictions did not allow for in-person meetings, LNHAs organized themselves to update the JAP remotely using a structured questionnaire co-designed with Oxfam, virtual meetings and phone conferences. The updated JAP later informed the workplan for 2021-2022. The WNHP also developed a health response plan which was shared with LNHAs to customize for their own responses. LNHAs in both sub-regions are displaying an increased desire to form consortia, especially to jointly develop proposals for humanitarian responses.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING THE FIRST YEAR

The HAF is an unprecedented locally-managed mechanism for funding LNHAs’ initiatives to strengthen the local humanitarian system. It has taken shape while being implemented for the first time, and inevitably some challenges have been met along the way. This section describes the most common issues experienced.

• IMPLEMENTATION DELAYS

For both decentralized HAFs, implementation started at a slower pace than initially planned. While the first activities were supposed to happen in July 2019, they began only in September and October.

At the end of January 2020, two months before the planned finalization of all HAF activities, only half the budgeted amount had been spent in both regions. Some delays in disbursing funds were due to the need for additional time to shape the HAF, others to late reporting: a recipient must submit satisfactory narrative and financial reports for previous activities to receive an advance for the next activities.

• INTERNAL CAPACITY ISSUES WITHIN HAF FUNDING RECIPIENTS

Late reporting was usually a result of staff turnover, especially in finance departments; lack of staff to implement activities; or lack of cooperation between finance staff and programme staff. Younger organizations found it especially difficult to write quality narrative reports. The HAF hosts, CEFORD and CARITAS Kotido, worked with recipients to strengthen their capacities in these areas as needed.

Influencing capacity among platform members remained weak: the ELNHA team reported that some LNHAs still struggled to understand what is really influencing work and what is not, and lacked strategies. As a result, few influencing activities have been implemented with HAF funding.

• INTERNAL BUREAUCRACY OF HAF FUNDING RECIPIENT AND HOST

In one region, local government and the HAF host found that internal bureaucracy complicated transfers of funds. For instance, the host of the HAF would normally take 25% of overhead on any transfer to partner organizations, but this should not happen for HAF funds. This issue was solved by requesting the funds to be transferred directly to the finance department. Local government accessed funds through the ELNHA project manager to implement the activities assigned to them.

• LIMITED NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVING HAF FUNDING

KALNHA in Karamoja and the WNHP in West Nile are regional platforms; however, ELNHA is implemented in only two or three districts per region: Kaabong and Kotido in Karamoja, and Arua, Koboko and Yumbe in West Nile. While the platform and HAF have the same steering committee, only some platform members can access HAF funding. This has generated frustrations among members from other districts.

In both sub-regions, HAF activities have been implemented by only a small number of local actors: the DDMCs, the HAF hosts, two radio stations in West Nile, and a couple of other NGOs. Steering committee members stated that HAF funding was awarded based on the quality of the submitted proposals and the expertise of the applicants, and observed that some local organizations are letting bigger ones lead in the development and submission of proposals: recipients of HAF funding can engage other LNHAs to implement activities. If more LNHAs could access funding, it would maintain the attractiveness of the mechanism for a wider group.

The steering committees also had to manage the disappointment of organizations that did not have their proposals accepted because they were not up to the required quality.

• REGIONAL PLATFORM AND THEIR STEERING COMMITTEES NOT YET FULLY FUNCTIONAL

The LNHAs’ platforms, KALNHA and WNHP, are still quite young. As they have the same steering committee, this immaturity sometimes impacts the management of the HAF. For example:

- One platform took longer than the other to establish the steering committee and has grown at a slower pace; its members have complained that the chair is not active enough.
- The host of the other platform’s HAF mentioned that a lot of time was spent mobilizing steering committee members, with back-and-forth communications slowing implementation.

- Improvements are needed in monitoring of HAF-funded activities by steering committee members to ensure quality.

• **COMPETITION BETWEEN LNHA WITHIN THE PLATFORM**

There is still some competition among local actors. Not all fully participate in the platform's initiatives, which limits the potential of the HAF.

WAY FORWARD AND SUSTAINABILITY

The following actions are considered necessary by the HAF steering committees and the ELNHA team to further strengthen the HAFs and ensure the sustainability of this mechanism.

- Strengthening the regional platforms:
 - Support platform members to shape their joint influencing work by performing a power mapping exercise, identifying influencing priorities, and linking the regional platforms with the national platform.
 - Use the HAFs to build LNHA's advocacy and presentation skills.
 - Document the platforms' experiences and achievements and use of HAF funding.
 - Support platform members to better articulate the focus of their activities: collective influencing for a stronger local humanitarian system, capacity development, networking among members and with other stakeholders, and resource mobilization to ensure sustainability of the platform and the HAF.
 - Steering committee members should continue to popularize the platform, putting forward the potential added value of membership, to attract more and more diverse members including refugee-led and women's rights organizations.
 - Support platform members to have a seat in various working groups within the country for more efficient information sharing with other actors beyond the platform.
- Enhancing commitment and engagement of platform member organizations:
 - Platform steering committees and ELNHA team to ensure that platform members (beyond the steering committee) are more directly involved in prioritizing activities from the JAPs and the subsequent development of workplans and budgets.
 - Steering committees to make the selection of concept notes for HAF funding more transparent.
 - Steering committees to perform assessments of new organizations so they can have the opportunity to apply to the HAF.
- LNHA applying to the HAF to ensure quality planning and implementation of their activities:
 - Putting communities at the centre of their projects, prioritizing refugee-led and women-led groups in their proposed activities, and ensuring fair representation of women at all stages.
 - Developing and submitting concept notes in a timely manner, reporting in a timely manner, and engaging with the steering committee when they face implementation issues.

In general, the sustainability of the decentralized HAFs is directly linked to the sustainability of the WNHP and KALNHA. The following signs are encouraging:

- During Covid-19 responses, as international actors temporarily closed their operations, task force teams at district and sub-county levels recognized the importance of LNHA. Through the platforms, LNHA have been part of task forces and represented on various sub-committees responding to the crisis.
- The steering committee of the WNHP is working on a strategic plan for sustainability, and plans for resource mobilization that involve grouping LNHA into various thematic areas.
- KALNHA has gained more members and is engaging other donors, such as GIZ. It is enhancing its ways of working, for instance by holding some steering committee meetings in districts other than Kaabong and Kotido, and launching a website.

ANNEX 1: KEY FEATURES OF THE DECENTRALIZED HAFS IN UGANDA, AS OUTLINED IN THEIR GUIDELINES

	West Nile HAF	Karamoja HAF
HOST	Community Empowerment For Rural Development (CEFORD)	CARITAS Kotido
STEERING COMMITTEE COMPOSITION	- Same members as the steering committee of WNHP, chaired by Arua District NGO Network (ADINGON) 14 members – nine core members (for decision making) and five members from different sectors for technical advice when necessary	- Same members as the steering committee of KALNHA, chaired by Uganda Red Cross - Nine members – chair, secretary, treasurer, sector leads, and District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC) as an observer
KEY PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES FOR HAF MANAGEMENT	- Responsibility for funds lies with the host (CEFORD) and steering committee of WNHP. - Clear allocation of roles and tasks between the chair and other steering committee members to stimulate coordination, ownership and learning. - The WNHP has a focal point person who coordinates activities by platform members and ensures linkage with the host, in consultation with steering committee members. - The steering committee holds quarterly meetings to agree on activities to be funded during the quarter. - Corruption is not tolerated. - Monitoring by CEFORD, the steering committee chair and others persons to whom the chair delegates responsibility to, for instance, check value for money, ensure quality of planned activities and track budgets.	- The HAF is entirely managed by the steering committee, which takes decisions about use of the HAF in consultation with KALNHA members. - Clear allocation of roles and tasks between the chair and other steering committee members to stimulate coordination, ownership and learning. - KALNHA has a focal point person who coordinates activities by platform members and ensures linkage with the host, in consultation with steering committee members. - Issues are presented to the chair or secretary. - The chair convenes quarterly meetings to be attended by steering committee members. - The HAF steering committee meets if there is a minimum quorum of five members, and decisions are reached by consensus. - The HAF steering committee and CARITAS management review submitted concept notes and approve those which are in line with the HAF workplan and activity budget. - The steering committee shares its decisions with Oxfam through CARITAS and gives feedback to the communities and other stakeholders. - CARITAS ensures that recipients of HAF funding sign an MoU with the steering committee, Caritas management and other relevant KALNHA members. - The HAF steering committee conducts monitoring, including financial verifications.
HAF ACCESSIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS FROM RECIPIENTS	- The HAF is accessible to members of the WNHP in Arua and Koboko districts. - WNHP members seeking funds for activities submit a concept note to the focal point person, who forwards it to CEFORD. Funding is awarded on the basis of the applicant's capacity and the activities' added value and alignment with the JAP. - Implementation of activities in the workplan shall respect schedules and budget; any changes shall be discussed in advance with all parties involved.	- Eligibility criteria for HAF funding: be a KALNHA member from Kotido or Kaabong district, registered with national or district government; have competent staff; have an active bank account and an operational office in the area. - KALNHA committee sends members in these districts an invitation to submit proposals for activities planned in the JAPs. Applications must include a concept note, assessment report, M&E plan, detailed budget, formal signed request for funds, and previous audited accounts. Applications are reviewed by the HAF steering committee and funding awarded based on the expertise and strengths of the applicants.

	West Nile HAF	Karamoja HAF
HAF ACCESSIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS FROM RECIPIENTS	10. Recipients of HAF funding shall submit narrative and financial reports to CEFORD within five days after the completion of an activity. 11. Funds shall be disbursed per activity and against reporting. Based on a signed MoU, CEFORD advances money to recipients, which have to provide full accountability.	13. Recipients of HAF funding should use generally acceptable accounting systems. 14. Recipients of HAF funding should account for activities to the HAF steering committee within five working days of completion, by presenting a narrative report (including pictures and success stories) and financial report (with supporting documents). Audits will be undertaken if deemed necessary by the committee. 15. All unspent funds to be returned to CARITAS together with the report and full accountability for the funds. 16. Any disbursement of follow-up funds shall depend on satisfactory accounting for the previous tranche.

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