DIGNIFIED CREDENTIALS TO ACCESS HUMANITARIAN CASH ASSISTANCE IN MIGRATION:

LESSONS LEARNT FROM UGANDA

FEBRUARY 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover photo: A mother from Bukedea participating in the Dignified Identities in Cash Assistance (DIGID) pilot and whose livelihood was affected by floods receives cash-in-envelope from Uganda Red Cross Society.
Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS), in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), carried out a pilot as part of the Dignified Identities in Cash Assistance (DIGID) project[1]. This pilot builds on the experience of the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) and the IFRC in 2021 in providing humanitarian cash assistance to vulnerable people with no official IDs and whose livelihoods were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic[2]. The DIGID project is governed by a consortium of NGOs composed of the Norwegian Red Cross, Norwegian Refugee Council, Norwegian Church Aid, and Save the Children Norway. It is funded by Innovation Norway.

The DIGID project in Uganda was conducted between January 2022 to November 2022. The URCS leveraged the same technology solution that was previously piloted in Kenya and adapted it for the context of Uganda. The project specifically looked at the migration context in Uganda and analysed the opportunities and risks of providing humanitarian-issued digital credentials to vulnerable migrants. The digital credentials were used to establish eligibility to receive cash and voucher assistance, a modality that the URCS has proven to deliver dignity and choice to people.

According to the UNHCR, Uganda is one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in Africa[3]. As of 2022, the migrants coming to Uganda are mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Burundi, and South Sudan, which either directly borders the country or is near it. The IFRC has a broad definition of migrants, which includes refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, and people moving between borders. It is important to note that the DIGID project does not create official IDs or replace government-issued IDs. It is limited to establishing eligibility for assistance and not as proof of identity.

Due to the sensitivity of dealing with migrants in Uganda, particularly with refugees and asylum seekers, the project opted to conduct simulations initially as an active way to go through the processes in a safe and controlled environment without interacting with migrants directly. The simulation requested participation from URCS volunteers that interact with migrant communities and provide assistance to them. Local government representatives were also invited to participate. The simulation feedback was then used as an advocacy tool to educate stakeholders, including government representatives and other humanitarian organisations, on the potential for digital credentials to help establish eligibility for cash assistance. The simulations were done in the Isingiro district close to the Nakivale Refugee Settlement and in Busia, where cross-border assistance scenarios were simulated between URCS and KRCS staff and volunteers.

Given the positive feedback and response from stakeholders that attended the simulation sessions, including the local government units, the DIGID solution was deemed ready to be piloted with internally displaced persons (IDP) that URCS is serving to have more practical learnings from communities. The URCS conducted the field pilot in the Bukedea district with four groups of 60 women who were internally displaced due to floods; 62% of them did not have official IDs. They each were given QR codes linked to their digital wallets and credentials, which were used to verify their eligibility to receive 250,000 UGX (66 USD) per family for livelihood support.

While there are clear benefits of the DIGID technology, including aid optimisation for the URCS and safeguarding people's dignity by issuing digital credentials, there is also room for improvement for the project, including more consultations with different types of vulnerable migrants to validate their needs and how DIGID could help especially in helping them own and use their data. Other improvements include working with Gravity to improve the technology of the DIGID platform, so it fits the standard operating procedures of URCS, employing a more targeted advocacy plan to engage the government on the benefits of the DIGID project, and working toward more partnerships with other local humanitarian partners to avoid re-registration and attend to the needs of vulnerable people quicker.

1   https://hiplatform.org/digid
2   https://cash-hub.org/resource/dignified-identities-in-cash-assistance-lessons-learnt-from-kenya/
3   https://www.unhcr.org/uk/uganda.html

Bukedea women are waiting for the verification process to receive cash assistance. Photo credit: Uganda Red Cross

Introduction

Problems with identification in migration

Migrants, including asylum seekers, refugees, and internally displaced persons, all face situations where their proof of identity can quickly become a thing of the past. Someone facing violent conflicts or natural disasters such as drought, famine, and floods, often lose or have their proof of identity destroyed. Without these vital legal documents proving their identity, a forcibly displaced migrant who crosses an international border will usually be unable to access and utilise legal channels to retrieve humanitarian assistance[4]. They face acute challenges in accessing registration and identification processes that make legal identity a tangible entitlement. These barriers may be structural and affect people on the move disproportionately because of their specific vulnerabilities or may be linked to states' policies and practices intended to exclude displaced persons[5]. Lacking a legal identity has immediate and adverse effects on displaced people, including facing difficulty proving their identity to employers and government officials to secure a livelihood. Those who have fled their country will have difficulty obtaining their legal documents since they usually can only be obtained in the place of origin of that displaced person. The journey to a displaced person's place of origin usually cannot be made due to threats to their security, lack of resources and fear of jeopardising their legal stay in that host country.

The IFRC's 2021 report Digital Identity: Enabling Dignified Access to Humanitarian Services in Migration[6], highlighted that migrants are being asked for identification at every step in their journey when trying to access basic humanitarian services; one reason is due to the accountability that humanitarian organisations must ensure knowing their customers and also making sure recipients

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4   World Bank (2017): Refugee Identification Challenges
5   Norwegian Refugee Council (2019): ID in Forced Displacement Contexts
6   https://preparecenter.org/resource/digital-identity-enabling-dignified-access-to-humanitarian-services-in-migration/

of aid meet the eligibility requirements. The report also highlighted that certain migrants might not want to divulge or share personal information for fear of being discriminated against, deported, or targeted negatively. The needs for identification by migrants, therefore, involve a careful balance so they can be included in humanitarian assistance without causing them harm.

Migration & identification context in Uganda

Uganda has been hosting refugees for a long time. The Nakivale refugee settlement in southwest Uganda is one of the oldest refugee settlements in Africa and hosted Tutsis who fled during the first waves of conflict in Rwanda in the 1960s and refugees from Sudan who fled during the first civil war in the late 1960s. Currently, the settlement hosts upwards of 70,000 refugees[7].

Uganda is viewed as a "progressive" refugee-hosting country. Refugees have the right to work, the government has a relatively open regulatory policy on living and intra-country travel, and refugees receive commensurate social services as Ugandan citizens. Additionally, Uganda is the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, with around 1.5 million refugees. Approximately 60% of these refugees are from Sudan, and 30% are from the DRC. They are primarily concentrated in the north and the southeast of the country. Due to their history of hosting refugees and Uganda's role in the region, the Ugandan government is heavily involved in migration. Similarly, with other countries in the region, Uganda wants to eliminate as much tension with migrants as possible to keep their country safe and secure. This has meant working with organisations like the UNHCR to safeguard refugees.

Uganda rolled out their national identity card program in 2014, which required everyone over 18 years old to carry on their person an identity card essential for accessing basic services and certain functional services such as obtaining a SIM card. Physical identification cards are now in the process of being replaced by digital identification, ultimately making physical cards obsolete. The Ugandan government has a goal of using "smart digital IDs" that employ biometric data collection and utilisation, namely recognising an individual's eyes and DNA. There have been some challenges with the digital ID rollout. Around 4.5 million people have been unable to obtain their digital credentials so far[8], leaving people without the ability to access basic services. Civil societies have jumped to action within Uganda and sued the Ugandan government because millions of citizens have been unable to access services or have been refused services due to lack of identification[9].

In 2018, UNHRC and the Office of Prime Minister (OPM) registered more than 1.1 million refugees, which included their personal data and biometrics. This was done not only to verify the identity of those receiving assistance to lower the risk of fraud but also to help improve the management of refugees and provide protection and assistance. But going through this massive registration process incurred strains, particularly for the refugee communities. Any efforts, therefore, that deal with collecting data from refugee populations, particularly if they relate to identity information, require agreement from the Government. This is to ensure that the efforts do not duplicate the data that may already have been collected and to avoid any tension within the refugee communities.

Uganda's strong background in recent years in pursuing a digital ID solution for its citizens highlights that they see a perceived benefit from the technology, but it does come with some level of sensitivity, and therefore, careful advocacy is needed from the beginning.

7   UNHCR Report: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/uganda.html
8   https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uganda-tech-rights/millions-of-ugandans-denied-vital-services-over-digital-id-cards-idUSKCN2DK28W
9   https://www.reuters.com/article/uganda-tech-biometrics/feature-uganda-sued-over-digital-id-system-that-excludes-millions-idUKL3N2X32RG

DIGID Overview

Uganda Red Cross Society staff and volunteers sorting printed QR codes that will be distributed to targeted households to help establish their eligibility for cash assistance. Photo credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

In order to address the challenges of migrants and their specific identification needs for humanitarian action, the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) partnered with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to implement the Dignified Identities for Cash Assistance (DIGID) project in Uganda. This project builds on the experience of the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) and the IFRC, who have successfully piloted the DIGID solution in 2021, focusing on cash assistance for non-migrant populations with no official IDs[10].

The DIGID project is governed by a consortium of NGOs comprising the Norwegian Red Cross, Norwegian Refugee Council, Norwegian Church Aid, and Save the Children Norway, with funding support from Innovation Norway[11]. The DIGID project does not create legal or official IDs and does not intend to replace or duplicate government-issued IDs. The purpose of humanitarian-issued digital identities is to help establish eligibility so vulnerable people affected by crises, disasters, and health emergencies can receive humanitarian assistance, particularly cash.

The DIGID project also aims to:

- Empower individuals to control and access their own data
- Provide assistance in low connectivity areas
- Enable recognition of digital credentials amongst other humanitarian actors

The Uganda Red Cross Society has been increasing their capacities and experiences in delivering cash and voucher assistance (CVA). They participate in the national cash working group and are part

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10 IFRC, 2021– Dignified Identities in Cash Assistance: Lessons Learnt from Kenya: https://cash-hub.org/resource/dignified-identities-in-cash-assistance-lessons-learnt-from-kenya/
11 https://hiplatform.org/digid

of a "Cash Consortium" funded by the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) to deliver cash assistance to refugees. With this project, the URCS aspires to learn how digital credentials could help provide more inclusive cash assistance to vulnerable people, including migrants, whom they serve.

Experience from Kenya

The first iteration of the DIGID project was rolled out with non-migrant populations in urban and rural locations in Kenya. The Kenya Red Cross Society worked with tech company Gravity to create and service the digital platform and create digital wallets which people used for verification to access cash benefits. The digital wallets storing digital credentials about the aid recipients could show their eligibility details to receive cash assistance.

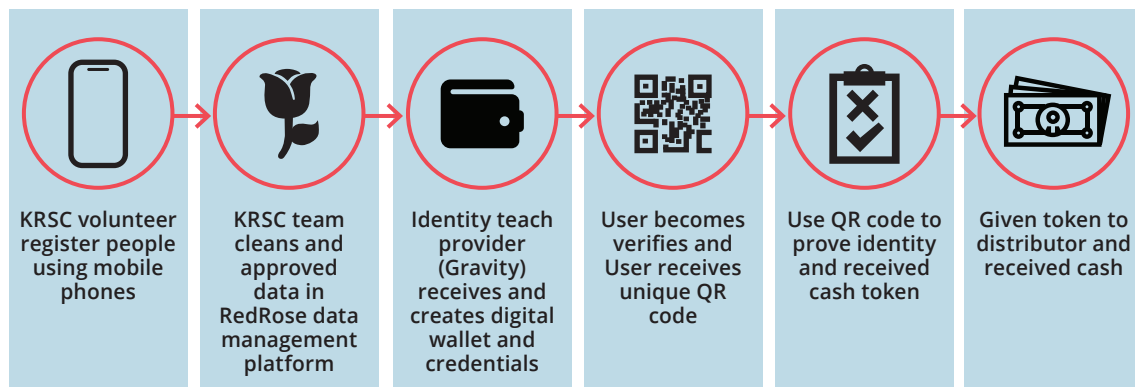| KRSC volunteer register people using mobile phones | KRSC team cleans and approved data in RedRose data management platform | Identity teach provider (Gravity) receives and creates digital wallet and credentials | User becomes verifies and User receives unique QR code | Use QR code to prove identity and received cash token | Given token to distributor and received cash |

Figure 1: The process flow used in the first phase of DIGID to issue digital wallets and digital credentials to establish eligibility for people to receive humanitarian cash assistance.

The learnings and recommendations from this pilot were used to expand the use of digital wallets for migration and healthcare. The KRCS was piloting the DIGID solution in 2022 with refugees, asylum seekers, and host communities in Kakuma and Kalobeyei areas, where the KRCS is providing health care assistance.

Report purpose and methodology

This report presents the lessons learnt, findings and observations based on reflections from key activities conducted throughout the implementation of the DIGID project in Uganda. Key informant interviews, informal discussions, and field interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders from URCS, representatives from the local government and other humanitarian organisations, and community members participating in the field pilot.

DIGID Key Activities in Uganda

Uganda Red Cross Society staff conducting a post-distribution monitoring exercise following the encashment.
Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

The DIGID project was implemented by the Uganda Red Cross Society and IFRC from January to November 2022. The following were the key activities. For a more detailed list of activities, please see Annex 1.

Step 1 Inception Workshop

The inception workshop took place on January 31st, 2022, at the headquarters of the Uganda Red Cross Society in Kampala. The workshop explored the need for digital identification in humanitarian action, particularly to support the work of URCS with migrants and host communities. It also helped develop an understanding of critical concepts related to digital identification, hear from the experiences of KRCS on their implementation of DIGID in Kenya, and identify potential scenarios or use cases where DIGID could be explored in Uganda. The workshop was led by the IFRC and attended by URCS staff from different departments. KRCS shared lessons from their pilot, and Gravity held a demonstration of the technology and the platform.

Step 2 Prioritisation of Scenarios

During the inception workshop, the URCS spent time brainstorming scenarios and potential uses of digital credentials, particularly to help assist vulnerable migrants in Uganda. Six scenarios were mapped out, which were evaluated based on opportunities and risks for vulnerable migrants and humanitarian organisations. After the scenarios were confirmed, the URCS prioritised them based on needs and risks to people, potential opportunities or impact to them, and the feasibility in

implementing the solution and running a pilot according to the project's timeline. The prioritisation of the six scenarios is listed below.

PRIORITY 1: Internally Displaced People (IDP) who lost their identification or did not have one seeking humanitarian assistance	IDPs are forced to leave their homes due to disasters or crises but have not left their country or crossed an international border. Their situation could be made more vulnerable by not having an official ID, which may have been lost or destroyed due to the disaster or crisis, or they may not have had one before. The URCS decided that IDPs would be the **highest priority** because IDPs could benefit from the digital credential while having a low sensitivity within the government. The URCS found that the government was more sensitive toward the URCS working with refugees and asylum seekers rather than IDPs who are already citizens of Uganda.

Similarly, host communities with no official IDs living in areas where migrants are attended to are seen to benefit from the DIGID solution and may have lower levels of sensitivity from the government, partly due to the integrated approach with migrants and host communities to avoid tensions between the communities. |
| **PRIORITY 2:** Referral of people to other organisations offering specialised humanitarian services | Aid agencies may have different focus areas and mandates that may affect how they prioritise the people they serve and the types of assistance and specialised services they provide (e.g., food, children, refugees only, etc.). Migrants may have to reach out to multiple agencies to obtain the right services.

This scenario aims at working towards cooperation and coordination between humanitarian actors while also exploring the minimal amount of data that is required to ensure effective referrals while preserving migrants' privacy. |
| **PRIORITY 3:** Cross-border Migrants requiring essential services | Migrants transiting across another country's borders will require essential services such as food, water, and shelter on their journey. Given the DIGID pilots in Kenya, the URCS identified an opportunity to collaborate with KRCS to discuss how migrants coming from their border could be recognised and provided assistance by the two National Societies. Given that the migrants are coming to Uganda from neighbouring countries, collaboration on cross-border assistance with the National Societies is deemed necessary.

This scenario also explored the potential for integrating DIGID in Humanitarian Service Points (HSP)[12], which are safe and welcoming centres that provide essential services to migrants at key points on migration routes. |

12 https://preparecenter.org/toolkit/humanitarian-service-points-toolkit/

PRIORITY 4: Refugee Employment Credentials	Refugees who are being employed as staff or brought in as volunteers by humanitarian organisations might not have their original employment or education certificates with them. There's an opportunity to utilise DIGID to create credentials for use by refugees in various NGOs when they seek employment or volunteer opportunities. These credentials could help them show their past experiences and training received and verified by other NGOs. This scenario is less about humanitarian assistance but could be complementary for those receiving aid and looking for livelihoods, which aligns with the vision of the government to improve the longer-term conditions for refugees.
PRIORITY 5: Newly arrived refugees	New refugees from other countries must wait for processing and documentation in Uganda. The issuance of a digital wallet and credentials to already recognised refugees that just arrived in the country could provide some short-term benefits and avoid exclusion from assistance as they wait for official documentation. This scenario requires close collaboration with the government and UNHCR.
PRIORITY 6: Asylum Seekers	Depending on the country of origin, asylum seekers may receive limited assistance from Uganda. The Ugandan government is very sensitive toward humanitarian organisations working with asylum seekers, which made this scenario a lower priority for the project, given the time needed to ensure proper buy-in and advocacy with the government. This scenario highlighted the importance of providing humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable, which might be considered invisible due to lack of status. The DIGID project does not aim to create a legal identity but rather help improve the ability of migrants to establish their eligibility for assistance.

Uganda Red Cross Society volunteers testing the DIGID platform during the simulation in the Isingiro district. Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

Women from Bukedea during an information session for the DIGID pilot. Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

Step 3 Further Engagement

After the inception workshop and the prioritisation of scenarios, the URCS started to engage with the governmental ministries in February 2022 regarding the DIGID project.

The URCS and IFRC met with the Office of Prime Minister - Commissioner on Refugees. The project team provided an overview of the DIGID project. The representatives from the government expressed interest but highlighted some questions and concerns:

- What data will be collected from refuges or persons of concern? Is this meant for duplicating efforts on data that have been collected already by OPM and UNHCR?
- How will data be collected? Will data be collected from all refugees?
- What are the expectations for sharing data with the government, and how will that be done?
- There was a concern that the credentials issued might be construed as legal ID and be used or shared by refugees as if it is legal ID. There is a risk of creating confusion with partners and potentially compromising the protection of persons of concern.

The project team noted the questions and concerns and mentioned that the project is still in its inception stage, and analysing these questions and concerns will be important to ensure the project does not create risks for vulnerable migrants. The project is also planning to do a small, limited pilot rather than a full rollout to identify critical learnings. The project team also reiterated that the project does not intend to create official or legal IDs and does not intend to collect information that has already been collected.

One important factor mentioned in the discussions was that assistance information is not systematically collected by the government and it relies on humanitarian organisations for this. Therefore , here is an opportunity for practical and privacy-protecting data sharing between the government and humanitarian actors that could also help reduce duplication of assistance

and improve the referral of services. These insights were useful in analysing the needs and opportunities of the DIGID project.

The URCS and IFRC met with the Office of Prime Minister - Disaster Preparedness. The project team focused the discussion on internally displaced people (IDP). In this meeting, the government representatives mentioned that eight districts in Uganda had IDPs at the time, primarily due to natural disasters. The government representatives were particularly interested in reducing the duplication of assistance and allowing people to get complementary services from other agencies. The opportunity for the DIGID solution to help coordinate with humanitarian actors in terms of assistance was seen as positive.

After consulting with the two groups in OPM, it was clear that the government's representatives needed more information to advise further. They requested more information regarding the detailed objectives of the project and the planned pilot (including the target number of people to participate in the pilot), the scope, methodology, and the data points that will be collected during the pilot. It was also clear that the sensitivity in dealing with refugees and asylum seekers was very high and close collaboration and buy-in from the government was needed. The government has the mandate to register and provide protection to refugees and people of concern.

Step 4 Simulations

After analysing the initial feedback from the government representatives and other stakeholders, the URCS and IFRC decided to focus on simulations, where the use of the technology could be tested in a safe and controlled manner with URCS staff and volunteers and using fictitious data, instead of field pilots that deal with real people and their data. The simulations were designed to be conducted in field settings where the scenarios of providing cash assistance using the DIGID platform could be simulated. Representatives from the local government units and humanitarian organisations providing assistance in the same areas were invited to observe and provide feedback during the simulation. The URCS conducted two simulations meant to garner support for the DIGID project within the Ugandan government and other humanitarian actors. Representatives from Gravity, the technology provider, were present in person and online to demonstrate the solution and answer questions regarding the technology and data.

The first simulation took place in the Isingiro district in the western region of Uganda from June 15th to 17th. A baseline simulation was done with URCS branch staff and volunteers in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement on June 15th, 2022 and went through the processes of providing cash assistance to refugees using the current tools of the URCS. The following day, the same staff, volunteers, the local government unit, and representatives from the Cash Consortium supported by ECHO were introduced to the DIGID solution. A scenario-based role play was conducted to see how the DIGID solution was adapted to URCS' cash assistance processes. Scenarios related to dealing with people without official IDs and referrals to other organisations with specialised services were examined. Feedback and recommendations were then discussed during the debriefing.

Key takeaways from the baseline exercise using current tools of the URCS (excluding DIGID solution):

- The lists of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) may not be as readily available as the lists of refugees and asylum seekers whose data can be obtained from UNHCR. The DIGID project should consider when data of people already exists in specific databases, so data collection is not duplicated.
- It was observed that people with disabilities and high vulnerabilities are being left behind. One reason is that they cannot go to registration sites or may need further assistance in being registered.
- People undergo a redundant re-registration process from different humanitarian organisations. With no to very little data sharing among humanitarian actors, re-registration is the only way to go using current tools. Donors are looking for more efficiency but also

higher accountability and transparency, and with consortiums funded by institutional donors, organisations are being challenged to improve data interoperability to avoid re-registration and duplication of data.

- In some instances, a temporary, paper-based "beneficiary card" with essential information that is signed by an authorised URCS personnel is issued to people to help facilitate quicker validation during a distribution.

- Registrations create an expectation for communities that assistance will be provided. Multiple registrations increase such expectations, and (timely) feedback to communities on why they were not assisted is not provided at times. People are left unaware if they qualify for assistance.

The key takeaways from the simulation where the DIGID solution was used::

- The DIGID solution does not change the data collection procedures of an organisation. They can use their existing tools and procedures for this. Once data is collected, creating a digital wallet and credentials could be as easy as copying and pasting via the Gravity web portal. Further efficiencies and more security could be gained if there is an integration between the URCS' data collection tool and Gravity.

- The verification process, which happens after the initial registration, could be time-consuming and involve going back to the communities in hard-to-reach areas. This process is greatly enhanced by having data in digital format, and once a person is already verified by one organisation, they can easily be recognised as verified by other organisations without having to send more people to conduct the same exercise.

- The verification at the time of distribution could be streamlined, making it faster to provide assistance than requiring much different documentation. The physical "beneficiary card" issued by URCS for those that have been verified could already be replaced with the digital credentials, which are not as easy to lose or falsify.

- Different types of communities could benefit from the DIGID solution, not just refugees with recognised status but other migrants and host communities that also need to establish their eligibility for humanitarian assistance.

Staff and volunteers from Uganda Red Cross Society and Kenya Red Cross Society after a joint cross-border simulation in Busia. Kenya Red Cross Society participants physically crossed the border between Uganda and Kenya to be with the Uganda Red Cross Society participants in this event. Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

- It was observed that people did not raise many concerns regarding data protection and privacy. This is not necessarily because they do not care about their data and privacy, but possibly because they are unaware of their rights to inquire about and access their data. The discussions highlighted possible power imbalances between the people providing their data and the humanitarian actors that collect and decide whether to give assistance based on data provided to them. Ensuring data responsibility from humanitarian actors and informing and educating those providing them with personal information is critical.

- People with disabilities or difficulties in being registered may have more opportunities to be included in assistance if their data is digitised and easily shared with little mobility required. The same could be helpful when people live in hard-to-reach areas.

- The opportunity for humanitarian organisations to prioritise the benefits to affected communities by fostering data interoperability could be realised with DIGID, where digital credentials verified and issued by one organisation are recognised by other organisations and therefore reduce the re-registration process, which is not only inefficient and duplicative but also forces vulnerable people to relive potentially traumatic and challenging circumstances and to share sensitive information multiple times.

- Having a good community engagement and accountability (CEA) strategy is important to ensure people are aware of why their data is being collected and digitised, how their credentials will be used, what rights they have to their data, and having the agency to manage and use their own data to get the services they require.

The second simulation took place in Busia on June 28th, a town at the border of Uganda and Kenya. The Kenya Red Cross Society branch and the URCS branch from their respective parts of Busia were invited to discuss the opportunities of providing continuity of care for migrants who cross borders. They met on the Uganda side of Busia. Similar to the simulation in Isingiro, the local government unit was also invited and participated with the staff and volunteers of URCS and KRCS. URCS and KRCS staff and volunteers acted as vulnerable migrants seeking essential humanitarian assistance, including cash and healthcare, across the borders on their migratory journey. With mock digital credentials issued by the KRCS, migrants were verified across the border by the Uganda Red Cross to establish their eligibility for humanitarian assistance. This simulation touched on the ability of the DIGID digital wallet and digital credentials to be portable data that migrants can take with them and be recognised when they request assistance. It seemed to also help when a migrant lost their official IDs.

The cross-border simulation provided an opportunity for the two organisations to see how the digital credentials issued by one National Society or organisation could be leveraged by vulnerable migrants when they move to a new location and seek assistance from another National Society or organisation. A scenario that was analysed in the simulation is shown in Figure 2:
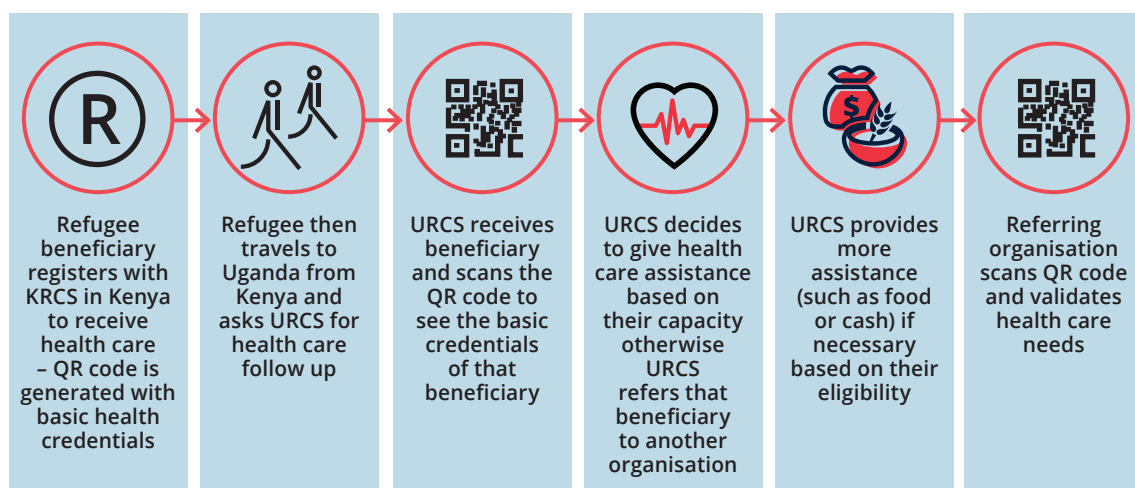

Figure 2: Journey of a migrant seeking assistance from Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies and how the digital credentials might be used

Key takeaways from the cross-border simulation:

- Between humanitarian service points (HSPs), migrants may travel through a long, difficult journey in harsh conditions. Having digital credentials and a physical QR code could help inform a National Society in their HSP that another National Society has seen the migrants in their journey. This could help in being recognised, determining eligibility, and receiving assistance quickly.

- When migrants cross the border to a foreign territory, they may face socio-cultural challenges, which can exacerbate their vulnerability, and they may find it difficult to know which organisation to approach to obtain the assistance they need. Official agreements should be put in place regarding what thematic area a humanitarian aid organisation would address.

- Digital credentials provide an opportunity for system interoperability in migration contexts among humanitarian organisations. Having procedures for data sharing and referral services that could be used in Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs) throughout the migration routes may come into reality if there is a robust coordination mechanism between sister national societies and other humanitarian aid organisations.

- The DIGID platform provides opportunities for iintegrating diverse humanitarian services to provide a range of assistance to migrants across borders and from different organisations, such as Restoration of Family Links (RFL), continuity of health care, GBV, etc. strengthening referrals from one organisation to the other.

- Functional humanitarian digital credentials may mitigate the risks posed by the lack of identity for migrants to access humanitarian assistance and there is a need for people in need of humanitarian assistance to be taken through more awareness on the aspect of data protection and privacy.

- URCS can learn from KRCS how its advocacy approach was conducted to have the buy-in of the government and other humanitarian organisations that have been closely involved as observers in the pilot projects in Kenya.

- The use of biometrics with the DIGID platform can expose more individual data, hence if it should be incorporated in the scale-up of DIGID, proper infrastructure should be in place to ensure the security of people, and the principle of minimisation of data should be greatly considered when collecting personal data to be limited only to required data sets.

Briefing of Uganda Red Cross Society staff and volunteers in Nakivale Refugee Settlement for the baseline exercise. Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society.

- There is a significant level of illiteracy in areas where most humanitarian actions occur. In the event of DIGID scaling up, more awareness should be implemented, and community engagement and accountability (CEA) approaches should be well established. Such general awareness may save vulnerable migrants time and energy in their quest for assistance from humanitarian organisations and through referrals.
- The USSD menu should be need-based, and in the aspect of languages, a pre-assessment should be done to the target people to consider the common languages in a particular context, and a proper mechanism should be put in place to register children as a target people due to child protection policies.
- The DIGID platform can be a key intervention at Humanitarian service points; such HSP could have an aspect of health aid to offer continuity of health care, and documentation and publications of the DIGID project could be an opportunity of getting linked to potential donors and funding.

Step 5 Field Pilot

Following the simulations

The URCS was able to pilot DIGID in the Bukedea district during the week of November 14, 2022, engaging with a group of IDPs. The vulnerable group was affected by flooding and was displaced. There were 60 pilot participants, with four groups from the sub-counties of Kolir, Kasenyi and Kamutur. The IDPs, among which 37 individuals did not have any form of ID, were given blanket support for livelihood in the amount of 250,000 Uganda shillings per person which amounts to The following activities were done during the pilot:

- URCS conducted programme sensitisation with the local government unit and affected communities to explain the DIGID pilot programme.
- Participants were registered using RedRose, a beneficiary data management platform.
- After confirming and cleaning the data, the required fields were uploaded in Gravity's web portal to create the digital wallets and credentials.
- QR codes for each individual were generated and issued to all participants with their PIN.
- Pilot participants that did not have official IDs were able to use their QR codes to show proof of eligibility at the time of cash distribution using a money vendor.
- Participants with official IDs received cash via mobile money, and with their QR codes, they experienced the verification process to raise awareness in the community.

Step 6 PDM (Post Distribution Monitoring)

URCS conducted a learning workshop after the pilot, which included the URCS staff, volunteers, and stakeholders to reflect on key takeaways from the activities. Additionally, URCS staff conducted a PDM, Post Distribution Monitoring, and report to conduct a more in-depth monitoring and evaluation process with a range of stakeholders who were either part of the project or observers. These reports gathered important information and findings that will be discussed in the findings section of this report.

Key Findings

Vulnerable women displaced due to floods were targeted for the cash assistance pilot in Bukedea.
Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

Perceived sensitivity of identity concepts related to migrants in Uganda

The sensitivity of digital identity in Uganda particularly in the migration context is important to analyse when dealing with an identification related project. The government has a mandate in providing official identity documents and for refugees and asylum seekers this involves a detailed data collection to establish their profile including the capture of their biometrics to ensure uniqueness and ease digital verification later.

Another sensitivity around digital identities was due to the efforts of the Ugandan government to roll out their digital identity initiative for national identification. In May 2022 it was reported that three charities sued the government "arguing that vulnerable groups have been denied access to potentially life-saving services due to flaws in the national ID card rollout[13]". Citizen identities are linked to social services and other necessary services, such as opening a bank account or getting a SIM card. Perceptions on how DIGID might be linked to this initiative given the "digital identity" title.

The term "digital identity" in the DIGID project title therefore raised some concerns the moment they are seen by stakeholders. Without knowing what the project is about, their thoughts gravitate immediately towards official and legal identity which combined with the term "migrants" are considered highly sensitive (see **"Step 2 – Prioritisation of Scenarios**" section above). The project team always adds an explanation that DIGID does not create any official IDs but rather helps establish eligibility for people to receive assistance such as cash. However, because "digital identity" triggers the same assumptions mentioned above, the project team decided not to use that term

13 https://www.reuters.com/article/uganda-tech-biometrics-idUKL3N2X32RG

when introducing the project, but rather used the terms "digital wallets" or "digital credentials" instead, which helped steer away from the confusion with legal IDs. The section on *"Education on the uses and function of DIGID ID"* below defines and differentiates functional ID and foundation ID in more detail.

Advocacy with the Ugandan government

From the start of the DIGID project in Uganda, the URCS engaged local and national government officials to secure government buy-in for the project. Learning from the Kenyan pilot, the KRCS had secured the support of the Kenyan government, which has been instrumental in continuing its pilot programs since the DIGID project began.

It takes time to explain concepts that are new to an organisation. And with technological components that they are not yet familiar with it was challenging, to effectively communicate with the government the objectives and approach of the project. As highlighted in the section above *"Step 3 – Further Engagement",* the URCS involved the Office of the Prime Minister early on, and used that opportunity to understand the concerns and questions from the government so that they can address them accordingly as URCS develops its project plan.

URCS ensured that the local government units were involved during the field level simulations and in the planning for the pilot in Bukedea. This was helpful in building a national level advocacy with the government, when the local government representatives were able to see how DIGID works and able to ask questions and share their feedback directly with the project team. This garnered support and trust from the local government and local stakeholders. This work paved the way for the URCS to implement the cash assistance pilot utilising digital credentials with small communities of IDPs.

There should be continuous conversations with the Ugandan government to continue garnering support for DIGID and using digital credentials for humanitarian assistance. The URCS should ensure the concerns and questions posed by government representatives in the initial consultations are addressed adequately, and the testimonies from local government representatives that have been involved in the process will be helpful.

Additionally, there is an opportunity for URCS in its unique role as auxiliary to the government to help advocate for national or official Ids. DIGID credentials offer only limited functionality and having a longer term and widely recognised ID will improve their access to other services not offered by the humanitarian sector.

Community perceptions

Another factor that contributes to the sensitivity of identity concepts is the perception of the community. Creating community awareness has had the benefit of addressing sensitivity around digital credentials for accessing humanitarian assistance. The awareness has provided people with information to leverage their understanding regarding existing sensitivity and complications of identity in Uganda. The participants in the pilot project in Bukedea were 98% peasant farmers, with only 3% having access to smartphones. There was also significantly limited access to other digital tools. However, through an effective creation of community awareness, participants in the cash assistance pilot were able to get a better understanding of what the DIGID digital credentials entailed, providing an opportunity for functional humanitarian digital credentials.

A majority, about 68% of the target population in the pilot cash assistance in Bukedea, have enough information on the digital identification process to use DIGID with confidence and with limited or no support. However, users with limited literacy levels need more support to overcome the challenges they face in using digital credentials.

Uganda Red Cross Society facilitating an information session in Bukedea on DIGID.
Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

Many people in Bukedea, a disaster-prone area, lacked official IDs because they were young or they did not qualify to get an ID during registration. However, some people never registered to get their IDs for personal or security reasons, and others have misplaced or lost their IDs. People liked the DIGID digital credentials because it was easy to use and to be verified quickly to access cash assistance. Participants in the pilot project believed the digital credentials could have the potential to facilitate access to other humanitarian services.

Community trust is important in driving humanitarian-issued digital credentials uptake among displaced communities needing humanitarian assistance. URCS has banked on the high level of trust the community has in them to collect and store their data because of their responsive feedback mechanism and proximity to the population. Most participants (95%) in the pilot activities in Bukedea had no concerns about their digital credentials to access humanitarian assistance. Some of the concerns raised by people regarding digital credentials were the fear of their personal details and those of their family to easily be widely known in the community or distributed out for other purposes. Obtaining informed consent from people in need of humanitarian assistance and having a mechanism to address their concerns can assure them of the security and privacy of their digital data.

Education on the uses and function of DIGID ID

DIGID offers a functional ID for people, which serves as a way for those without any form of ID to prove their eligibility for humanitarian assistance using their digital credentials. This is different from a foundational ID is typically a legal form or official ID, such as a national ID card or passport, while a functional ID has very limited and focused purpose typically, such as a library card allowing an individual to borrow a book from a library but not enrol in school with it. It is essential to distinguish between a foundational ID and a functional ID, especially for government entities that are responsible and mandated to issue foundational or legal identities and for the people obtaining the DIGID credentials, which has a limited purpose to receive humanitarian assistance.

URCS staff and volunteers should do more to educate people on the different types of credentials and the uses for different digital credentials. Thereby, the person would be aware of precisely what the DIGID credential could be used for and that it should not be considered a legal ID. The education efforts would also help assuage the Ugandan government's concerns that DIGID could cause confusion for its recipients on when such credentials could be used and for what purposes.

Given the concepts and technology is still quite new to many people including URCS staff and volunteers, there were some confusions about the DIGID credentials that were raised during the simulations. For instance, some stakeholders thought DIGID was a beneficiary management system and that they could create as many credentials related to an individual and store them in the wallet. This was clarified by differentiating the systems related to programmatic decision making such as a beneficiary management solution and a system that establishes eligibility based on a minimum set of data, where DIGID fits in. DIGID in a way is a layer above a beneficiary management system, where more information could be stored about households due to the needs of a programme. But DIGID should only have a minimum set enough for people to be recognized and given their assistance. When piloting the DIGID platform in other national societies, the IFRC should clarify the purpose of digital credentials to ensure national society staff and volunteers are clearly aligned.

Uganda Red Cross Society staff and volunteers discuss DIGID functionalities during a joint cross-border simulation with the Kenya Red Cross Society in Busia. Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

Recommendations

Uganda Red Cross Society staff scanning a QR code that refers to the digital credential of a participant in Bukedea.
Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

User Consultations Are a Must

The URCS should conduct more user consultations to better understand the perception of communities on the technological solution. They should seek ideas on how DIGID might be able to address their needs including how to receive assistance faster especially for those with no official identity documents typically required in CVA, also on how to manage and use their data to request services specific to their needs, and to better understand their perception of the security of their data.

The DIGID pilot, which took place in November 2022, was done with limited user consultation. Some of the participants already had valid identification needed to obtain mobile money, making the DIGID project for cash assistance redundant for them. With more consultations, perhaps the pilot could have been designed to ensure those with official IDs were given opportunities to request for other assistance being provided by URCS in their areas.

Utilise Existing Consortiums

The URCS is part of consortiums which pool their resources together for specific projects and objectives. The URCS, is currently working within a Cash consortium which ECHO supports, or the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. This consortium should be consulted more in the future when taking part in new pilot programs which have a connection to the work being done within the Cash consortium. Additionally, the URCS is a member of the Uganda National Cash Working Group, which was established in 2016. The consortium is a community of humanitarian actors that operates from the humanitarian approach

to cash coordination. This consortium should be utilised to advocate for the DIGID platform and to highlight the activities done during the pilot program to the other members. The other consortium members also have experience advocating with the Ugandan government, which is knowledge the URCS should leverage.

Explore Other Use Cases

The URCS should explore other potential uses for the DIGID credentials and wallet, which could be complementary to information which is already being collected from other organisations in Uganda. While Red Cross national societies have piloted DIGID for cash assistance and medical assistance, there could be an exploration, after substantial user consultations, of other ways DIGID credentials could meet the needs of various affected groups. URCS staff have already started to brainstorm these additional use cases, which include complementary assistance for shelter, credentials around education and livelihood training, and support for family reunification. Continuing these efforts is key because more organisations will see value in partnering with the DIGID program within the URCS if those organisations perceive value for their own organisation through DIGID credentials.

Reaching the objective of reducing duplication

The URCS should engage the UNHCR to foster a partnership around data sharing. The partnership should focus on sharing information on vulnerable migrants registered on their system after the person has approved sharing their identification information. The UNHCR records data in their system to establish a profile and issue an official refugee credential. Therefore, such data do not need to be collected again by URCS or other humanitarian organisations; sharing such data becomes valuable and reduces duplicative efforts. The URCS could create a digital credential for the person based on the information they have already provided to the UNHCR. Then they could add more credentials to their digital wallets related to assistance, which may not necessarily be recorded in UNHCR databases, such as healthcare, shelter, or livelihood assistance data.

Engage with the government

An important learning from the URCS DIGID simulations and pilots is that government support and buy-in are crucial for the program's success. Without the government's support, the URCS could not work with local migrant and host communities. The URCS should prioritise efforts to advocate for DIGID with the government. One of the government's concerns was that DIGID would be another duplicative effort that would strain people. They wanted to be completely aware of the program's overall benefits and how it would make people's lives easier. The next steps for the URCS are to bring the learnings and benefits from the simulations and small pilot with IDPs to the government and showcase the benefits of digital credentials and DIGID in humanitarian action. The URCS should be prepared to answer the concerns of the Ugandan government and come to them with an action plan of how to work together with other humanitarian organisations to reduce the duplication of person registration and duplication of assistance. Additionally, DIGID applied to both migrant and host populations. and URCS should employ different advocacy efforts for both migrant and host community groups due to their differing sensitivities.

Conclusion

Uganda Red Cross Society staff conducting a post-distribution monitoring exercise following the encashment.
Photo Credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

Uganda is advancing in technological innovation, and their application to address humanitarian and development challenges is seen with organisations such as the Uganda Response Innovation Lab (Uganda RIL)[14], hosted by Save the Children Uganda, convening discussions and promoting innovative projects for the sector. This was one of the reasons why the DIGID consortium selected Uganda as a pilot country for DIGID, where the consortium members' network has a presence. It was in October 2021 that Uganda RIL, Uganda Red Cross Society, and IFRC hosted an online workshop on digital identification for migrants with humanitarian organisations and private sector representatives. The online workshop provided insights into the needs of vulnerable migrants, organisations supporting them, and companies developing solutions to problems such as identification, which helped frame the DIGID project in Uganda.

The Uganda Red Cross Society has been developing capacities in Cash and Voucher Assistance and supporting vulnerable migrants. In their efforts to continue strengthening their capabilities, innovative solutions such as the digital wallets and digital credentials developed by the Dignified Identities in Cash Assistance (DIGID) project are essential for URCS to learn from, particularly in migration context.

Thirteen months since the workshop webinar in 2021, the URCS has produced key learnings and have turned concepts into practical application that's useful for other humanitarian organisations looking to address similar issues of recognising and establishing eligibility for people on the move to receive cash assistance. Some of these key lessons were:

- Recognise the sensitivities in migration and work closely with the government to explain the objectives of the project and how to complement their efforts with the humanitarian imperative.

14 https://www.responseinnovationlab.com/uganda

- Simulations are a good way of promoting active advocacy with different stakeholders who are new to this type of technology and the concepts related to digital credentials. It also ensures responsible innovation by not testing new technology on vulnerable people. Stakeholders from the local branches of the URCS, local government representatives, and other humanitarian organisations operating in the same areas can come together, conduct some tests in a controlled and safe manner by using fictitious data that mirror real life scenarios.
- There are many opportunities for vulnerable cross-border migrants being attended by humanitarian organisations throughout their journey. With the same digital credential referenced using a QR code, a migrant would easily be able to show that they have been seen by another Red Cross or Red Crescent National Society before or be able to show what assistance they could be eligible for especially if continuity of care is needed such as prescribed medications or health related services and procedures.
- There is a potential for those with no official identity documents to not be left out in cash assistance by having their credentials be available for verification and authentication at the time of aid provision. Something that could digitally replace an otherwise paper based card or token provided by the organisation to the targeted households (e.g. Red Cross card).

With a successful pilot in reaching 60 vulnerable and internally displaced women with cash assistance, many of whom did not have official identity documents, there was also room for future improvements. For instance, URCS should conduct more community consultations on how best to enable recipients of the digital credentials to seek services they need from humanitarian organisations and explore ways on how they could be incentivised to manage and own their data. URCS should also work closely with Gravity to improve how data flows within URCS' internal systems to Gravity and also better secure the QR codes besides PIN numbers, which is an issue for communities with low literacy rates.

The pilot also focused on a single organisation. And the clear benefits of DIGID is when there are multiple organisations interacting and recognising the digital credentials of vulnerable people, which could lead to reduction of duplicated data, reducing stress for individuals who may recount traumatising details in their journey, and efficiently and quickly provision assistance such as cash because eligibility could be confirmed faster. URCS is already working with consortiums and is part of the national cash working group and can use their experiences and lessons learnt from the DIGID project to advocate for innovative and responsible ways of providing services to migrants using humanitarian issued digital credentials.

When innovation is utilised correctly, efficiency and problem-solving can soar with a suitable investment. Humanitarians have often used the term "innovation" to refer to the role of technology, products, and processes from other sectors and new forms of partnerships. The use of innovation throughout the humanitarian sector has, at times, lacked direction and coordination with other actors in the field. A better understanding of the potential and purpose of humanitarian innovation could unlock further inspiration and benefits when problem-solving for crisis-affected people. Continuing to foster collaboration and innovation, as seen through the work done with the DIGID consortium and the work being done in Kenya and Uganda, will lead to better solutions for those lacking a form of identification.

In June 2022, MercyCorps announced its partnership with CoinBase and CryptoSavannah, an Uganda-based crypto and blockchain firm, to conduct a project to address challenges in financial inclusion and economic empowerment of refugees and asylum seekers due to "inefficient identity systems"[15]. This highlights the needs and the efforts of private and humanitarian sectors to continue to address the issues of vulnerable migrants in their attempts to get dignified services and an opportunity for these sectors to merge on a common problem.

15 https://bitcoinke.io/2022/07/cryptosavannah-launches-a-refugee-blockchain-identity-solution/
    https://medium.com/@social_87087/cryptosavannah-mercy-corps-ventures-and-coinbase-partnership-on-digital-identity-and-cash-transfer-ed042d7a582e

ANNEX 1: DIGID PROJECT TIMELINE

The following were key activities and milestones achieved by the URCS and IFRC in their implementation of the DIGID project in Uganda.

Date	Activities & Milestones
October 2021	The Response Innovation Lab Uganda, URCS and IFRC hosted an online workshop to discuss the opportunities and actions around digital identification in the migration context in Uganda[16]. Attendees included representatives from humanitarian organisations and tech providers.
January 2022	An inception workshop was conducted with URCS to get an overview of the DIGID project, review lessons learnt from Kenya, and discuss how the project could be applied in Uganda. The workshop also discussed the scenarios where identification is done with vulnerable migrant communities and attempted to prioritise the use cases for the project. Based on the inception workshop, a project plan was prepared by the URCS.
February 2022	Consultations with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) responsible for the refugees and those responsible for disaster preparedness.
February - May 2022	Setup and configuration of the DIGID platform by Gravity based on URCS requirements.
May 2022	Gravity provided in-person training on the platform for URCS staff.
June 2022	Simulation in Isingiro district with URCS staff and volunteers. Invited local government representatives and other humanitarian organisations providing assistance in the Nakivale refugee settlement to discuss how DIGID might be used to establish eligibility and verify migrants receiving cash assistance. Video: https://youtu.be/NWNHcaPTusA.
June 2022	Cross-border workshop and simulation in Busia, the border between Uganda and Kenya. Representatives from the Uganda Red Cross Society branch in Busia (Uganda side) and Kenya Red Cross Society branch in Busia (Kenya side) attended and discussed the potential for digital credentials issued by one National Society could be used to identify and provide assistance when they cross the border.
August 2022	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) highlighted areas to improve on in terms of risks to data protection and developed mitigation measures.
November 2022	Field pilot in Bukedea district targeting 60 vulnerable internally displaced women due to floods.

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16 https://hiplatform.org/events/2021/10/15/multi-stakeholder-workshop-on-digital-identification-in-migration-context-in-uganda

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 14 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.