**Community-Led Refugee–Host Integration and Peacebuilding in Kiunga – Lamu County: From Local Practice to Global Recognition**

| County: | Lamu | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sector/s: | Peacebuilding, Disaster Management, Humanitarian Action, Social | Sub-sector/Theme: | Refugee–Host Integration, Cross-Border Peace, Community Resilience |
| Keywords: (for search in the online platform) | Refugee integration, peacebuilding, border communities, social cohesion, disaster risk reduction | | |
| Target Audience: | County Governments, National Government Agencies, Development Partners, Researchers, Civil Society | | |
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| Resource Persons | 1. County Administration-Department of Public Service Management, Community Elders, Refugee Representatives, Security Agencies, Humanitarian Partners | | |

**Introduction**

Kiunga is a remote border town in Lamu County along the Kenya–Somalia frontier. The area is geographically isolated and characterized by limited infrastructure, recurrent climate shocks, insecurity, and a historically weak state presence. For decades, Kiunga has served as an entry point for refugees fleeing conflict, instability, and drought in neighboring Somalia.

Unlike other refugee-hosting contexts in Kenya, Kiunga has never had formal refugee camps or sustained humanitarian funding. Refugees arrived directly into villages already facing poverty, water scarcity, and fragile livelihoods based on fishing and small-scale farming. This created a high risk of tension, competition over scarce resources, insecurity, and social fragmentation among host communities, refugees, the indigenous Boni community, women, youth, and security personnel operating in a fragile border environment.

## Implementation of the practice

In response to these challenges, Lamu County Government through the directorate of Disaster Management & Peacebuilding adopted a community-led, equity-based model of refugee–host integration. The approach emphasized coexistence, shared responsibility, and dignity rather than segregation or dependency on external humanitarian systems.

Key interventions included:
• Hosting refugees directly within local households and settlements rather than in segregated camps, promoting daily interaction and social bonding

Picture 1: Cross border meeting between Lamu County Government and  Somalia leaders at Raskamboni

• Equal distribution of County relief food between host and refugee communities to prevent perceptions of exclusion or favoritism
• Fair and transparent rationing of water supply schedules across all communities to reduce competition and conflict
• Provision of subsidised seeds and basic agricultural inputs to both refugees and host households to enhance food security
• Allowing refugees access to farming land and fishing grounds under locally agreed community rules
• Establishment of a sustainable 50/50 resource-sharing model as a guiding principle for humanitarian and development support

The practice was implemented progressively between 2012 and 2025 across Kiunga and surrounding borderland areas. Leadership was exercised through public service roles including Immigration Officers, Sub-County Administrator, and Lamu County Director of Disaster Management & Peacebuilding, working closely with community elders, refugee representatives, and local administrators.

Immigration and security agencies conducted standard government screening and vetting of refugees at the border to verify identity and address security concerns. While the initiative did not manage vetting directly, it worked closely with immigration, local administration, and security actors through regular engagement forums. This collaboration strengthened trust, information sharing, and ensured that refugee integration complemented national security processes.

Key collaborators included Lamu County Government administration, community elders, security agencies, humanitarian and development partners, and academic institutions. The model relied

primarily on local leadership, social capital, and existing County resources rather than donor-driven humanitarian frameworks.

**Results of the practice**
The community-led integration model has generated sustained and transformative outcomes, including:
• Significant reduction in conflicts related to water, land, and other shared resources
• Strengthened social cohesion and trust between host communities, refugees, and security agencies
• Improved community-based disaster preparedness and response in a climate- and conflict-prone setting
• Enhanced cross-border collaboration between Kiunga (Kenya) and Raskamboni (Somalia), contributing to regional stability.


Picture 2: Cross section of refugees during integration forums

The Kiunga Model has achieved significant milestones and recognition:

- **International Recognition:** The model was acknowledged through the **UNDRR Sasakawa Award process** as a good practice in community resilience and peacebuilding in fragile border contexts. (https://shorturl.at/r9BYt)
- **Global Visibility:** In 2025, **Rotary International** featured and published the model in its official magazine, highlighting it as an innovative and replicable approach to refugee–host community integration. (https://shorturl.at/FASun)
- **Upcoming Global Platforms:** The model will be presented at **BAU University in Istanbul in February 2026**, showcasing Kenya's leadership in peacebuilding.
- **Awards and Evaluations:** Lamu County Government has successfully passed the second round of evaluation for the **UCLG PRIZE AWARD 2026** and is expected to showcase the model in Morocco this June if it reaches the finalist stage.

These achievements have positioned Lamu County as a pioneer in peacebuilding and resilience in fragile border regions.

**Lessons learnt:**
What worked well:
• Strong community ownership and leadership
• Fairness, transparency, and equity in resource sharing

- Integration of refugees within host communities rather than segregation
- Effective collaboration between civilian authorities and security actors

What was challenging:
- Chronic scarcity of natural and financial resources
- Initial resistance and fear among some host community members during early stages
- Limited early documentation of the practice.

What would be done differently:
- Earlier and more systematic documentation and knowledge sharing
- Proactive engagement with national policy actors to support scaling.

What would remain the same:
- Community-led decision-making
- Equity-based and dignity-centered approaches to refugee–host relations

**Recommendations**
The Kiunga experience demonstrates that community-led refugee–host integration is viable, sustainable, and scalable, even in fragile and resource-constrained settings. Counties and stakeholders facing similar challenges are encouraged to:
- Promote equity and fairness in resource allocation for refugee-host integration
- Integrate refugees within host communities rather than isolate them in camps
- Strengthen trust between communities, County institutions, and security agencies
- Invest in community-based disaster risk reduction and resilience
- Document and share local innovations through platforms such as the CoG Maarifa Centre
- Segregation, exclusion, and over-reliance on externally driven humanitarian systems should be avoided.

**Further reading:**
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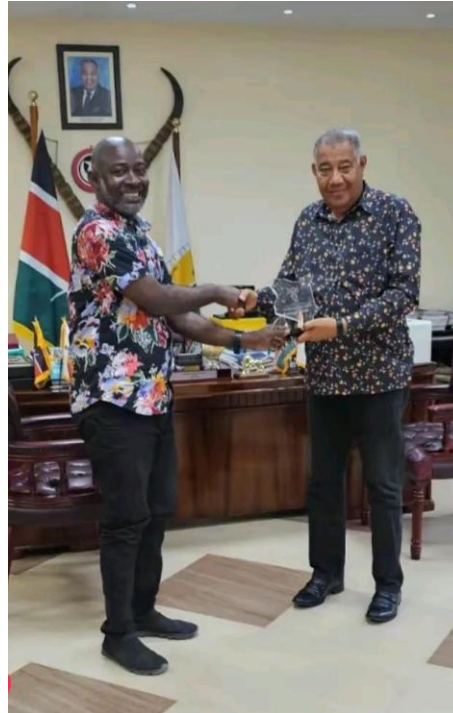
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community-led-peacebuilding-shaped-a-global-model

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Picture 3: Shee Kupi Shee – Director, Disaster Management & Peacebuilding, Lamu County  receiving awards for the initiative from H.E The President and H.E. the Governor