

THE ROLE OF REFUGEE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE GOVERNANCE OF FORCED MIGRATION IN KAMPALA

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INTRODUCTION

In Kampala urban refugee case load is excluded from the mainstream refugee assistance and protection that is focused on the settlements. These categories of refugees who opt to stay out of the settlement are supposed to cater for themselves. Relief agencies, service providers and decision makers often ignore these refugees. This has created a situation where the role of refugee community organizations (RCOs) in the governance of forced migration is vital. In an urban environment community-based organizations have the unique ability to reach forced migrants who are scattered around the city.

This presentation will use YARID (Young African Refugees for Integral Development) as an example of one of the refugee community organizations working in Kampala. YARID seeks to empower youth, women and children refugees in the city to overcome the burdens of deprivation and vulnerability to become healthy, educated, self-sustaining and contributing members of the society.

Majority of the refugees in Kampala are young people who have fled the countries neighboring Uganda. Given the lack of education and work opportunities in the city, YARID is organizing sport activities for refugee youth. Sport is one of the only forms of recreation available to them. YARID uses sports to overcome trauma, and to sensitize members on personal health, including HIV/AIDS. It also aims to

promote gender equality by having a separate football team for women. Sport can also support efforts aimed at peace building and reconciliation among different nationalities of refugees, and refugees and nationals. Given the sport and other activities that YARID provides for the young refugees in Kampala, its role in the governance of forced migration in the city is central.

THE URBAN REFUGEE CONTEXT IN KAMPALA

The public perception of a typical refugee is of a person who has been forcibly displaced by war or personal insecurity, perhaps suffering physical and emotional trauma and economic loss. The refugee is assumed to be fleeing to or be already at a place of temporary sanctuary, such as a refugee camp. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partner non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will provide protection for the refugee in the camp and meet his immediate needs of food, shelter and medical care. When conditions in the home area permit, the refugee will return and rebuild his life. Until then, he will receive the basic aid necessary for survival in his temporary situation of displacement (Jacobsen, 2005).

In reality, the situation of many refugees can no longer be described as “temporary.” The average period of displacement rose from 9 years in 1993 to 20 years in 2009 (Loescher and Milner, 2009: 9). There were 2.3 million refugees living in sub-Saharan Africa in 2009, of which 98% were in protracted refugee situations (PRS) (Kamara, 2009). Short-term aid delivery is not an appropriate intervention for this population.

Increasingly, refugee life is not camp-based. Of the 15 million refugees world-wide, over half are estimated living in urban areas, legally or illegally. The exact size of the largely hidden refugee population in towns and cities is not known.

In Kampala, the number of urban refugees fluctuates. UNHCR has registered over 35,000 urban refugees while Human Right Watch estimates the refugee population to be even 50,000 (WRC, 2010:4). In 2001 the Ugandan government estimated that as many as 50, 000=of the 184,000 refugees hosted by Uganda were living in Kampala. UNHCR reported assisting only 274 of them (Human Rights Watch, 2002: 217). In 2002, a study conducted by the Refugee Law Project found a similar lack of recognition and support:

“There are approximately 180,000 refugees officially registered in Uganda, of which the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) lists only 173 or less than one-tenth of one percent of the total, as being on its urban caseload” (RLP, 2002).

Refugees under UNHCR urban caseload are different from others. They get financial and material assistance. Whereas others only get access to counseling and emergency medical care.

UNHCR’s most recent statistics for Uganda show that there are 149,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the country, of which 37,298 are registered as urban refugees in Kampala. Approximately 65% are from the Great Lakes area; the majority of these are Congolese (UNHCR, 2010). Assuming these statistics are a close approximation of the reality on the ground, even 25% of Uganda’s refugee population lives in Kampala. It is not clear to what extent Kampala’s urban refugee population has actually increased. Perhaps the invisible have simply

been made visible. What is clear, however, is that at least in theory, the existence of urban refugees has only recently been officially recognized by governments and aid organizations as having the same human rights as any other person. The UNHCR's 1997 policy on urban refugees took the position that delivery of services to urban refugees was expensive and inefficient, and recommended that refugees should remain in camps to access services. This policy proved unrealistic and unworkable. The new *Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*, released in September 2009, states (Article II:14):

"The Office considers urban areas to be a legitimate place for refugees to enjoy their rights, including those stemming from their status as refugees as well as those that they hold in common with all other human beings."

UNHCR has the same responsibility towards them as it has to all refugees. Nationally, Uganda's Refugee Act 2006 was launched in May 2010, giving official recognition to a population which in reality already existed.

Among urban refugees are people with disabilities, single mothers with many young children, unaccompanied minors and single men. Although host government expects them to cater for themselves, they are often unable to do so.

There are five groups of refugees in Kampala: those on UNHCR's urban caseload, those with status and permission to live in Kampala, those with status and unlawfully living in Kampala, asylum seekers, and unregistered refugees. Refugees on UNHCR's caseload mostly reside in Kampala to receive medical treatment. They might also have security

risks and thus cannot live in settlements. Some of them are preparing for resettlement. (Bonfiglio, 2010).

Officially, when asylum seekers arrive in Uganda, they are expected to report to the nearest police post at the point of entry. However, in practice many asylum seekers travel directly to Kampala for a number of structural and bureaucratic reasons. First, asylum seekers reported lack of information regarding registration procedures at border entry points and therefore believed that they had to travel to Kampala to officially register as refugees. Second, asylum seekers who fled their country in large numbers often made no explicit decision about where to register and headed for Kampala as soon as crossing into Uganda (RLP, 2005). In addition, numerous refugees move to Kampala after first residing in refugee settlement for reasons relating both to physical safety and access to employment and services.

A UN official has described the refugee crisis in southwest Uganda as a “silent emergency” as the government and humanitarian agencies struggle with a lack of resources. (SZABO,C.,2010)

The humanitarian news agency,quoted Uganda’s deputy representative of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR,) Nemia Temporal, who said:

“We can hardly meet international standards of indicators such as water, health and food. For instance, we are delivering 15 litres (of water) per person per day instead of the standard 20”.

Temporal said the international community no longer considered the plight of refugees from fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as urgent. Though Uganda is now home to almost 143,000 refugees from the DRC, the UN’s figures for February show. At least

45,000 live in a single refugee settlement, Nakivale, near the DRC border with Uganda. (SZABO, C., 2010)

If UNHCR is unable to meet even the basic need of refugees in the settlement where we can also find a number of other humanitarian agencies, how are the refugees in urban area supported?

According to the research conducted by the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC 2010) the reasons why refugees come to Kampala are varied. Above all, refugees interviewed stated that the formal and informal economies offer a wider variety of employment and business opportunities compared to the agriculture settlements. Other reasons include access to health services, better education facilities, and access to financial and communication services for remittances and Internet to connect to relatives. Some of them also move to Kampala to escape the physical insecurity of the settlements, such as ethnic discrimination or sexual exploitation.

Upon arrival in Kampala, the majority of asylum seekers face immense difficulties accessing basic services such as health care, shelter, and food (RLP, 2007: p7). Some asylum seekers already have friends or relatives in Kampala who may provide initial support. According to the research conducted by the RLP in 2007, many refugees and asylum seekers interviewed appeared to be without such networks and therefore have few options for accessing basic services.

I was told when I was in Kisoro that if I go to Kampala, there is UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies and they will help me in

everything (food, rent, treatment...) but when I reached Kampala I was disappointed, I found myself in the road without any place to sleep, without food.”(anon.)

Only two organizations assist refugee and asylum seekers in Kampala: InterAid and the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS). But they don't have the capacity to assist and provide for all urban forced migrants (RLP, 2007). Moreover, these organizations are influenced by the government policy which requires assistance for refugees to be provided in settlements:

“In 2004, under heavy pressure from OPM, JRS suspended all services to registered refugees and offered assistance only to asylum seekers” (RLP, 2005: 17).

In other words, the assistance offered in Kampala terminates once refugee status has been accorded, and in some cases even before, depending on the availability of resources (RLP 2005). Even when assistance is made available (usually by JRS and InterAid), it may be too little to help them to survive. Therefore refugees have to rely on “good Samaritans” for assistance. They are characteristically religious people some of whom are refugees themselves (RLP, 2005).

When refugee status is granted, the refugee receives an acknowledgement letter from UNHCR that shows to which settlement is being referred to. OPM endorses such letters and then, through InterAid, refugees are sent to the appropriate settlement. Those Refugees who want to stay in Kampala they have to demonstrate why they should remain in the urban centers, so they are allowed to remain in Kampala if they are able to prove “self-sufficiency”. Once asylum

seekers are given a refugee status, assistance is limited to those on the urban caseload and this group represents an exceedingly small fraction of the entire urban refugee population. The only services that those who have proved their “self- sufficiency” can continue to access as refugees are emergency medical assistance offered to all refugees by InterAid. For all other services, they have to rely on Kampala municipal services. It has been noticed that local government officials and civil servants in Kampala do not appear to be aware of the presence of refugees in the city, and refugees are not budgeted for in city planning provision (RLP 2005).

When asylum seekers and refugees in Kampala find themselves without assistance, this creates a situation where refugee communities have to play a significant role in the governance of forced migration.

In the following section the role of refugee community organizations (RCOs), and in particular the role of the Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID), will be discussed in relation to the governance of forced migration in Kampala.

REFUGEE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS (RCOs)

Refugee Community Organizations are groups formed by, of and for refugees and people seeking asylum. They are essentially self-determining, but usually reliant on funding from the voluntary or statutory sectors. RCOs are organizations where people can meet others from their national or cultural background and gain strength from the sense of safety and support that these interactions can supply(Refugee action 2006). They are formed by people whose skills and resources are committed to meeting the needs of those who have

come to the host country in search of safety, and to enabling people to build new lives.

Refugee Community Organizations (RCOs) are a means by which people who have become disempowered by the experiences of forced migration can negotiate meaningfully with the host community and can begin to break down the barriers to participation. As such, they play a vital role in the integration of refugees into the host society (Refugee action, 2006).

In Kampala there is a multitude of refugee community organizations scattered in different parts of Kampala where refugees live. The number of the RCOs is unknown and the reason may be because some of them do not have formally constituted community organizations; barrier to recognition.

The government of Uganda (GoU) recognizes a variety of rights to refugees in its 2006 Refugees Act, including *“the right of association as regards non-political and nonprofit making association and trade unions.”*

Refugee Community Organizations (RCO's) have been supportive to asylum seekers and refugees at different stages of their applications. They direct and orient new asylum applicants. They advise them based on their experience; support in filling their asylum applications and showing the way to the Home Office, they give their accompaniment upon request and necessity. For some of them the communities serve as starting point and for the others they are an advisory body, which try to arrange cases when things are not in the right direction.

As we said before, upon arrival, most of asylum seekers are not aware how they have to go through the asylum seeking process and they do not know from where to start because there is no one to give them information and they do not know where to find the services to support their settlement. Even if they can manage to help them processing their

asylum cases, much is still have to be done in helping them to integrate the host society.

This has pushed RCOs in Kampala to go beyond offering simply advice and support. They have created activities and are providing services that forced migrants lack like education (English language and other trainings), to arrange cultural, social, sporting and artistic activities, women's groups, and computer (IT) classes. RCOs also provide mentoring, informal translating, interpreting and many other activities.

Most of these services are provided by refugee-led organizations. Other researchers have documented significant instances of support and cooperation among refugee communities. Bonfiglio (2010) notes that most of the non-formal educational, recreational and social support opportunities made available to Kampala's urban refugees are initiated and delivered by the refugees themselves, usually on a voluntary basis due to lack of external funding. Bonfiglio found examples of schools, handicraft co-operatives, recreation groups and support groups.

In ASSOFRA (Association de Femmes Réfugiées en Afrique) a refugee women community, when they have a case of a woman refugee or asylum seeker who have a problem of rent, before she finds a solution they look for a member of the community who can receive her at home and other give the support of food. (repr. Of ASSOFRA)

The provision of these things has built a connection between CROs and forced migrants so that they are in good position to mobilize them about relevant issues.

Further, the RCOs have the unique ability to reach out immigrants in their native language. They have the advantage to reach refugees and asylum seekers because they have the language access that allow them to talk to actual members in communities and go into their neighborhoods and meet with them.

THE YOUNG AFRICAN REFUGEES FOR INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT (YARID)

Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID) is a registered refugee organization that was founded in 2007 by young Congolese refugees, who formed it based on their experience of what happened to them, when they were forced to face the fact that they were refugees in a foreign country. YARID is dedicated to give back hope to refugees, and its work is targeted to refugee youth, children and women, in particular. YARID's work aims at overcoming the burden of deprivations and vulnerability so that the refugees can become healthy, educated, self-sustaining and contributing members of the society. One of the objectives of YARID is to give as much information to the refugees as possible in order to make them feel at home in Uganda. Refugees mainly come from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Burundi.

Since its implementation in 2007 YARID is striving to improve the lives of Refugees through these programs:

SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

YARD has geared its programs in a way that brings together a variety of refugees from different backgrounds, religions, communities and nationalities as well as Ugandan nationals. This has led to minimizing of stereotypes, discrimination and conflict among these groups, through this program that uses football and other games to help refugee youth and children manage stress and trauma from the circumstances surrounding their displacement, to promote community cooperation and development and to mobilize youth refugees especially girls who

are socially marginalized to engage and participate in HIV/AIDS awareness and sensitization training skills. Refugee children and youth would otherwise remain idle because of a lack of access to formal schooling and employment.

YARID has five football teams in which more than 150 refugee youths participate. They include a team for female youth, children, and male youth.

YARID females' soccer team

The main purpose of this program is to help young women/girls address issues that are prevalent in their daily lives as refugee women in Kampala. It helps to promote leadership skills among them, develop character, self-esteem and promote a sense of belonging among the women/girls by using sport as a way of helping them get passed the experiences that they may have gone through during the war that they experienced in their country. This program is used as a channel for communicating the different social issues that are ongoing like prostitution, violence against women, HIV/AIDS, poverty, sexual abuse.

YARID youth boys' soccer team

This program is also about helping the youth integrate. , It especially employs boys that do not have the money to attend formal schools and that find employment extremely difficult because of a lack of skills and capital. There are also boys who were forced to be part of the rebel army, or who had to watch their loved ones being killed. Therefore, it aims at promoting behavioral change among this particular group of people.

YARID children's soccer team

Football program for children, some of whom are orphans, helps them in improving their physical, emotional, and social development. Most of these children are not enrolled in formal schooling and many have never attended school because of the circumstances surrounding their displacement.

Sport activities improve the ability of refugees to take direction, focus, and learn. The team integrates football skills with life skills to improve the children's chances of survival. Furthermore, the coaches provide counseling to participants and advice about their future.

YARID EDUCATION PROGRAM

This program aims to empower refugees and asylum seekers in Kampala with literacy, life skills and livelihoods strategies in order to become self-reliant. The project intends to equip this vulnerable group with basic functional adult literacy skills so that they can manage to read and write. As the majority of them is from countries where English is not the official language, these people find it hard to communicate, interact and integrate within the Ugandan host community because of the language barrier. YARID has for the last four years offered English lessons to refugees and asylum seekers.

YARID offers literacy education that promotes self – reliance, self-esteem, addresses the daily needs of refugees, and promotes community involvement.

YARID has two types of classes for this program: the English for Adult (EFA) classes and the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) classes.

EFA classes

As the majority of its beneficiaries are from the Great Lakes Region (Rwanda, Congo, and Burundi) which are French speaking countries, once in Uganda these people are confronted with the problem of a language barrier. In response of this, YARID organizes English classes for them so that they can be able to communicate with nationals in their host environment that increases their self – esteem and employability, and may be helpful if they can continue with their formal education.

YARID organizes English classes Monday to Friday morning (8am – 10am) (level 1, level 2 and level 3)

FAL classes

Among refugees and asylum seekers in Kampala are those who are illiterate who have never attended school because of the circumstances surrounding their displacement. Through this program YARID gives them the skills of reading, writing and numeracy in their local languages. In this program YARID works with different refugee churches in Kampala to utilize their familiarity with the various communities to identify the truly needy who may register for FAL.

In this program, YARID has four instructors who through its partnership with the Finish Refugee Council (FRC) received training on basics of how to teach adults, how to plan teaching sessions and on functional English/literacy teaching methods.

For the refugees who have completed the third level in FAL program, YARID advocates for them and helps them to proceed with professional trainings like computer training or tailoring These trainings are

designed to help them to meet their needs and to become self – sufficient.

Through YARID’s partnership with the Pan African Development Education and Advocacy Program (PADEAP) 15 refugees from YARID have completed computer training while 12 others are still learning. 10 girls have completed one year training in tailoring and 1 woman has completed catering training. Currently, through the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) one girl from YARID is doing tailoring that will be completed at the end of the year.

For refugee children, YARID has succeeded to connect 16 of them to Xavier Project; a charity organization that was founded by a volunteer from the United Kingdom and that support refugee and vulnerable children in different private schools in Kampala.

YARID REFUGEE GIRLS AND WOMEN COOPERATIVE

This is an empowerment program where women and girls are taught how to make handicraft like hats, bags, necklaces, in order to generate income for themselves and their families, and explore the issues of their daily lives. Some of the women lost their husbands as a result of the circumstances surrounding their migration to Uganda and are the sole providers for their families. The cooperative aims at advocating for women to help them get loans in order to be able to start businesses. In this group, issues like violence against women, sexual abuse, unequal access to education, lack of productive healthcare are discussed with the refugees.

YARID English club

This club aims at improving and practicing English speaking skills in a friendly and supportive environment. During this meeting, different topics can be discussed and especially those linked to refugee's life like the new 2006 refugee Act of Uganda which, legislates and governs the rights and obligations of refugees and asylum seekers in Uganda etc. The club allows not only refugees to improve their speaking skills but also create a space where they can exchange ideas and get informed about different issues.

One refugee explains:

“When I came to Kamala, because of the language barrier I lost a lot of my natural self-confidence, a friend of mine directed me at YARID, I joined the English class but I found that I didn't regain my confidence but when I joined YARID English club, I found other people and now I can try to express myself without fear”.

YARID as a refugee organization has been promoting issues related to the governance of refugees and other forced migrants in Kampala and more widely in Uganda. This includes, for instance, the promotion, training and dissemination on the rights of forced migrants. YARID has done this through training forced migrants on their rights stipulated both in international and national legislations governing the rights of forced migrants. YARID also offers referral services to refugees and asylum seekers. In this regard YARID partners with other organizations and stakeholders in the field of refugee protection and governance such as, InterAid, the Office of Prime Minister (OPM), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Pan African Development, Education and Advocacy Program (PADEAP) and Finnish Refugee Council (FRC). The aim is to

assist refugees in accessing services which YARID does not offer or have no capacity of meeting.

YARID also works with community local administration such as local councils (LCs) in promoting best practices in the governance for forced migrants in Kampala. This helps in easing tensions, discrimination and xenophobia against forced migrants. This has also enhanced local integration and peaceful coexistence between forced migrants and the host population.

YARID incorporates gender dimensions in all of its programs, policies and governance activities. This is reflected in the organization governance structure where women play a critical role. As a refugee organization which works with young refugees and asylum seekers, young women and girls are part and parcel of the organization's programmes. YARID is working with other stakeholders and community based organizations focusing on refugee and asylum seekers in Kampala. The organization strongly believes that those partnerships ensure a brighter, better future for refugee youth and children.

YARID has also been working with PADEAP, Global Coalition Against Poverty (GCAP) and United Nations Millennium Campaign Africa Office, Nairobi in streamlining and mobilizing forced migrants in Kampala to participate in activities highlighting the dire poverty afflicting forced migrants and how to mitigate this. This also includes advocating for programs and policies that incorporate the needs of forced migrants

and displaced peoples in the programs aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

YARID is conducting all these activities on members' contributions. The executive board and all of the staff are working on voluntary basis until some external funding can be secured.

Confining all refugees in camps is simply not a viable alternative. Dwindling donor support and rising food prices continue to fuel a humanitarian and security crisis among the world's refugees. The United Nations and its partners are not able to maintain the camp system of dependency while fulfilling the UNHCR mandate to protect refugees and ensure their basic human rights. Urban livelihood support is a necessity rather than an option. Urban livelihoods initiatives are now officially recognized as an essential element of UNHCR's mandate. Refugees themselves desire empowerment, not sporadic charity.

Refugee community organizations, however, have long had an important role in helping refugees and asylum seekers in Kampala. Numerous researchers have shown that most of services and social supports made available to Kampala's urban refugees are initiated and delivered by refugees themselves through their different communities. They have repeatedly demonstrated the desire and ability to use their own capacity to build dignified lives and to make a positive contribution, both to their own communities and to their host nations.

Despite all the services and social supports that the RCOs provide, to refugees and asylum seekers in Kampala, their members are struggling with enormous issues

Refugees have little opportunity to influence the decisions which profoundly affect their lives.

The views of all refugee community organizations need to be heard, and RCOs, are keen to get involved and to have their views heard.

Noel Calhoun, 2010 shows in his studies how UNHCR began to highlight the importance of working with refugee communities in Executive Comity conclusion of 15 February 2001, entitled "*Reinforcing a Community Development Approach*". The conclusion notes that:

"UNHCR programmes often tend to focus on individual service delivery to refugees, and omit engaging and building on the capacities of the refugees themselves and their communities. Such an approach limits refugee partnership and participation, and invariably produces dependency; this has proved to be limiting, resource-demanding and too problem-focused."

Its conclusion goes on to recommend that UNHCR engage in partnership with refugees in order to achieve various purposes, including: strengthening refugee initiative, reinforcing their dignity, achieving greater self-reliance and increasing cost-effectiveness of programmes. Overall, the document is framed as a guide to programming, suggesting that UNHCR should ensure that refugees participate in the design and delivery of the organization's programmes so as to make them more effective, efficient, and respectful of refugees' dignity and capacities.

“True partnership means ... being willing to receive as well as to give; to listen to refugees as well as to talk to refugees; to be questioned by refugees as well as to ask questions; and finally, to use all resources for the refugees to enable them to face their past, live their present and hope for a better future.”

(Father Agberagba, October, 2000).

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