

UNHCR ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
1-3 JULY 2015 – International Conference Center Geneva

THEMATIC SESSION
BACKGROUND PAPER

Seeking Solutions for Youth and Adolescents

Wednesday 1 July, 17.00 – 18.30, Room 3

Background

Adolescents and youth are at a pivotal stage of their development – transitioning from childhood into adulthood. Under normal circumstances, this is a stage of life when young people are starting to make plans for their future, a critical time for identity formation and when long term adult relationships begin to be formed. This is also a time when young people begin to make important decisions about education, training, skills development and employment needs - decisions which can shape their futures. Yet, the future for forcibly displaced adolescents and youth is often much less certain, can appear bleak and often does not facilitate what we would consider normal transitions. Access to secondary and tertiary education, training and skills development are extremely limited and there are few meaningful or safe wage-earning opportunities. Forcibly displaced young people must often assume adult roles and responsibilities, including caring for elderly and young family members and completing household tasks, often without the requisite skills and the opportunity to invest in and plan for their own future. They can be at increased risk of violence, sexual assault, abuse and exploitation which can endanger their lives, physical health and safety. With few alternative life opportunities, young men, in particular, may be at risk of forced conscription into armed forces or recruitment into gangs and criminal activities; while adolescent girls and young women may be forced into early marriage and face the challenges of early child birth with all its concomitant health risks. Young people also often lack access to appropriate health care, in particular access to sexual and reproductive health services and information that will help them to make informed choices about their futures, as well as mental health care and psychosocial support.

Imagining a future can be impossible for young people whose lives have been uprooted by conflict and violence and then effectively stalled, or in some cases completely halted. A lack of identifiable solutions and the inability to plan for the future can have devastating psychological, emotional and developmental impacts on refugee and displaced adolescents and youth, forcing them to live in a perpetual state of limbo.

Aims

With a panel made up exclusively of refugee youth speakers and a refugee youth moderator, this dedicated youth session will explore what solutions mean for young people and how we can help young people to achieve them. The young refugee panellists will describe what solutions mean for them and how they have tried to find solutions to their own personal situations. They will discuss some of the unique challenges that young people face in seeking solutions. The session will not only explore what the three traditional durable solutions mean for young refugees (i.e. voluntary repatriation, local integration and third country resettlement), but also how access to a broad range of services – including

continuing and flexible education, skills training, livelihood programmes, financial literacy, sexual and reproductive health services and information, life-skills training, violence prevention and protection – can provide young people with valuable skills and information, help keep them safe and healthy, shape the decisions they take and help them to make plans and map out a future. The session will also explore the importance of successful integration of young people into host, return or resettlement communities as an effective strategy in seeking durable solutions.

Break-out sessions led by expert NGOs will explore four different programmatic areas (education and skills training; economic strengthening and livelihoods; protection, violence prevention and access to SRH information and services and mental health care; and integration of youth and adolescents into host, return and resettlement communities). The importance of youth participation and including youth and adolescents as partners, leaders and decision-makers in all of these programme areas and in seeking youth-led solutions will be an over-arching theme for the whole session.

Youth Profiles:

Moderator

Farah Abdi

“My names are Farah Abdi and I am a 20 year old Somali refugee who currently resides in Malta, after arriving here by boat in November of 2012 from Libya.

I am a migration blogger with a Maltese daily called Malta today. I bring to light the hard issues migrants’ face, in a country where migration is seen as a negative phenomenon.

I was born in the town of Beledweyne, which is located in south central Somalia, in 1995. I am the first born, in a family of two. My mother moved our family to neighbouring Kenya in search of a better future and an education when I was only 3yrs old. We first settled in a refugee camp at the Somali-Kenyan border, before moving to the Kenyan capital where I would start my early education.

This was set to be the beginning of a normal life for us, until I discovered my different sexual orientation at the age of 5yrs. I knew that something was very wrong when I would find myself playing with girls instead of boys during our play breaks. My teacher called on my mother to report my unusual character. After this, my mother was harsh to me and ordered me to stop being an embarrassment to the family. From then on, I knew that my family, and society would never accept me due to my sexual orientation. I remember praying to god every night for the feelings to go away. The situation was made worse by the fact that my family was from Somalia where Islam is the way of life. The religion sees homosexuality as an evil affecting the family setting the way god meant it to be. Somali culture, which sees the backbone of a family, as a man and a woman getting married to have children didn't help the matter either. I knew from early on that the only way to keep safe was to hide my sexuality. Even my own mother would push me to the wrath of Sharia law if the truth about my sexual orientation ever came to light. Being in Kenya didn't help either, because the country has draconian laws when it comes to the LGBTI community, where people convicted of homosexuality face up to 14yrs in jail. I always knew that I would have to leave at one point of my life in order to be free.

I made the decision to flee from home in 2012, at the age of 16yrs. I knew that the journey ahead was going to be very difficult, but nothing prepared me for what I would come to face in the months that followed. I went to Uganda from Kenya, where the LGBTI community faces even more deadly punishments if detected. From Uganda I moved onto South Sudan, where I was physically abused and

imprisoned by South Sudanese militia, after I was caught traveling without documents together with a group of other Somali refugees. I had to bribe the militia to get out, and I was able to move onto North Sudan. Again North Sudan was an Islamic country known to violate human rights, and I knew I would have to leave. While there, I remember wearing baggy clothes and growing a beard in order to conceal any traces of my sexual orientation. From there I embarked on a journey that took me 12 days across the Sahara desert. I finally arrived in Libya thinking that all my problems were now behind me. But, little did I know, my worst nightmares were about to begin.

I ended up staying in Libya for a period of seven months, during which I would be imprisoned by Libyan militia five times, for trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea by boat. I was also constantly physically abused, and I was exploited to work as a labourer for free in Libyan farms and construction sites.

I finally made it out in November of 2012, arriving in Malta where I would once again be put in detention despite being a minor. I got out of detention fast though, because I was outspoken, and I could communicate in English really well. I was taken to an open centre for minors, where I would start my journey to asylum and the fight for human rights.”

Speakers

Aime Kalangwa

“I am 21 years old refugee from Congo. I came in United States in 01/21/2011. I was born on the 26 of December 1993 in the village called Nyamitaba which located North Kivu district of the DRC. I am from the two tribes because my mother was from the Tutsi tribe and my father was from the Hutu Tribe. Those two tribes are enemies. However, my parents saw beyond that. My family consisted of ten children. I had six brothers and three sisters.

We were living happily until war broke out in my village in 2007. At the time, I was attending school in 5th grade. After I lost my family, I escaped from my country to Uganda. I was homeless for almost 2 years. The only survivors of my entire family are me and my younger brother who is now 17 years old.

When I came to the U.S, they put me in 12th grade in High school. It was really hard for me to learn a new culture, a new language, a new lifestyle, and new technology. School was also a struggle since I missed grades 6 through grade 11, but finished the year with a 3.8 GPA and received my High School diploma and I recently graduated from Broward College with my Associate Degrees and now attend FAU (Florida Atlantic University) where I am working towards a double major in criminal justice and political science. I was the first person to finish High School in my entire family.

I would like to share my story and let people know what is going on or happening to the other youth who didn't get resettlement and give them hope. I believe I have a lot to offer youth in the process and also youth who are not going to be resettled. My story is a story of hope and hard work which is universal. I want to stress the importance of education to these youth because that is the key to a brighter future.”

Najeeba Wazefadost

“I was born in Afghanistan into the Hazara Shi'a Muslim minority. I only have bad memories of my childhood: the fear of being killed or persecuted, of having no access to education, of being considered “non-human”. Arriving as asylum seekers on a small fishing boat in 2000, I and my family were taken to Detention Centre and released in to community where life started to change. Although I knew education was the key to success, my first day at school in Australia – unable to speak English, unable to read or

write, and sitting next to a boy – was daunting. The experience of inequality in my home country led me to become interested in studying law, but my passion for science eventually made me to graduate from Bachelor of Medical Science. I have been involved in a number of organisations such as ChilOut (Children out of Detention), Amnesty International, Bamiyan Association and chairperson of Hazara Women of Australia advocating for the rights of refugees and the release of children from Detention Centres. In 2010 I was a finalist of the Young Human Rights Medal Award and in 2011 I won the 'Young Woman of the West Award' for my work in not-for-profit organisations. In 2012 I won UTS human right medal award and in 2013 I won final premier women of the year award. I am currently working as a case manager at SSI as well as writing my own story named "Surrealistic nightmare."

Foni Joyce

My name is Foni Joyce Vuni. I am 22 years old. I am a student at Jomo Kenyatta University pursuing a Bachelor in Mass communication with a major in Public Relation and a minor in Broadcasting. I am a South Sudanese national but I reside in Nairobi with my parents and 4 younger siblings. My parents came to Nairobi in 1991 due to the war that broke out in my country.

Growing up in a foreign country was not easy as due to my status as a refugee. A lot of discrimination was involved; the fact that I was a South Sudanese, abuses and jokes about my country and the South Sudanese people generally came about my way. Making friends was not easy as I didn't know who to trust and who not to, I became suspicious of everyone around me.

As I grew up I got to understand that my status should not limit me from pursuing what I want. By making personal decision of not letting what other children and classmates say about me affect me really went a long way for me as through that I figured I would use the resources in my host country to show that being a refugee will not determine who you will be. I did my very best to pass my exams and also used my hobbies and talents to stand out. I became outspoken and would voice out what is right and what is not. I identified different people of good character to teach me on few things on how to maximize on opportunities that can be found within the host country before returning home.

My focus now is to use what I have learnt in school to represent my fellow refugees in a different light. I wish to change the perception that just because one has undergone harsh conditions they cannot make it. I wish to improve their identity, image and reputation not only among other people but especially among themselves.

My ambition is to become a role model to other young ladies. I want to become an advocate for refugees and voice out what war has done to them and also how to take advantage of resources around them in their host countries to improve themselves.

Outline of the Session

17:00 – 17:12: Introduction and Welcome by Moderator.

17:13 – 17:34: Speakers [7 minutes/ speaker]

17:35 – 17:45: Questions to panelists and moderated discussion

17:45 – 18:15: Break-Out Sessions

Group 1: Education and Skills Training – Led by Refugee Education Trust [RET] and Norwegian Refugee Council [NRC]

Group 2: Protection and violence prevention (including access to SRH and mental health care) – Led by ORAM

Group 3: Livelihoods and economic strengthening – Led by World Vision International and Women’s Refugee Commission

Group 4: Integration of youth and adolescents in host/ return and resettlement communities – Led by USCCB and Settlement Services International

18:15 – 18:30: Plenary – feedback from break-out sessions and discussion.