

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
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BACKGROUND PAPER

Session title: Youth as humanitarian actors – A joint response?

Date: Thursday, June 16

Time/Room: 16.45 – 18.30, Room 2

Across the globe, a generation of displaced youth carries dreams, hopes and aspirations for their own futures as well as the future of their families and communities.

Youth represents a pivotal time in life when discoveries and decisions are made about one's future path, identity and place within society. Displacement often catapults youth into a situation of chaos, shattering future plans, confusing identity and changing the very nature of society and youth's place within it. Yet in this challenging context, youth have shown time and time again their resilience and the enormous contribution they can make towards creating a better future and rebuilding their communities. They take initiative, self-organise, offer support to peers and vulnerable groups and often step up to support families in times of crisis. Despite this proven capacity and potential of youth to be a part of the solution, they are often marginalized in a humanitarian response and their voices are rarely heard by the community and humanitarian agencies. The result is a generation of youth with untapped potential and a wealth of missed opportunities to engage, empower and enable young people to transform their futures and communities.

The Global Refugee Youth Consultation (GRYC) 2015/2016 has provided a unique opportunity for youth to speak for themselves about the issues affecting them on a platform that recognizes their capacity and gives them the freedom to shape content, build solutions and engage with decision-makers and key stakeholders. It is in this spirit that the idea for the current session was conceived. The moderator and speakers will be refugee, IDP and host community youth from a variety of humanitarian contexts worldwide including East Africa, South East Asia and the Middle East.

As well as representing a broad geographical spread, the participants bring their experiences working with and for youth across a variety of sectors, all of which have also been identified as priorities in the provisional findings of the GRYC. The speakers and moderator join the session as youth who are themselves active in humanitarian response. More importantly, they represent youth in their respective countries, with whom they engage on a daily basis but who are unable to join the event for protection, logistical and practical reasons.

Ahmed joins us from Kakuma camp in Kenya where he has grasped the opportunity not only to participate in **higher education**, but to mentor and support fellow refugee youth through higher education programmes, which work via a blended learning approach and in collaboration with

universities around the globe. A mere 1% of refugees have access to higher education¹ compared to a 32% average worldwide. In response, digital technologies are pushing the boundaries and creating opportunities for youth in even the most remote areas to access post-secondary learning opportunities.

Mary brings a wealth of experience from her work with fellow displaced and host community youth in Myanmar, where she empowers and supports young people to build self-reliance through **technical, life skills and entrepreneurship training** programmes. Not only do young people account for roughly 40% of the world's unemployed, but they are up to four times more likely to be unemployed than adults². The need for work-readiness and market driven skills training programmes has never been higher and is crucial in contexts of displacement where youth are particularly vulnerable and their futures are uncertain.

Peter will share the perspectives of Syrian refugee and Lebanese host community youth from Northern Lebanon. The unprecedented influx of refugees to the country has put an enormous strain on the already limited resources and infrastructure, as is the case in most countries affected by the Syrian crisis. Positive engagement between refugee and host community youth as well as support to vulnerable host communities have become essential to enhance peaceful coexistence between refugee and host communities. Peter's work with committees comprised of refugee and host community youth has been one constructive way to engage young people in building **social cohesion between communities**.

Our moderator Foni is joining us from Nairobi having just graduated from university under the DAFI refugee scholarship scheme. Throughout the past few years, Foni has not only completed her Bachelor's degree and held the role of president of the Kenya DAFI students association, but she has also found the time to engage in youth-related **coordination and advocacy** initiatives both nationally and internationally. As a voice for youth, she has been an active member of the global Youth and Adolescents in Emergencies Advocacy working group (YAEA) and has attended international events to represent the voice of youth at a policy level.

This session aims to explore the role and contribution of youth in humanitarian response from the perspective of young people and from a wide range of sectors and geographic locations worldwide. With youth leading the discussion, we will explore the challenges they face in displacement, discuss some of the solutions they have found to such challenges and examine some of the ways in which youth can engage with humanitarian actors to strengthen protection in their communities. Youth led recommendations will be shared and there will be multiple opportunities for the audience to comment, engage and discuss throughout the interactive and dynamic session.

Speakers:

Ahmed Abdi – INZONE Higher Education Space Kakuma

Mary Wai Wai Lwin – Norwegian Refugee Council Myanmar

Peter Mahfouz – Caritas Lebanon

Moderator:

Foni Joyce – Youth and Adolescent in Emergencies Working Group

¹ UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/568bc62b9.pdf>

² S4YE https://www.s4ye.org/sites/default/files/Toward_Solutions_for_Youth_Employment_Full.pdf