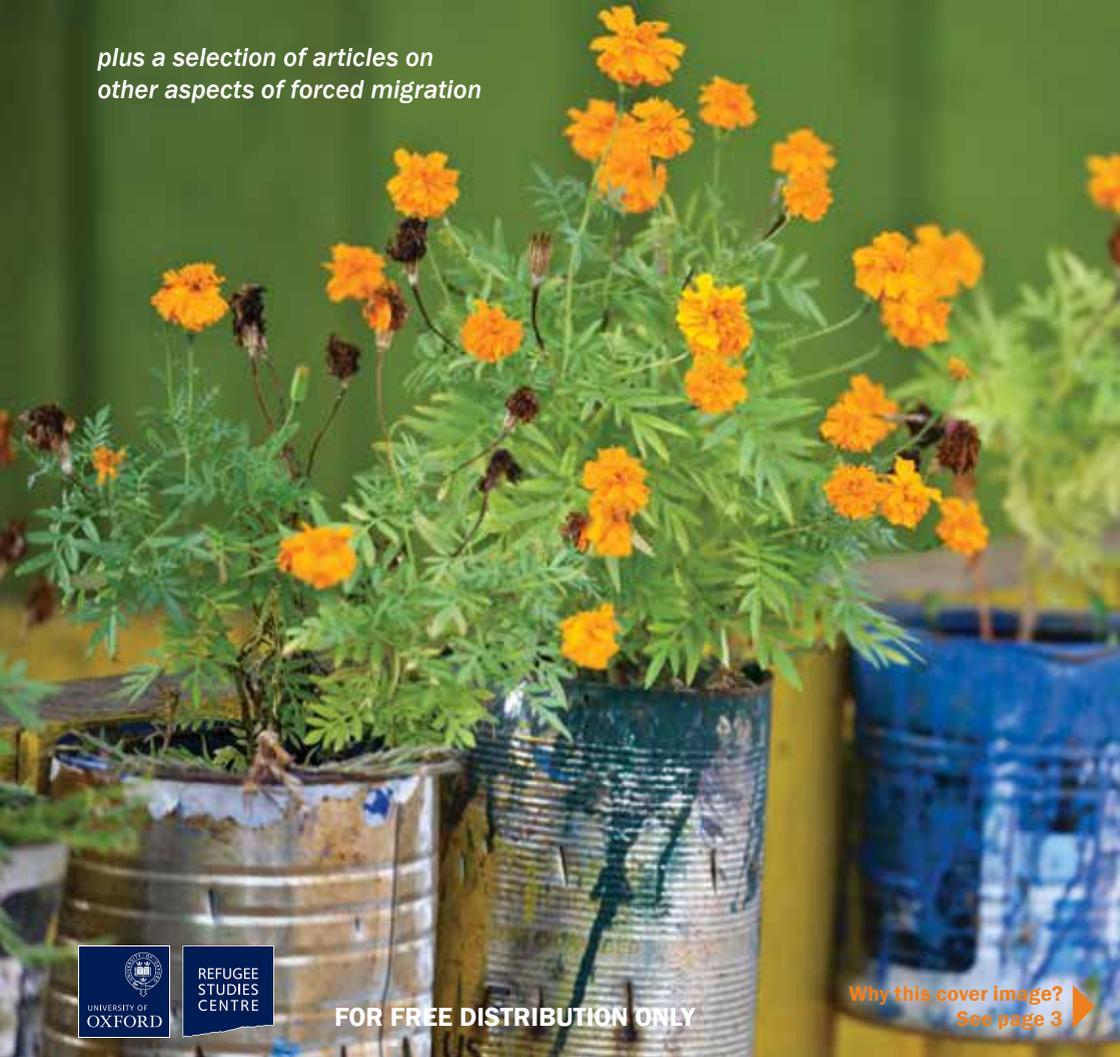


# FORCED MIGRATION review

Issue 53  
October 2016

## Local communities: first and last providers of protection

*plus a selection of articles on  
other aspects of forced migration*





## From the editors

### Forced Migration Review

(FMR) provides a forum for the regular exchange of practical experience, information and ideas between researchers, refugees and internally displaced people, and those who work with them. It is published in English, Arabic, Spanish and French by the Refugee Studies Centre of the Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford.

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It is often people's immediate community that provides the first, last and perhaps best tactical response for many people affected by or under threat of displacement. However one defines protection or community, external actors will struggle to provide appropriate support unless they understand this reality. Unless they develop a greater awareness of the role of community-based protection strategies, they may fail to actively incorporate the 'agency' of the community into policy and programming; at worst, they risk undermining local communities' capacity to avoid or survive violence and displacement.

This issue's feature theme, 'Local communities: first and last providers of protection', looks at the capacity of communities to organise themselves before, during and after displacement in ways that help protect the community. Refugee and IDP authors from Rwanda, Sudan and Yemen share their insights, while other authors reflect on the subject in general or look at specific community-led protection strategies in countries such as Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Dominican Republic, India, Nigeria and Uganda.

As usual, this issue of FMR also includes – in addition to the feature theme articles – a varied selection of articles of interest on other forced migration topics.

**Formats and languages:** The full issue and all the individual articles in this issue are online in html, pdf and audio formats at [www.fmreview.org/community-protection](http://www.fmreview.org/community-protection). FMR 53 and its accompanying FMR 53 digest (which provides introductions to all articles plus QR/web links) will be available online and in print in English, Arabic, French and Spanish.

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### Forthcoming issues and feature themes:

- FMR 54: Resettlement (due out February 2017)
- FMR 55: Shelter (due out June 2017)

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And, finally, please do look at the back page to read our short report on the recent **Reader Survey**.

**Marion Couldrey and Maurice Herson**  
Editors, *Forced Migration Review*

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**Why this cover image:** In Caqueta, Colombia, a community leader took the initiative to help her community find a safe, dignified and healthy place to live after they were displaced by guerrillas. In contrast to most of the images and metaphors that spring to mind when we look for an illustration of 'protection' – a sheltering roof, maybe, or a helping hand – to us this picture reflects a displaced community striving to rekindle the vestiges of normality. It speaks also of resourcefulness and creativity, and of a place that someone can flourish in, a place where there is belonging and safety: the coming together of community and protection. "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow", as the film star Audrey Hepburn once said.

## Understanding and supporting community-led protection

Nils Carstensen

**Supporting locally led protection strategies can significantly improve the impact of protection interventions. External actors first need to acknowledge the capacity of people at risk as independent actors themselves.**

In recent years, there has been growing evidence of the effectiveness of locally led protection strategies and actions... A local women's association in Sudan advises communities on how to seek protection in foxholes or mountain caves to escape aerial bombardments. A minority Christian family chooses to travel with friends belonging to the Buddhist majority in government-controlled parts of southeast Myanmar. And self-taught local bomb-removal squads in opposition-controlled parts of Syria remove or neutralise unexploded cluster and barrel bombs in densely populated neighbourhoods.<sup>1</sup>

In such cases, some of the communities are already displaced and are trying to avoid being forced to leave their homes yet again, while other communities are trying to minimise the risks that might otherwise make flight and displacement inevitable. In crisis situations, there are multiple and often quite different understandings of what 'protection' means and what strategies and actions might bring about a degree of protection. Particularly in situations where the parties to conflict and national or local authorities show little or no respect for international or national law and norms, locally defined needs, strategies and understandings of protection may differ significantly from what an international 'normative' protection approach usually entails.

According to the most widely accepted definition, humanitarian protection aims to prevent or, failing that, limit or mitigate the impacts of abuses. This approach tends to see protection as something that outsiders try to provide for vulnerable members of a particular community in order to promote compliance with relevant bodies of international law. Such activities by

external actors are, when they work well, crucial for protecting and saving lives. This approach, however, is defined by translating different international laws, rights-based approaches, institutional mandates and generalised guidance into protection activities in highly complex local realities and does not always resonate with local realities and the experience of people at risk.

The growing evidence base of locally rooted protection strategies and action includes the 2009 Oxfam paper on community-based protection in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Cuny Center's inventory of self-protection strategies, several documented cases in Colombia, and the Local to Global Protection (L2GP) and the Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Practice Network studies of self-protection in Burma/Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe; recent work by the Stimson Center, the Sudd Institute and the Center for Civilians in Conflict has also contributed to the understanding of self-protection in DRC, South Sudan and Syria.

This growing appreciation for locally led protection has also manifested itself in practical guidance for humanitarian programme staff (and partners), while recent policy papers such as the Global Protection Cluster Strategic Framework 2016-19 and ECHO's new Humanitarian Protection policy document reflect the importance of self-protection with humanitarian policymakers and donors.<sup>2</sup>

When exploring the potential and limitations of communities' self-protection strategies, it is crucial to be mindful that the growing appreciation for self-protection must never undermine the primary responsibility that the state has for protection. Existing international law, conventions and norms constitute indispensable legal cornerstones for the protection of civilians. From a more pragmatic point of view, it is also important to note that while community-based and

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individual self-protection strategies may be crucial for survival, they do not by themselves provide the degree of safety, security and dignity that people need and are entitled to. Thus, though vital, local agency must never be regarded as a substitute for the protection responsibilities of national authorities or – failing that – relevant international actors.

*“We stay alert and informed so that when we hear of possible attacks from war veterans we flee from our homes with our children. But we still live with fear.”* (Opposition activist, Zimbabwe)

### Local understandings of protection

The most important and inspiring findings in the self-protection research available to date are about what vulnerable people do to protect themselves and their communities, and how they do it. The main factors here are:

**First, the range of assets available to them:** This will be affected by the extent of sharing within and between families and communities, and by the level of community cohesion and the quality of local leadership.

**Second, the key protection and assistance roles played by indigenous civil society networks:** The activities of armed groups and national authorities are often perceived as having mixed impacts; in Sudan and Myanmar, for instance, armed opposition groups were seen as both potential sources of threats and as important agents of protection.

**Third, access to material, financial and natural resources:** Communities identified livelihoods and protection as intimately linked, that is, that the ability to protect oneself and one’s community depends on the kind (and magnitude) of resources that communities and families can draw on when crisis hits.

**Fourth, the relative importance of local culture, religion, tradition, values and social norms, and customary law:** These often matter more than formal rights, particularly when dealing with threats from within the family and the wider community such as domestic violence and gender-based violence.

Often, local understandings of protection differ from – or extend significantly beyond – how protection is understood and applied by

international actors. When one respondent in Sudan stated that, “If we could not defend ourselves with weapons, we would not be able to survive”, he identified a protection strategy which no principled rights-based humanitarian actor could support. But when a woman in the same area explained that, “We are not animals. We don’t just need food and water to live. We like to make ourselves look beautiful and dance even when we are hungry”, her strategy for surviving and preserving dignity through the use of perfumes, hair extensions and guitar strings might resonate with an aid worker with an appreciation for the psychosocial aspects of protection, including the importance of social connectedness and agency. Being able to maintain one’s dignity and one’s identity as part of a distinct community, without losing hope, was shown to have a major influence in determining whether people had the wherewithal to protect themselves, their family members and their wider community.

When viewed from a local perspective, protection threats – and associated self-protection and survival efforts – are highly contextual and change rapidly with time, season and conflict dynamics. Protection needs and strategies thus have to be continually analysed, and be addressed at national, community, family and individual levels. Gender- and age-disaggregated analysis, for example, shows significant variations in both what are perceived as the most important threats and what are deemed relevant and feasible self-protection strategies.

As much as self-protection is important, there are also numerous examples of what are often referred to as ‘negative protection strategies’: strategies which, while achieving short-term protection ‘gains’ for some in the family or community, come at a very high risk or human cost. Examples include accepting the risk of attack to fetch water for the family; allowing early child-marriage to reduce family expenditure or gain money; or sending a young family member to fight for an armed group to secure the family’s protection. While outside actors should not support such strategies, understanding them and then working with communities,

families and individuals to develop less negative strategies remains crucial.

*"Sometimes we knew when we went to get water that they [enemy soldiers] might be waiting to rape us. But we had no choice."* (Woman, South Kordofan, Sudan)

Another frequent finding is that many locally led protection efforts do not fit into externally defined categories or 'sectors' (protection, livelihoods, shelter, nutrition, etc). Nor do they fit nicely into a particular phase of emergency preparedness, response, recovery or development activities. A community perspective will naturally defy such aid industry classifications, with the result that self-protection and other locally led responses are often not eligible for external funding.

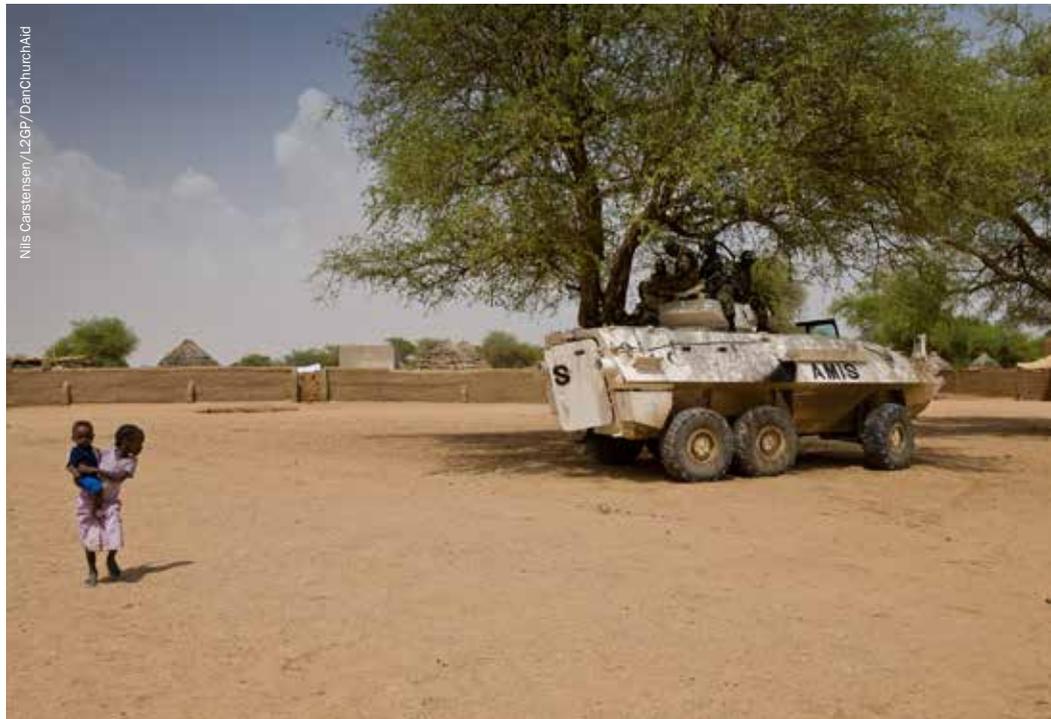
*"First we lost our way of life, then we lost our dignity in the way that we were treated by*

*international humanitarian agencies – it seemed like international agencies had their own agendas. They paid no attention to our own capacities to cope with the crisis."* (Volunteer with a local organisation in Gaza)<sup>3</sup>

### Different approaches, similar goals

Affected individuals and communities are faced with the imperative to act here and now in order to survive and protect themselves and their families, communities and assets. Guided primarily by experience, people make instant decisions in response to an urgent need to act.

International humanitarian protection agencies, however, are usually guided by a complex mix of humanitarian principles and international law; national, regional and international geo-political realities; availability of resources; restrictions dictated by logistics, access and staff security; and



Nils Carstensen/L2GP/DanChurchAid

Darfur: A young girl with her brother watch the African Union peacekeepers (AMIS) in 2006. The peacekeepers withdraw to their base in late afternoon but most attacks on civilians occurred in the evening, night and early morning – the very times when peacekeepers and international aid workers were absent. During these times, the communities themselves were the only providers of protection.

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institutional mandates, policies and donor restrictions. Their actions must be measured, monitored and justified – all time-consuming processes which may not keep pace with either the threats faced or the urgency with which communities need to act.

While it is important to acknowledge such differences in understanding and practice, it is equally important to note that, despite their different practical, contextual and conceptual backgrounds, these approaches are to a large extent trying to address the same protection threats and challenges. They should therefore be seen as complementary, rather than mutually exclusive.

However, despite the increased attention given to self-protection activities and their obvious complementarity to international efforts, L2GP and other research – such as a 2014 survey about community-based protection conducted with protection practitioners<sup>4</sup> – has found that truly locally led protection efforts are rarely acknowledged or supported by outside agencies. While the majority of respondents to the survey understood community-based protection as activities “originating from within and being led by communities to protect themselves”, only a handful could refer to concrete cases which they knew of and/or had supported. Rather, the vast majority of respondents suggested examples of ‘community-based protection’ which actually originated from an external agency but which included informing or engaging communities at different stages of implementation.

Given the documented lack of real support to truly locally led protection efforts, it seems all the more pertinent to recall the hierarchy of factors affecting the safety of civilians:

*“The first, and most critical, [factor] concerns the actions and motives of the parties to a conflict; the degree to which warring parties adhere to the rules of war is the fundamental factor in the level of risk facing civilians. The second concerns the steps that civilians take to protect themselves from the direct and indirect consequences of the actions of warring parties. The final factor concerns the interventions of third parties aimed at protecting civilians.”<sup>5</sup>*

A crucial first step to improving the synergy between local and external protection agency is for outside actors to acknowledge people at risk as independent actors with significant capacity. However, for any true progress to take place, outside actors must go further and place local understanding of protection threats and local strategies at the very centre of their own activities by giving affected communities and individuals actual control and decision-making power over programmes and projects. If based on humanitarian principles and done with sufficient caution, sensitivity and mentoring, such a move would not only strengthen local agency but would also inform and improve external agency.

This is a demanding process and some external protection actors may be better suited and more able to take forward a locally led protection approach than others. Still, even small steps in this direction will help to overcome the current gap in both understanding and action between local agency and most outside agencies.

*“The mountains protected us. We ate wild food and treated ourselves with traditional medicines. We depended on our communities, collaboration and unity to help each other to survive and not give up.”* (Man, South Kordofan, Sudan)

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1. This article partly builds on the chapter ‘Community self-protection’ co-authored with Aditi Gorur for (2016) *Protection of Civilians*, OUP. <http://bit.ly/OUP-Protection-of-Civilians-2016>  
The article also draws on published and unpublished research produced for L2GP. Where not otherwise indicated, quotations come from L2GP studies. Thanks to James Thomson, Kerren Hedlund and Sofie Grundin for their contributions.

2. See resources on p62.

3. See Berry K and Reddy S (2010) ‘Safety with dignity: integrating community-based protection into humanitarian programming’, HPN/ODI Network Paper No 68, p5. <http://bit.ly/ODI-Berry-Reddy-Paper68>

4. (2014) *Community-Based Protection: Survey Findings and Analysis*, prepared for UNHCR’s 2014 Annual Consultations [www.unhcr.org/en-us/574308244](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/574308244)

5. Pantuliano S and Svoboda E ‘Humanitarian Protection – Moving beyond the Tried and Tested’ in Willmot H, Mamiya R, Sheeran S and Weller M (Eds) (2016) *Protection of Civilians*, Oxford University Press. <http://bit.ly/OUP-Protection-of-Civilians-2016>

## Challenging the established order: the need to 'localise' protection

Simon Russell

**The growing criticism of protection actors for neglecting indigenous coping strategies and capacities should prompt a radical, creative re-think of attitudes and approaches.**

In 1977 Pierre Bourdieu wrote that "every established order tends to make its own entirely arbitrary system seem entirely natural".<sup>1</sup> In the case of humanitarian protection, that established order has been made up since 2005 of the cluster approach, with a global protection cluster in Geneva and 28 protection clusters in the field. These clusters formulate a programme of action for protection at the country level (within a broader humanitarian response plan), based on a common definition of 'protection' dating from 1999:

*Protection encompasses all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law, namely human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law.*<sup>2</sup>

It is only recently that this common definition of protection, rooted in international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, has been challenged, and the challenge has come from an unexpected quarter: people affected by crisis themselves and community organisations. They say that the definition of protection is a Northern construct, does not take into account the traditions and concerns of local people, and reflects the supply-driven biases of humanitarian agencies rather than the needs of affected people. This is a simplified version of a complex argument but, nonetheless, the challenge has been made and remains to be addressed.

In the 2015 report *Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in the Context of Humanitarian Action*<sup>3</sup> the authors criticised protection actors for neglecting existing and potential indigenous coping strategies and capacities and noted that indigenous crisis response systems and customs do

not necessarily fit easily with mainstream humanitarian approaches. They wrote that: "looking ahead, it is fair to assume that there may well be more fragmentation, that the universality, which has been at the centre of the traditional humanitarian ethos, will be increasingly confronted by new thinking and practices and that there will be far more diversity in the humanitarian arena". How can this change be channelled to be constructive rather than destructive?

It is very hard to change an established order, where system and culture play such a strong role. In terms of the inclusion, or rather exclusion, of the Global South, partnership is not just about dialogue but about a broader range of actors shaping the system and how it operates. In order for local actors to be valued within the system the nature of the inter-relationships between national capacity and the international system needs to shift from a largely paternalistic and sub-contracting relationship to one of more equal partnership. This would also require a shift in the current framework that predisposes North-based standards and norms and largely overlooks indigenous or community values.

In some cases local or traditional norms may result in negative coping mechanisms and 'harmful practices' but in many other cases effective community mechanisms and local resilience are being undermined by 'ready-made' responses that are imposed without consultation or awareness of context. That can produce behaviour that conforms on the surface only, without enabling meaningful or sustainable protection measures to be adapted and integrated into community life.

### Breaking the mould

The dynamics of the cluster approach need to be examined to see if it is itself an

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impediment to greater inclusion of local actors. Coordination of a strategy for solutions to displacement in south-east Myanmar, for example, was done outside the cluster approach and yet was more inclusive of a broad range of partners, including local agencies, than the protection cluster response in Rakhine State. In the Humanitarian Policy Group's report of March 2015 on international, local and diaspora actors in the Syria response, the authors wrote that: "The formal system has seen many changes over recent years; some have improved it, others have not, but none has been what one might call radical or fundamental. Even if radical change is unrealistic in the short term – and it probably is – the formal system should take Syria as an example of the challenges to come. It needs to explore creative ways of responding, and do so not in isolation but by involving new players, even unfamiliar ones."<sup>4</sup>

Inclusion of a wider range of actors requires more substantial change than simply setting another place at the table and asking them to participate in a structure that does not meet their needs. National NGOs are often the first responders in an emergency but there is scope for national NGOs to engage in all phases of response. They sometimes are excluded from coordination mechanisms or do not participate because they do not find them relevant or do not have capacity to do so.

The structure of Humanitarian Country Teams and the cluster approach inherently reinforces international leadership over local ownership. The question is how to break out of a sub-contracting mindset. Much work has been done on capacity building but it is the quality of partnership that

is important, and three issues in particular need to be unpacked.

**Financing:** Money is key. Better access to financing is critical for local agencies but there is a need to simplify access to funds by thinking about proportionality. Why do national NGOs need to overcome high regulatory hurdles to get small amounts of money? Particular issues include auditing requirements and the constraints imposed by counter-terrorism legislation. One approach could be to make separate pots of money available through protection clusters for disbursement to local NGOs (the Start Network<sup>5</sup>, for example, has seed funding for local response), since pooled funds at the country level have excluded local NGOs so far. At the May 2016 World Humanitarian Summit it was agreed that more funding should be channelled – and more directly – to local agencies; the target agreed was to direct 25% of humanitarian funding "as directly as possible" to local and national agencies.<sup>6</sup>

**Decision making:** There is a need to find better ways to include local agencies in the international architecture at global and local levels. The way national NGOs are included in Humanitarian Country Teams is not sustainable owing to the imbalance in



IDPs in Rakhine State, Myanmar. The site is home to thousands of Muslim IDPs who were forced to flee from their homes when inter-communal violence in 2012 displaced up to 140,000 people.

the resources that national NGOs can devote to participation. The networking power of clusters can also be undermined by the atmospherics of clusters – such as the attitudes of international staff or something as simple as whether the local language is used for communication or not.

**Respect:** The Principles of Partnership need to be inculcated in organisations across the sector.<sup>7</sup> This means increasing awareness and building more equal relationships, which in turn will entail changing the attitudes of international aid workers, who need to attune themselves to local culture and learn to talk with local people as equals.

What is the Global Protection Cluster doing to address some of these issues? At the core of our Strategic Framework for 2016-19 is the objective of engaging local and national actors more meaningfully, including through a revitalised governance structure. The Global Protection Cluster is also creating a Protection Lab to define the challenges associated with localisation; based on this analysis, it will then identify

possible solutions and run pilot programmes so that proposed strategies can be further refined before they are shared more widely. The work of the Lab will be explicitly shaped as a dialogue, in which our understanding of protection is changed in practical ways to conform to what is locally understood. This aspiration has been expressed before but needs to take concrete form.

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1. Bourdieu P (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press. <http://bit.ly/CUP-Bourdieu-1977>
2. This definition, which was originally developed over a series of ICRC-sponsored workshops involving some 50 humanitarian and human rights organisations, has been adopted by the IASC.
3. <http://bit.ly/ReliefWeb-2015-whole-of-system-review>
4. Svoboda E and Pantuliano S (2015) *International and local/diaspora actors in the Syria response: A diverging set of systems?*, ODI, HPG Working Paper <http://bit.ly/ODI-Svoboda-Pantuliano-2015>
5. [www.start-network.org](http://www.start-network.org)
6. See box The Grand Bargain on p62.
7. Equality, Transparency, Results-Oriented Approach, Responsibility and Complementarity <http://bit.ly/ICVA-Principles-Partnership>

## Women-led self-protection in Sudan

Nagwa Musa Konda, Leila Karim Tima Kodi and Nils Carstensen

**In parts of Sudan, local NGOs and women's groups have taken the lead in their own protection, and their considerable achievements have helped change the status of women in their communities.**

Since the outbreak of civil war in 2011 in Sudan's South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, the civilian population has experienced intense aerial bombardment and ground attacks. At least 4,082 bombs and missiles have hit predominantly civilian targets including villages, schools and hospitals.<sup>1</sup> Some 450,000 women, men, boys and girls are internally displaced while another approximately 250,000 people have fled to South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. Since the war broke out, the Sudanese government has banned international humanitarian actors, media representatives and local traders from accessing opposition-controlled areas.

In the absence of any effective international assistance and protection,

local NGOs and a women's association have supported up to 400,000 individuals by providing basic survival and self-protection guidance and by building awareness. In this article, Nagwa Musa Konda, former Executive Director of Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organisation, and Leila Karim Tima Kodi, head of the Nuba Mountains Women's Association,<sup>2</sup> speak about their experience of locally led protection efforts in Sudan.<sup>3</sup>

**Nagwa:** *The situation is very tense. We have bombings, or planes flying over, nearly every single day. Most victims of the aerial bombardment are children but also many women. When the bombing happens, the women will run after their children*

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*to try to save them and because they run in the open, they are very exposed to the shrapnel from the bombing. That is why having foxholes everywhere [shallow depressions that afford protection to people lying in them] and training people to jump into the holes rather than run away have been so important for people's protection. As soon as you lie down rather than stand up, your exposure to flying shrapnel is so much lower.*

As war broke out in June 2011, research into local survival and protection experience from the previous war in the area (1985-2002) was just about to be concluded. Local and international researchers associated with the Local to Global Protection (L2GP) initiative, together with the local NGOs which had taken part in the research, rapidly turned the research into a self-protection training package. The research pointed to some key experiences from the previous war which seemed relevant for civilians in the new war. The research pointed in particular to three important sets of threats and challenges:

- reducing risk of injury or death from aerial bombardment and long-range shelling by seeking shelter and providing first aid training and kits to communities
- reducing life-threatening risks from lack of food, clean water, income, basic services and shelter by mobilising traditional knowledge of wild foods and herbal medicine and introducing household rationing to stretch sparse resources
- overcoming fear, a sense of isolation and hopelessness, and erosion of dignity through basic community-based psychosocial activities including continuing education and other activities for children.

"Protection is very important. If it were not for the awareness on protection, many people would not be alive now. Since the war continues, we will continue with the message on protection." Leila Karim, Nuba Mountains Women's Association

**Nagwa:** *As we found out that most of the victims of the fighting and the aerial bombardment were women and children, we sat together with the Nuba Mountains Women's Association. We realised that*

*many of the younger women, men and of course the children had not lived in the war zone during the previous conflict and they had no idea of what to do when war and aerial bombardment began again.*

*The standard training that was developed lasts for four days and the volunteers who take part have to commit to bringing all they have learned back to their communities. Women who attend a particular mosque or church will go back and train those constituencies. Teachers will teach the children in their schools as well as other teachers. In this way, basic protection training has reached more than 400,000 people since the war started.<sup>4</sup> The number of casualties has greatly lessened and people are somehow able to cope better with both the bombings and the fear of the bombings.*

### **Dig foxholes everywhere!**

**Leila:** *In the Women's Association we inform the women about current events and advise them on how to deal with war and how to protect themselves, cooperate with each other and keep safe. From the beginning, we took the threat from aerial bombardment very seriously and encouraged people to dig bunkers and foxholes in safe areas. Right away, we began teaching our children that as soon as they hear the sound of the airplanes, they have to immediately jump into the bunker and lie down for safety. Whether their mothers are with them or not, the children have to hide themselves.*

**Nagwa:** *The protection volunteers went on to suggest that communities and local authorities move schools, mosques and churches to safer locations, whether close to caves in the hills or into the forest. Teachers were encouraged to take a small blackboard and conduct their classes under trees close to the caves in case aerial bombardment suddenly happens.*

*We also bought basic whistles to alert children if they are playing and do not notice the aeroplane coming. In other places, we have people on watch with a large bell – once you hear the bell, you immediately get into the foxholes. The planes do not give you time to run, so it is important to be very close to a safe shelter if bombing suddenly happens. That is why the key messages in the beginning was the importance of digging foxholes everywhere – at home, at the water pump, in the market, at schools, mosques and churches – everywhere!*

### Daily challenges

As the war continued, more issues and messages were included in the training – such as economising, reducing meals, storing food, gathering wild foods and how to prepare them – and pre-positioning food in different places in case a family's house is bombed and burned down.

Many water-points have been destroyed or have stopped working and many communities are now forced to use traditional wells and in some cases surface water for drinking. Basic advice on how to boil water or use water purification tablets was therefore included in the training curriculum along with how to respond to a number of other health-related threats and issues.

**Nagwa:** *Staff from local health clinics warned that there are HIV/AIDS cases in the area, so we added HIV/AIDS risk education as well. Health services and medical supplies are very few in the opposition-controlled areas. There is just one small hospital caring for a population of around 1 million people, so we also included knowledge of traditional herbs and medicine. This is traditional knowledge, often known to women of the older generation but lost to young women, so the trainers now disseminate it to all generations.*

*Basic first aid training is part of the workshops – including guidance on how to stop serious bleeding. With the poor roads, very few cars and a great distance to the only functioning hospital, being able to stop bleeding may prevent a patient from dying before she or he reaches the hospital.*

### Changing the status of women

Performing such important, life-saving roles in the community earned the women greater respect among a range of local stakeholders (mosques, community leaders, armed groups, etc). This gave the women the status and a platform from which they have been able to begin addressing more sensitive and challenging issues – such as gender-based violence – within the community. When considering the impact that the work of local organisations in the Nuba Mountains has had, international actors would do well to consider how best they can support such community-led protection



Women at market in South Kordofan, with foxhole behind them.

efforts in active conflicts – including how appropriate funding modalities could be developed to support this kind of work.

**Leila:** *We work a lot with issues around violence against women. We do that through conferences and workshops targeting both men and women to create awareness about violence against women. Men who batter women are punished and that makes them afraid. Although there is still violence, it is very much reduced.*

**Nagwa:** *The communities, and increasingly the traditional leaders and local authorities as well, respect the women for what they have done and how it has helped save lots of lives. We all realise that because of the awareness campaigns the casualty rates from bombing have decreased to very low numbers.*

*Now when there is a local leadership meeting, they call for the Women's Association to participate. They also realised that they need women to be involved in training the police cadets. The local Secretariat of Health took part in the first aid*

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Nils Carstensen/L2GP/DanChurchAid

training; the Judiciary got involved when the women raised issues of gender-based violence – including how and where to report possible cases. Eventually, that led to members of the Women's Association in some places being part of the customary courts when they decide in cases related to gender-based violence.

### Dealing with trauma and despair

**Nagwa:** Many people – children, women, men – have seen their loved ones killed in front of their eyes. Some have seen their homes burned down with all their belongings. Many people are now deeply traumatised by what they have experienced and from the daily fear and terror they face. Still, we are a proud and resilient people; while some have fled, the majority try to stay on, because this is our homeland. This is where we grow our food and where we live. People do not want to go and suffer in a refugee camp in somebody else's country – instead we have adopted many different strategies to be able to survive and remain at home.

In such a situation, it is important to stick together and to support those who have just lost a loved

one by comforting each other and by making sure someone is not left to her or himself in times of trauma. In response to the ongoing psychological strain of living in a war zone, the women have come to realise and actively use small things like hair extensions, make-up or perfume to restore their dignity. Even if – or maybe even more so when – you are forced to live in a cave, when you do not have enough food for your children or yourself, and you live in constant fear of the next bombardment – feeling clean, smelling nice and looking good actually becomes crucial to your self-respect and your ability to survive.

When the women come together, sit, and prepare the perfumes or do each other's hair, they get a chance to talk, to explain their situation, and that gives them a chance also to comfort and encourage one another. To me personally these small things are important too. Despite all the challenges, despite all the suffering, I do not want to look messy or walk around smelling bad. I want to be a normal Nuba woman and therefore I'll protect my dignity for as long as I'm alive.

### Nagwa Musa Konda

Former Executive Director of the Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organisation

### Leila Karim Tima Kodi

Head of the Nuba Mountains Women's Association

### Nils Carstensen [nic@local2global.info](mailto:nic@local2global.info)

Documentarist and senior humanitarian advisor, Local to Global Protection [www.local2global.info](http://www.local2global.info) and DanChurchAid [www.danchurchaid.org](http://www.danchurchaid.org)

1. Between April 2012 and June 2016 as reported by Nuba Reports, a group of independent journalists working in the area. See <http://nubareports.org>.
2. The southernmost, mountainous parts of South Kordofan are referred to as the Nuba Mountains by most of the inhabitants of the area.
3. Due to access restrictions, interviews for this article were carried out in several locations (including South Kordofan) and on multiple occasions between 2014 and 2016. Equally, interviews with key staff of Kodi, another local NGO engaged in the activities, have informed this article. Thanks also to Justin Corbett and James Thomson for their inputs. Lastly, the article draws on several papers and a short documentary film on women-led protection in Sudan to be found at [www.local2global.info](http://www.local2global.info).
4. This was confirmed in a 2014 evaluation which showed that 80% of 640 randomly selected households knew about all the protection messages. In terms of impact on actual behaviour, digging foxholes, hiding in caves, family budgeting, food storage, health, sanitation and first aid messaging have had the greatest impact.

## “This group is essential to our survival”: urban refugees and community-based protection

Jennifer S Rosenberg

**Nearly 60% of all refugees now live in cities, a trend that will continue as camps increasingly become an option of last resort. Already, this urban shift is catalysing monumental changes across the sector, including in how humanitarians think about, and embark upon, community-based protection.**

The ‘communities’ at the heart of community-based protection are not predetermined.

Communities can cohere around any number of shared characteristics, and be more or less inclusive or exclusive depending upon their own internal social norms and power dynamics. Ensuring that every refugee has access to community-based protection requires, in the first instance, seeing them as individual rights holders. So while community-based protection arises through collective action, an overarching goal of protection programming is to empower individuals to know and claim their rights – and to recognise which ‘community’ may be most relevant for helping them do so.

To help deepen understanding of urban refugees’ particular protection needs, in particular the risks of gender-based violence (GBV) and avenues for supporting them in mitigating those risks, in 2015 the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) conducted research in four cities with sizeable refugee populations: Beirut, Delhi, Quito and Kampala. Over 500 urban refugees across the four cities were interviewed, plus a variety of local stakeholders in each city.<sup>1</sup>

Findings from this research emphasise key areas of risk affecting all urban refugees, especially risks related to finding safe accommodation and trying to earn enough money to survive in the city. Perhaps more surprisingly, the findings highlight significant differences in how these and other risks manifest for different groups of urban refugees. For this reason, WRC then disaggregated its findings for the following subpopulations: women and girls; men and boys; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) refugees; refugees engaged

in sex work; persons with disabilities; and male survivors of sexual violence.

A similar pattern of differences unfolded regarding self-protection strategies and refugees’ efforts to constitute, or to tap into, a particular community that could serve as a protective social network. But what this ‘community’ looked like varied enormously across and within refugee subpopulations, underscoring that, for many refugees, notions of a broader ‘refugee community’ neither resonate with nor reflect their day-to-day reality.

### Questions of identity

Sometimes communities that refugees identified as being most relevant for their protection were not primarily made up of other refugees at all but rather of certain members of the host community. This was especially true for marginalised populations, such as sexual and gender minorities, but it was also true for refugees engaged in certain types of labour, including sex work.

This is because for some refugees, the aspect of their identity most relevant to their protection – both as a vulnerability factor, and as a shared characteristic around which networks of peers coalesce – is not their identity as refugees. Any number of identities (racial, ethnic, gender) or personal or environmental characteristics (the language they speak, the job they work at, the neighbourhood they live in) might weigh most heavily for an individual in terms of being important for them in accessing or forming a protective community.

The importance of prioritising refugees’ own assertions of identity is perhaps best illustrated by refugees who

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are especially at risk of violence because they are members of stigmatised and marginalised subpopulations. Sexual- and gender-minority refugees, for instance, are often ostracised by broader refugee communities, including by their own families. LGBTI refugees often experience violence at the hands of other refugees as well as members of the host community; they also experience discrimination and abuse when attempting to rent apartments, find jobs or even access services, including mainstream refugee services.

Enhancing community-based protection for LGBTI refugees therefore requires, in the first instance, supporting them in defining the contours of the communities that are most relevant – and safe – for them. This community may include LGBTI members of the host community, as for example is the case for many LGBTI Syrian refugees currently living in Lebanon. Members of the Lebanese LGBTI community share information and offer peer support to LGBTI Syrian refugees, and help connect them with local LGBTI organisations and LGBTI-friendly service providers. Syrian LGBTI refugees said that they turn to a local LGBTI organisation in emergency situations (such as if they are caught without ‘correct’ papers or arrested because of their sexual orientation or gender identity) since they feel this organisation is their best option for receiving responsive and knowledgeable legal support.

### **Kinship and security**

By contrast, in Quito, WRC interviewed Luisa<sup>2</sup>, a gay woman who had fled violence in Colombia to seek safety and asylum in Ecuador. Although Luisa participated in a support group for women hosted by an NGO in Quito, she broke down in tears when describing how isolated and alone she felt, unable to disclose who she “really is” to the women in the support group, and living in fear of being “found out” as a lesbian. She did not know any other gay individuals in Quito, refugees or Ecuadorians, and was surprised to learn that there were multiple LGBTI civil society organisations in Quito, including one run by and for gay women.

Hence it may be that for LGBTI refugees, their access to community-based protection will involve linkages to host community LGBTI organisations – and humanitarian actors should enable and encourage these linkages. They can do this by reaching out to local LGBTI organisations in the early stages of response to consult them about their interest or capacity to engage LGBTI refugees and to share their knowledge and experiences about how to live safely as a sexual or gender minority in the host community.

As Luisa’s story suggests, subcommunities can be a vital component of community-based protection for marginalised refugees. In Beirut, in addition to being a part of broader, primarily Lebanese, LGBTI social networks and community activities, Syrian trans women refugees have formed a smaller, more tightly knit peer community of their own. They are a circle of friends, coworkers and housemates who engage in activities that mitigate their individual and collective risks of day-to-day violence: small yet essential actions that range from sharing information (for example, about a dangerous checkpoint) to sharing taxis. They are also the first people they will phone for emotional support and referral information when they are victims of physical violence. Trans women in Ecuador, Beirut and Kampala report that such violence, including rape, is a regular occurrence, and that they are especially targeted because of their dual status as transgender individuals who are also refugees.

There are examples of marginalised refugees forming their own subcommunity-based protection organisations in other cities as well. In Kampala, an organisation called OGERA was formed by refugee sex workers to facilitate their access to the types of peer support, specialised services, and health and safety information they deem most relevant and urgent for them. Also in Kampala, an organisation called Angels, led by and for LGBTI refugees, engages in a variety of protection activities: emergency food rations, a safe space, peer counselling, and access to a computer so that members do not have to visit cyber cafes to send emails or Skype with friends or relatives abroad. Angels’

headquarters also serve as a makeshift shelter for homeless LGBTI refugees. In one group discussion, members of Angels said that the group is “essential to our survival”.

OGERA and Angels arose organically, through conversations among and collective actions by refugees with shared identities, yet both organisations struggle to keep their organisations afloat, to pay rent on their offices and fund their activities. Neither of them – nor the LGBTI organisation in Beirut – receives any financial support from humanitarian donors for their work with LGBTI refugees.

### Doing more to strengthen community-based protection

Two key strategies emerged from WRC’s consultations for strengthening community-based protection in ways that would enhance at-risk refugees’ access to protective peer networks and to specialised services and information.

The first strategy is brokering linkages between refugee at-risk subpopulations, such as LGBTI refugees or refugees engaged in sex work, and relevant host community organisations (whether civil society groups or private service providers). This requires international actors to systematically map potential host community partners or referral pathways, and reach out to them proactively to learn what barriers they may face in engaging refugees and what types of assistance might help them overcome those barriers.<sup>3</sup>

The second strategy is actively supporting community-based organisations (CBOs) led by or involving refugees. These CBOs engage in varying protection-related activities, depending on their members’ primary needs and concerns as well as their organisational capacity. Yet, among the groups consulted by WRC very few were receiving support from UNHCR or one of its partners; in particular, financial support for activities was cited as being difficult if not impossible to obtain. At the same time, the few who **were** able to secure some form(s) of support – be it help with programme management, access to a physical meeting space, or seed

money – said that it was critical to their existence and ability to engage in activities.

Supporting local community-based protection in urban settings calls for humanitarian actors to pursue both of the above strategies simultaneously. Doing this will not necessarily require new financial resources but it will require proactive efforts to re-channel or re-programme existing resources, both human and financial. Both strategies will require reworking existing funding mechanisms to enable greater flexibility in the awarding of grants to a diverse array of host community organisations.<sup>4</sup> Making it easier for refugee CBOs to receive small grants will also be essential to realising community-based protection and translating it into something that can have a tangible impact on refugees’ daily lives.

And at the heart of both strategies – at the heart of community-based protection – should be direct consultations with refugees. Such consultations are key not only to identifying refugees’ most urgent risks but to supporting the refugees in defining, in the first instance, the communities most relevant for them in mitigating those risks.

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1. For more information on research methodology and results, including separate reports for each subpopulation, see (2016) *Mean Streets: Identifying and Responding to Urban Refugees’ Risks of Gender-Based Violence*.

[www.womensrefugeecommission.org/gbv/resources/1272-mean-streets](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/gbv/resources/1272-mean-streets)

2. Name changed.

3. WRC is currently piloting a tool for urban practitioners that guides them sector by sector (health, education, etc) and subpopulation by subpopulation to identify potential partners in enhancing refugee protection, especially around GBV prevention and response.

4. See box on The Grand Bargain p62.

### FMR Podcasts

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## Refugees as a first stop for protection in Kampala

Eugenie Mukandayisenga

**As Rwandan refugees in Kampala, I and others like me are uniquely placed to help newly arrived refugees find their feet in the city. The work is demanding but vital.**

Uganda is now the third-largest refugee-hosting country on the African continent, home to over 500,000 refugees.<sup>1</sup> In Kampala, Uganda's capital, tens of thousands of refugees have come from surrounding countries and beyond, melting into city life. I myself am one of these self-settled refugees. I fled Rwanda and came to Kampala about ten years ago.

While living in the city offers a range of opportunities which cannot be found in the rural camps, refugees in Kampala are expected to be self-reliant – find homes, work and fend for themselves – with very little support from international aid agencies. Navigating this while adjusting to a new environment is a physical and emotional struggle for many refugees. In the absence of international aid, there are many things refugees do to support one another in day-to-day life, and this mutual assistance is vital as the front line of protection.

In my first few years here a friend had offered me a loan to pay for some training

with a Ugandan jewellery maker who then, after training me, provided me with some materials to set up a small business of my own selling my jewellery designs around the city. I now work full-time at the Jesuit Refugee Service, an international organisation where I teach arts and crafts as livelihoods training for refugees. However, these technical skills that I pass on to my students form only a very small part of the overall support I am able to offer them at an emotional level or in friendly guidance. Outside my day-to-day role I spend evenings and weekends meeting refugees in need through several networks I have made in the city.

### Support for refugees

Firstly, I create a space for therapeutic conversation about problems that people are often unable to express to others – topics that they might not be comfortable sharing with the authorities or with large, seemingly detached organisations. International agencies, with their financial,



Eugenie Mukandayisenga (in yellow dress) teaching handicrafts to fellow refugees, Kampala, Uganda.

time and resource constraints, can rarely offer personalised emotional support, and short-term interactions with strangers are not conducive for anyone to share their personal struggles. Refugees know that they will receive the most effective and appropriate assistance by working with individuals who have already been through the same thing.

Critically, these conversations also help me to understand how I can best offer assistance to meet their specific needs. I ask myself: Do they need money from me, or for me to offer them a room in my house, or for me to arrange and escort them to various appointments? Or is it sufficient for me to simply offer advice – to direct them to helpful service providers, to suggest opportunities to earn an income, or to help them manage their finances? While this approach can be extremely time- and resource-intensive, it allows me to offer tailored assistance.

Secondly, I serve as a local 'guide' to help other refugees – especially new arrivals – learn how to survive in Kampala. The list of potential needs and services for these refugees is seemingly endless. These have included accompanying individuals to the police station when they are summoned, and informing them of their rights so that they are not abused by opportunistic officials; taking them to the hospital when ill, injured or pregnant; and helping with death certificates and burial arrangements.

Thirdly, I offer guidance and support to young school-age women, both refugees and Ugandan nationals. Women's rights are a serious problem here in Kampala but seldom discussed.<sup>2</sup> I have recently assisted a young female refugee who desperately wanted to go to school but who was unable to secure the funds to pay fees, buy a uniform and cover other related costs. Without an education, she felt she had no possibility of building a promising future. Others in this situation will sometimes achieve financial security and therefore the opportunity to pursue their academic aspirations by getting into a relationship with an older man. For this young woman, I intervened as quickly as I could by speaking to her school and covering her costs. I wanted to make sure that her

physical, sexual and mental security was protected. I also offered advice to her and her family in order to encourage them and to give them ideas about how they can continue covering these costs themselves in the future. Again, building a close relationship with this family allowed me firstly to understand their situation and then to offer advice from a friendly position as compared to ad hoc and untailed advice that is sometimes provided by international agencies.

### Observations

These small efforts that I make are enacted at the individual level but the impact can be monumental, improving the well-being of whole families and wider social networks. Through my work, and that which other individuals and refugee community organisations do, we are able to inspire other refugees to follow a similar path of service, to reclaim dignity and security in situations that deprive them of opportunity, and to reject frequently imposed stereotypes that refugees are lazy and incapable individuals.

Providing help for other refugees is not without challenges and it is important to recognise what individuals go through in order to help others. A significant time commitment is required to build relationships with people and listen to their real needs. When individuals approach me, they know that they are talking to someone who cares about them and who will be there for them until their problems are resolved or are more manageable. As a mother of two, I am constantly balancing the needs of my own family with those of others, pushing my resources as far as they will go.

There are very few external organisations that offer such robust assistance from the time a refugee arrives in country until they are more settled. In an ideal situation, the largest service providers – including UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), its implementing partners and the Ugandan government – would allocate more resources to increasing the amount of contact with refugees in their daily operations.

There are limitations, however, to how far institutions can change in this respect.

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Many organisations are constrained by donors' demands or unwieldy bureaucratic structures and expectations, or they lack the willpower or interest to change their responses, thus stifling opportunities to improve the delivery of services. It is all the more critical, therefore, that they recognise the invaluable service that locally settled refugees like myself provide to others in need.

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Rwandan refugee working with Jesuit Refugee Service as a handicrafts trainer

1. UNHCR News update December 2015  
[www.unhcr.org/567414b26.html](http://www.unhcr.org/567414b26.html)

2. In 2014 I wrote a blog on this topic looking at how violence affects livelihoods in refugee communities here in Kampala:  
<http://bit.ly/RSC-HIP-Mukandayisenga-2014>

## Combatting dependency and promoting child protection in Rwanda

Saeed Rahman, Simran Chaudhri, Lindsay Stark and Mark Canavera

**Continuing dependence on aid that waxes and wanes with time and that comes largely from external sources can lead to feelings of powerlessness. It can furthermore undermine family- and community-based initiatives to protect children.**

Gihembe camp in Rwanda was established in 1997 to host large numbers of refugees coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); today it houses 14,295 people,<sup>1</sup> nearly half of whom are under the age of 18. For Gihembe camp residents, their lives depend on assistance from others.

Refugees in the camp live under curfew and – in a country where the availability of land is strained even for citizens – with limited farming options. Research undertaken in 2013<sup>2</sup> asked residents about the impact that this lack of livelihoods options has had on relationships and roles within the family in child protection, and how these relationships and roles are perceived. Parents feel unable to provide for their family's basic needs – food, clothing, shelter, education – and children witness this disempowerment. The inability of parents to afford school fees combined with a lack of positive coping methods leads children to turn to harmful practices to meet their needs, such as stealing, prostitution and risky forms of employment. Caregivers in the camp reported teen pregnancies, juvenile delinquency and lack of access to education as the most common threats to their children's well-being. For their part, children noted domestic violence, run-ins with authorities and substance abuse as key

harms to which they are exposed. Children and caregivers alike noted insufficient food rations – and lack of livelihoods activities – as core drivers for these risks.

When families see their children engaging in risky activities, some family members try to explain to them the negative consequences of their actions. This works in certain cases; however, many refugees noted that as their situation of displacement continues, families feel powerless.

*"We don't know what we can do for [the children]. The big problem is their mindset that has been ruined, so it's very difficult to help them."*

The stress of protracted displacement also changes family structures and caregiving practices. In the most extreme cases, a husband may leave a family, or a mother may abandon a child, rationalising that the child will be better off alone. More commonly, caregivers sell or rent out their child's UNHCR ration card, an act perceived by agency child protection workers as a violation of the child's rights; however, some parents do this in good faith to meet needs for their children that they perceive to be higher priority, like paying for school fees, clothes or other items.

*"When a girl gets to be 14 years old she needs clothes, underwear and sanitary pads. ... I sell the ration so that I can buy those things. So because I have many children, you understand that I can't fulfill all their needs. So they go outside to search for money in one way or another, and sometimes they come back pregnant or infected with HIV."*

### Community-based child protection mechanisms

Our research identified a number of community-initiated resources that residents could and did turn to. These mechanisms represented a combination of initiatives from when they lived in DRC and new initiatives that had been established during camp life in Rwanda. There was a general perception, however, that community-led initiatives were far weaker in the camps than they had been in the residents' home communities in DRC.

Families would involve relatives and tribal leaders to resolve conflicts to do with children, including conflicts related to parentage and child abuse. Schools and churches were also perceived to be at the heart of efforts to protect and to care for children. UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and the Rwandan government provide educational scholarships until 'senior three' level (third year of secondary school, after six years of primary school), after which students must fund themselves to complete their studies; to promote school attendance, parents formed Parent-Teacher Associations, volunteered at nursery schools and local churches, and organised the Hope School, a refugee school for students unable to afford to continue in the public school system. Youth sports groups were organised to keep children occupied (although these were often considered as appropriate only for boys), and community members served as social workers to support families and enforce children's school attendance. These organisations and initiatives were consistently viewed positively by adults and adolescents; however, leaders said they often lacked the material or technical support they needed to be effective.

*"Here in the camp, they started [nursery] schools ... having classes in churches and elsewhere. [but]*

*they lacked aid and support from the benefactors... The nursery school project within the camp fell apart; thus children go to school at six years old while the period before they are always messing around."*

Hope School, a secondary school founded and run by refugees who had benefited from secondary and university-level support when it was available in the past, stood out as an exemplar of an effective and sustainable community-based initiative in Gihembe. The school was supported by families' contributions – between \$1 and \$2 a month (earned by selling off portions of their rations) – to meet the needs of students who were unable to afford school fees after senior three level. In the year when we were interviewing the residents, it was reported that 100% of children who took the national exams at Hope School had passed, and this was a great source of pride for the students, teachers and community. The camp organisation running the school had plans to expand with some material support from UNHCR such as desks and chairs. However, the school still faced the challenges of meeting Rwandan building codes for schools, ensuring that their curriculum was in line with national standards and being able to pay teachers.

### Negative impact of external agencies

In a protracted situation such as in Gihembe camp, where the refugee population is almost entirely dependent on external resources for their survival, this level of dependency can be a threat to the community's own ability to respond to child protection threats. There are three main ways we see this negative impact occurring. The first is through the withdrawal or reduction of goods or services. When donor funding dries up, camp services dwindle, a reality that will have stark effects when family and community resilience have not been systematically strengthened. Seeing these resources diminish and having few alternatives push children and caregivers to pursue risky coping behaviours.

*"You see here within the camp our education is supported by NGOs. These NGOs sometimes can stop their programmes while we're in the middle of*

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*the term; thus we're forced to drop out from school for the whole year. You have to wait for any other [form of] support to [be able to] start where you dropped out."*

Secondly, the parent-child relationship is often altered and weakened. Children may learn to look first to NGOs for assistance rather than thinking of their families and communities as their first recourse, a tendency that directly undermines the effectiveness of traditional structures to protect children. Not only does the child learn that the family cannot help them but caregivers may also internalise the notion that they are not best placed to protect and to care for their children. One mother exclaimed:

*"God can only act through the NGOs so that our children can finish their studies."*

And, lastly, a population dependent on relief has little leverage in determining what services will be made available to it; residents are thereby disempowered from solving their own problems. Refugee-assisting organisations, themselves often stretched, were perceived to lack transparency, a fact which – coupled with refugees' lack of alternatives – led to feelings of powerlessness for families. Such feelings create a trust barrier between refugees and the organisations mandated to serve them, discouraging refugees from contacting the NGOs and ultimately putting children at risk. The example below demonstrates one refugee's experience concerning her granddaughter's alleged rape and ensuing pregnancy.

*"I contacted the president of the camp ... He transferred my case to [the camp management's] GBV [unit] but apparently they were not very interested in my case. GBV transferred the case to AVSI [an international NGO], and AVSI transferred the case to the police ... The police told us that they couldn't do anything because there was no proof but that when the girl gave birth, they would do the DNA test to confirm the identity of the father so that he pays for what he has done. AVSI came here when my grandson was born but we are still waiting ... We haven't heard anything yet. We think that they are corrupt or that they don't care about our problem."*

## Conclusion

In a situation where formal programmes are in constant flux, prioritising endogenous protection mechanisms can provide a more effective and more acceptable way to minimise harm while simultaneously putting the power to protect back in the hands of the caregivers. One way practitioners can do this is by meeting the needs of refugee-led initiatives working to build community pride and combat feelings of powerlessness.

Where possible, efforts led by refugee-assisting organisations should target the families of children rather than sidestepping families to provide support directly to children. While certain services (such as for abused children) may have to target children directly, the provision of assistance relating to education, food and shelter must start from a family point of view. A family-based approach to supporting refugees has the potential to reinforce children's expectations that their families and neighbours can support their needs, to encourage children to look for help within their community before turning to external sources, and to empower caregivers to confront child protection challenges both themselves and together.

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1. As of end March 2016, Rwanda is home to a total of 74,530 refugees from DRC.
2. By the CPC Learning Network in collaboration with HealthNet TPO, TPO Uganda and AVSI. See Prickett I, Moya I, Muhorakeye L, Canavera M and Stark L (2013) *Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms in Refugee Camps in Rwanda: An Ethnographic Study* <http://bit.ly/CPCNetwork-2013-Rwanda>; see also AVSI and InfoAid (2013) *Child Protection KAP Survey in Rwandan Refugee Camps* <http://bit.ly/AVSI-2013-Rwanda-survey>

## Local action to protect communities in Nigeria

Margee Ensign

**Collaborative, creative initiatives in Nigeria helped protect local communities from much of the impact of Boko Haram violence. When international agencies arrived, however, they ignored these efforts.**

Our city, Yola, sits on the edge of the Sahara desert, where green turns to brown on maps of the continent. Located in Adamawa state in north-east Nigeria, Yola is both Christian and Muslim and has a long history of tolerance. The American University of Nigeria (AUN) was established about a decade ago by Atiku Abubakar, a former Vice-President of Nigeria, who grew up in this area; his vision was to build a university that would help to improve the lives of people in this region which has some of the highest illiteracy, unemployment and child and maternal mortality rates in the world.

The AUN-Adamawa Peace Initiative (AUN-API) arose during nationwide strikes in 2012 over the removal of fuel subsidies. The usually tolerant city of Yola became tense and unstable, like much of the country. At talks between the AUN and local leaders it was decided that one of the best ways to protect our community was to focus on youth and women – those who had no education, no income, often few or no family members, and little connection to society. And a critical decision was made early on that local leaders, who knew the community best, would identify these individuals, not the University. Then we at the University would design programmes to meet their needs. We never could have foreseen that programmes designed to improve literacy and incomes would eventually help to protect a city.

As the threat of the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram<sup>1</sup> increased, the ability to identify and support vulnerable people, especially young males, became the basis for a successful intervention and community protection effort. Initially we did not think of these programmes specifically as protection against violence but as strategies to give people education, income and hope. Over time, however, as we met with thousands

of disaffected youth, it became clear that their option had become binary: join an AUN-API programme or join Boko Haram.

*“It was either Boko Haram or you: there is nothing else for us.”* (18-year-old boy, Yola, Nigeria)

The first AUN-API programmes were ‘Peace Through Sports’ projects, large-scale information and communications technology (ICT) training, and women’s income-producing projects. It was in March 2014, however, that we realised that we would have to rapidly expand our efforts and play a significant role in protecting our community. That month the Emir of Mubi, a town to our north, sent an urgent request that we visit Mubi and bring food and clothes. A dozen API members drove north and met with the Emir. “Go into the room next door,” he said, “but be prepared as you will be shocked.” The large room contained about 500 women and girls. There were no men or boys. When the women were asked where their husbands and boys were, their response shocked us all: “Our boys were taken by Boko Haram and our husbands were burned in front of us.” Peace, protection and the expansion of our programmes to reach vulnerable youth became our obsession. But what did protection mean in our environment?

The University had already established its own security force. Hiring initially close to 300 local people, our head of security – a former US Marine as well as professor – worked with API members to identify ‘vulnerable’ older youth and then train them as guards. This had the dual effect of both reducing the vulnerability of and increasing incomes for a large group of people. Furthermore, these security officers became visible symbols of protection in the community, and could be our eyes and ears in the community. As importantly,

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members of AUN-API were also trained in self-protection and, because Muslim and Christians were learning together, these activities promoted understanding and connection between religious groups that often had little understanding of each other. This training has continued for three years, with additional training provided during periods of increased violence and near holidays, when trained citizens protect each other's churches and mosques.

### Support for IDPs

Soon after we returned from Mubi, the internally displaced people (IDPs) began arriving. First a few hundred, then 5,000, and ultimately 300,000, mostly women and children. They had no food, no clothing and no place to live. Chief Abdulmumini, one of our AUN-API members, said that if the University would provide seeds and school fees, he would settle them on his land. We raised funds for seeds, food and clothing, and foolishly thought the problem of displaced people had been solved. But over the next 12 months thousands more poured into Yola. The vast majority – according to our data, 95% – ended up living in the community where they had family or other connections; the remaining 5%, the most desperate, who had no such family connections, moved to the government-run IDP camps.

By April 2015, we were feeding 276,293 people every week. Peace Through Sports now had close to 12,000 participants, the women's income projects had approximately 2,000, and ICT training was ongoing during this whole period, reaching about 1,200 people. Two peace conferences were held with peace activists from states badly affected by Boko Haram violence.

After the peaceful election of President Buhari in May 2015 and a new governor for our state, many displaced people said they wanted to go home and plant their crops before the rains began. In May 2015, the Governor asked AUN-API to travel north, with an army convoy, to see if it was safe for people to return home. It wasn't. The devastation was widespread. Almost all infrastructure had been destroyed, and there was no drinking water, no health clinics, no schools. Homes were destroyed, fields barren. As we drove through the region, people came out of the bush to thank our colleague, the head of security, who had not only led the establishment of our security force but had also held a weekly radio show on self-protection (which had included messages about the whereabouts of Boko Haram and suggestions for where to hide). Hundreds of people greeted him and told him that he had helped them stay safe and alive, a reminder of how essential it is to give people under threat information about basic safety and self-protection.

### Arrival of international agencies

Then international agencies began arriving in Yola. Our AUN-API members briefed dozens of them on our peace perspective, the reach of our membership, our programmes and what we had learned. But we were largely ignored. Instead of drawing on this experience and our network, the agencies showed little desire to learn from us or involve us in their projects. Here are a few examples:

Throughout the crisis, AUN collected data on the IDPs – where they were from, age, gender, level of schooling and so forth. When we offered to turn this data over to a major international organisation, their



IDPs queuing for food, Yola, Nigeria.

representative said, “Why would we want your data?” He then went to the state governor, and negotiated to pay a large amount of money in order to conduct their own surveys.

Many victims were traumatised by what they had seen and experienced. Our AUN psychologist, a trained trauma counsellor, began to train other AUN employees so they could offer basic counselling to those who had experienced violence. When another international aid agency arrived, they did not offer to support these efforts to deal with post-traumatic stress. They simply tried to hire her away from AUN.

AUN expanded its efforts with our computer science students and staff to find ways of connecting people who had lost their families; we also used our TV show, *The Peacemakers*, and our website to show pictures of people looking for family members. When we asked for support from an international agency, we were told, “We only help people who are in camps.” This was despite the fact that the vast majority of the IDPs were not living in camps but on floors throughout our community.

AUN-API members met with the representatives of another agency to discuss food distribution. By then, our food supplies for the refugees were very meagre. We did not ask the agency to share their food supplies but asked only that they tell us who they were feeding in order that we did not duplicate their efforts. Their response stung: “We cannot share our lists of who we are feeding – you might have Al Qa’eda working with you!” One AUN-API committee member pointed out: “They don’t even know it’s Boko Haram not Al Qa’eda terrorising us!”

These attitudes led to misdirected efforts – and arguably resulted in more suffering. There is much work to be done to make the international system listen to those on the ground, who may know the most, and be more responsive.

### Breaking the cycle

Despite our telling the displaced people that they should not return home yet, they still wanted to risk going home. They are farmers, and they wanted to plant their

crops, to try once again to be self-sufficient. The majority began returning north in mid-2015, and by September there were only 100,000 left in Yola, most still living in our community and being fed through our efforts.

New problems emerged, however. Tensions were high in many communities to which the displaced people were returning, because members of those communities had themselves done some of the killing. Communities were divided. AUN-API was asked to take on a new role – that of leading reconciliation efforts. With a small grant from the Canadian government, we began reconciliation efforts with women, children, religious leaders, vigilantes and elders. This work is on-going, and we hope to expand it.

Our self-protection efforts had worked. We had been able to feed close to 300,000 IDPs. Boko Haram violence came only to the edges of our city and Boko Haram was able to neither overrun nor recruit in Yola. Many community leaders attribute this to our peace, development and security programmes. The community knew the University was totally committed to peace and progress, as was the religious and political leadership of the community.

The Boko Haram violence recedes; the problems do not. Left in its wake in Yola, outside the University’s gates, are thousands of children left orphaned by the conflict. Local families have taken them in, and the University has started ‘Feed and Read’ programmes for these boys and girls, teaching basic literacy and numeracy while providing a free meal cooked by local vendors. The programme is growing but cannot keep up with the demand. It is essential that these small efforts be replicated and expanded, otherwise the cycle will begin again with youth who are uneducated, destitute, with no family, no support, and “nothing else” in their lives. We all know where that leads.

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1. Since the current insurgency started in 2009, Boko Haram has killed 20,000 people and displaced 2.3 million from their homes. It was ranked by the Global Terrorism Index as the world’s deadliest terror group in 2015.

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## Refugees hosting refugees

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

**Acknowledging the widespread reality of ‘overlapping’ displacement provides an entry point to recognising and engaging with the agency of refugees and their diverse hosts in providing support and welcome to displaced people.**

It is often taken for granted that local communities hosting refugees are composed of settled and established groups of citizens. However, newly displaced populations not only share spaces with or aim to integrate into communities of ‘nationals’ but also into communities formed by established or former refugees and IDPs, whether of similar or different nationality/ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup> This is especially the case given three key trends in displacement: the increasingly **protracted** nature of displacement, the **urban** nature of displacement and the **overlapping** nature of displacement.

While a great deal of academic and policy attention has been given to the first two, very little research has been conducted into the nature and implications of ‘overlapping’ displacements, including with regard to local communities. I use this term to refer to two forms of ‘overlap’. Firstly, refugees and IDPs have often both personally and collectively experienced secondary and tertiary displacement. This is the case of those Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees who left their refugee camp homes in Algeria and Lebanon to study or work in Libya before being displaced by the outbreak of conflict there in 2011, and of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees who had originally sought safety in Syria only to be displaced once more by the conflict there.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, refugees are increasingly experiencing overlapping displacement in the sense that they often physically share spaces with other displaced people. For example, Turkey hosts refugees from over 35 countries of origin, Lebanon from 17 countries, Kenya 16, Jordan 14, Chad 12 and both Ethiopia and Pakistan 11.<sup>3</sup> Given the protracted nature of displacement, over time these

refugee groups often become members of communities which subsequently welcome and offer protection and support to other groups of displaced people.

### Reviewing common approaches to hosts and integration

The focus on ‘local host communities’ and the ‘national population’ is understandable on policy (and political) levels in contexts of protracted urban displacement. This is especially the case since integration is recognised to be a two-way process: it depends not only on the actions and attitudes of the incoming population but also on the “readiness on the part of the receiving communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse community”.<sup>4</sup>

Reflecting this, most integration tools and indices of integration focus on the characteristics, experiences and integration outcomes of displaced people, which are then compared with the experiences and outcomes of national host populations. In addition to providing the framework to examine the similarity/difference between refugees’ and hosts’ socio-economic situations, diverse policy tools prioritise the importance of local host perceptions of their own and refugees’ situations in the hosting environment and host country. In the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, for instance, an increasing number of baseline attitudinal studies are underway in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. One objective of these is to identify communities where policy interventions are needed to defuse tensions between hosts and refugees as they compete (or perceive inequalities) over scarce resources and services, and to develop programmes to promote social cohesion between hosts and refugees.

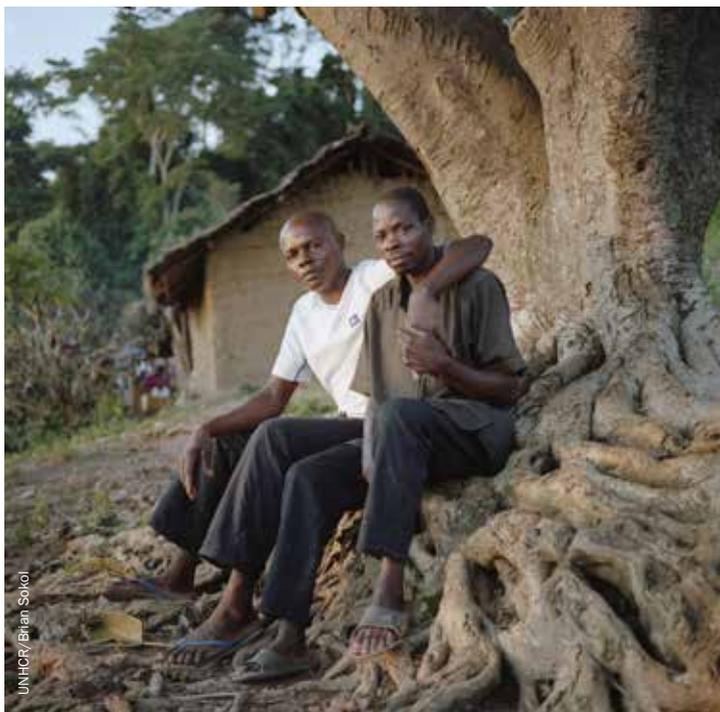
### Hybrid hosts

The overlapping nature of displacement leads to a blurring of the categories of 'displaced person' and 'host'. In the context of northern Uganda, for example, host populations live in the same camps as IDPs, may also have limited access to land, and are generally considered to be IDPs – or indeed 'IDP-hosts' – and the distinction between displaced population and host population may be unclear in many other situations around the world. Also in the border region between South Sudan and northern Uganda, communities which had once hosted IDPs and refugees have themselves been displaced and are being hosted by others. In other situations the displaced then become hosts to newly displaced people.

The ongoing cycles of displacement and multi-directionality of movement create a methodological challenge for any estimations of the impact of displacement on local communities, as it is likely that the meaning of 'host population' will differ in every displacement context. This also raises questions about the extent to which policymakers and practitioners are aware of, or aim to address, the impacts that newly arrived refugee groups have on established refugee communities, whose protracted presence in urban spaces in particular may have rendered them invisible (or less significant) to donors and humanitarian agendas. Indeed, this highlights the need for strategies that can support newly displaced refugee groups while remaining sensitive to the socio-economic conditions of 'national' host communities; such strategies also need to avoid marginalising or compounding the existing social exclusion of established refugee-host communities.

### Refugee-hosts

Refugee-led initiatives developed in response to existing and new refugee situations directly challenge widely held (although equally widely contested) assumptions that refugees are passive victims in need of care from outsiders. My ongoing research in North Lebanon examines encounters between established Palestinian refugees who have lived in an urban Palestinian refugee camp on the outskirts of the Lebanese city of Tripoli since the 1950s (Baddawi camp) and increasing numbers of new refugees arriving from Syria since 2011. These include not only Syrian refugees but also Palestinian and Iraqi refugees who had been living in Syria at the outbreak of the conflict and who have found themselves refugees once more. Palestinians are now active providers of support to others, rather than merely aid recipients themselves,



UNHCR/Brian Sokol

A returnee in Equateur Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo, sits with his arm around a refugee who had fled with his wife and children from the Central African Republic. "I was a refugee in CAR in 2009", the returnee-host says, "but returned voluntarily three years ago." He met this family by chance at Batanga transit centre. "Immediately I said that I had to give them shelter at my place." He himself had been hosted by a family in CAR.

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reflecting the extent to which urban camps can become shared spaces.

This is not the first time that Baddawi camp and its refugee inhabitants have welcomed 'new' refugees. Baddawi camp residents also hosted over 15,000 'new' Palestinian refugees who were internally displaced from nearby Nahr el-Bared refugee camp when that camp was destroyed during fighting in 2007. With an estimated 10,000 refugees from Nahr el-Bared still residing in Baddawi camp, these 'internally-displaced-refugees-hosted-by-refugees' have in turn become part of the established community in Baddawi hosting 'newly' displaced refugees from Syria.

On one hand, arriving in the camp – whether Baddawi or other Palestinian camps in Lebanon – and sharing its increasingly cramped space and limited resources has offered refugees from Syria an opportunity to form part of the broader 'refugee nation', a space of solidarity in which refugees from Syria can be with other refugees. On the other hand, however, not all refugees in Baddawi are viewed equally, nor have they been equally welcomed, or had equal access to space and spaces, services and resources.

Indeed, while highlighting the relational nature of refugeedom, and destabilising the assumption that refugees are always hosted by citizens, the encounters characterising refugee-refugee hosting are not to be idealised, since they are also often framed by power imbalances and processes of exclusion and overt hostility by the members of the original refugee community towards new arrivals. Rather than viewing these tensions as inevitable, it is clear that certain policies and programmes activate resentment and insecurity among hosts, and there is therefore an increasing commitment to implementing development-oriented programmes that aim to support both refugees and host communities. In the context of overlapping displacement and refugees-hosting-refugees, these tensions may be the result of the uneven development of programmes for different 'generations' of refugees and for refugees according to their country of origin. This is particularly visible in Baddawi camp,

whose established inhabitants have received limited assistance from UNRWA<sup>5</sup> since the 1950s while new arrivals from Syria receive support from an expanding range of international and national organisations.

The challenge that remains is for researchers, policymakers and practitioners to actively explore the potential to support the development, and maintenance, of welcoming communities, whether these communities are composed of citizens, new refugees or established refugees. Acknowledging the widespread reality of overlapping displacement provides an entry point to recognising and meaningfully engaging with the agency of refugees and their diverse hosts in providing support and welcome as active partners in processes of integration, while also recognising the challenges that characterise such encounters. At a minimum, new programmes and policies must avoid re-marginalising established refugee communities which are hosting newly displaced people; at best, they can be sensitive to supporting the needs and rights of all refugees, whether they are hosting or being hosted.

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## Northern Uganda: protection in displacement, protection on return

Denise Dunovant

**In the absence of international or state assistance and protection, community members in northern Uganda stepped in to fill this vacuum both during displacement and throughout the laborious return process following the conflict's end.**

For twenty years, from 1986-2006, northern Uganda experienced a long and vicious civil war. Fought mainly between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), the conflict displaced between 1.5 and two million people across vast swathes of northern Uganda. In the Acholi sub-region, some 90% of the population were eventually displaced, with most forced by the government into internally displaced persons' camps, some for up to a decade. Another significant number – the focus of this article – were displaced to urban areas, particularly Gulu, the main urban centre in northern Uganda, which tripled in population during the conflict.

Over the course of five fieldwork trips in seven years (between 2008 and 2015), I was able to find and follow more than 100 households displaced by the war to Gulu from their rural homes in Atiak sub-county north of Gulu. Interviewing these families in both Gulu and Atiak provided the opportunity to learn how they were able – or at least attempted – to obtain varying levels of protection from the broader Atiak community during their initial flight from Atiak, their arrival in Gulu and (for some) their return home to Atiak years or decades later.

### Initial providers of protection in Gulu

When Atiak households arrived in Gulu, they (like others displaced to urban centres throughout the war) faced a situation where assistance for those forced to move to new locations was virtually non-existent. One third of these households arrived during two specific peak periods of violence: 1986-87, at the beginning of the war, and 1995-96, after a massacre in Atiak town in which

some 300 people were killed. In both these instances, a small number of households reported receiving small amounts of food and other necessities from the Catholic diocese, the Red Cross or World Vision. However, the vast majority of households were ignored, not only by their government but by the international community. Thus they were forced to rely on themselves and/or others from Atiak who were already in Gulu in order to survive in an environment very different from the one they had left behind.

Initially, most Atiak households in the research sample who were displaced to Gulu spent their first days or weeks (sometimes even months) living in public spaces: bus stations, churches, hospitals, the police station, and Kaunda Grounds, a large open field west of the town centre. After some time, however, most families reported that they heard of elders who had been settled in town before the war and they would seek out one of these elders to ask them for assistance. Depending on the stage of the conflict, such people were often able to do little more than offer advice or provide potential connections, as their resources were already strained from helping their own immediate families. Still, the fact that this process often occurred meant that people from Atiak often felt an affinity toward others from the area who had been displaced to town because of the war.

Seeking assistance from fellow Atiak people (no matter which of Atiak's 12 clans or 136 villages they came from) helped fill the vacuum created by a lack of humanitarian or state involvement with the urban displaced. Households were able to receive advice about places to rent and job opportunities and, sometimes, how to gain access to a small plot for cultivation. For the households

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I interviewed, this broader community assistance was often crucial to being able to survive and remain in town. In this sense, the Gulu-based Atiak community was the first provider of protection during displacement.

### Protection in town during and after the war

When households were asked in the initial 2008-09 interviews to describe their lives in Atiak before the conflict, people inevitably referred to some sense of community protection and group activity. People knew that if they had a bad harvest, they could almost always find someone to help. If they needed money for school fees, they could sell a goat or cow, or find a clan member or other relative or friend to assist. Clans cleared and planted communal tracts of land together, farmed together and hunted together. This sense of belonging, however strained during displacement, was rarely completely destroyed. And it was not only important during displacement.

Those households which were able and willing to maintain social connections with others from Atiak during their years in town, despite changes and challenges, were the ones most likely to return successfully to Atiak after the war. Indeed, this sense of connection was crucial. For some households, these connections were deeply intertwined with their lives and livelihoods in town. We learned from such households that for people who assisted family or friends in town, it was most often reciprocated when they attempted to return. But even in the absence of specific material assistance, maintaining meaningful relationships with people 'back home' would ultimately provide a form of acceptance and protection when households went back to Atiak.

Atiak households in Gulu, whether displaced during the war or living there from before the war, made sacrifices within their own immediate families in order to provide assistance and protection to those needing help within their extended Atiak community. Such actions tended to be respected by those on the receiving end, and returned when possible.

### Protection in the return process

As the process of return from the camps escalated from 2008-09 onwards, many international observers warned that the return process would engender another conflict: war over land, between households and clans but also between government or commercial investors and clans. A common theme accompanying such warnings was the argument that twenty years of war and displacement had led to 'social disintegration' and a breakdown of Acholi culture.

While the return process was certainly marked by numerous land-related problems, a high proportion of land ownership cases were ultimately resolved, with mediation often performed by community leaders, casting strong doubt on the assertions (or assumptions) of social breakdown in Acholi. Though land disputes still occur, sometimes leading to insecurity and the potential for widows, orphans and others to be denied access to land, these generalised concerns and fears seem to be resolved more often and effectively than often feared.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, only ten of the 61 Atiak households in the research sample who had attempted to return failed to do so. And only five of these spoke of being involved personally in a land dispute (while one other was ultimately able to return after resolution of a dispute). Two of the households who failed to return were actually offered access to land but turned it down as the size or location was not to their liking. Three other households – two female-headed and one male-headed – genuinely experienced land disputes that could not be resolved.

The 51 households who attempted return, almost all of whom had nurtured relationships throughout their displacement with those remaining in Atiak, were warmly accepted back to Atiak. This included 23 female-headed households, 16 of which had returned permanently, and seven of which were moving back and forth between Gulu and Atiak. Narratives of these returns show different forms of protection being provided by community members: married couples being able to return to the exact spot they had left during the war as the

clan had kept it available for them; fathers providing a space for their daughters in Atiak after these women lost or separated from their husbands; and brothers-in-law taking the lead to invite women back whom they knew to be suffering in town.

This is not to say that the return process was without problems. After their return to Atiak some of these urban displaced households faced resentment over their perceived easier or more prosperous lives in town from those who had remained in the area, or a deterioration in the initially positive responses from relatives regarding their return. Still, most households who returned expressed a firm belief that their lives were better because of their renewed connection with Atiak.

Thus, Atiak households, especially those who had maintained relationships with the wider Atiak community over time, were

helped by their community both upon their displacement to Gulu and upon their return to Atiak. And much of this assistance was linked to the concept in Acholi culture of *kit mapore* – the right or fitting way to co-exist with others.<sup>2</sup> This in turn helped to create a situation in which local communities provided protection to their own members through the different phases of displacement.

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## Rethinking support for communities' self-protection strategies: a case study from Uganda

Jessica A Lenz

**Local communities will continue to find ways to address the risks that confront them with or without humanitarian support but the international community may be able to enhance these solutions.**

In every crisis people find creative ways to protect themselves. Examples include digging trenches in market places in Sudan for protection from aerial bombings; establishing underground schools and medical clinics in Afghanistan and Syria to continue lifesaving services; using radio in the Central African Republic to convey critical messages for those at risk; and negotiating directly with armed groups in Colombia to prevent the use of children in armed conflict. While humanitarian actors recognise the importance of community-based protection or self-protection, they struggle to tap into these solutions. Too often, their programmes neglect to identify and build on existing protective strategies, and may consequently undermine what is keeping people alive and safe.

The component parts of addressing risk include reducing the threat, reducing vulnerability and increasing capacity. Too often, humanitarian action tends to emphasise addressing vulnerability and building capacity while neglecting to address the threat component of risk.

In Colombia, for example, while humanitarians invest in education programmes to reduce the vulnerability of children who might turn to armed groups, members of the community establish networks or engage in dialogue with armed groups to reduce the threat. While both efforts are necessary, the balance of effort is often skewed, with communities taking on a significant role in finding solutions to some of the most severe and pervasive risks.

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While humanitarian programmes do provide life-saving support and services like shelter, food and medical treatment, programming is not often focused on preventing or reducing exposure to the most severe risks people experience in a crisis, like abduction, sexual violence and indiscriminate attacks.

For several years, a number of NGOs have sought to strengthen humanitarian action to reduce the risk that people experience in a crisis. One initiative, the InterAction-led Results-Based Protection Program, seeks to promote a fundamental shift in how humanitarian interventions to enhance protection are assessed and designed and how theories of change are developed, implemented and monitored. The aim is to change how humanitarian action prevents and responds to violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation that people experience in crises. Current practice can often be rigid and too generalised, and can prioritise checklists over problem-solving techniques to understand and respond to protection problems. The Results-Based Protection Program emphasises problem-solving methods that are participatory, analytical, reflective, adaptive and iterative. Central to this approach is the need to identify what people are already doing for themselves and to establish a conversation that can illuminate what is needed to support these solutions.

Solutions that work are often organically driven and grow from those closest to the problem. Problem-solving by humanitarian actors therefore needs to shift the starting point of action back to the people themselves. External actors need to establish relevant methods for communicating with affected people; this includes understanding who the 'gatekeepers' of information are and how they may support or become barriers to the reduction of risk. They also need to ensure the meaningful participation of affected populations at the earliest stages of a response, as well as throughout the response. This helps humanitarian actors ensure that communities' information needs are met, thereby enhancing their capacity to act and to reduce their exposure to risks. Information needs to be relevant, accurate,

from a trusted source, and accessible to different groups within the affected population. Information can promote confidence by enabling populations to assess their own threat environments and it can empower populations to design community-led solutions through collaboration, negotiation and practical solutions.

If humanitarian actors start with the experience of the affected population to identify specific threats, who is vulnerable to these threats, and why, it is then possible to disaggregate risk patterns beyond sex and age to include gender, ethnicity, time, location, political affiliation, religion, disability, economic status and other factors which have implications for exposure to threats. Humanitarian actors need to identify what capacities people can bring to bear to reduce the threat and/or their vulnerability to a threat, and recognise the importance of establishing relationships and partnerships – including with affected populations – for collaborative problem-solving across different disciplines to reduce risk. Solving protection problems demands a conscious approach to mobilising relevant actors to cultivate complementarity between their roles.

### A case-study from northern Uganda<sup>1</sup>

During the height of the crisis in northern Uganda in 2003, many young girls were abducted into the LRA and made to be wives of military commanders. Where this resulted in babies being born, some of the girls found ways to ensure the survival of their babies by secretly dropping them off near churches and convents. As in most crises, it was the people most severely affected that came up with solutions – but there were ways in which their solutions could be enhanced. This case study illustrates one example of how a problem-solving approach can enhance community solutions.

- **The problem:** Children in captivity, trying to escape from the LRA.
- **The community-based protection solution:** Children held in captivity used their own ways to secretly communicate with other children in order to inform each

other of safe places: areas where they could escape, and locations (near churches and convents) where they could drop off their babies so that they would stay alive.

- **The enhanced solution:** Engaging formerly abducted children in the design and use of communication technology to send messages to their friends and others still in captivity as a way to assist with their escape.

The process of starting a dialogue with the affected population – in this case, children – took an enormous effort to build trust and acceptance. The purpose was to ask questions and, by listening without judgement or preconceived ideas, to understand what helped children escape and what created more risks. Through focus groups, one-to-

one interviews (by peers) and workshop-like activities, the children shared their stories and it emerged that while in captivity children were usually able to access radios and listen to messages coming out of local radio stations. Although many of the messages focused on ‘asking children to return’ and not to fear retribution, some of the information they heard was about services and rehabilitation centres; the children said that knowing about these support services helped to motivate them to continue to find ways to escape and to not give up hope or to fear that their communities would reject them if they did return.

Through this dialogue the children pointed out that while the radio programmes were informative they did not communicate (safely) where or how children could escape.



Sister Angélique Namaika (UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award laureate) accompanies an internally displaced rape survivor and her young son for a prenatal checkup. The young Congolese woman was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army, was raped and became pregnant, before being freed from captivity by the Ugandan army. When she first returned, her family turned her away and she was forced to live on the streets, attempting to feed herself and her infant child by selling charcoal. Sister Angélique took her in, taught her income-generating skills, and helped her to care for her malnourished son. Two years later, the young woman is now married, is able to support herself, and is pregnant with her second baby.

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Key relationships, safe locations, useful skills that children could apply such as methods of persuasion, and forthcoming events that could be used as opportunities for escape... all these could be crafted into relevant and informative messages if done carefully.

Following the dialogue, the children started organising a radio talk show particularly aimed at supporting children who had already returned. The aim was to provide psychosocial support and share experiences that formerly abducted children could relate to and learn from to strengthen their reintegration. There were already radio programmes organised by child rights clubs that aired talks on children's rights; this new effort was to expand on these initiatives and to engage formerly abducted children as 'guest' speakers.

To do this required a careful analysis of the risk that these formerly abducted children could face. Would their voices be recognised – which could lead to further harm or re-abduction? If children in captivity heard a particular child speaking, would they trust the source – and, conversely, if they did not recognise the voice, would they dismiss the message? If the voice was recognised by the community members, would that expose them to stigmatisation? Analysing these risks with the children allowed each child to make an informed decision about whether or not they would participate in this form of communication.

When the child rights radio programmes aired, the children were able to share their experiences and provide critical messages for children who had already escaped. In doing so, however, they knew children in captivity were likely to be listening to these radio shows and so they crafted messages that a child in captivity could pick up on and relate to, identifying skills they could use and sharing information about locations that were deemed safe places for escape and where support could be easily accessed.

### Using the lessons

While the effects of this initiative were never assessed to determine whether or not the messages contributed to the escape or

release of children from the LRA, there are things of value that can be learnt from a problem-solving approach to protection that supported and built on existing community-based protection mechanisms.

As part of the analysis and understanding of the contextual patterns of risk, dialogue with survivors of a particular risk (child abduction) enabled their experiences to inform the response in order to address these particular patterns of risks. Furthermore, listening to survivors' stories and coping mechanisms enabled humanitarians to better understand how to strengthen coping mechanisms to minimise risk and how to best communicate information, and allowed for strong ownership – by survivors – of the design of the initiative.

Engaging locally owned media sources that were used by the community and the children in the LRA (and building on already existing communication channels accepted by the community) was important not only in delivering the messages but to enhance the possibility of continuity. And analysing the protection risks and ethical considerations with the affected population was critical to enhancing the likelihood that the initiative would promote protection and be sustainable.

Community-based protection is not new. People will continue to find solutions with or without humanitarian support but the international community can enhance these solutions. By adopting methods that promote listening, engaging in meaningful ways and analysing the problem starting from the perspective of the affected population, we can recalibrate our thinking and redesign our approach to more effectively support a community's protection strategies.

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1. The example provided is based on an initiative led by several actors including Save the Children-Denmark/UK, Quaker Peace and Social Witness, World Vision and the author (who at the time was an independent researcher).

## Rebuilding lives in Colombia

Emese Kantor

**A grassroots women's organisation in Colombia is working to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, and to support the healing of survivors.**

In the context of widespread sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Colombia, the courageous work of grassroots women's organisations in the Pacific coastal city of Buenaventura has been critical in saving lives, accompanying and supporting survivors and their families, and breaking the culture of silence and denial regarding sexual violence. One of the most active organisations is called Butterflies With New Wings, a network of 12 community-based grassroots organisations which was formed by women committed to protecting each other and the women of Buenaventura.

In Colombia, SGBV is used for the purposes of gaining control over territory, resources and communities, intimidating civilians, obtaining information, as retaliation for breaking imposed social codes, and as punishment for sexual orientation and gender identity. Women and children, women leaders and their families, human rights defenders, land rights activists and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people are at particular risk. And SGBV – which is committed by all parties to the conflict – remains both a cause and consequence of displacement.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the lack of protection for survivors, the high level of impunity, poor coordination among service providers (legal, medical, psychological), the stigma and discrimination faced by the survivors, distrust in institutional mechanisms, and the often poor quality of culturally insensitive services all create fear and mistrust. These in turn lead

to under-reporting of SGBV and thus to these human rights violations remaining invisible.

In Buenaventura, internally displaced people (IDPs) make up around 58% of the population and over 80%<sup>2</sup> of the total population live in poverty. People living in the area continue to suffer massive human rights abuses. These include the recruitment of children, torture, kidnappings, killings, threats to life and physical integrity, extortion, and SGBV.

The violence committed by armed groups and subsequent displacement have had a devastating impact, disproportionately affecting indigenous people and Afro-Colombian communities, especially women and children. According to a recent report: "Despite the major impact that violence has on the Colombian population, mental health is still an unexplored field." The psychosocial wounds caused by armed conflicts are less visible than those caused by bullets but that can seriously affect the lives of the survivors



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and their families.<sup>3</sup> There is still a critical gap in addressing these invisible wounds, not only for helping individuals and their communities recover but as tools for sustainable peace and grounds for finding durable solutions.

### Butterflies and healing

The network's name was initially Butterflies With Broken Wings, a name given by a young survivor of a massacre when she described herself to one of the volunteers as a butterfly with broken wings. After several years of promoting self-healing, the network decided to change the name to Butterflies With New Wings to reflect the outstanding results of their self-healing work and to empower their members.

The network has over 100 volunteers and 30 coordinators covering different neighbourhoods, 75 facilitators and four regional coordinators. Volunteers travel – in pairs – on foot or by bicycle, bus or boat to reach women at risk and to support them. They themselves often face danger and receive threats because of their work and the neighbourhoods they visit. The Butterflies put a great emphasis on self-healing by creating spaces for recovery while reminding women of the strength and wisdom of their ancestors. Preserving Afro-Colombian culture has become one of the missions and self-healing tools for the Butterflies.

The network draws on an ancestral Afro-Colombian practice called *comadreo* to reach out to women in different neighbourhoods in some of the poorest and most violent parts of Buenaventura. Women in these areas are often afraid to report sexual violence and the few women who do so remain unprotected because they often live alongside their aggressors. Building trust in this kind of environment is a slow and challenging process but the Butterflies have found that women respond to the principal of *comadreo* which has the sense of meeting in a spirit of respect, trust, solidarity and confidentiality. And meeting together helps Afro-Colombian women survivors of sexual violence learn more about their culture and traditions: knowledge passed down through the generations but often lost or forgotten

when they fled their homes. These meetings remind the women and girls of a time when their ancestors used braiding to hide seeds or make maps in their hair, maps that helped them and their community to find their way back to a safe place or to freedom – hence the importance of hairstyles as a form of cultural expression for Afro-Colombian women.

The network uses a wide range of traditional healing practices: rituals, ceremonies, symbolic actions and storytelling. By creating a confidential space where women can share their most painful memories, sometimes for the first time, without any fear of stigma or discrimination, the network helps survivors take their first steps to self-healing.

Network members also aim to strengthen the capacity of local state institutions in preventing and responding to SGBV. The network is an active member of an inter-sectoral committee working to prevent gender-based violence and to promote mental health (Mesa Intersectorial contra las Violencias de Género y la Salud Mental) where they can share the knowledge they have gained – through their community outreach work – about gaps in referral pathways and prevention approaches.

The Butterflies run training workshops on project design, monitoring and evaluation to make their interventions more sustainable. The network provides their members with opportunities for training not only in women's rights but also in areas such as health care, psychosocial support and case management. In addition, they have explored the possibility of engaging men and boys in their activities through a pilot project working with young men from Buenaventura; the project was so successful that the network is planning to develop it in more parts of Buenaventura in parallel with their interventions with women and girls.

### Recognition of impact

The network has supported and accompanied over 1,000 women and girls from Buenaventura, and in 2014 Butterflies received the Nansen Refugee Award for their outstanding work in protection. The award is now helping them achieve another goal –

building a women's refuge and a community centre.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Buenaventura accompanies the network in their work in self-healing, community strengthening, and mitigating the psychological and social stress experienced by individuals, families and communities living through violence and displacement.<sup>4</sup> The work of the Butterflies and similar grassroots organisations is crucial not only for the enormous impact they have on the lives of the women and girls in Buenaventura but also for the effect that the personal healing of individuals has on a society's recovery.

Multisectoral and coordinated efforts by all relevant stakeholders to prevent and respond to SGBV will be a vital element in

constructing a sustainable peace, following the announcement in August 2016 of a peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

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## Community-based protection: the ICRC approach

Angela Cotroneo and Marta Pawlak

**The ICRC tries to ensure that its activities on behalf of IDPs and those at risk of displacement support, rather than undermine, communities' and individuals' self-protection mechanisms and coping strategies.**

Communities and individuals affected by armed conflict and violence do not wait for humanitarian actors to analyse and address the problems and threats they face. They permanently monitor their surroundings and take decisions themselves: displacing themselves as a self-protection mechanism, deciding how best to travel in groups and to ensure that children and older people are not left behind during flight, choosing in advance which road to take, discussing locations to avoid, hiding food and medical supplies along the route, negotiating directly with weapon bearers...

There are plenty of measures that people adopt prior to and during flight in order to move in a safer and more organised way, and – while in displacement – to cope with the new situation and meet their protection and assistance needs. How can humanitarian actors ensure that their interventions do not undermine communities' and individuals' self-protection mechanisms and coping

strategies but rather help to strengthen them? At the same time, how can communities and individuals be supported to avoid having to resort to harmful coping mechanisms?

While proximity to and dialogue with affected populations have always been part of the working modalities of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), today the ICRC makes specific efforts to ensure that community-based protection (CBP) approaches are integrated more systematically into its response. Engaging with communities in this way not only aims to help strengthen their resilience by reducing their exposure to threats and to harmful coping strategies but is also seen as a crucial component of the ICRC's commitment to being accountable to affected populations. This means engaging with affected communities and individuals in order to better understand their needs and protection concerns, recognising that they are the 'experts' on their own situation,

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The ICRC talks with community leaders in Chad who have given shelter to displaced people about the distribution of agricultural equipment.

and taking their capacities and views into account in defining the ICRC's response.

In some cases, the ICRC supports communities by strengthening their existing self-protection activities or by developing new strategies identified by the community. In other cases, where it identifies a possible strategy that has not been suggested by the community, the ICRC may propose such a response in full consultation with them.

The ICRC's CBP activities are an important complement to its other protection approaches. Through confidential dialogue and structural support targeting authorities and weapon bearers<sup>1</sup> (both state and non-state actors), the ICRC seeks to prevent forced displacement, and other violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and harming behaviour that may result in displacement of the civilian population,<sup>2</sup> and to help the authorities fulfil their obligations to protect and assist IDPs under their jurisdiction.

By combining activities at the levels of the weapon bearers, authorities and communities, the ICRC aims to maximise its protection impact. The idea is to work simultaneously to influence the behaviour of perpetrators,

provide support to responsible authorities to create a conducive environment for the respect of people's rights and dignity in the longer term, and strengthen the resilience of people by reducing their exposure to risks. For example, in some situations activities at the level of the weapon bearers and authorities may take some time before they translate into tangible and sustainable results. In these circumstances, CBP activities can help communities to reduce their vulnerability to protection threats and reinforce their coping strategies with more immediate effect. In order to guarantee a successful CBP approach, it is best if complementary activities are undertaken at all levels.

### CBP workshops

The ICRC organises workshops, bringing together members of a community and ICRC staff, in order to develop a greater understanding of their specific needs, vulnerabilities and capacities, and to engage in a structured discussion with concrete outcomes and conclusions. Participants debate the problems and threats they face, rating them in order of importance; they then analyse the causes and consequences of

the problems, making concrete suggestions for addressing them and identifying corresponding coping strategies. After the workshop, the ICRC evaluates each suggestion and will conduct a feasibility assessment if necessary; the ICRC then shares with the community its suggestions about which activities could be implemented, and the community is then involved in the design and implementation of the selected activities. Where appropriate, suggestions received from the community that go beyond the ICRC's scope of action are communicated to other actors for possible follow-up.

The selection of workshop participants is crucial, and the composition of the focus groups must be determined to allow for consideration of gender-, age- and disability-related vulnerabilities. This helps the ICRC take into account IDPs' specific vulnerabilities and capacities in contributing to their own protection. For example, in contexts of displacement, men can be particularly vulnerable to arbitrary arrest, women to exploitation, children to forced recruitment, and elderly people and those with disabilities to movement restrictions. The CBP workshop can also be used to bring together members of the IDP community and residents in order to better understand the possible similarities and/or differences in the situations of IDPs (or returnees) versus their host communities, and to foster joint strategies.

### Concrete activities within a CBP framework

The ICRC identifies five types of activities that can be implemented as part of a CBP framework to help address people's specific vulnerabilities and protection concerns, taking into account their capacities, during the different phases of displacement.

**Risk education/awareness:** These activities involve providing information on threats and how to address or avoid them, and raising IDPs' awareness of their rights so that they know how to access essential services and identify when the authorities are not complying with their obligations. For example, in Ukraine, the ICRC has in recent years carried out mine risk education activities for IDPs and returnees in areas

contaminated with mines or unexploded ordnance. Since 2010 in Georgia, the ICRC has organised information sessions for families of missing persons, the majority of whom were long-term IDPs, on their legal rights in relation to pensions and missing person declarations, which are needed in order for the family to be eligible for state support. Information on rights and services are especially important for IDPs, who find themselves in a new place, often deprived of their usual support network and without access to information that is essential for them to enjoy their rights and access basic services.

**Self-protection:** During the pre-displacement phase, CBP can be used to support people at risk to better prepare for displacement by helping communities to reinforce early warning systems and to reduce some of the possible risks associated with flight, such as family separation and the loss of essential documents. In 2011 in Cauca, Colombia, the ICRC helped communities exposed to imminent displacement to safeguard their belongings. Families were provided with boxes in which they could deposit their most valuable possessions, which were then stored by a local NGO in a safe area.

**Assistance to reduce exposure to risk:** This involves assistance that addresses the physical needs of a person at the same time as reducing their exposure to a direct threat or providing an alternative to risky or harmful coping strategies. In some contexts, the ICRC may move a well to be closer to the IDP community in order that people are not put at risk by having to travel long distances to collect water. In Sri Lanka, the ICRC provides income-generating activities for returnee widows to help reduce their need to resort to harmful strategies such as saving money by not seeking health care or by sending children out to work.

**Engagement with those who are the source of threats:** Enhancing or developing engagement strategies involves a) activities which reinforce communities' attempts to ensure that authorities and weapon bearers uphold their obligations and respect the community's rights and b) mediation and

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liaison activities between communities and authorities and weapon bearers to develop direct dialogue. For example, during a recent CBP workshop with IDPs from a camp in the Central African Republic, women reported that they had formed an association in order to be better equipped to raise their concerns with weapon bearers and to negotiate safe access to land; the ICRC is currently considering the possibility of supporting their endeavours.

**Community self-organisation and social cohesion:** While weapon bearers are often responsible for causing harm, suffering can also be caused by civilians themselves. This is particularly true in situations of displacement where social cohesion – the willingness of community members to cooperate with each other to better cope with threats and improve resilience – has been weakened, and where tensions between host communities and the displaced population and among the displaced people themselves are common and may increase as displacement becomes protracted. Because of its specific mandate, the ICRC itself does not address social cohesion but Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies (ICRC's primary partners in situations of displacement) can contribute greatly on this issue. Some of the ICRC's activities can nevertheless have a positive impact in terms of reducing tensions between host communities and IDPs, at the same as responding to IDPs' material needs. For example, in order to defuse tensions in situations where IDPs and host communities compete for scarce natural resources such as firewood, the ICRC may distribute briquettes to IDPs.

### Limitations and constraints

The contribution of CBP activities to reducing exposure to threats and the need to resort to harmful strategies, and their concrete impacts, are difficult to measure other than qualitatively. During impact assessments, the local communities with whom the ICRC has been working are asked to share how the interventions have contributed to their safety and well-being. Some community-based protection activities may provide a false sense

of security. In Sudan, for example, the ICRC provided whistles to IDP women collecting fire wood so that they could raise the alarm in case of danger; during later evaluation of the intervention, it was realised that the women were going out of range and the whistles could not be heard when they were attacked.

Implementing community-based protection is time consuming. Staff must be trained in CBP methodology, evaluations must be conducted and team members from different programmes must be mobilised. This makes it challenging to implement during emergencies. In times of acute emergency, where access and security are a concern, it is often not feasible to organise a CBP workshop with people who are fleeing or are not yet in a stable situation. However, there may still be ways to engage with communities. For example, the ICRC may conduct workshops with people who have recently left a particular situation. In February 2016, the ICRC conducted a CBP workshop with Syrian refugees newly arrived in Jordan in order to collect information on the situation of IDPs at the Syrian border that they had recently left. Another possible solution may be to conduct CBP workshops with members of Red Cross or Crescent National Societies who may be living among the displaced community and may therefore have more direct knowledge of the situation.

Despite these limitations, community-based protection lies at the heart of the ICRC's operations. It reinforces accountability to affected people, and ensures that communities are recognised as agents of their own protection.

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1. See <http://bit.ly/ICRC-weapon-bearers>
2. On ICRC and displacement prevention, see Talviste V, Williamson J A and Zeidan A (2012) 'The ICRC approach in situations of pre-displacement', *Forced Migration Review* issue 41. [www.fmreview.org/preventing/talviste-et-al](http://www.fmreview.org/preventing/talviste-et-al)

## Networks and ‘the right to the city’ in Medellín, Colombia

Jonathan Alejandro Murcia and James Gilberto Granada Vahos

### Collective action by displaced people in Medellín has been both diverse and strategic.

In the past ten years, the city of Medellín in Colombia has received more than 300,000 people displaced by violence. When other options other than leaving fail, the process of settling elsewhere is itself primarily a process of collective action in the city. The presence of many houses and families creates community but requires effort to acquire basic collective services and facilities. This has led in Medellín to social and communal forms of collective action.

These activities are an expression of ‘the right to the city’<sup>1</sup> in the places where people have ended up. Collective settlements turn into districts within neighbourhoods that already exist and that are already recognised as administrative entities in the municipality. Some of these new sectors go on to be accepted into the official list of districts, while others face opposition and are eventually eradicated. The struggle for official recognition becomes part of the collective memory of the displaced people and the name they gave to the settlement becomes the name of the official district – sometimes the name of their place of origin, sometimes a new name, reflecting a new start for the community.

In the process of taking on Medellín as their new home, the displaced population has found ways of forming organisational structures or participating in existing communal organisations. Meeting their needs provides a common purpose, including in their dealings with the state, as they set up organisations that focus on claiming, protecting or demanding guarantees of their rights in displacement.

Their collective action has also led to their participation in political life and an impact on aspects of the administration of the city. There may be opportunities to do this in a variety of circumstances: while resisting eviction orders; while making demands by occupying churches or public buildings, or making formal petitions, and so on; while

holding marches or vigils in protest or commemoration; and making connections with other non-governmental organisations, trade unions or farmers’ associations. In 2005 an Alliance was formed among governmental and non-governmental organisations – including those formed by displaced people – that eventually led to the setting up of a roundtable, a committee and a technical unit to deal with displaced ‘victims’ in Medellín.

By all these means the displaced population developed relationships with a large number of social and institutional actors. Among these were ties to the University of Antioquia which gave them access to medical and psychological assistance, and political and legal advice. Students and teachers from various undergraduate colleges conducted work accompanying vulnerable communities and victims. The Department of Preventive Medicine and Public Health, for example, worked with the communities to undertake nutritional studies of the population, while community interactions with the students and teachers of Political Science and Law led to the filing of a class legal action requiring the state to provide potable water to the community of Vereda Granizal in Bello Municipality and to the construction and management of a Community Development Plan for the people there, most of whom are displaced.

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1. A term coined by Henri Lefebvre in his 1968 book *Le Droit à la ville*.

## Effective community-based protection programming: lessons from the Democratic Republic of Congo

Richard Nunn

**Oxfam's work with local communities in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo has prompted the organisation to develop guidance for themselves and for others working in similar situations.**

The ways in which communities respond to risks vary widely, and their protection strategies can be positive or negative in the effects they have on people's lives. In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), positive community protection strategies include women moving to fields in groups or changing the times of their movements. In a number of areas in South Kivu, women use coded signs to alert others to areas which are not considered safe and should be avoided, for example by drawing a cross on a tree trunk. In Irumu, in Orientale Province, where armed group incursions, violence and looting were common in 2011, traditional early warning systems included banging pots or using whistles when people became aware that bandits were near.

In many cases community members work with local authorities to find responses to protection threats.<sup>1</sup> In one South Kivu community, authorities banned the sale of alcohol before midday after women denounced the contribution of alcohol consumption to domestic violence and community conflicts. In another community, after cases of animal theft increased tension in the area, local authorities agreed to establish a commission (which included the local vet and a traditional leader) to ensure that documentation for livestock being sold in the local market and at abattoirs was checked. And in another, authorities supported the population in negotiating a reduction in fines demanded when community members failed to pay the 'security tax' imposed on the population by an armed group.

Other community protection strategies can create new threats, or have negative effects on some or all of the community. The absence of FARDC (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the national army) in many locations has led communities to establish

local self-defence groups which conduct night patrols. The members of these groups, however, are often at risk of attack, and they in turn have also been implicated in abuses including arbitrary arrests and detention, exacting illegal fines and torturing detainees. Some leave their communities and form armed groups themselves, adding to a wider problem.

Individuals often pay a number of illegal taxes in order not to place themselves at further risk of abuse. This includes people who have been arrested having to pay for their own transport to the police station, and survivors of sexual violence being forced to pay to obtain a medical certificate.

In cases of sexual violence, a common response is the forced marriage of survivors to perpetrators. Although the predominant narrative in DRC is that of sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups or FARDC, survey data reveal that in most cases of sexual violence against women or girls, the perpetrator is known to the survivor. Although forced marriage is illegal, custom, lack of knowledge of the law and widespread impunity perpetuate this practice. Reasons cited by community members in South Kivu include parents fearing that after rape their daughter will have no marriage value, and poverty pushing families to accept a dowry from the perpetrator instead of starting a legal process (which has an uncertain outcome and can entail paying transport costs to court for both survivor and perpetrator).

### Pragmatism in the face of threats

Some strategies cannot be simply defined as 'positive' or 'negative'; they may be positive for one group within a community and negative for another. In some communities, men going to market risk being tortured and killed as

they pass through checkpoints; families have reported making a conscious choice that women would take produce to market instead of men, even though women in turn risk sexual abuse and assault, judging this a more acceptable risk. Some other communities have instigated formal dialogues with armed groups to find solutions to protection problems in the absence of FARDC; they might make agreements to supply these groups with food or money in order to stop abuses – but this does not fully address the threat as it often leads to accusations of complicity and abuse by FARDC.

Displacement is a common strategy in DRC in response to imminent threats or as a pre-emptive measure. But while displaced people may find new livelihood opportunities in the place they flee to or have greater access to services, displacement removes people from their social networks and from what they know, and may create further risks. Women and children are often separated from their husbands and other family members during displacement, whether as a deliberate strategy ('women and children first') or as a result of confusion during the process. To prevent this, some parents in Masisi, North Kivu, have begun to carry a long cord which they can tie their children to during displacement. Separation can increase exposure of women and children to sexual violence and theft, and men to being killed or accused of being a member of an armed group. During displacement, members of armed groups may also try to assimilate into the population, again exposing the latter to the risk of being accused of complicity.

These examples demonstrate that community protection strategies often reflect a pragmatic decision to find a 'least worst' solution to a protection issue where those responsible for protection are either absent, are unable to fully play their role or are perpetrators themselves. Organisations working in community-based protection should endeavour to a) mitigate the risks or discourage the use of negative protection strategies, b) reinforce existing positive strategies and c) support new positive mechanisms.

### Community Protection Committees and good practice

Since 2009 Oxfam's Community Protection Programme<sup>2</sup> has been establishing and supporting Community Protection Committees in DRC to identify, prevent and respond to risks within their environment. This includes: systematising existing positive self-protection strategies; local advocacy; raising awareness of human rights, the law and medical, legal and psychosocial services; and promoting participation by different citizen groups in decisions relating to protection. In this way, local civilian and military authorities become more receptive and responsive to protection issues and civilians' needs, while community members become better informed of and able to access appropriate referral services. Reviews and evaluations of this work (including, most recently, research involving 32 communities which had previously hosted a full programme cycle and which Oxfam had by then exited from) have enabled Oxfam to draw out guidance for good practice in community-based protection work.

Community-based protection models are not one-size-fits-all. Protection Committees work extremely well in DRC but may not be appropriate in contexts such as Syria, where committees are commonly associated with the state security apparatus and viewed with suspicion. Elements of good practice, however, can be transferred across contexts to ensure the quality of any community-based protection intervention:

Any action must be informed by **proper analysis of the risks** faced by a specific community. The analysis should explore local strategies and solutions used to mitigate risks, requiring a nuanced understanding of the context and the actors involved (both formal and informal). In some areas, for example, customary law may be a community reference point because implementation of the national law is not possible or is riskier than customary practices. In Haut Uele, remote communities rely on traditional mechanisms because the nearest magistrate's court is over three days' walk away, and the police are unable to provide staff with either food for the journey or arms to defend themselves or prisoners against

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Lord's Resistance Army attacks. In such cases, advocacy to encourage better service provision by the justice system must be undertaken before suggesting that a community follow due process in addressing crimes.

Furthermore, there should be ongoing training and support on risk analysis. Community members should be trained to identify the potential risks of any action which they take, so that they can decide when an action is too risky. In Mulenge, South Kivu, after conducting a Risk Analysis, the Protection Committee decided not to directly approach the armed group responsible for extorting money from passers-by. Instead they raised the issue with customary leaders, who went to meet the armed group in their place. The customary leaders agreed to give the group a field which they could use to cultivate crops, putting an end to the extortion.

It is important to **engage all stakeholders** in a community in analysing risks and developing responses. 'Community' protection strategies do not necessarily consider all groups within a community, and some groups may benefit from one strategy to the detriment of others. Ensuring participation may mean protection structures are made up of representatives of different groups, or may entail giving some groups a separate forum in which their concerns can be discussed openly and then included in wider actions. Oxfam's strategy in DRC includes separate women's fora in each community, which discuss protection issues which affect women specifically. These issues are then incorporated systematically in community protection plans. Oxfam is also currently considering how best to ensure that youth are able to participate effectively in the programme. Other groups may include ethnic minorities or displaced persons, depending on the context.

**Volunteerism** gives committee members substantial credibility in their work and should be the bedrock of community-based protection – but must be implemented realistically. Where an activity takes all day, some compensation should be given to participants; they should at a minimum be fed or, for example, given some transport money. Participants in Oxfam's recent research showed

high degrees of motivation and commitment due to the inherent value of the work they were carrying out; in contrast, in areas where people are paid monetary incentives for protection activities, the motivation to continue often dies along with the project funding.

Behaviour change and community empowerment take **time, human resources and funds**. Ideally, engagement in a community should be maintained for two to three years depending on the context, although lesser gains are achievable in a shorter time. Regular training, coaching and collaborative problem solving are essential. The time and the staffing needs, as well as the intensity of activities such as training and awareness raising, mean that the financial investment should not be underestimated.

Community-based protection should **complement other activities** aiming to reduce vulnerabilities and exposure to risk. Activities could include improving physical access to services and resources, and should also include training for authorities on their roles and responsibilities in protection. Most significantly, they should include advocacy around protection risks and gaps in services or barriers to them which have been identified by the community.

Community protection interventions should **not replace community actions or remove responsibility from authorities**. Levels of engagement of external actors should reduce over the lifetime of a project as the capacity of communities and authorities is built. The implementing organisation should not be, and should not be perceived to be, a substitute for those with a responsibility for protection, and community structures should not be seen as a substitute for or a parallel system to authorities.

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1. Threats here are defined as violence or the threat of violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation.
2. The author wishes to acknowledge the work of and contributions from: Helen Lindley-Jones, Protection Coordinator for Oxfam in DRC; Melanie Kesmaecker-Wissing, Protection Programme Manager for Oxfam in DRC; Edouard Niyonzima, Protection Team Leader for Oxfam in South Kivu, DRC; and Augustin Titi, Coordinator, CEDIER South Kivu, DRC.

## Community Liaison Assistants: a bridge between peacekeepers and local populations

Janosch Kullenberg

**Community Liaison Assistants may be UN peacekeeping's most effective instrument for community engagement, with the potential to play a critical role in the protection of civilians. However, their effectiveness is curtailed by the lack of a comprehensive vision, hesitant military responses and cumbersome administrative structures.**

The protection of civilians has become a central tenet of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping. Most peacekeeping missions are now mandated to support host authorities in various forms but are also required to take unilateral action should the host government be unable or unwilling to protect civilians under threat of physical violence. It has become increasingly clear that, to be able to do this, peacekeepers require greater local understanding and consideration for existing protection mechanisms.

UN Peacekeeping<sup>1</sup> has long struggled to engage with local communities in their own protection. The focus of international interventions has typically been on political processes at the macro level and the implementation of mandated milestones, such as supporting and enabling peace agreements to be signed and elections to be held. Accordingly, most of the civilian staff of UN peacekeeping missions are based in the capitals and regional centres. While support to these processes is important for the creation of an environment conducive to the protection of civilians, the actual protection work of UN peacekeepers happens at the local level. The UN's military contingents, known as 'Blue Helmets', are deployed in many remote locations and often do not speak the local language. Rapid rotations do not leave them enough time to become knowledgeable about the history and socio-political elements of local conflicts.

This disconnect has considerably reduced the effectiveness of protection efforts. Communities that are sidelined – however unintentionally – by peacekeeping missions tend to perceive this behaviour as arrogant and demeaning and often

react with various forms of resistance. In addition, the peacekeeping mission might be so disengaged from them that local populations do not understand their complex mandate and their considerable practical limitations. Instead, they see numerous white landcruisers, armoured vehicles and helicopters, and come to develop unrealistic expectations that can alter their perceptions of security and thus further endanger them.

In return, peacekeepers – who do not fully understand local conflict dynamics – tend not to recognise warning signs and therefore have experienced difficulties intervening in a timely manner. In the most dramatic cases, this has led to the failure of UN peacekeepers to prevent extreme violence against local communities. One such incident was the Kiwanja Massacre in 2008 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where 150 civilians were killed less than a mile away from a UN base. The failure of the peacekeepers to take action triggered harsh criticism but also spurred the development of a major innovation.

### **Towards better community liaison**

After careful analysis of the massacre, the Civil Affairs Section of MONUSCO (the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC) convinced the mission leadership that more local knowledge and understanding were needed in order to prevent similar incidents in the future. It was decided that rather than just hiring more interpreters, peacekeepers should be provided with a resource that could take on a more comprehensive role through engaging with local communities. A new instrument was created – the Community Liaison Assistant (CLA).



CLAs are national staff who act as an interface between the peacekeeping mission, local authorities and populations. They are deployed directly with uniformed peacekeepers on the ground, where they help commanders to understand the needs of the local population and to plan adequate responses to threats faced by those communities. They also manage MONUSCO's early warning system by establishing radio networks, widely distributing emergency telephone numbers and providing telephones and credit to key contacts. This system enables communities in remote areas to alert MONUSCO and by extension national security forces to respond to immediate threats. In addition to passing on alerts, CLAs provide all sections of the mission with alerts, background information and analysis from the field through daily, weekly and flash reports.

At the same time, CLAs disseminate messages from the mission to the population and help manage the local population's expectations. Their outreach activities and two-way communication have helped to build confidence in political processes and the involvement of international actors. Finally, CLAs' local expertise and grassroots networks make them ideal facilitators for field visits by peacekeeping personnel and allow them to implement a variety of protection-relevant activities.

Alongside a growing recognition that focusing more attention on communities' own protection strategies is more effective and cost-efficient than interventions that are entirely based on the perceptions and priorities of outsiders, CLAs have been increasingly tasked to work with communities to increase their alertness and responsiveness to threats. CLAs support communities to establish Community Protection Committees where the local population, civil society and traditional authorities can come together to discuss threats, mitigate conflicts and develop solutions.

Besides building the capacities of these committees through providing training and working closely with them, CLAs also help the committees to spell out their protection strategies in Community Protection

Plans. Through working on these plans, communities can reflect on protection threats and develop mitigation strategies that can be subsequently shared with the peacekeeping forces in order to inform their interventions.<sup>2</sup> There have been some teething problems with these committees and questions remain as to whether peacekeeping missions are the best qualified for engaging local communities, or if this could be done better through coordinating with other organisations already working in this domain; however, within the existing framework the initiative seems to be fruitful.

### Mainstreaming the instrument

Given the effectiveness of the CLAs in DRC, the initiative gained wider recognition and has recently been adopted by three other major peacekeeping missions as a way for them to better engage with communities and involve them in their own protection. With the guidance of the original developers from MONUSCO's Civil Affairs section, UNMISS (South Sudan), MINUSMA (Mali) and MINUSCA (Central African Republic) have all recruited CLAs, and there are now 280 CLAs deployed in the field.

The vast majority of these CLAs are employed by MONUSCO. One reason for this is that the 'younger' missions are still in the process of scaling up to at least two CLAs per peacekeeping base, which entails complex and sometimes unsuccessful negotiations about budget allocations. Another reason is that because of varying operational contexts, missions have adapted the instrument and applied different visions for the CLAs. UNMISS, for instance, decided to not deploy CLAs with Blue Helmets on peacekeeping bases but have them work as normal civilian staff with the heads of regional offices. A recent evaluation found that this has diluted CLA's defining feature and thereby compromised their ability to function as civil-military coordinators in the field.<sup>3</sup> However, with the outbreak of major hostilities in 2013 and their resumption in July 2016, UNMISS has been in crisis mode and therefore unable to optimise its use of CLAs. Likewise, the logistical and security conditions in Mali have limited the requirement for CLAs.

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Despite these differences, comparison across contexts indicates that some challenges are inherent to the instrument. By the very nature of their deployment, CLAs live under difficult and potentially dangerous conditions, with limited office support, restricted mobility, and often only intermittent access to the telephone network and the internet. These challenges make regular reporting, management and rotation difficult. In addition, CLAs have to balance a number of dilemmas connected to their double role as insiders and outsiders. For instance, they are an integral component of the peacekeeping forces but also have to negotiate their own security with other armed actors, including for when the mission withdraws. Furthermore, CLAs have to build close relationships with the community yet avoid bias and breaches of confidentiality. However, while these aspects are indeed challenging, research suggests that the most pressing issues are not directly rooted in the CLAs themselves but rather in how the CLAs are used and empowered.

### Ways forward

It has become evident across missions that CLAs are not a strategy in themselves and can only be as good as the administrative structures and resources dedicated to their support. The task of managing a large number of national staff in remote locations is enormous. The relative rigidity of the UN's administrative regulations makes it difficult to deploy CLAs flexibly according to needs in the field. In addition, the various types of information that CLAs provide need to be analysed, referred and reacted to.

Despite these demands (and in the context of having to hire a large number of staff exceptionally quickly), missions did not receive a corresponding increase in their managerial capacity. MONUSCO adapted relatively quickly by dedicating a couple of CLAs and some international UN Volunteers in the regional offices to manage CLAs deployed in the field – a practice that has been replicated by the other missions but may not be the best solution in the long term. International staff should spend more time in the field with CLAs, for instance

through rotating in and out of field offices. In addition, UN headquarters has been asked to establish a new staff category for the CLAs in order to allow for more flexible deployment.

Furthermore, the CLAs' effectiveness depends on the willingness of the UN's military contingents to react to threats against civilians. If local populations feel that peacekeepers are not taking enough action, their confidence in the CLAs also diminishes. The lack of decisive action to protect communities by some troop-contributing countries at best renders CLAs ineffective and at worst puts them in danger, as armed groups come to see them as informants without power.

In response, peacekeeping missions are working towards integrating CLA reports and alarms into an integrated reporting system and databases, so that analysis and information sharing are done more systematically and reacting to alerts becomes much less a question of subjective interpretation by national contingents. Instead of a discussion between a given CLA and their respective commander on the local level or between different levels of the military contingent's hierarchy – both have often led to considerable delays in response – CLA reports will feed directly into a centralised mission-wide report and response structure. In this way, CLA alerts would be treated systematically and transparently, increasing the pressure on troop-contributing countries to take action while avoiding personal conflicts between the CLAs and their respective commanders.

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1. [www.un.org/en/peacekeeping](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping)

2. See also MONUSCO CLA *Best Practice Review 2014* <http://bit.ly/MONUSCO-CLA-Review-2014>

3. For more details on the mainstreaming of CLAs see forthcoming evaluation by DPKO/DFS Policy and Best Practice section entitled *Survey or Practice: Community Liaison Assistants in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*.

## Refugee community development in New Delhi

Linda Bartolomei, Mari Hamidi, Nima Mohamed Mohamud and Kristy Ward

**Recognising that process is as important as outcomes, a community development approach can be effective in supporting local communities as providers of first resort. A project run by the Somali and Afghan refugee communities in India shows how this can work.**

The critical role of people themselves as ‘providers of first resort’ in displacement is well established. Community-based protection is now a key principle for UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and for non-government organisations (NGOs) but the question of how to support and enhance refugee-led initiatives remains an ongoing challenge. Working with communities to identify what support they want and need from external organisations, and who should be involved in providing this, is critical.

Community-based protection is often seen as something that the community must do by itself, and initiatives that involve other organisations or supporters are sometimes not seen as genuine ‘community-based’ projects. But external actors can play a critical role in supporting communities in determining their own needs and running their own projects. (This role can be particularly important when displaced persons do not have legal rights to establish their own community organisations, as is the case in India.) This means moving beyond instrumental gains for UNHCR and NGOs, such as cost savings and extending the reach of their services, to re-thinking what ‘support’ means and how partnerships can be fostered. Community development (as a distinct framework of theory and practice) has much to offer in this regard as it recognises that process is as important as outcomes.

The Refugee Community Development Project (RCDP) was run by the Somali and Afghan refugee communities in South and North Delhi, India. RCDP was established by the University of New South Wales’ Centre for Refugee Research (CRR), in consultation with the refugee community and with the support of UNHCR. NGO Don Bosco India, a UNHCR-funded implementing partner, provided space for some project activities and in the later years became a local

coordinating partner for mainstreaming community development lessons in broader service delivery for refugees. During its four years of operation (until the end of 2015), the project developed a comprehensive programme of education, women’s support, and livelihoods activities, employing 31 Somali and Afghan community workers and involving 2,100 refugee community members who participated in education classes, women’s social support groups, recreational picnics and income-generating activities.

The project went beyond service delivery. It worked on the premise that explicitly recognising individuals’ contributions in the personal, community and institutional domains is an essential element of enabling protection. This model fostered the agency of displaced people: that is, their ability to evaluate choices, make decisions and take action.

*“Most of these women were something in their country – some were doctors, professors, teachers – and after coming here to a new country they felt like they were nothing, so the women’s groups have in a way brought their self-confidence back. They feel important now; they are part of something.”*  
(Somali female, Project Co-Coordinator)

### Elements for success

The project has shown that partnerships with UNHCR and NGOs have much to offer refugee community-based organisations but that these require new ways of working that change their traditional roles in delivering services.

**A community development approach:** There is a subtle but important distinction between community-based approaches and community development. Community development involves a process of supporting communities to determine their own issues and develop and implement solutions.

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Central to good community development is the involvement of communities as equal partners in every stage of the project development, implementation and evaluation processes. Community-based projects may contain elements of community development. Often, however, they are run with volunteer support from displaced persons but are planned and evaluated by external organisations. Community development requires a shift in thinking about who leads and makes decisions, who sets the agenda, and how power is redistributed.

**Refugee leadership and decision making:** In RCDP, it was the Somali and Afghan communities who decided what the project would do. Building on the UNHCR Regional Dialogues with Displaced Women and Girls held in 2010-11, they held a two-day consultation with over 200 people, established a 12-person steering committee and developed a community survey undertaken with 300 households. Community workers managed all aspects of the project and initiated regular meetings with UNHCR staff and UNHCR-funded implementing partners (including Don Bosco) to ensure coordination and avoid duplication of activities. Two Co-Coordinators – one Somali and one Afghan – managed the community centre and activities, and provided support to community workers.<sup>1</sup> People in the community have the skills and knowledge to run projects although they may lack the security of legal rights and may sometimes lack confidence, given their experiences of discrimination and exclusion in host countries.

*“We can do everything here with little support from UNHCR. This is the feeling that the RCDP has given to people. That still you are human, still you are alive, and you have something to do.”* (Afghan male, former Project Co-Coordinator)

**Supporting women in leadership roles:** One of RCDP’s main aims was to respond to the high level of gender-based violence that women talked about in the UNHCR Regional Women’s Dialogues. The community decided that women’s social support should be a core project activity, and therefore established women’s groups

and adult literacy classes. Three women were elected as focal points for each group, on a rotating basis, to coordinate monthly group activities, and the women attending the groups provided peer support and shared their skills. Women said that that it mattered when they spoke because they were recognised for their abilities to make plans, take decisions and manage group activities.

**Cooperation with UNHCR and partner NGOs:** RCDP would not have been successful without the support of UNHCR and its NGO partners including Don Bosco and the Socio-Legal Information Centre (SLIC). Initially the project was seen by some as a duplication of existing services but over time the staff of Don Bosco, SLIC and UNHCR came to see a reciprocal benefit. Don Bosco provided local project support assisting the project team in situations that required negotiation with police, government services and landlords; at the same time, Don Bosco could refer vulnerable cases to RCDP and, through them, make connections to the community. Meanwhile, UNHCR began asking refugee community workers to co-facilitate participatory consultations because of their skills and experience, and to assist in providing information to the community about changing visa requirements. Thus RCDP became an important conduit to the wider community because of the trust that the team had developed with both humanitarian organisations and the community.

**Appropriate salaries:** Community projects often ask people to work as volunteers or for low pay – whether because refugees do not have work rights or perhaps on the assumption that displaced people have lots of free time – but this devalues people’s skills and experience and sets up a hierarchy that places greater value on those working for established NGOs than those working for community projects, regardless of responsibilities. RCDP community workers were paid the same rate of salary as Indian workers in NGOs, in recognition both of their skills and their level of responsibility in managing a community-based association with over 2,100 participants and a significant budget.

### What can be learned from RCDP?

Community-based approaches, when underpinned by community development values, have an important role to play beyond filling service gaps. They are critical in recognising the agency and capacity of individuals in displacement. Successful community initiatives are often replicated or scaled up by UNHCR and NGOs as they have the funds and resources to be able to do so but communities must lead decision making around whether the project should be extended, what it should do, how community members will be involved and what type of support they need. This is often a time-consuming process for communities and for those funding and supporting such initiatives. However, successful outcomes of empowerment and self-determination cannot be achieved without adequate process.

Good community development is time-consuming, messy and complex, and cannot easily define clear outcomes and objectives from the start to be measured at the end of a project. Not knowing how things might turn out is challenging in the world of accountability for donor funds. Valuing the journey and its transformational qualities for individuals and communities is critical to the success of refugee-led community-based initiatives. We acknowledge that this is difficult for UNHCR and NGOs, given their policies and the demands of donor accountability, but believe that far more can be done in terms of building the evidence on the basis of which to advocate for far greater donor flexibility.

The RCDP was established as a pilot project with the stated aim of developing and modelling community-led approaches that might be replicated in other similar settings where refugee-led community-based organisations cannot register in their own right. While the Project is no longer in operation in its original form in Delhi, the lessons learned have been mainstreamed across the work of UNHCR and Don Bosco in Delhi who have reoriented many of their programmes and activities to support community-led projects and initiatives. Although the RCDP project office closed

at the end of 2015, remaining funds have enabled the women's groups to continue to meet on a monthly basis, while funding is sought to continue. All those involved in the project are proud of developing and leading a protection initiative that was 'by refugees for refugees' and the protection 'dividends' have been far greater than the activities implemented. We were especially proud of the fact that the project brought the Somali and Afghan communities together in one project.

Community-based responses, however, are not a protection panacea. Alone, they are unable to address the multiple protection challenges that people experience in displacement. The partnership between UNHCR, Don Bosco and RCDP in Delhi illustrated that different organisations should, and can, take on different roles in the same project. In many cases these may also be different from what organisations are used to and can therefore require some reorienting of approaches and building of new skills for all those involved.

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1. From 2015 the project was led by the authors Mari Hamidi and Nima Mohamed.

### Could FMR support your funding bid?

FMR has on occasion been included in successful programmatic and research funding bids to the mutual benefit of all parties. If you are applying for external funding, would you consider including FMR in your proposal (and budget) to enhance the dissemination and impact of learning and results? Please contact the Editors at [fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk).

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## Community policing in Kakuma camp, Kenya

Hanno Brankamp

**Community policing has become a popular way of promoting local ownership of security in refugee camps in Kenya and more widely, but it can also fall victim to its ambivalent position at the intersection of refugee communities and state policing.**

Making refugee camps 'safe' for their residents is the responsibility of police, military or other national security forces in host countries. Aid agencies and governments alike acknowledge that the (physical) protection of camp refugees is meaningless without refugees' own active participation. As a consequence, a number of camps are now policed jointly by national police and refugee auxiliary forces that operate under special agreements and a Community Policing framework.

As a governance strategy, community policing aims to create a direct link between local communities and official government forces in an attempt to curb violence and crime, and build a sustainable relationship of trust with the population. In many African societies, community police have even become the predominant providers of everyday security services in the face of corruption, distrust of the police, or weak performance of official authorities. Local policing initiatives emerge as ready alternatives to deliver justice and security by making use of local knowledge, customary practices and/or traditional leadership networks.

In refugee camps, with diverse multi-faith and multi-ethnic populations, policymakers are now seeking to embed security operations in local structures. Today, community policing in refugee camps exists across a variety of geographical locations, social environments and cultures, and their responsibilities are expanding. These responsibilities encompass information exchange, mediation between parties to a conflict, crowd control and showing a physical presence in the camp through daily foot patrols and security sweeps thereby demonstrating 'refugee ownership' of security operations on the ground.

In Nyarugusu refugee camp in western Tanzania, refugee guards – known as *Sungusungu* – are armed with light weapons, such as sticks and clubs, and have been involved in tackling crime and public order disturbances since the early 2000s. They answer directly to the camp commandant, a Tanzanian government official who oversees all camp operations.

In Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps in Kenya, NGOs and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, routinely face resistance from refugee communities that are understandably sceptical of outside interference. A rudimentary community policing scheme in Dadaab, first introduced in 2007, has since evolved into Community Peace and Protection Teams (CPPTs) under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). However, severe mobility restrictions in and around Dadaab and the strength of clan-based forms of organisation have strongly influenced CPPTs' behaviour within the communities and across the camps.

### Security in Kakuma

The case of Kakuma refugee camp illustrates some of the more ambivalent and conflicting aspects of community-based policing in humanitarian contexts. Kakuma lies in Kenya's remote north-western Turkana County and comprises a patchwork of 18 national and numerous ethnic refugee communities who have escaped various conflicts in the region over the past 24 years. In May 2016, Kakuma was home to over 192,000 refugees, the majority coming from South Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Ethiopia. This heterogeneity and the wide geographical expanse of the camp make policing a challenging task.

Kenya's government security agencies hold responsibility for law enforcement but also operate alongside commercial security companies hired to secure the humanitarian compounds. Security reports reveal a wide range of crimes occurring in the camp – sexual violence and rape, domestic violence, banditry, theft, inter-communal clashes, organised crime, drug abuse, boot-legging, traffic violations and disturbance of public order – but many refugees see Kenya's police itself as a source of insecurity, corruption and extortion.

Community policing in refugee camps seeks to mitigate these concerns by actively engaging local communities where outside intervention is unwanted or feared. In Kakuma, as in Dadaab, LWF manages the CPPTs, a refugee force that cooperates with the Kenyan police in patrolling, crime investigation and crowd control. The current programme has its origins in an earlier security initiative – 'refugee guards' – and now exists alongside various other community-specific customary justice mechanisms. CPPTs in Kakuma have since become an ever-growing force of 330 refugee security officers (55 women and 275 men) and 27 Kenyan nationals in supervisory roles.

Over recent years, LWF has made efforts to discourage sectarianism and ethnic affiliations within its community policing forces but with only limited success. Kakuma is visibly divided between a large number of different refugee communities, and of course CPPTs are recruited from these very communities. Despite using an aspirational language that dissociates policing work from ethnicity and clan, the CPPTs are very much rooted in their respective ethnic communities and clans. Some community administration buildings even serve as operational bases for CPPTs' patrols, interrogations, or mediation between conflict parties.

To refugees in need of assistance and physical protection, CPPTs may seem more accessible and less intimidating than the Kenyan police, and every block has at least two assigned refugee officers on duty, day and night. In theory, CPPTs are responsible for information gathering in police inquiries because of their language skills and knowledge of local communities. In emergencies, refugees contact these local staff who assess the situation and then request police reinforcements or an ambulance, if required. A Somali CPPT recruit was adamant that all security operations in

Kakuma crucially depend on the community police: "The police cannot just come here and know right away what is going on. They depend on us [CPPTs] to tell them what is happening and what should be done about it".<sup>1</sup> And indeed, it is not without reason that the CPPTs are habitually referred to as the 'eyes and ears' of the police and UNHCR.

However, this close association has also created a new set of problems; some residents perceive CPPTs as spies and collaborators in a camp system of surveillance

and control and as agents of corruption, not protection. Ironically, CPPTs are at the same time exposed to police violence, especially when appearing to interfere with or encroaching upon police responsibilities. Community policing in Kakuma is therefore contingent not only on the legitimacy of CPPTs in resolving disputes and cultivating trustful relations with refugee communities but also on their actual and perceived liaison with national police forces.

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1. Interview, Kakuma II, March 2015.



CPPTs on patrol in Kakuma refugee camp.

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## The role of community centres in offering protection: UNHCR and Al Ghaith Association in Yemen

Nicolas Martin-Achard and Al Ghaith Association

**Community centres play an important role in offering protection for displaced communities, particularly for members of those communities who have specific needs. Somali refugees in Yemen formed the Al Ghaith Association and are now running their own community centres to support fellow refugees. Below, UNHCR and Al Ghaith discuss their approaches.**

### Community centres and their protection role

Nicolas Martin-Achard

In situations of forced displacement, the ties which hold a community together are often severely weakened or broken. Maintaining the social fabric of displaced communities and promoting their peaceful coexistence with host communities can therefore be highly challenging in the different settings refugees find themselves in – both in urban and in rural settings, where they either live alongside their hosts or in camps. Refugees may struggle to find safe spaces where they can gather, may lack information and help, and may not have access to work where they could use their skills and capacities to support themselves, all of which limit their ability to participate in decisions affecting their lives and to protect themselves as individuals and as a community. These challenges are particularly acute for marginalised groups and people with specific needs.

As part of its work to try to address these challenges, UNHCR works with local communities to support community centres or establish new ones – safe public spaces where women, men, boys and girls of diverse backgrounds can meet for social events, recreation, education and livelihood programmes, information exchange, and other purposes.<sup>1</sup>

While the preferred option is to ensure that refugees are able to access, use and meaningfully engage in existing local community centres, this may not always be possible (for example, where refugees live in remote areas). In such cases, refugees may be supported in initiating and running their own

community centres. In some other instances, such as during the initial stages of emergency responses, neither option may be feasible and UNHCR or a partner organisation – in consultation with the community – may have to undertake the initial management of the community centre; in this scenario, the plan would be to gradually hand over this task to local organisations or refugee groups, as in the case of Al Ghaith.

When Somali refugees first settled in camps in Yemen, UNHCR started running community centres out of former military buildings. The centres were later managed by partner NGOs. Meanwhile, some of the Somali refugees started organising themselves and initially provided computer classes for members of their community, with used computers they had acquired. They eventually created their own association, Al Ghaith, and gradually got more involved in running activities at the centres. When the partnership between UNHCR and the NGOs ended, Al Ghaith took over management of the community centres themselves, designing and implementing their own annual plans, with financial support from UNHCR.

#### Sustainability

Promoting sustainability is usually the main challenge faced by operations supporting community centres, which often incur high running costs, including rent, utilities and staffing. Some community centres managed by local NGOs or refugee groups have found ways to generate income in order to reduce

their dependency on external funding. In Egypt, a Syrian refugee women's association managing community centres is running a successful catering business for local Egyptians and Syrians alike. The food is prepared by women in the centre. In addition, the association charges a small fee for skills training and for the use of their kindergarten. Fees are waived for the most at-risk families. Similarly, a committee of persons with disabilities running a community centre in Kigeme camp in Rwanda generates income through screenings of football matches and renting of rooms for events.

### Security and protection

At the heart of UNHCR's community-based approach to protection is mobilising and building on the capacities of refugee populations so as to preserve and promote their dignity, self-esteem, and productive and creative potential. Community centres can be a key resource in promoting peaceful coexistence through joint activities where both refugees and host communities come together. In Lebanon, for example, refugees and local people both serve on management committees of community centres. In Nepal,

early childhood development centres in the refugee camps are used by locals as well. In settings where host communities and authorities may be unwelcoming, the ability to gather gives refugees a sense of belonging and security, especially persons with disabilities, older persons, unaccompanied and separated children or others who may be particularly marginalised or at risk.

Having access to a wide variety of services and programmes that cater to people of different ages, genders and diversity profiles in the same location is particularly convenient for refugees whose mobility may be hampered by distance, transportation costs or security concerns. Community centres in some contexts also work closely with networks of community volunteers/workers, who can use the centres as their offices, and through their outreach work will spread information about the community centres – and the services provided – in remote areas and to persons with limited mobility.

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1. See the community-based protection practitioners section on UNHCR Exchange [www.unhcrexchange.org/communities/9159](http://www.unhcrexchange.org/communities/9159)

## Knowing one's own community

Al Ghaith Association

As they say, "necessity is the mother of invention". "Necessity" inspired us to set up our refugee association, Al Ghaith. We, as refugees, observed that there was a gap, and to fill that gap we needed to play our role in serving our community. While UNHCR makes efforts to protect the refugees, it cannot cover all the needs of the refugee community in all aspects of life. It is based on this that we thought about forming an association. After long discussion and meticulous deliberation and planning, we founded Al Ghaith.

Our agreed objectives defined our targets and the categories of people we serve, not to mention the areas of community development on which we should focus our efforts. Being ourselves members of this community, we came to know our weaknesses and strengths

and worked together on a common task to meet the needs in our community. Through needs assessment and focus group discussions with different groups, we identified the need to support people with specific needs – including older persons, the very poor and orphans – as our main priority.

We furthermore manage the donations we receive to make sure we target these categories of people with the aim of improving food security while also focusing on education as a protection tool. We have also identified and recruited qualified members of the community to become teachers, guards and cleaners at our centres and facilities, thereby creating some sources of income.

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The main challenges we have faced with regard to sustainability were the budget constraints. As Al Ghaith members we are working with very limited resources. Despite the support of UNHCR we are still unable to meet all the needs of our community, and the lack of proper facilities or equipment affects our ability to organise some recreational activities in the community centres such as football, basketball and music or to provide spaces as gyms and playgrounds.

While Al Ghaith would technically be able to respond to the needs of the community in different sectors, funding those activities remains a challenge. This is why we are currently focusing our efforts mainly on capacity building of the refugee community.

### Promoting harmony

The way the community has been given the opportunity to manage the centre is remarkable and has had a big impact. The list of our needs is long but, on the other hand, we have succeeded in continuing our social activities regardless of all the difficulties that we have encountered. We give everyone the chance to discover new, hidden talents and then improve them through indoor and outdoor activities – through games, music-making, workshops and awareness-raising sessions. And we have enabled our community to socialise at the community centres by encouraging affection and harmony among the community members.

Al Ghaith Association

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## The role of cultural norms and local power structures in Yemen

Mohammed Al-Sabahi and Fausto Aarya De Santis

### Community power structures and attitudes in Yemen are key factors in how IDPs can gain protection and assistance.

Humanitarian needs were already acute before the conflict in Yemen escalated in March 2015. Yemen has always suffered from weak governance and social services, high youth unemployment and high rates of poverty. Half of the population has no access to safe drinking water and three-quarters no access to safe sanitation. And approximately 3.1 million Yemenis have been internally displaced, of whom 2.2 remain displaced as of July 2016.<sup>1</sup>

Yemen's predominantly tribal social structure is based on the collective responsibility and accountability of tribal leaders (sheikhs) to their communities. Tribes have come to function as states, providing stability, protection and economic support for their members. Sheikhs have always held a considerable level of informal power, and this power has survived the conflict – and even increased.

In general, sheikhs gain legitimacy through their ability to resolve conflicts and

safeguard the tribe's interests. During the current conflict, some sheikhs have gained more legitimacy by aligning themselves with the armed groups who control the local area; such sheikhs are perceived as providing greater security for their people – and thereby enhance their own status. Furthermore, as people lose faith in government institutions, they increasingly turn to power structures such as the sheikhs. Almost 65% of IDPs have indicated that they rely on sheikhs for safety and would turn to them for conflict resolution. The intervention of humanitarian NGOs has also added to this legitimacy as NGOs will seek approval from sheikhs before working in their communities.

IDPs have tended to seek refuge in areas near communities that they trust – communities governed by a shared tribal code. These bonds have also manifested themselves in host communities helping IDPs during difficult times, and sharing whatever resources they have. However,

this social cohesion and the tendency towards community-based support can be adversely affected by humanitarian assistance that fails to cover all those in need. A strong message has emerged from a recent protection study conducted by Oxfam that assistance should not be based on IDP or host community status but rather on need. Current prioritisation for assistance is often status-based rather than needs-based, resulting in the urgent needs of the host communities going unaddressed.

In a recent study of 416 households (58% IDPs) undertaken by Oxfam and published by the Yemen Community Engagement Working Group,<sup>2</sup> 48% of respondents felt that humanitarian assistance was not necessarily reaching the most vulnerable populations. There are two important factors to consider here: firstly, access to information and, secondly, community attitudes within Yemeni society.

**Access to information:** The survey indicated that the elderly, people with intellectual disabilities, people who are illiterate and the most marginalised communities in Yemeni society have more difficulty than most in accessing information about the availability of humanitarian assistance, and therefore more difficulty in accessing the assistance. Interestingly, community leaders and sheikhs, while highly regarded in terms of usefulness and trustworthiness by affected communities, were not preferred as intermediaries to relay information from the humanitarian community to the affected population and vice versa. Cell phone calling (59%) and word of mouth (56%) are the most used channels of communication by the affected population. Community volunteers (32%), radio (25%) and WhatsApp (24%) were also reported as frequently used. (WhatsApp is used by 26% of the IDP population.) Television is also commonly used but less so than these other channels. Particular attention must be given to how agencies can disseminate pertinent information to reach more marginalised sectors of the population.

**Community attitudes:** More efforts might also be needed in understanding

how the community defines vulnerability. Al-Muhamasheen ('the marginalised') is a minority group within Yemen, which has suffered continual discrimination, persecution and exclusion from mainstream society, and has continued to be shunned by the rest of the society even during these times of conflict. For example, while 'Yemeni' IDPs will live in rented houses, with relatives, or in public or abandoned buildings, the majority of al-Muhamasheen IDPs will live in tents or on open land, always at risk of eviction and violence. They do the jobs that nobody else is willing to do – clear rubbish, sweep the streets and clean out the drains – but during the conflict, the majority of al-Muhamasheen IDPs have found themselves without work. The only solution for them is to live off the humanitarian assistance provided by NGOs but if NGOs only work through sheikhs and established communities, and as the al-Muhamasheen's vulnerability is not acknowledged by sheikhs, some of the most vulnerable IDPs will continue to be left out.

As the humanitarian community attempts to help IDPs in Yemen during the current conflict, policymakers and practitioners need to explore ways which ensure that delivering humanitarian assistance does not undermine culture and local power structures but rather utilises them to help **all** IDPs and host communities to better withstand the consequences of conflict.

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1. See Yemen Protection Cluster Task Force on Population Movement, 10th Report, July 2016  
<http://bit.ly/Yemen-TFPM-10thReport-July2016>

2. See De Santis F A and Carter S E (2016) *Enhancing Informed Engagement With Conflict Affected Communities in Yemen*  
<http://bit.ly/Yemen-Community-Engagement-August2016>

Findings from an Oxfam study of affected communities in Yemen (both IDPs and host communities in four governorates) will be available shortly.

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## The role of community in refugee journeys to Europe

Richard Mallett and Jessica Hagen-Zanker

**For Eritreans and Syrians coming to Europe, community networks both encourage the initial decision to go and provide elements of support along the way.**

We have long known that people's social connections and networks often facilitate their migrations in some way – through financing the upfront costs or receiving people upon arrival, for example. But these same networks also have a role to play in promoting migration as a viable option in the first place. For a study for the Overseas Development Institute,<sup>1</sup> we interviewed 52 people from three countries – Eritrea, Senegal and Syria – who had recently 'made it' to three European countries: Germany, Spain and the UK. For many people it was often the advice and actions of people they knew which helped them make up their minds to move. Much of the time, these influences came through personal contacts who had already made the journey. Almost every Syrian we interviewed, for example, knew someone personally who had made the trip through the Balkans previously. This reality, together with the sharing of these people's specific pathways through online social communities, are part of what normalises the idea of crossing borders.

Media coverage of the 'refugee crisis' has tended to depict refugees and migrants as passive victims subject to the whims of evil people smugglers. But it is inaccurate to view these people as having no control over their fate. Despite the vulnerability that underlies many refugees' and migrants' journeys (stemming in turn from their undocumented status, desperation, fear and unfamiliarity with new places and rules), refugees negotiate, join forces and fight back.

Part of what has defined the 'refugee crisis' so far is the role of community in facilitating migrations and protecting vulnerable individuals. The most visible examples have tended to come in the form of European citizens stepping in but migrants and refugees themselves provide vital aspects of support for each other. A brief

story of one Syrian woman's journey offers a single yet far from atypical illustration:

*After crossing over from Turkey, Fatima and her two children ended up travelling from Greece to Germany with a group of four Iraqi men she met on the boat from Turkey to Greece. They stood up for Fatima when threats were encountered, paid her share of expenses when her money ran out and carried the children when they walked for days. When the group of travelling companions arrived in Munich, everyone moved to different towns where they had friends. Fatima was stuck at Munich train station, with no money. Again, Fatima was lucky. She met a German who told her there was a supermarket close by run by an Iraqi, who might be able to help. She went there and the Iraqi man bought her train tickets, gave her children biscuits and gave her 50 Euros for them. Later that day they got on a train to Berlin.*

So, far from being the product of purely individualistic, rational-actor behaviour, we see that migration is instead an example of collective action. As Fatima's case shows, this collective action is lubricated by a shared identity – which might be joint participation in the journey itself – and ultimately by membership of a community, however loose or temporary that might be. We see this in relation to financing, decision making, and facilitation more broadly. The same can be said of the way in which migrants and refugees strive to secure protection along the way; these collective actions, far from being singular occurrences, are seen repeatedly.

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1. Hagen-Zanker J and Mallett R (2016) *Journeys to Europe: the role of policy in migrant decision-making*, Insights Report, Overseas Development Institute <http://bit.ly/ODI-JourneysToEurope>

## Integrating protection into disaster risk preparedness in the Dominican Republic

Andrea Verdeja

**Addressing protection as a key element of community-based disaster risk reduction and preparedness efforts is essential to safeguarding human rights in disaster and emergency settings.**

Since the early 2000s, the protection sector has made great strides in identifying and responding to risks affecting local populations during emergencies, whether in conflict situations or disaster response. While a vast wealth of knowledge, experiences and literature has been generated over recent years around protection in these contexts, less attention has been given to thinking about protection through the lens of disaster risk preparedness. That is, in disaster settings, protection measures and activities are normally implemented during the response phase but are not as often meaningfully considered as an integral part of disaster risk reduction and prevention efforts.

In many countries, during or immediately after a disaster, state response actors are frequently unable to reach affected populations for significant periods of time, or may lack the capacity or resources to assist the population to the full extent needed. As a result, during any given disaster it is communities themselves, and not necessarily state duty-bearers, who are most likely to be the first responders. In this sense, communities play a crucial role in their own safekeeping and, with the right tools, can be effectively involved in implementing protection measures to prevent and/or respond to situations of harm or abuse that often take place in emergency settings. It is within this context that a consortium<sup>1</sup> of organisations comprising Oxfam, Plan International and Habitat for Humanity has sought to work at the community level in the Dominican Republic with riverside urban poor communities – *barrios* – that are at high risk of disaster-induced displacement.

On a periodic basis, the Dominican Republic suffers major climate-related events

that, when combined with the underlying conditions of extreme inequality and widespread impoverishment, result all too often in disaster. Among the most significant recent examples are Hurricane George in 1998, which left over 85,000 internally displaced and 350 dead; the Jimaní flash flooding in 2004, which erased several communities from the map and left over 600 dead and around 1,000 families displaced; and, in 2007, tropical



Training in disaster risk reduction and management, San Cristóbal.

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storms Noel and Olga which left over 160 dead and 140,000 people internally displaced.

With little or no government follow-up, and rendered almost completely invisible by the absence of a national register or census, thousands of families displaced by these events continue to live today in the 'temporary refuges' they were originally relocated to by the government, still waiting after years, if not decades, to be resettled or sent back to their places of origin. In reality, these 'refuges' are no more than improvised shacks made out of tin, cardboard, mud or canvas, often located in high-risk zones with no access to basic services and in crowded and deplorable conditions.

During and after emergencies, however, affected communities are also routinely exposed to additional and severe protection risks. For example, many Dominicans living

in high-risk zones refuse to be evacuated and sent to state-run collective shelters as these are considered unsafe due to the prevalence of sexual abuse and exploitation committed by state actors (particularly the military) and by shelter managers who take advantage of the vulnerability of the population under their care.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, access to food and medical attention is often deliberately withheld by response actors, who demand transactional sex or sexual 'favours' in exchange for humanitarian aid. This abuse of power is further manifested in cases of corruption, coercion and intentional deprivation of services based on political affiliation, socio-economic status or ethnicity, the latter predominantly targeting Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent who are systematically denied access to basic aid or services, and in some cases are even banned from using the shelters.<sup>3</sup> Cases of sex trafficking and forced prostitution rings, as well as child labour and abuse, have also been reported in these settings, particularly in marginalised urban areas.

The consortium's one-year pilot programme, culminating in September 2016, aimed to set up community-based protection brigades to address these threats, targeting the riverside urban *barrios* in the city of San Cristóbal where the combination of poverty and lack of adequate land planning has resulted in thousands living on the flood plain of the River Nigua. As already happened in 2007 with tropical storms Noel and Olga, these communities are all at extreme risk of being washed away when the next hurricane, tropical storm or flash flood takes place.

In this framework, efforts have been focused on training and organising San Cristóbal's riverside communities in disaster risk reduction and management through the formation of community-led disaster preparedness, mitigation and response networks in each neighbourhood. Each network comprises 25-30 community members, specifically recruited to ensure a good gender and age balance – with the participation of women and men from young adults to the elderly – as well as the inclusion of members who are generally left



Oxfam-Pian International Habitat for Humanity/Ana Paola Van Dalen

out from collective decision-making spaces, such as people living with disability within the community and Haitian immigrants.

These community-based DRR networks are structured in units consisting of 6-10 members, with each unit receiving several months of specialist training in a different aspect of disaster response: evacuation and rescue, WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), communication or shelter management. While these aspects are all part of the traditional roles played by community-based DRR networks around the world, the project sought specifically to train members of the shelter management unit to form a specialised protection brigade, a pilot initiative which if effective could be replicated within and outside the Dominican Republic.

### Protection brigades

As part of the objective to integrate protection effectively into disaster risk preparedness at the community level, all network members were trained in protection measures and principles, including how to provide assistance adapted to the specific needs of women, children, elderly, people with disability, people living with HIV/AIDS or other chronic illnesses, and immigrant (predominantly Haitian) populations. Protection brigades then carry out the crucial task of putting these principles into concrete action. After additional training in prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation as well as child protection, these community-based protection brigades also act as a monitoring, prevention and response mechanism inside the collective shelters in the face of recurrent cases of sexual violence and other kinds of abuse of power. This includes guaranteeing access to reference and complaints mechanisms in cases of rights violations, ensuring victims are responded to and receive proper care through appropriate channels, and providing accompaniment throughout the process.

While the community-based DRR networks are integrated into the national disaster risk management system under the supervision and coordination of the Civil Defence, protection brigades also

benefit from working directly with the state's social protection agencies, a crucial element in guaranteeing their effectiveness and sustainability. Therefore, one or two focal points were selected within each team for the purpose of official liaison between the affected population and the local government's justice department and social protection services, specifically with the provincial representatives of the Ministry of Women, the Child Protection Welfare Agency, National Agency for Disability, Public Health Services and the Office of the Attorney General.

With the aim of institutionalising this coordination, specific emergency protection protocols were established in conjunction with these state actors, who up until now had little access to or knowledge of abuses occurring during emergency settings in their jurisdiction. By establishing a coordination mechanism between the government's social protection agencies at the provincial level and the community-based protection brigades in the field, it is hoped that a greater number of cases in emergency settings will be responded to and channelled appropriately through the state's protection and justice systems.

All countries in this region, and particularly the small island developing states in the Caribbean, face the certainty of a disaster sooner or later. Ensuring that protection measures and mechanisms are integrated into disaster risk reduction and preparedness efforts, particularly at the community level, can go a long way to safeguarding human rights when and where disaster strikes.

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2. Casares García R (2013) *Mujeres y Niñas en Contextos de Desastre: Tres Estudios de Caso sobre Vulnerabilidades y Capacidades en la República Dominicana*, Oxfam/Plan International. <http://bit.ly/Oxfam-Plan-mujeres-ninas-DomRep-2013>
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## Filling the funding gap for community protection

Khalid Koser and Amy Cunningham

**An initiative to help local communities build resilience against violent extremism may offer useful lessons in how to help local communities access funding to support their self-protection efforts.**

One of the main obstacles to communities organising to protect themselves is a lack of funding. Often they have a better understanding than outsiders of what the challenges may be, and have innovative ideas for overcoming them, but they lack the finance to put these ideas into action.

Research by the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) has identified three main reasons why local communities cannot raise money. First, they lack appropriate networks. They are not sufficiently aware of or within easy reach of funding opportunities – for example, through national governments, small grants programmes of donor agencies, or international or national non-governmental organisations. Second, even where there is awareness of the opportunities, local communities are often either not eligible or not able to apply for funding. They may not be registered; they may not be able to complete the requisite log frames and budget proposals; and they may not be able to conduct the monitoring and evaluation that are usually required. Third, there may be a lack of trust between local communities and prospective funders, whether the national government, bilateral donors or NGOs.

The GCERF funding model attempts to overcome these challenges in three main ways. It is a blended fund, meaning that it pools contributions from governments and other donors, and issues grants under the GCERF banner. This in effect makes the funding neutral, and is one way to overcome the trust deficit between local communities and certain bilateral donors. In addition, GCERF funds consortia of local initiatives centred on a principal recipient, often a local NGO, and one of the main criteria for their selection is their outreach to local communities. While these principal

recipients need to have some experience of managing funds, it is not a prerequisite that the sub-recipients in their consortia have previously received funding. Furthermore, the intent is to overcome the funding gap in a sustainable way, by providing successive three-year rounds of investment, and at the same time supporting capacity development on fundraising skills.

As important as supporting selected vulnerable local communities is to try more systematically to address the funding gap. One way GCERF does this is by engaging a range of stakeholders – national governments, civil society, the private sector and local donor representatives – in the funding mechanism. Thus, for example, as governments develop national action plans on preventing violent extremism, funding for local communities is highlighted as a critical component. Similarly, awareness has been raised among local businesses about the potential for their investments to help stabilise fragile environments.

GCERF's particular focus is supporting local community initiatives<sup>1</sup> to build resilience against violent extremist agendas. While the linkages between violent extremism and displacement have not yet been fully explored, much displacement around the world today is within and from societies beset by violent extremism. In some cases GCERF is focusing its support directly on displaced communities, for example Rohingya communities in Bangladesh. But even if the communities in question may not be directly affected by displacement, lessons learned in supporting resilience among communities vulnerable to violent extremism certainly apply to efforts to support those vulnerable to the risk of displacement.

The initiatives supported by GCERF in its first round of grant making (mid-2016) fall

into three main categories. One is to raise awareness of violent extremism, for example through working with local media. Another is to mobilise against violent extremism, for example by establishing community response teams. A final set of interventions is designed to provide alternatives to violent extremism, for example through income generation. Significant challenges still need to be overcome – such as monitoring and evaluation, security, and controlling management costs to ensure that the maximum funding possible reaches local

communities – but eventually the lessons learned from this initiative should be of wider value, including to those supporting local communities vulnerable to displacement.

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1. Currently in Bangladesh, Kenya, Kosovo, Mali, Myanmar and Nigeria.

### The Grand Bargain – more funding for local agencies?

As anticipated, 'localisation' came out a winner in discussions at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, with a target agreed in the 'Grand Bargain' to direct 25% of humanitarian funding "as directly as possible" to local and national agencies.

Twenty-seven international NGOs also signed the new Charter4Change (<https://charter4change.org>), committing themselves to passing 20% of their funding to national NGOs by 2018 (and publishing the actual percentage transparently) as well as addressing the negative impact of recruiting local staff into international NGOs, thus draining local organisations of their capacity.

The summit also saw the launch of NEAR ([www.near.ngo](http://www.near.ngo)), a network aiming to "reshape the top-down humanitarian and development system to one that is locally driven and owned, and is built around equitable, dignified and accountable partnerships".

Adapted from 'The World Humanitarian Summit: winners and losers', IRIN, 26th May 2016  
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[www.fmreview.org/community-protection](http://www.fmreview.org/community-protection)

## Preparing for self-preservation

Casey Barrs

**All too often, violence proves to be beyond influence, forcing international aid agencies to pull back and leave local civilians to face the danger alone. External actors need a far deeper understanding of local communities' experience of and strategies for self-protection, and a far greater commitment to support those communities.**

In each new crisis, it is often the basic elements of community which provide the first, last and perhaps only tactical responses for survival. The international humanitarian community, however, is often not predisposed to recognise these elements, relying rather on institutions as partners – but institutional partners in the governmental and non-governmental sectors may lack legitimacy and durability, and they may lack relevance. We tend to conflate NGO partners with civil society yet they are only a small part of civil society; when atrocities descend, people go to protect and be protected by those closest to them; they do not walk into an NGO office. Civil society does indeed hold the answer to local self-protection but in forms that are far less institutionally based.

For example, there are leaders with a legitimacy that commands the confidence, cohesion and rapid compliance that are so essential amid fluid violence. Often such leaders are not formally elected and their structures are neither statutorily constituted nor housed in brick and mortar buildings. They are individuals who by social standing, social contract or social unit are motivated to aid their own people. They might be service providers who by profession support the population. They might be community elders who by tradition look out for the people. They might be heads of clan or family who protect their own. In this article, the word 'community' will be shorthand for this wider social architecture of protection.

The Cuny Center has inventoried hundreds of ways by which locals survive violence. The inventory documents self-protection relating to safety as well as to life-critical sustenance and services. Amid conflict, malnutrition and disease are bigger threats than machetes or bullets; far more

people die during violence from the collapse of sustenance and services than from direct violence – and civilians often risk their safety to obtain these basics. Some local strategies have saved the lives of millions: deals with belligerents, homegrown early warning systems, subsistence farming and foraging, sharing and remittance networks, shadow and coping economies, discreet service delivery, and flight.

If civilians do decide that flight is the best option, the better they prepare the more likely it is that they will arrive at destinations with their social units and economic assets more intact. This 'intactness' helps postpone the day when they have to succumb to dangerous coping practices or fall foul of the predatory behaviour of others. It forestalls the exhaustion of resources at these destinations – which is often what compels more dangerous secondary and tertiary flight. Having this social and financial capital might even help them better navigate the challenges and costs of returning home and rebuilding their lives at an earlier stage.

### Limits and hard realities

"By their very origin, all coping mechanisms are sub-optimal. [...] Yet they represent the best informed response to crisis, because they are developed by those whose lives and livelihoods are most vulnerable."<sup>1</sup> However, the calculations and choices that people at risk make to protect themselves and their communities do not necessarily take account of all alternatives, consequences and needs.

Firstly, people's strong drive to protect their own might exclude minorities. Secondly, societal beliefs also affect the protection calculation, at times in ways that may make outsiders feel uncomfortable, especially in regard to gender, as the gatekeepers

of protective action are generally male. And, thirdly, communities often arm themselves or align themselves with armed groups. This might afford them protection but it also risks deepening the cycle of violent abuses. Supporting non-violent capacities for survival can mitigate the push-and-pull forces that compel violent response; it can offer choices where there appeared to be none other than the gun.

Local capacity for self-protection is far from perfect. But as Nils Carstensen of the Local to Global Protection initiative notes, we need to strike the right balance between principles and pragmatism; working with ‘unconventional’ structures and strategies will require us to develop “new, agile, and flexible support modalities.”<sup>2</sup> We already have the skill sets for most of this work; the greater challenges come from our mindsets. Too much of what we call ‘innovation’ is actually tinkering around the edges of the box. MSF’s Bernard Kouchner once argued that “professionalization and bureaucratization would harm the organization’s revolutionary, nimble, and heretical orientation” and “overwhelm its improvisational tactics.”<sup>3</sup> Today we need more of Bernard Kouchner’s heresy and Fred Cuny’s exasperating brilliant unorthodoxy. Many have long urged support of local capacity for self-protection but no such approach has yet been systematised throughout the aid industry.

### Supporting self-protection

Of the varied organisations concerned with matters of peace and conflict, it will very often be the aid service provider that is best positioned to support local capacity for self-protection as it generally has the best access, contacts and trust on the ground, as well as the best awareness of context and cultural nuance. Aid providers have the necessary skill sets (from providing life-critical sustenance and services), and are committed to community mobilisation. They are also the most likely to have defensible reasons for being in conflict areas, and have comparatively more autonomy of action.

When local and international aid providers work together, they can

significantly ramp up self-protection preparedness in remote and unstable areas. As violence approaches, an aid provider can do more to support the capacity of its counterparts – its local staff and partners – to serve alone in the face of danger, and, with those counterparts in the lead, do more to support the capacity of communities to survive alone in the face of danger.

Of all possible protections, the ones that bolster local capacity will be the last ones standing because they strengthen the people who are left standing alone as violence shuts the world out. Even here, we must take care that any initiative we call ‘community-based self-protection’ is indeed community-born and not merely a project that we conceive and a community then runs. We must also ensure that such protection is **not** premised primarily on the ability to influence violence or on the presence of outside parties.

At times those of us working in the international aid community express the belief that “presence is protection”. The risk is that our local counterparts and communities believe it too – and consequently feel a false sense of solidarity and security that may delay their own natural instincts to brace for survival. This in turn violates another protection dictum: “Do no harm” to those we serve. The maxim has twin responsibilities. One is not to put them in harm’s way – for example, by giving false hope. The other is not to leave them in harm’s way – for example, by withdrawing without having supported their capacity to survive.

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For background and guidance on supporting local preparedness, please visit [www.civiliansinharmsway.org](http://www.civiliansinharmsway.org).

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# Rethinking gender in the international refugee regime

Megan Denise Smith

**Currently the instruments of refugee status determination make asylum claims depend on images of women that are characterised by victimisation and motherhood.**

The international refugee regime, defined by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, inadequately addresses gender-related persecution and, in particular, the asylum claims of refugee women. The Convention is based on a liberal rights narrative relying on 'gender neutrality' and universal applicability – but with gender not mentioned in the Convention, it cannot take account of the gender-related persecution that affects women primarily.

While the figure of the refugee woman has emerged as the iconic portrait of modern-day forced migration in the popular imagination, asylum-seeking women, and gender as a concept more broadly, have historically been at the margins of the refugee regime. It was, for example, not until the 1990s that gender-specific and gender-related persecution began shaping Refugee Status Determination (RSD).

Feminist activists' and scholars' attempts to integrate women's experiences into this legal framework culminated in the liberal discourse of 'women's rights are human rights' and its codification into the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).<sup>1</sup> This framework, however, obstructs protection for those fleeing gender-related persecution by its representation of asylum-seeking women as victims, poor 'Third World' women and mothers, and particularly through its amalgamation of women and children into a single category. These representations of asylum-seeking women are problematic.

Female asylum seekers flee persecution for many of the same motives as their male counterparts. But many more suffer further persecution and loss of additional political and socio-economic rights. Various expressions of gender-specific harm such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, so-called honour crimes and forced sterilisation

are common in women's asylum claims. The gendered nature of such forms of harm is significant for the ways in which difficulties continue to arise in bringing these gender-related claims within the scope of refugee law.

Specifically, refugee women are categorised as a Particular Social Group in the terms of the 1951 Convention. A Particular Social Group is considered to be a group of persons who share a common characteristic as well as their risk of being persecuted, or who are perceived to share a common, innate or unchangeable attribute relating to their identity. Women's dominant gender roles then become their definition as members of a Particular Social Group and that definition becomes the default ground for women's claims for asylum.

## The 'essential' woman

Creating a space for women in the legal framework has been one way in which feminists have attempted to counter women's invisibility in the Convention. However, fitting women into the Convention through the 2002 Guidelines on Gender-Related Persecution<sup>2</sup> has only been achieved by painting a monolithic picture of women as passive, dependent, vulnerable victims and thus peripheral to international politics and without agency.

Measures to improve RSD and expand the Convention definition for gender-related persecution have tended to portray 'essential' refugee women's identities that are constructed by UNHCR, the media and governments but not by refugee women themselves. Key to this victimhood narrative are certain images and categories, such as the lumping together of 'women and children' in one of the most often quoted statistics in refugee policy and literature, that women and children constitute 80% of the world's refugees. Since women and children

generally make up 80% of a population, regardless of whether they are refugees or not, this representation problematically chooses to represent refugee women as maternal figures consigned to a particular narrow gendered role. The conflation of women with children identifies men as the norm against which all others may be grouped into a single leftover and dependent category, rather than as independent actors.

Secondly, such a characterisation perpetuates a paternalistic narrative of the state, as saviour to protect 'women and children'. A study on RSD in the UK shows a direct correlation between the granting of refugee status and the adherence of the asylum seeker to the narrative of victimhood.<sup>3</sup> To gain state protection, a woman must demonstrate that she behaves in the proper way for a woman, that is, as a de-politicised, voiceless victim of an oppressive culture. This silencing of her agency is more likely to achieve a successful refugee claim.

A more powerful approach would incorporate multiple forms of identity and relations – those related not exclusively to gender. In order to adequately ensure the protection of refugee women, UNHCR – the UN Refugee Agency, mandated by the Refugee Convention to be responsible for refugee protection – should ensure that gender-related persecution is appropriately considered and understood. The process of reform implied by this will require more fundamental changes than nuancing the reading of the Convention through the application of the Guidelines. In order to have a serious impact on the lives of displaced women and men, there needs to be a sustained focus on opening up alternative political and legal spaces. The nature of the institutions that manage the response to refugees is not going to change merely due to a greater, mainstreamed 'gender focus' in which women are conceived as a group with special needs.

The RSD Guidelines have only been adopted in a minority of jurisdictions worldwide and many of the challenges that asylum-seeking women face are often overlooked. UNHCR is the key actor in its ability to influence states in this regard,

particularly in the Global North. Though UNHCR cannot bind states *per se*, it is a highly persuasive authority and states have an obligation to cooperate with the agency. It thus remains the key body for guidance in this area on good gender practice. It can play a leading role by providing an adequate framework to influence a change in the way gender is in practice characterised in RSD processes.

### Conclusion

The law and process of RSD have tended to be marginalising and, above all, disempowering for women. A more critical view of refugee women would represent them as agents in their own right beyond categories of 'women and children' or victims to be saved. Inclusion of women's voices is necessary in order to shift dominant representations of refugee women and their protection overall.

By their very nature UNHCR and the Guidelines can only inform and not constrain a state's legal policy towards female refugees. In any case the Guidelines that are used to assist in interpreting gender-related persecution claims are underpinned by assumptions about the category or stereotype expected of an idealised refugee woman, while the law has simply incorporated a concept of gender that is detrimental to female asylum applicants. What is required is a way to undermine the essentialist concepts of gender on which current decision making, case law and legal doctrines are predicated. The Refugee Convention is a living instrument that may need to change and evolve in order to meet the challenges and requirements of refugees.

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The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of INTERSOS.

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## Colombia: the peace process and solutions for forced migrants

Jeisson Oswaldo Martínez Leguizamó

**If, as seems likely, Colombia reaches a peace agreement to end its long internal conflict, the settlement may create the political and legal conditions to solve the phenomenon of forced migration of its citizens.**

The search for durable solutions to conflicts is perhaps one of the greatest and most inspiring challenges for modern societies. Colombia seems now to be on the verge of ending a period of violence that has – in addition to the dead and missing – made six million people displaced internally and 400,000 refugees.

The peace talks in Havana, Cuba, between the Colombian government and the main rebel group, the FARC-EP, have started yielding agreements that include concrete measures regarding forced migrants. A core element is the Integrated Truth, Justice, Reparations and Non-Repetition System.

**Truth:** A Truth Commission will be set up with three key objectives: to “help to clarify what happened, offering an explanation of the complexity of the conflict to promote a shared understanding in society”; to “promote recognition of victims as people who saw their rights violated and as political subjects of importance to the transformation of the country”; and to “promote coexistence in the country, creating a transformative environment that allows the peaceful resolution of differences and the building of a culture of respect and democratic tolerance.”

The agreement also provides for the Truth Commission to look at how the war has affected different groups, including women, children, people with disabilities, indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations, LGBTBI people, and trade-unionists and merchants. It also mandates the Commission to throw light on issues around displacement and dispossession of land, both major causes of the conflict.

**Justice:** There are five objectives under this heading, relating to: the right of victims to justice, offering truth to Colombian society, protection of the rights of victims,

achieving a stable and lasting peace, and protecting the legal rights of those who participated directly or indirectly in the armed conflict. At the core should be the rights of victims and the severity of the violations suffered by them. The document notes that the consequences of these violations are more serious when it comes to persons belonging to vulnerable groups, such as displaced persons and refugees.

Although the agreement provides for the state to grant amnesty for political offences, it is clear that those responsible for forced displacement, crimes against humanity and serious war crimes are not eligible for amnesty or pardon.

**Reparations:** The aim of these measures is that all those who have caused damage during the confrontation should contribute to addressing the consequences. Thus both the rebel groups and the government are to undertake individual and collective actions of reparation, and both material and symbolic measures to repair the damage to the social fabric. These efforts are to be directed especially towards political movements, women’s organisations and professional groups affected by the conflict.

In respect of compensation for displacement, the agreement states that “the government will launch programmes for the return and resettlement of displaced people” and “plans for accompanied and assisted voluntary return for victims abroad (...) in safety and dignity”. The return and resettlement plans will primarily target areas where development programmes are to be implemented and in coordination with the process of land restitution. In addition, returns and resettlement should be carried out in tandem with plans

for rural housing and water, income generation, promotion of the rural economy and decontamination programmes to clear up unexploded ordnance.

The government will involve both individuals and communities in the design of security measures, and will reinforce communal defence programmes in order to promote human rights and to complement the processes of land restitution, return and resettlement.

Specifically regarding forced migrants outside the country, the agreement talks of “recognition and reparation of victims abroad to be strengthened, including refugees and exiles ... through plans for accompanied and assisted return”. To facilitate their return to the country, the programme will “create the conditions for rebuilding their lives, including access to the basic rights to employment, health, housing and education at all levels”. Also it stresses that “priority will be given to return to the places which they were driven out of, respecting the will of the victim”.

### From agreement to implementation

The Havana Agreements (which require ratification by the Colombian people during 2016) are configured as an ambitious political tool, not only to end the armed confrontation but to reverse the pattern of unequal development and to achieve durable solutions to forced migration of Colombians, both internally displaced and political exiles. However, successful implementation will require Colombian society as a whole to be aware of and to enforce the different elements of the Agreements. For this to happen, the government will need to create an educational strategy to bring all Colombians (including exiles, refugees and migrants) into the process.

Internally displaced and exiled people have been involved in the search for peace at various stages. Before the institution of the peace process itself they contributed through various activities inside and outside the country, setting out the position against war and in favour of a concerted resolution of the conflict. After the start of the dialogues, exiles were instrumental

in the international dissemination of progress, through forums, meetings, conferences and rallies. They ensured that the outcomes of these events were brought to the negotiating table – and some are now a part of the agreements that have been signed. They have also brought significant international support to the process, from civil society and from significant political and cultural figures. At critical moments, when it seemed that the parties were about to abandon the talks, exiles and refugees mobilised to demand that the dialogue continue and insisted on the importance of a bilateral ceasefire to ensure its continuity.

Today, when most of the obstacles to agreement have been overcome, the process seems to have reached a point of no return. In these circumstances there are several tasks outstanding where displaced people can play a part. The most urgent is to promote active and informed participation in the validation process which will take place through what is being called a Plebiscite for Peace. Supporters of the peace have already begun campaigns across the country and abroad in favour of a ‘Yes’ vote. The plebiscite will take place some 30 to 45 days after the final signing of the agreement.

The government for its part must ensure the safety of those who are trying to disseminate the content of the dialogues and agreements. The government will be making a grave error if it does not commit itself to the process of dissemination but leaves it at the mercy of those powerful groups which currently have a monopoly on information. Despite the commitments adopted by the executive to disband the paramilitaries, they continue to operate in several areas of the country. For this reason, an ‘Agreement on security guarantees’ has been needed, stipulating that for peace building it is essential to combat the criminal organisations – including those that have succeeded the paramilitaries – that are responsible for murders and massacres or that threaten defenders of human rights, social movements or politicians.

Once the agreements have been ratified, their implementation will require active

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national participation and international observation. The scale of the reforms demands that the final agreement must not be a purely declaratory document but must have an irreversible legal and normative status, so that all of it acquires a binding character to be accepted and fulfilled by all citizens. Only in this way can it create the political

and legal conditions to end the conflict and to find effective and lasting solutions to the forced migration of Colombians.

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## Statelessness and the refugee crisis in Europe

Katalin Berényi

**The European Union needs to issue a Directive on common standards for statelessness determination procedures with a view to mitigating the particular impacts of statelessness in the context of the continuing refugee crisis in Europe.**

In the upheaval of today's refugee crisis, European immigration officers can face the particular yet confusing case of stateless people<sup>1</sup> seeking asylum in Europe, with the result that stateless people regularly face long periods of immigration detention waiting to be identified in need of international protection as stateless persons.

Having a nationality constitutes a legal bond with a state<sup>2</sup> and provides numerous rights as well as obligations. Not having a nationality leaves the concerned individual legally non-existent and largely unprotected by national legislation. Their access to education and health care is extremely limited, they cannot legally get married, they cannot vote and they may also be unable to return to their country of origin as citizens. Statelessness may result from a variety of causes<sup>3</sup> but in the case of Syrian refugees seeking protection in neighbouring countries and in Europe, gender-discriminatory nationality laws are greatly to blame.

In Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, nationality is passed on exclusively by the father. As a result, in the absence of the father, Syrian mothers cannot register the birth of their child who may therefore not acquire a nationality. Due to continuing conflict and displacement, the father may be untraceable or his whereabouts unknown. In addition, a child can also be rendered stateless if the father is stateless, if there is no proof that the father is a national of the country concerned, if the child

is born out of wedlock, or if the marriage has not been registered (which is also not uncommon in current circumstances). Syrian Kurds are particularly liable to have already been left without a nationality. Finally, birth registration practices in the countries hosting most Syrian refugees (Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon) show serious shortcomings, which put newborn babies at risk of being stateless. These factors leave a generation of Syrian children at high risk of statelessness and thus of being unable to claim their rights.

### What is the importance for the EU?

In practical terms the European Union (EU) may not be able to return those without an identified nationality when the conflict ends. But meanwhile in the case of stateless asylum seekers who meet the criteria set out in Article 1 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees – including those who did not have a nationality prior to their departure – the 1951 Convention is to be applied instead of the statelessness conventions of 1954 and 1961. Unlike the latter conventions, the 1951 Refugee Convention has been signed and ratified by **all** EU Member States. However, the 1954 Convention has also been signed by most EU Member States, who are therefore obliged to provide a certain level of protection to stateless persons falling within their jurisdictions.

The EU's mandate in protecting stateless persons is often contested. Whereas the



UNHCR/Achilles Zanolis

A young woman from Syria carries her child in her arms next to a makeshift camp located near the train station of Idomeni on the Greek-FYROM border, March 2016.

**prevention and reduction of statelessness** are to be primarily addressed through nationality law, which is under the competence of the Member States, the **protection of stateless persons** is governed through migration law, where arguably, according to the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has competence;<sup>4</sup> therefore, the EU has to address several of the statelessness-related legal and protection challenges within the asylum context.

In order for the EU to successfully manage the cases of thousands of stateless refugees, beyond the legal reference in the Lisbon Treaty it should put in place an EU Directive providing for common standards for the elaboration of statelessness determination procedures in each EU Member State.<sup>5</sup> The elaboration across the EU of dedicated procedures would help Member States to provide very similar protection regimes, thereby preventing well functioning procedures in some Member States from creating a pull factor. Yet so far only Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom have put in place such procedures and even these demonstrate severe shortcomings.

The elaboration of common standards for an EU-wide statelessness determination

procedure would greatly improve access by affected individuals to a protection status in a situation of mass influx, prevent 'protection-shopping' and challenge the existing procedures in a constructive way. Even though Member States' considerations and interests may differ in relation to stateless persons, which might delay the elaboration of such common standards, the mainstreaming of their rights, their status determination and the related protection requirements need to be put higher on the political agenda of the EU.

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1. The international legal definition of a stateless person in the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons is "a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law".
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## Refugee women as entrepreneurs in Australia

John van Kooy

**The 'Stepping Stones to Small Business' programme in Australia is appreciated by participants but has shown that 'entrepreneurship' is a problematic concept in the context of women from refugee backgrounds.**

Starting a small business in Australia is often discussed alongside the 'risk-taking' attributes of entrepreneurs. This characterisation casts entrepreneurship as positive and adventurous, with the promise of rewards. However, some groups in Australia have no choice but to pursue self-employment due to their constrained opportunities in the labour market. Refugee women, in particular, face barriers to being part of the workforce that relate to language, culture, gender and family, and employer attitudes and practices. For many of these women, entrepreneurship has significant risks and is motivated not by opportunity and ambition but by necessity.

Stepping Stones to Small Business is a programme which provides business training, networking opportunities and mentoring for refugee women in Melbourne. An evaluation of the programme in 2015 suggests that participants, while positive about the knowledge they had gained and the networks they had developed, largely had not converted these newly acquired resources into small business income. Many refugee women demonstrated the traits often associated with entrepreneurship – a desire for independence and autonomy, for example – but still faced barriers to small business development, such as a lack of personal savings and the need to delay for family reasons. Our findings reflect important distinctions between notions of entrepreneurial risk and reward, the realities of small business development, and overlapping opportunity constraints associated with gender, ethnicity and forced migration status.

### Push and pull factors

Economic necessity and difficulties in securing waged employment can often push people who have been granted refugee protection into self-employment. Refugees

have lower rates of workforce participation, higher rates of unemployment and lower average earnings than other migrants in Australia. They are also more vulnerable to long-term unemployment, are less likely to secure 'good' jobs (according to definitions advanced by the International Labour Organization), and tend to be clustered in low-status, low-skilled occupations. As in many other host countries, refugees in Australia face employment barriers relating to language, unrecognised or undervalued qualifications and experience, 'cultural distance' within workplaces, and employer discrimination.

There are also pull factors that attract refugees to entrepreneurship, such as the allure of financial security and independence, or previous small business experience in their home country. Self-employment may offer the possibility of enhanced professional standing and higher earnings than waged employment, given that migrants work predominantly in lower paid, precarious jobs.

Refugees in Australia have demonstrated many of the qualities stereotypically associated with entrepreneurship. A 2011 study of first- and second-generation refugees in Australia found that many of them have a propensity to take risks and take advantage of opportunities when they arise.<sup>1</sup> Recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics also indicate that refugees derive a higher proportion of income from self-employment than other migrants, with this income increasing sharply after five years of residence.

However, entrepreneurial migrant women have particular constraints on small business development, such as difficulties acquiring start-up capital, a lack of financial skills, limited access to affordable childcare, and fewer market-relevant support systems and networks than men. Expectations of

family responsibilities, underpinned by religious restrictions and cultural norms, may add to these limitations. Even if women overcome the attitudinal barriers in their family and community towards women running businesses, they may still be considered responsible for childcare and home management, which can lead to conflict between work and family demands. Nevertheless, the incentive for many migrant women to start small businesses may also spring from a desire for freedom from insecurity and to overcome traditional barriers related to language difficulties, and financial and institutional constraints, such as ethnic and community solidarity.

### Stepping Stones to Small Business

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) is a non-governmental research, service delivery and advocacy organisation that works to alleviate and prevent poverty. Consultations with refugee communities identified interest in a service to help women from refugee backgrounds to learn about small business in Australia. In response to this interest, BSL developed Stepping Stones to Small Business, with the support of philanthropic and government funding. Since 2011, 128 migrant women of different ages and from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds have participated in workshops and seminars.

Stepping Stones provides training and advice, and teaches the prospective business owner the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to improve microenterprise performance. Training is delivered flexibly, in ways that meet migrant women's language requirements and their family and caring responsibilities. Trainers and coordinators aim to create a learning environment which is supportive and gender-aware, suitable for those for whom English is an additional language, and responsive to the characteristics of participants. Programme coordinators, trainers and mentors attempt to identify and build on participants' existing strengths and skills to help them refine their business ideas.

Applicants to the programme are asked to articulate their small business ideas and their motivations for entering into self-

employment. Women who have an idea are accepted into the programme, which then provides free, intensive small business training over eight days. Training covers key concepts such as marketing, customers, legal obligations, seed capital and managing operations. Participants self-assess their progress against a 12-step 'business milestone' framework which includes topics such as how to project estimated annual budgets and perform basic accounting practices.

Additional workshops provide information about the available forms of support from local councils, community banking options, government services, and access to the advice of independent specialists in marketing and communications. At the completion of the training, each graduate is linked with a business mentor drawn from a pool of volunteers in the local business community.

A 2015 evaluation found that participants overwhelmingly agreed on the value of the intensive training sessions for the establishment of their business. Acquiring new knowledge and information has led to participants reporting feelings of greater confidence and empowerment.

*"Before the programme I experienced job loss and suffered self-doubt and negativity. The programme took my mind off the problems in my personal life and built my self-esteem... [Women] have barriers, struggles and taboos. They needed to be supported and their confidence has to be built."* (59-year-old woman from India)

96% of participants surveyed reported that their social networks were 'better' or 'much better' since participating in Stepping Stones. 76% reported that their business networks were also 'better' or 'much better' since participating.

Participants also recounted how they have transferred some of the knowledge and information to other women in their communities, whether in Australia or in their home countries. For example:

*"Now I will continue to grow my business... After that I will save more money to help women in my country. In Iraq, disabled women have no power, no*

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*support from the government and often no food... I can help the women in Iraq."* (60-year-old woman from Iraq)

This highlights the complex motives behind business development, with some women wanting to use their increased financial capacity to assist not only their families but also others – especially women – in their home countries.

### Small business outcomes still elusive

While participants appreciated the value of the training, most had not yet started their businesses upon 'graduation'. At the conclusion of the 2015 programme, 71% of surveyed participants were still relying on their previous primary source of income. Fewer than 20% had any business income or were employing staff. Data from the programme in 2011-14 suggest that 57% neither started a business nor continued with an existing business after graduating. Among those who had started a business, the average annual turnover was just AU\$14,160. In comparison, the full-time minimum wage in Australia is slightly over AU\$34,000.

The main reasons that small businesses had not been started were a lack of start-up capital, the need for work experience, and family reasons. Survey results from the 2015 cohort show that 72% of respondents preferred the use of accumulated personal savings for start-up capital rather than credit or loans, indicating the need for the women to already have jobs and steady income.

How do we reconcile the overwhelmingly positive feedback women gave about the programme with their poor small business outcomes? One explanation may

lie in the risky business environment: government figures indicate that less than one third of all nascent small businesses in Australia reach an operational state within the first three years. We could expect a lower success rate for fledgling micro-enterprises operated by migrant women, given the additional barriers they face.

Another explanation is that conventional measures of business success – such as annual turnover and sales, growth, profitability, registration of the company and innovation – may need to be redefined to reflect the needs and aspirations of women from refugee backgrounds. Those who have difficulties accessing mainstream employment may benefit from a modest micro-enterprise turnover that supplements another source of household income. Others who choose to look for paid work and save money might also be considered 'unsuccessful' entrepreneurs – but stable employment avoids the financial risks of micro-enterprise.

Policies and programmes need to reconsider entrepreneurship and what entrepreneurial behaviour entails for women in light of the influences of gender, ethnicity and migration status. It is necessary to consider wider forms of enabling support that would involve attending to employment constraints, while empowering women to make choices that enhance their economic security.

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## Power, politics and privilege: public health at the Thai-Burma border

Nikhil A Patel, Amos B Lichman, Mohit M Nair and Parveen K Parmar

**Participants in a field-research methods course on refugee health at the Thai-Burma border learned that beyond the biological vectors and disease processes that contribute to human suffering, power, politics and privilege play central roles in negatively affecting refugee health.**

This article comes out of an experiential learning field trip undertaken as part of a public health course on refugee health through the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. Six public health students from the Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health and 13 Karen students in their second year of a two-year public health curriculum spent three weeks developing a research project that might assist one of the many non-governmental and camp-based organisations that provide services in a camp on the Thai-Burma border. For the Harvard students, whose reflections form this article, this was a short-lived experience; for the Karen students, most of whom have grown up in one of these refugee camps along the border, it is a daily reality.

Before arriving in camp, we imagined inaccessible dirt roads running through precarious, mountainous terrain but the camp is actually located off a paved highway. A cursory glance at the houses may lead one to hastily conclude that people have just arrived in camp but, in reality, these 120,000 refugees from Burma have been in Thailand for decades. In front of the Thai military checkpoint is a sign at the entrance of the camp that reads ‘temporary shelter’ – although the camp has been there for 17 years.

One of our Karen colleagues is 27 years old and has lived in camp for years. He came here from his village in Burma in search of an education. The fighting has caused many from his region to flee across the border to Thailand, and left very few educational opportunities in eastern Burma. His family remained behind in Karen State, and he has not seen them since coming to camp. He got married but, soon after, his wife also fled Burma and was resettled to another country where she has lived and worked since. She sends small remittances to him, and they

speak on the phone frequently, but he does not believe that he will ever be able to join her.

The situation for refugees is a dire one. In the current geopolitical climate none of the three ‘durable solutions’ of voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement is a viable option. The Thai government, in agreement with Burmese officials, has stated their explicit wish to shut down the camps along the border. Rumours of camp closures circulate but camp residents overwhelmingly state they do not want to go back.

During our time in camp, we came across an article written a few weeks prior to our arrival.<sup>1</sup> The author’s observations led him to believe that the time was right to close the camps, stating that “sustenance is provided and work prohibited. This has discouraged independence, enterprise, and entrepreneurship.” Yet he cites data that half of camp residents suffer from a mental health problem, a consequence of “loss of self-sufficiency and growth of short-term thinking.”

For us as budding public health professionals but also simply as observers, these claims do not hold merit and in fact may harm refugees. The students we worked with are independent thinkers, enterprising and entrepreneurial, despite the confines of camp. They are also resilient. Mental health concerns are significant and under-addressed in camp but common mental disorders like depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder are rather a result of the terrible history of trauma so many of these refugees have endured.

### Mental health

One of our group projects was designed and developed to assess community attitudes in

camp towards mental health care. Having experienced stressors of violence and displacement, refugees are particularly at elevated risk for chronic mental health disorders. Factors that are associated with poorer mental health include unstable living arrangements, lack of economic opportunities, the fear of forced return and ongoing conflict in the regions they originally fled.<sup>2</sup>

In a study to assess mental illness among Karenni refugees, 11% of respondents indicated that they had a previously diagnosed mental illness.<sup>3</sup> Culture-specific, physical symptoms were quite prevalent. These included “numbness”, “thinking too much” and “feeling hot under the skin”. As one refugee stated succinctly, “... I am not allowed to go outside the camp. There is no job, no work. So much stress and depression. I feel that I am going to go crazy here.”<sup>4</sup>

There is a clear need for a better understanding of mental health in this setting. Unfortunately, our Karen students were instructed at short notice that they needed to return to their home camp to be accounted for in a verification exercise, effectively putting a stop to the group’s proposed mental health study. The irony is stark, as it is this volatility and lack of control in day-to-day life that contribute to psychological distress. There are enormous mental health implications of living a life that does not adequately allow one to exercise basic freedoms of movement, livelihood and political agency. These are human rights issues, and these human rights are directly linked to individual health and public health.

The lens through which we view a situation determines how we understand its causes and our obligations. We were fortunate to spend three weeks accompanying our colleagues in camp. In that time we became acutely aware of how unbalanced power dynamics, a lack of political autonomy and an inherent lack of privilege lead to disparities in health and human rights.

Travelling 12,000 miles provided a valuable perspective on how the issues of power, politics and privilege are pervasive in refugee camps but also gave us insight into our own inherent privilege. We are at

liberty to move freely, express ourselves freely and take advantage of seemingly endless opportunities. What then is our role as transient observers in this context? We believe that when we bear witness to injustice, we have a responsibility to advocate for and amplify the voices and concerns of those who lack the privilege to have their voices heard. Dr Martin Luther King Jr’s words written in a *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* in 1963 still ring true today: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”

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## Humanitarian visas: building on Brazil's experience

Liliana Lyra Jubilut, Camila Sombra Muiños de Andrade and André de Lima Madureira

**Brazil's humanitarian visas are an important tool in complementary protection, offering legal pathways for forced migrants to reach a safer country. However, they have shortcomings that need to be addressed in order for the practice to serve as a model for an enhanced instrument of protection for humanitarian migrants elsewhere.**

Brazil's granting of humanitarian visas began in 2012 in favour of Haitians after the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, and was extended in 2013 to benefit people affected by the conflict in Syria. The general national legislation on migration dates back to the period of dictatorship (from 1964 to the mid-80s) and, with its logic of national security, offers very limited possibilities of visas and of regular status for migrants. This changed a little in the late 1990s when a specific law on refugees was established, in what can be seen as a step towards accepting humanitarian grounds for staying in the country. Ever since, there have been debates focusing on changing the migration regime so as to allow for other humanitarian forms of entry and residency in the country but the only real achievement has been the introduction of ad hoc humanitarian visas for forced migrants, and even for this Brazil has been praised.

### Haitians

In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake Haitians wanting to migrate to Brazil faced two challenges: first, a regular tourist visa was required which many Haitians did not possess and, second, the routes to Brazil were risky, for instance because of the activities of human smugglers. In 2012, the Brazilian government decided to create an easier legal pathway for Haitians coming to Brazil and made it possible for humanitarian visas to be obtained at the Brazilian Embassy in Port-au-Prince, citing "the deterioration of the Haitian population's living conditions due to the earthquake in that country on January 12, 2010".

An initial quota of 1,200 visas a year and the limitation of visas only being issued in Port-au-Prince were later revoked.

Any number of these visas could then be obtained and at any Brazilian consulate, even outside Haiti. It is important to note that the requirements for the humanitarian visas are less than for the regular tourist visa, requiring only a valid passport, proof of residency in Haiti and proof of good standing.

The visas were thus a way to facilitate the arrival of Haitians in Brazil, an innovative measure for making it easier to reach a safer country. But once in the country they did not have guaranteed migration status. In light



A 12-year-old Syrian refugee girl plays with her new Brazilian friends at school in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

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of this, most Haitians sought refugee status, at which point they were granted temporary documentation and work permits. However, the Brazilian government's understanding was that environmental crises were not a valid reason for recognition of refugee status. The solution adopted was to refer the Haitians' refugee applications to the National Immigration Council (CNIG), which has the competence to rule on those cases considered 'special or not regulated'. CNIG granted permanent residency for humanitarian reasons to Haitians, with those Haitians who had a humanitarian visa having their migration status resolved faster. It is estimated that over 85,000 Haitians have entered Brazil since the earthquake.

### Syrians

It is the Brazilian government's position that it is important for refugees to have access

to procedures for applying for asylum, that it recognises the disproportionate burden that countries neighbouring conflicts may endure, and that the international community needs to take action as these are matters of international law.<sup>1</sup>

In light of this, in 2013 the National Committee on Refugees (CONARE) passed a resolution allowing for visas to be granted to people affected by the Syrian conflict with fewer requirements than for a regular visa.<sup>2</sup> Initially valid for two years, it was renewed in 2015 for a further two years.<sup>3</sup> The resolution recognises that those who flee war and/or persecution are usually not able to fulfil the formal requirements for a Brazilian visa, such as presenting bank statements, invitation letters and a round-trip airplane ticket. In this case, Brazilian embassies are exceptionally authorised to grant visas even when the travel document of the applicant is due to expire in less than six months and to issue a *laissez-passer* for those who do not possess a valid passport. However, family members of Syrian nationals who are in Brazil have not been able to get humanitarian visas for themselves. At the Brazilian diplomatic representations they have been instructed to apply for family reunification instead but as quite a few of the Syrians in Brazil are still asylum seekers, and not refugees, this demand in practice has resulted in there being no way for family members to enter Brazil.<sup>4</sup>

The broad provisions of the resolution allow visas to be granted not only to Syrian nationals but also to people affected by the Syrian conflict so that minority groups such as the Palestinians and Kurds have also benefitted from the Brazilian humanitarian visa programme. Over 8,500 humanitarian visas have been granted in total<sup>5</sup> and 26% of all refugees in Brazil are now Syrian, at 2,298 forming the largest refugee group in the country.<sup>6</sup>

As in the case of Haitians, the humanitarian visas to people affected by the Syrian conflict serve as a way to facilitate travel to Brazil. Once they are in the country forms of regularisation of their migration status need to be sought.



## Good, but how good?

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has praised Brazil for the use of humanitarian visas in the context of the Syrian conflict and urged other countries to take similar steps in order to facilitate regular migration channels for those affected by that conflict.

However, despite the humanitarian visas being a positive development in Brazil's migration regime, there are shortcomings. The first of these is the fact that Brazil's humanitarian visas are established through normative resolutions of administrative organs of the Executive. This means that they can expire, be amended or be revoked depending on the political will of the government. In late 2015, as the time of the expiration of the resolution on humanitarian visas for people affected by the Syrian conflict approached, there was a real risk that it was not going to be renewed. In the end it was, but uncertainty and legal insecurity are marks of both sets of visas.

A second issue is that the humanitarian visas were established and are applied in ad hoc situations based on nationality or specific contexts, that is, for specific groups of people. Thus there seems to be a violation of the principles of equality and non-discrimination. The question needs to be posed as to why migrants from similar situations are not benefiting from this form of protection.

Since both these shortcomings can be seen as adding flexibility to the implementation of the humanitarian visas, the model could appear palatable to states that might replicate it and would be able to tailor humanitarian visas to the groups and situations that they desire. However, it also adds legal uncertainty and reinforces the political nature of a humanitarian measure.

Thirdly, there is the fact that once in the country other forms of protection need to be sought. In the case of Brazil all forms of humanitarian protection lead in practice to a request for recognition of refugee status, causing severe inflation of the pressure on the system for dealing with refugees. However, there seems to be no contingency plan in the event that the people who are granted humanitarian visas

are not recognised as refugees, or do not find another migration status in Brazil.

Lastly, asylum seekers from the Syrian conflict who have been granted humanitarian visas were, for most of the period of the existence of the visas, recognised as refugees as a group on a *prima facie* basis, without going through individual refugee status determination. This practice could lead to the potential recognition of persecutors as refugees. Recently, however, individual interviews were reintroduced, as a simple correction of this problem.

There seem to be similarly obvious solutions to all the criticisms of the Brazilian humanitarian visas. If humanitarian visas are to become a more widespread step forward in advancing protection for humanitarian migrants, the Brazilian practice can be seen as a good starting point.

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## Engaging with innovation among refugees and IDPs

Danielle Robinson

**Traditional humanitarian actors should develop mechanisms to support innovation by displaced people. Two cases of technological innovation developed by Syrian refugees illustrate the point.**

Innovation and technology are increasingly recognised as important elements in the humanitarian system. However, innovation and use of technology by displaced people themselves also happen alongside the traditional actors operating in the humanitarian system. Mobile technologies, in particular, are central to the lives of forced migrants: important resources for economic survival, maintenance and development of social networks, and the navigation of migration routes. It is unsurprising, therefore, that refugees and asylum seekers have started engaging creatively with mobile technologies to meet their own political, social and economic needs. What is surprising is the delayed response on the side of the humanitarian system in recognising and supporting these uses.

Refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and asylum seekers are using technology to build their own virtual communities, connecting with family and friends, documenting their personal migratory experiences and providing advice to other displaced people around the world.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, they are identifying challenges unique to their communities, and developing products and services to overcome these challenges, often without the support of traditional humanitarian actors.

### Dubarah

Dubarah is an online network which helps Syrian refugees and asylum seekers find job opportunities in countries to which they have relocated. Dubarah was founded in 2013 by Ahmad Edilbi, who was working at a mobile communications company when the Syrian conflict broke out. He was subsequently forced to flee Syria, moving to Dubai while the rest of his family relocated to Lebanon or Turkey. In the year following

his relocation, Ahmad both witnessed and experienced the loss of purpose, dignity and the negative perception of being a refugee. Inspired by his experience, and recognising the power of the Syrian diaspora, he launched Dubarah as a tool to help refugees play an active and productive role in society.

Dubarah creates a virtual community for Syrians fleeing from the conflict who are relocating to countries in which they have little experience or connection. It shares information about work vacancies, scholarships, education, investment opportunities, legal advice and housing assistance. The platform also provides a guide which explains living conditions in 32 different countries, as a means to increase refugees' cultural understanding of their current host countries and potential future host countries. Dubarah also strives to provide psychological support for the members of the online network by connecting refugees with Syrian expatriates and other members of the Syrian diaspora in order to gather and share resources which are tailored to the specific cultural, social, political and economic needs of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers.

In 2013-14, Dubarah provided "an average of 500 solutions and consultations ... per day with a total of 25,900 opportunities secured between jobs, investments, start-up advice, housing, legal consultations, and educational opportunities."<sup>2</sup> Having started as a web platform, Dubarah has now expanded to include a mobile application and a global directory of Syrian professionals.

### Gherbetna

Gherbetna is a smartphone app and website for refugees from the Middle East. Gherbetna – meaning 'exile' in Arabic – helps refugees and asylum seekers adapt to life

in countries of relocation. Users can access tips for settling in countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Algeria, Germany, Austria and Sweden, and can also ask questions on topics ranging from official registration to the best local food options.

Gherbetna was created in 2014 by Mojahed Akil, a young Syrian software developer who fled to Turkey in 2011 while his parents and siblings fled separately to Saudi Arabia and Dubai. This meant that he was trying to navigate the political and economic hurdles posed by the Turkish government alone. "I would have to go to government offices every day to find out information about what are my rights in [Turkey]".<sup>3</sup>

The application provides news about migration routes, such as which border crossings are open and which areas are safe, as well as providing an online forum for jobs and educational opportunities and a general discussion section where users can post questions. Due to Turkey's large population of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers, the app also features a significant number of Turkey-specific tutorials which provide a step-by-step guide for navigating government services in Turkey such as the process of applying for Turkish residence permits. There are similar tutorials for other countries too.

## Conclusions

Key to the appeal and success of both applications has been their ability to facilitate interaction among refugees sharing common experiences. Additionally, these platforms have been able to tap into the knowledge and resources of diaspora communities.

Absent from the design of both Dubarah and Gherbetna, however, has been the targeting of the specific needs of women and girls. At the time of writing, there has been little public discussion on either platform of women's needs: women's and girls' gendered experiences of migration, their specific protection needs and opportunities to address them, or the challenges that women and girls face in accessing public services such as education or health services. Additionally, by their very nature neither platform takes into account the

fact that women globally have less access to mobile phones or computers, and what access they do have is typically monitored by fathers, husbands or male siblings.

Innovative uses of technology have helped displaced people contribute to the resilience of their communities in displacement. Traditional humanitarian actors can and should better support this type of innovation. Increased investment in innovation incubators can better enable refugees and IDPs to use their talent, skill and creativity to the advantage of their communities.

Constraints on and opportunities for innovation will vary by context. In order for the humanitarian community to support displaced communities, they must first understand the social, political and economic barriers to innovation which displaced populations experience. These include xenophobia and discrimination; lack of access to finance, banking, housing and the right to work; and loss of assets. By understanding these constraints – and the potential catalysts – humanitarian actors could better target their resources towards innovation. In doing so, the humanitarian community can better help refugees and IDPs to help themselves.

In the design and implementation of every innovation, regardless of context, the demographics of the end-users should be considered. This includes differences in gender but also in age, religious affiliation, race and ethnicity, among other considerations. Crucially, the humanitarian community – which should understand the gendered and other impacts of migration, displacement and technology – must develop mechanisms which take steps to address those impacts while supporting technologies originating in the community.

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## South African midwives caring for immigrant and refugee women

Mamokgadi Gloria Victoria Koneshe

**Over recent years South Africa has accepted many refugees and asylum seekers, among whom are women requiring maternity services. Because the values and cultural practices of immigrant pregnant women sometimes differ from those of the midwife, their rights to good treatment may be violated.**

The midwife assumes a variety of roles – advocate, adviser, confidante, decision maker, custodian, teacher and coordinator of care. As cultural diversity intensifies, the need for specialised knowledge in performing these roles increases; specifically, midwives need to be skilled in bridging cultural barriers.

In South Africa every midwife is expected to care for a pregnant woman irrespective of her race, colour, ethnicity, religious group or nationality, and the therapeutic relationship between a midwife and patient can be adversely affected if the midwife is ethnocentric, xenophobic or poorly trained in the values of their profession or communication skills.

In public hospitals some clinical facilities do not have sufficient staff and equipment, and this has resulted in some midwives feeling that resources should be used for South Africans only. It appears that immigrant women are not receiving the same care as local women (or are treated differently), and there is a feeling among pregnant immigrant women that they are treated unkindly because they are foreigners and refugees.

Language barriers between midwives and pregnant immigrant women have a negative impact during labour. Immigrant women are made uncomfortable by the difficulties they experience in communicating with the staff, the frequent impossibility of following advice given and the reaction of the midwives. The immigrant women find the midwives rude during labour, yet the lack of knowledge of their language makes it difficult to understand what they want from them; even intonation, voice quality, vocabulary,

silence may all have different meaning in different cultures. A midwife who is not aware of these may disrespect an immigrant woman unintentionally.

*“They told me they cannot attend to me because I am an immigrant, I don’t have papers, I didn’t have any proof of residence.”*

Women who receive antenatal care early in pregnancy and who have more antenatal visits tend to have lower maternal and antenatal mortality and better pregnancy outcomes. However, pregnant immigrant women are often turned away from these services because of lack of documentation; high levels of complaints about their antenatal care have remained constant over past decades.

Immigrants have stated that their relationship with the midwives is not cordial, and can actually be alarming, and attribute the lack of personal care to their being immigrants. Many immigrant women say they are addressed in a derogatory manner and called by names which indicate that they are from foreign countries. Immigrant women are often left alone or verbally abused or threatened with physical assault, leaving some of them with post-traumatic stress.

*“The nurses that I met were not even ready to look at my face...”*

Despite midwives’ commitment to respect for the human being, her dignity and privacy, personal values, beliefs and cultural traditions, pregnant immigrant women much of the time have no right to make decisions and their beliefs and cultural practices are often ignored. Most immigrants do not get the care and support they are entitled to.

## Recommendations and challenges

Educators in nursing colleges and universities should place greater emphasis on cultural sensitivity in midwifery care. Midwives should be trained in client relations and in communication skills and should be encouraged to attend workshops on human rights and cultural issues.

Some midwives feel that they are not obliged to speak English with immigrants as they think the women should have learned at least one South African language. Where immigrants cannot communicate even in English, interpreters should be used, despite the potential compromise of confidentiality

between midwife and the pregnant woman. Otherwise midwives could include the spouse or members of the family for the purpose of communication and support.

Finally, the management of hospitals should provide front-line staff with clear guidelines on how to admit or register immigrants and should assist in administrative matters to empower the midwife to render culturally sensitive care.

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## thematic listings

In response to requests from readers, we are now publishing FMR thematic listings. The first three are online at [www.fmreview.org/thematic-listings](http://www.fmreview.org/thematic-listings).

Each thematic listing provides a listing of FMR articles (and full issues) focusing on a specific topic. The themes of the first three are:

- Protection at sea • Youth • Health

You will find for each article listed: the title, year of publication, the author(s), some introductory

sentences, and links (url and QR code) to where you can access the full article online. Most of the articles are available in English, Arabic, French and Spanish. Articles are generally available online in pdf and html formats; more recent ones are also available in audio/mp3 format. Please feel free to link to, share and print these listings.

## Thank you to all FMR's donors in 2015-16

FMR is wholly dependent on external funding to cover all of the project's costs, including staffing. We are deeply appreciative to all of the following donors for their support and collaboration.

Catholic Relief Services-USCCB • DanChurchAid • Danish Refugee Council • European Union • Global Protection Cluster • Government of Denmark • International Committee of the Red Cross • International Organization for Migration • Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs • Mohammed Abu-Risha • Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs • Open Society Foundations • Oxfam • Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs • UNHCR • Women's Refugee Commission

We would also like to thank all those who have supported the production and dissemination of FMR by making individual donations through our online giving site at [www.fmreview.org/online-giving](http://www.fmreview.org/online-giving). Even small donations help to keep FMR going, so please do consider making a donation.

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### Kathrine Starup

Danish Refugee Council

### Richard Williams

Independent consultant

October 2016

[www.fmreview.org/community-protection](http://www.fmreview.org/community-protection)

### Reporting refugees: what a journalist learnt on the migration trails to Europe

**Annual Harrell-Bond Lecture 2016:** Patrick Kingsley, Migration correspondent, *The Guardian*  
26 October 2016, 17:00, Oxford

Registration required: <http://annual-harrell-bond-lecture-2016.eventbrite.co.uk>. A podcast of the lecture will be available shortly afterwards at [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk).

### Emergency Shelter and Forced Migration RSC Public Seminar Series

**Michaelmas Term 2016, Wednesdays 17:00**

This series, convened by Tom Scott-Smith and Mark E Breeze, will bring together experts in architecture, urban planning, anthropology, history, humanitarianism, engineering and design for an inter-disciplinary discussion on shelter for refugees, looking at: the architecture of the refugee camp, the history and politics of emergency shelters, and the limitations of design in the management of displacement. Details at [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/seminars-michaelmas-2016](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/seminars-michaelmas-2016) This seminar series will complement FMR issue 55 on Shelter to be published in 2017: see [www.fmreview.org/shelter](http://www.fmreview.org/shelter).

### Beyond Crisis: Rethinking Refugee Studies

**RSC conference, 16-17 March 2017**

**Keble College, Oxford**

Over the past year, the so-called European refugee crisis has created unprecedented public interest in forced displacement, as well as a demand for research. Yet there have been few spaces in which to reflect on the state of Refugee Studies and to explore the extent to which we have the academic tools necessary to think about and respond to a changing world. The RSC will host a major international conference to assess what kinds of knowledge, evidence and concepts are needed to understand and respond to contemporary challenges. Details at <http://bit.ly/RSC-Beyond-Crisis> Please submit proposals for individual presentations or full panels to [susanna.power@qeh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:susanna.power@qeh.ox.ac.uk) by 17:00 on 15th November 2016.

### Mobilising the Diaspora: How Refugees Challenge Authoritarianism

**Alexander Betts and Will Jones. October 2016. ISBN 9781107159921.**

Mobilising across borders, diasporas emerge to challenge authoritarian governments. Focusing on Rwandan and Zimbabwean exiles, this book examines the centrality of transnationalism within global politics, the historical and political contingency of diasporas, and the precarious agency of refugees. <http://bit.ly/Betts-Jones-2016>

### Refugee Economies: Forced Displacement and Development

**Alexander Betts, Louise Bloom, Josiah Kaplan and Naohiko Omata. November 2016. ISBN 9780198795681.**

Uganda allows refugees the right to work and a significant degree of freedom of movement. This book examines what is possible when refugees have basic economic freedoms, and shows that far from being an inevitable burden, refugees have the capacity not only to help themselves but to contribute to their host societies. <http://bit.ly/RefugeeEconomies2016>

### Assessing Refugees' Right to Work and Access to Labor Markets

**Roger Zetter and Héloïse Ruauadel, KNOMAD Working Paper (Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development)**

This Working Paper argues that for refugees the right to work is vital for reducing vulnerability, enhancing resilience and securing dignity. Based on a sample of 20 countries hosting 70% of the world's refugees, this working paper investigates the role and impact of legal and normative provisions providing and protecting refugees' right to work within the 1951 Refugee Convention as well as from the perspective of non-signatory states. [www.knomad.org/publications](http://www.knomad.org/publications)

### New staff appointments at the RSC

**Dr Olivier Sterck** (Junior Research Fellow in the Economics of Forced Migration) will research refugee economies in Kenya, Uganda and Burundi; he will also work on the impact evaluation of a programme expanding work permits for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

**Dr Natascha Zaun** (Junior Research Fellow in Global Refugee Policy) will be undertaking research on the reform of the global refugee regime and responsibility sharing in global refugee policies.

Research Officers **Dr Ali Ali** and **Dr Fulya Memişoğlu** are working on the RSC's Politics of the Syrian Refugee Crisis project which compares responses and policy towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

### Elizabeth Colson: 15 June 1917 – 3 August 2016

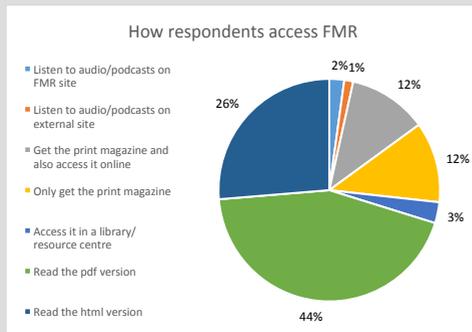
The Refugee Studies Centre is sad to announce the death of Professor Elizabeth Colson, a renowned anthropologist who made a huge contribution to understanding the implications of resettlement related to economic development and to the study of forced migration more generally. She also played a key role in establishing and consolidating the RSC in its fledgling period from the 1980s and early 1990s. Elizabeth Colson's academic and personal contribution to the Refugee Studies Centre and the field of Refugee Studies are memorialised in the RSC's endowed Elizabeth Colson Professorship in Forced Migration and the Colson Public Lecture, given annually by an anthropologist of note.

# FMR Reader Survey 2016 – results and observations

We are very grateful to the approximately 550 individuals who took the time to respond to our recent Reader Survey.

One of our purposes was to find out whether we are getting FMR out there as effectively as we can, and in ways and formats that suit people.

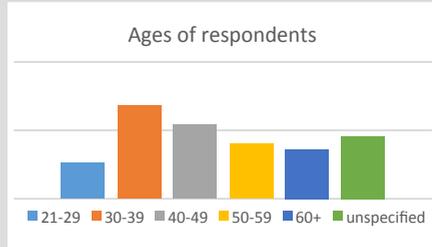
We will try to address the individual preferences of respondents but we are also reviewing – in light of the responses – the overall balance of our printed magazine, printed digest, online version, podcasts, email alerts, and our presence on Facebook, Twitter and issuu. That said, the overall message seems to be that we are doing approximately the right things. This chimes with the impressionistic view we get from ongoing interactions with authors, donors, Twitter followers and so on. In response to being asked where we might make improvements, a gratifying number of respondents told us to go on doing what we have been doing.



There were some general and some specific suggestions for improving or adding to the FMR website. The website will, in any case, have to be moved to a new platform in the next year or so, and we will be able to take these suggestions into account as we do that.

Our proposal to produce occasional 'thematic listings' received general approval, and three are now available at [www.fmreview.org/thematic-listings](http://www.fmreview.org/thematic-listings). Other people find the FMR website's 'Search' does the job for them for their individual requirements.

FMR evolves continually but some of the more radical suggestions, such as giving up print entirely, won't happen in the near future, if ever.



However, the Survey has given us food for thought for the coming stages in FMR's evolution.

There was a considerable number of suggestions to do things that we already do, such as **podcasts** (which we have done in English since 2010), **email alerts** about new calls for articles (we do this), use of **Twitter** (we are active on Twitter and Facebook), and **html** versions of the articles online (yes, available in all four languages). The lesson for us is that we obviously need to make readers more aware of all the ways and formats they can access FMR.

And many people gave us suggestions for improvements: some changes but also for more things to do, eg webinars, videos etc. Some suggestions would completely change FMR's publishing model, for example shorter and more frequent editions, longer and more in-depth articles, weekly or monthly electronic publication, etc. FMR's capacity to do such things is limited – what would we stop doing to enable us to do those new things? – but it is useful to know where readers think FMR can go. We have been challenged to think whether we are ready for radical change, and how much of it we need. Certainly, to do more, we would need more funding; readers' suggestions of potential funding sources would be warmly welcomed!

We received a few suggestions for **themes** that we could cover, and these will be a helpful addition to the pool of ideas we have for future issues. More challenging were the requests for more **material written by refugees** and/or people from the Global South. We would indeed love to have more and it's not from a lack of effort that we don't already; perhaps readers could help us by putting us in touch with potential authors, or by co-authoring such articles.

For more detail on the survey results, please see [www.fmreview.org/readersurvey2016](http://www.fmreview.org/readersurvey2016)

