

Urban Refugees

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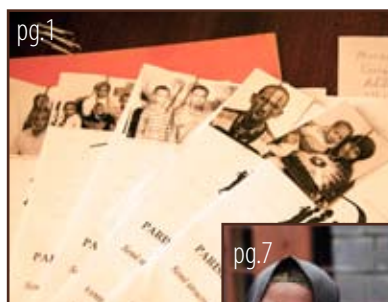
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A young refugee in Nairobi who sustains himself by producing different kinds of bead work.

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Foreword

When we think of refugees, images of big crowded camps normally cross our mind. Over the past few years, however, there has been a growing trend of refugees moving into cities. This is in line with the global trend towards urbanisation. More than three billion people - the majority of the world's population - now inhabit towns and cities worldwide with nearly half of them living in slums and informal settlements.

In sub-Saharan Africa, six out of ten refugees still live in refugee camps or settlements. Globally, however, it is estimated that half of the over 15 million refugees reside in urban areas. Yet the exact size of the largely hidden refugee population in towns and cities is not known.

Their reasons for moving to the cities vary: in the camps refugees face harsh living conditions, lack of space, medical facilities, adequate education and high insecurity. Other factors are tightening asylum policies and protracted refugee situations due to continuing conflict in countries of origin, as well as hopes of finding a sense of community, safety

and economic independence in displacement. Seeking refuge in urban settings, however, presents many challenges and refugees in cities are often more vulnerable than those who choose to stay in the camps.

Most asylum seekers reach the cities without any means of survival, social networks or language skills; they often live in miserable conditions, sleeping on the floor or sharing small bare rooms in crowded, poor neighbourhoods. They receive no or far less assistance than those residing in the camps and are expected to be self-sufficient, although many have no source of income. While they contribute to the local economy

through informal employment, they have tremendous difficulties accessing formal employment.

In Eastern Africa, JRS started assisting urban refugees in the early 1990s and is still one of the few organisations to support them with food, rent, education and livelihoods. Through projects in the three capitals Kampala, Addis Ababa and Nairobi, JRS provided emergency assistance to 11,600 refugees in 2009 alone.

This year on November 14, we celebrate the 30th anniversary of JRS. We will use this opportunity to take a closer look at the situation of refugees living in urban areas in our region, thereby acknowledging that urban displacement has emerged as a new challenge in meeting the needs of refugees in Eastern Africa. May the readings in this anniversary edition of our newsletter bring you closer to those most vulnerable among the displaced. I hope it will encourage you to become active on their behalf. ■

Protecting urban refugees in eastern Africa

By Stella Ngumuta
JRS Eastern Africa

In international law, nobody has yet defined the term “urban refugee”. Commonly, the expression refers to those who have been forced to flee their home countries, crossed international borders and relocated in towns and cities, rather than in refugee camps.

Urban refugees do not form a uniform group. The term “urban refugee” has different meanings. It can refer to 1) refugees legally recognised by the host government or the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) residing legally or illegally in urban areas; 2) asylum seekers who have not yet been granted legal status; 3) asylum seekers whose refugee status has been rejected by the authorities but who are still seeking international protection; and 4) forcibly displaced persons who could be recognised as refugees but who, for various reasons, have not yet registered with the relevant authorities.

Why are so many migrating to the cities?

According to its 2009 statistics, UNHCR estimates that more than half of the world’s 15 million refugees of concern to the agency reside in urban areas, while less than one third live in refugee camps. The governments of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia require refugees to move to designated transit centres, camps or settlements. But as host governments find it increasingly difficult to provide assistance and protection in the camps, many refugees migrate to urban areas, hoping to find greater security and become self-reliant.

The movement from camps to cities has come to a peak mainly because of the inadequate protection, insecurity and limited resources in the camps. Refugees who have left the camps tell stories of sexual abuse and gender-based violence, brutal attacks, killings, abductions, ethnic-based clashes among refugee communities, clashes with host communities and alleged recruitment by militia groups. Refugees leave camps because their lives and safety



Many urban refugees are more vulnerable than refugees who live in camps.

are threatened. Harsh living conditions, inadequate medical facilities and limited livelihood and educational opportunities also contribute to the urban migration trend. Many refugees, particularly Somalis and Ethiopians, have spent over 20 years of their lives in refugee camps.

No matter where they are, refugees still have rights

When refugees choose to live in urban areas, governments continue to be responsible for protecting their rights and freedoms.

UNHCR, in its 2009 *Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*, acknowledges the need to protect

and assist urban refugees who were previously not entitled to either. It further states that the rights of refugees are not affected by their location, the means they used to arrive in an urban area or their status and confirms that UNHCR considers it legitimate for refugees to live in urban areas.

Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Sudan are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention and have adopted and incorporated the conventions into their national legislation. Both national legislation and international conventions stipulate the rights and obligations refugees have within their country of asylum and form the basis

Who is a refugee?

The internationally recognised definition of a “refugee” was established in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (“1951 Refugee Convention”). According to the Convention, anybody forced to flee their country of nationality or residence because of persecution or fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is recognised as a refugee. African countries signatory to the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (“1969 OAU Convention”) have gone a step further. They also recognise as refugees persons who flee widespread violence, foreign domination or external aggression in the whole or part of their country.

for protecting and assisting them. By agreeing to be bound by these laws, states have an obligation to uphold and protect the rights and freedoms of urban refugees the same as they do for their own citizens or for refugees living in camps. Reciprocally, refugees have an obligation to respect the laws of the country of asylum and can be arrested or prosecuted if found guilty of an offence.

Fundamental rights and freedoms

The most important fundamental right of a refugee is the principle of non-refoulement. This is the right to be protected from expulsion or forcible return to a country where the refugee’s life or freedom could be in danger.

Refugee legislation further guarantees refugees the right to obtain an identification document as well as valid travel documents. However, not being granted official documentation by the host government or UNHCR,

or receiving the documents after long delays is one of the major hurdles urban refugees face in the region. Without them, refugees easily become victims of police harassment, extortion, arbitrary arrest or detention.

One of the most contentious issues in eastern Africa is refugees’ right to work. While the 1951 Convention allows wage-earning and self-employment, states have restricted this right. Ethiopian authorities do not issue work permits for urban refugees. Conversely, the Kenyan government allows refugees to be formally employed under almost the same conditions as other foreigners. This means refugees have to acquire work permits or business licenses and produce the necessary documents to work. In reality, many were obliged to leave those documents behind when they fled and permit costs are so high that it becomes impossible for them to enter formal employment. Uganda allows urban refugees to be formally employed and expects them to pay taxes like every other employee. Urban refugees in all three capitals, however, engage in illegal unskilled wage-earning jobs with the acquiescence of the authorities.

Urban refugees should always have access to basic social, economic and cultural rights. Officially recognised urban refugees in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda have access to primary education and health facilities. Host governments, donors and non-governmental institutions need to collaborate more in order to increase access to these and other essential services.

Furthermore, government protection should extend to sexual and gender-based violence and torture or slavery. Urban refugees should have free access to law courts, freedom to practice their religion and impartial treatment without discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, sex, nationality, ethnic identity, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

Governments restrict rights

The fact that all these rights are ensured by national and international legislation does not mean they are always respected. Host countries sometimes violate or fail to guarantee these rights. There are rampant cases of police harassment, extortion, arbitrary arrest and detention. Often refugees do not receive appropriate documentation, have no freedom of movement, no right to earn a living and are denied access to basic services, such as health and education. Strict encampment policies and harsh immigration laws also constrain refugees’ rights and freedoms.

Host governments may also restrict refugees’ rights and freedoms for purposes of national security or in order to maintain public order. These concerns and the needs of the local population become a priority rather than the safety and freedom of refugees. It is difficult for host governments to respond to the needs of urban refugees while confronted by large numbers of poor citizens with similar needs.

Urban refugees are more vulnerable

Over the years, the migration of refugees to urban areas has prompted host governments and aid agencies to rethink their protection and assistance strategies. To a large extent, urban refugees are more vulnerable, more in need of assistance and less visible than refugees who live in camps. Among them are people with disabilities, single mothers with many young children, unaccompanied minors and single men. Although host governments expect them to cater for themselves, they are often unable to do so. Host governments should therefore collaborate with aid agencies and local communities in order to provide adequate protection and assistance for urban refugees and ensure their rights are respected. ■

Stella Ngumuta is JRS Eastern Africa’s regional advocacy officer in Nairobi, Kenya.

At a glance: UNHCR's 2009 Urban Refugee Policy

In September 2009, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) issued their newly revised 'Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas', thereby replacing the former 1997 'Policy on Refugees in Urban Areas'. This new policy follows more than ten years of discontent expressed by many NGOs and others regarding the role of UNHCR in protecting refugees and asylum seekers in urban areas. In many ways, therefore, the release of the 2009 version presents a better opportunity for UNHCR, along with host governments, city authorities and partner agencies, to assist this 'invisible' group.

- In the context of rapid urbanisation, one of the most significant global trends, UNHCR considered it essential to reconsider the organisation's position on the issue of refugees in urban areas and adopt an approach that is more positive, constructive and proactive than in the past.
- In doing so, UNHCR is responding not only to the phenomenon of refugee urbanisation, but also reflects sub-standard care and protracted stays in refugee camps in which freedom of movement is restricted, self-sufficiency or employment opportunities limited, and the protection of human rights far from assured.
- The policy is based on the principle that the rights of refugees are not affected by location, their means of arrival or their status in national legislation. Nor are UNHCR's mandated responsibilities affected by these factors.
- Covering many of UNHCR's areas of concern, the document includes reception conditions, registration and data collection, documentation, refugee status determination, community outreach, fostering constructive relations with urban refugees, addressing security concerns, strategies of self-reliance and access to livelihoods, access to health care, education and other services, durable solutions, and the question of freedom of movement.
- The policy states that it is legitimate for refugees to live and exercise their rights in urban areas and, in this regard, UNHCR foresees its role in creating this space to include advocacy, monitoring and capacity building for local services to meet the particular needs of refugees.



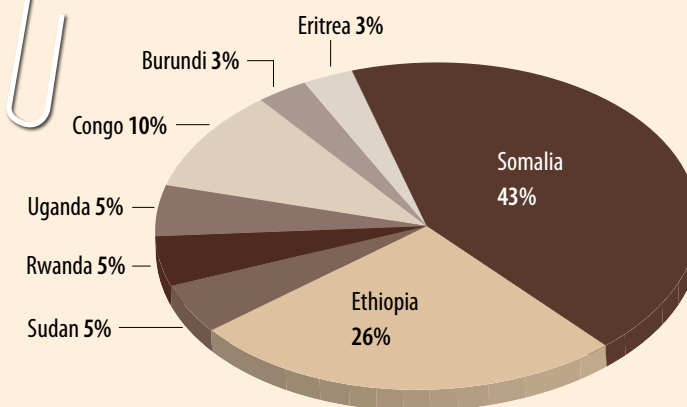
Three Somali refugees share this room in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

- It aims both to encourage and contribute to the progressive development of national legal and policy frameworks integrating refugees and others of concern in urban areas into the social fabric of cities and towns in an appropriate rights-respectful way.
- UNHCR aims to mainstream the new urban refugee policy within the 2011 programming, striving continuously to improve its performance in 2012 and beyond.

Sources: UNHCR policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas, September 2009; Forced Migration Review, Issue 34, Antonio Guterres, "Protection challenges for persons of concern in urban settings, p.8/9 and Alice Edwards, "Legitimate" protection spaces: UNHCR's 2009 policy, p.48/49, www.fmreview.org

States of origin of refugees in Nairobi

Source: UNHCR, 2009b



By Angelika Mendes
JRS Eastern Africa



Refugee women gather for a weekly prayer meeting with a JRS pastoral worker in Nairobi.

Food and healing

JRS emergency assistance in eastern Africa

Unlike their counterparts in the camps, refugees who live in urban areas cannot rely on material assistance or legal protection. They have hardly any support network, often do not speak the local language, face hostile attitudes from the local population and are vulnerable to police arrests.

While the phenomenon of refugees living in urban settings has long been regarded as temporary, there is growing awareness that refugees who choose to stay in the cities do so for many years. In fact, most conflicts or civil wars go on circa 15 years and accordingly the majority of refugees are displaced for an average of 17 years. With persisting conflict and instability the situation is unlikely to change.

JRS started assisting urban refugees and asylum seekers in Eastern Africa in the early 1990s and is still one of the few organisations to assist them as they wait between six and 24 months for their refugee status determination. Unfortunately, during this time they receive little or no aid from other agencies.

In 1991, JRS started to help refugees in Nairobi, responding to the needs of a huge influx of Somalis. Since then, JRS has offered wide-ranging support including food, financial aid, education services, medical care, pastoral and psychosocial assistance, information, and non-food items; thus responding to the urgent unmet needs of newly arrived asylum seekers and the most vulnerable refugees. Currently, these services are provided through five parishes of the Archdiocese of Nairobi, situated in lower income and slum areas.

In 1997 and 1998, JRS started assisting refugees and asylum seekers in Addis Ababa and Kampala respectively, providing the same services as in Nairobi. Between January and June

2010, the organisation reached out to over 8540 beneficiaries in all three capitals.

A temporary respite

“We give people a temporary respite so that they may recover and regain their coping skills; we give them time and some security so that they may set their eyes on the future,” says Nora McCarthy OSF, former project director of the urban programme in Kampala which has supported more than 19,400 refugees and asylum seekers since its inception in 1998.

Refugees are either referred from other agencies or learn from fellow refugees about the possibility of receiving support from JRS. In Nairobi, 15 to 25 refugees a day knock on the JRS door, asking for food assistance or financial aid to pay their house rent. JRS staff listens to each of them, trying to find a way to help. “It is not easy to discern who is needy and who can cope on their own,” says Joseph Waweru, JRS Social Worker in Nairobi. Home visits to assess individual situations are conducted regularly. Refugees whom JRS cannot assist are referred to other agencies.

Some are afraid to register with the authorities and unsure of how to proceed – they need direction. Those in need of food assistance are normally referred to one of the five parishes where they will be screened by a social worker. If capacity permits they will be integrated in the programme immediately. If not, they are put on a waiting list. Between January and June 2010, more than 93 metric tons of food were distributed in Nairobi but with persistent instability in the region it is impossible to calculate a budget that can cater for all. “It is much more difficult to raise money for urban refugees than for refugees who reside in camps,” says Frido Pflueger SJ, JRS Eastern Africa Director. “We face this problem continuously”.

In order to raise awareness regarding the situation of urban refugees, JRS in Kampala regularly visits local parishes and also takes part in radio programmes. English language lessons, offered daily for French speaking refugees, mostly from the Great Lakes

JRS started assisting urban refugees and asylum seekers in eastern Africa in the early 1990s and is still one of the few organisations to assist them as they wait between six and 24 months for their refugee status determination.

region, are a crucial integration tool. “I can see a real change from when they first come to enroll and when they accomplish the course after one year. Many are frightened and suspicious at first but after a few months their lives change. They make new friends, continue their education or find jobs,” says English teacher Joe Stevens Mande.

Prayer to heal and forgive

Prayer forms another important part of emergency assistance. In Addis Ababa,

25 - 30 refugees gather every Friday for two hours to pray, share and listen to the word of God. “Please don’t stop this programme. This is where I am healed,” a refugee told Hanna Petros, JRS Project Director in Addis recently. “Participants share their stories and we cry together, encourage each other, sing and pray for each other,” says Ms Petros. “A lot of family problems come up during these sessions.” Forgiving is another major challenge for many. “This programme is especially about forgiveness. It is very difficult to forgive,” says Ms Petros.

And how do JRS staff members cope with the stories they hear every day? “I talk to my family but it follows you everywhere, even in your dreams,” says Meron Mengesha, JRS Social Worker in Addis. Sharing within the team is another way to unburden. Staff in Nairobi go for counselling and debriefing at the end of each month. And again, prayer also helps. ■

Angelika Mendes is JRS Eastern Africa’s regional communications officer in Nairobi, Kenya.

Our hope for the future

My hope for the future is to get money and to buy a house so that I can collect my family and put them under one roof. I want to help the children with no parents.

Macumi Florida from Burundi, 28 years, refugee in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

I left my wife, my five children and two nephews in Kinshasa. My biggest wish for the future is to find a safe place here in Kampala so that they can come and join me here.”

Congolese man from Kinshasa, refugee in Kampala, Uganda

My hope for the future is for God to bring peace to Africa so that those in exile will return to their countries and live a good life. I want to become a doctor and live in my own country with my family, if there is peace.

Ahmed Abaker from Sudan, 20 years, refugee in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

I wish to live in my country if there is peace; but if not, I would like to go somewhere else where I find peace and get money and live.

Tedros Tesfaye from Eritrea, 36 years, refugee in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

I have been a driver in Kigali and we were doing good. My wish for the future is to learn the language so that I can find a job as a driver again to support my young family.”

Rwandan man, refugee in Kampala, Uganda

I would like to get resettlement or find a sponsor to get access to higher education. I would like to learn how to manage myself and after that, I would like to work in UNICEF to help children who lost their parents and to give them a future.

Hanna Patrick from Kenya, 17 years, refugee in Addis Ababa

My hope for the future is to save my fellow compatriots; to be an important national figure who sees hope for vulnerable groups such as orphans, widows/ widowers, and to have a sound health and education.

Gabriel Diing Shadrach from Sudan, 21 years, refugee in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

I was threatened and chased in Somalia. I tried to find a safe place there, but wherever I went, there was no peace. Thus my wish for the future is to find a peaceful place to stay where my mind can rest.”

Somali journalist, refugee in Kampala, Uganda



A Congolese refugee who lives in Nairobi since 1993, producing art work made of sisal.

“My work is to encourage”

A look at JRS accompaniment in Nairobi

INTERVIEW

with Sr Mercy Njeri LSJ

Sr Mercy, you have been a pastoral worker in the JRS Urban Emergency Programme in Nairobi for six years. What do you like most about your work?

It is the contact with the people, the personal encounter that I like most. There is a certain mystery surrounding this encounter.

Why did you start working with refugees?

In 1998 I worked in South Africa with Catholic Development Welfare and for the first time I was confronted with refugees and the difficulties they face. I thought if there are refugees in Kenya I want to tell them karibuni [welcome], don't be afraid, just feel at home!

What changes do you see taking place in the refugees you accompany?

I see that they move forward in many regards. When I first meet them they are sad and lonely and nobody looks after them. Once we start accompanying and assisting them they realise they are not alone. They notice they are not just refugees in a foreign place, but there is someone to support them. They regain their dignity. They feel they are people again and begin to look at life differently although they have lost everything. Suddenly, they feel confident and become creative. They are not afraid anymore, may even set up a business; they know they are here to stay and find their way to survive.

What has changed regarding the context they live in?

I have noticed that refugees in Nairobi have become more aware of their rights and the same applies to Kenya as a host country. The government acknowledges that refugees have

rights. Moreover, the experience of the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008 was like a wake-up call for many Kenyans. They realised that from one day to the next, they themselves can become refugees and this has changed their attitude towards refugees. I have seen Kenyans who share their compound with refugees and support them with materials or food. They see they are poor and even if they have nothing, they help them.

Where do the refugees you accompany come from and where do they live?

Nairobi hosts refugees from countries such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan among others. They live among the local population, which means they rent houses among them and share the same daily struggles. However there are areas in Nairobi where each nationality prefers to live, for instance the Somalis in Eastleigh or the Congolese in Kayole or Kasarani. Once they are settled they integrate with the Kenyans.

What are they most in need of?

What they are most in need of is shelter, a mattress, somewhere warm where they can put themselves. Another major need is food. Only when these needs are met will they start looking for education. My general experience is that human beings experience a kind of isolation in the depth of their being, which at times is a spiritual loneliness and there is that desire to share with others. People who are displaced by war and have gone through crises have a strong desire to share their past experiences.

What are your responsibilities as a JRS pastoral worker?

My greatest responsibility is to listen and be available to the refugees. It is only through listening that I come to discover them and their material, spiritual and psychological needs and can start accompanying them and advocating for them. The first step is always to build a friendship based on confidentiality and trust from both sides. With this the journey



Sr Mercy has accompanied refugees in Nairobi for six years and many have become her friends.

of accompaniment, service and advocacy starts.

What does your average day look like?

There is no average day. Ordinarily each day starts with a well planned schedule. However once I start moving, plans change immediately because I might be on my way to a specific family but before I reach them I meet refugees who ask me just to listen or they tell me someone is sick and I go to visit that person, inform them where they can get assistance or contact the office to find a solution.

The first step is always to build a friendship based on confidentiality and trust from both sides. With this the journey of accompaniment, service and advocacy starts.

The refugees I visit are normally big families, they live in poor areas and often share one room which is both bedroom and kitchen, for which they pay around KSh 2,000 (USD 25) rent per month. If they are lucky they have a mattress, otherwise they sleep on a mat. We normally sit on the floor.

The men often leave in the morning to look for casual work but even Kenyans have difficulties finding casual jobs. They can only be hired if they have an ID card which for most refugees is not the case. For the rest of the day the men are idle, sitting outside, chatting while the women are in the house. If the children do not have access to school, they are at home as well.

I normally tell them what kind of assistance JRS can offer or I refer them to other agencies.

Why are home visits so important? Is material assistance not sufficient?

Home visits offer refugees a chance to share personal experiences which they may not have been able to share

during the initial interview. It is a time to listen, to look at the difficulties they face, to encourage them and to pray together. We normally sit on a mat on the floor while we share and we are equal, at the same level. This makes them share more than at the office.

I normally conduct these visits with great respect because I cannot take it for granted to be welcomed into someone else's home. I am happy to be accepted in their community, in their life. It gives me joy when someone opens the door for me. I thank God for this opportunity to meet the refugees. We have become as one.

Some of the refugees live far away and are bedridden and unless I visit them I will not get to meet them and they may not come to the office. Once I found a burnt child during a home visit and we took him to hospital. The parents told me they had no money to take the boy for treatment and did not even know where to take him. He would have died if I had not come.

Another time I visited a lady and noticed that her six year old boy was very shy and withdrawn. I asked her what was wrong with him and she told me she was raped in front of him. Now we are in the process of finding a place where they can both get counselling.

There was one young man who said he had a lot of problems. He worked as a house boy for a Kenyan who made him work until late at night. I asked another family if they could host him and he is a different boy now, he is at peace. I am very happy about that. Through the home visits I have met and made friends with so many refugees and I can bring them together so they can support each other.

Also, I make home visits to verify information refugees give to JRS. Sometimes it says on the mandate that a person has six dependants. But once you go and visit them you find that one may be very old and needs special care. You cannot tell this from just looking at the document. Sometimes I meet pregnant women who don't know where to go, so I direct them. Others have food but no pots.

That is why I find home visits very important. They help me to assess their situation and determine their needs.

Which challenges do you face in your work?

The home visits are not always smooth. In some places I am turned away or shouted at and expected to identify myself. Sometimes refugees who have just arrived misunderstand



JRS distributes food to refugees in Nairobi through five parishes.

the purpose of the visits and become suspicious.

It is a big challenge for me to meet refugees whose claim for asylum was rejected and who were not granted refugee status by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in Kenya. They have a lot of problems. JRS gives them time and tries to help with food, medical assistance, blankets or basic utensils where possible.

Another challenge is when I go on a home visit and find a family is not able to take their children to school because they cannot afford the uniforms. Some organisations only give two uniforms so if there are four children, the other two will have to stay at home. So you find young girls going around doing odd jobs, while others are at school.

Refugees who are sick are yet another challenge. They cannot afford to buy

medication, so they suffer. Or the young girls who arrive without their parents and are forced into prostitution because they need shelter. And you cannot offer them any alternative. That is very hard.

If you could change something about the situation you deal with on a daily basis, what would it be?

I would try to set up a place where these girls would be safe and where they can learn some skills to make a living. A 19-year-old Somali girl just told me the other day "I have nowhere to stay; I have no money, nothing." I had to tell her I cannot take you home, I cannot provide shelter for you. I encouraged her to move to the [refugee] camp where she could work as a teacher. Young boys are also in trouble. There is no safe place to take them.

Sr Mercy Njeri is a pastoral worker in the JRS Urban Emergency Programme in Nairobi, Kenya. She was interviewed by Angelika Mendes, JRS Eastern Africa's regional communications officer.

Your job sounds very exhausting. Where do you recharge your batteries?

When I come home in the evening I can share with my community, they are good support. I can also share and discuss with my team at JRS and together we find solutions. At the end of each month I go for counselling and debriefing. That is how I offload the strain. I wish it could be twice a month because when I go at the end of the month carrying that entire load is a lot.

And prayer helps. In my community we have an hour of adoration each day. There I can kneel at the feet of Jesus and let it pour out. This gives me the energy to come back the following day. Without prayer, I don't know how I could deal with it all, it would be too much. ■

A place to feel welcome

Ndashborwa, a 35-year old refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), arrived in Ethiopia in 2006. During the flight he lost his wife when rebels opened fire on them. He sought asylum in Addis Ababa and was recognised as a refugee.

Like Ndashborwa, refugees in the Ethiopian capital usually live dispersed among the local population. Significant numbers of refugees reside on the outskirts of the city with no support from the local community.

Most refugees come to Addis from the refugee camps for security reasons or because of serious medical conditions. Once in the city, they have to deal with sky-rocketing living costs which in most cases they cannot afford. Often, the family remains in the camp while a parent moves to Addis for medical treatment. This separation causes additional stress and burden for refugee families.

However since neither the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) nor the Ethiopian Government's Administration for Refugees and Returnees (ARRA) - normally in charge of granting refugee status and providing assistance - can cover living costs for the whole family in Addis, there is no alternative.

To give refugees a place where they can come together, feel welcome and spend their time in a useful way UNHCR, ARRA and JRS jointly established a community centre in 1996. Run by JRS since the beginning, the Refugee Community Centre (RCC) is still the capital's only such centre. Frequented by over 500 refugees,

the centre is a place where children can play and adults socialise, attend language courses or computer lessons, take part in vocational training and workshops and use the library and internet facilities. It also offers counselling and support to refugees who are traumatised or with special needs, thus helping them maintain a sense of identity and find some normalcy in an otherwise challenging and unfamiliar situation.

A place for encounter

Ndashborwa started attending English and computer classes at the centre in April 2007. Taking part in different courses he learned about peace education, time management and self-esteem. "The training helped me to interact smoothly with people from various cultural backgrounds, improve my skills and competencies and

By Tekeste G/Kidan
JRS Ethiopia

reduced my sense of helplessness and stress," he says. He was also trained as a photographer within the vocational training programme offered at RCC.

Through its various activities the centre aims to help refugees integrate into the Ethiopian way of life. Neighbours from the local community around the centre are encouraged to get to know them, make friends and appreciate the diversity they bring to Ethiopian society. To enhance social integration, local people also have partial access to the centre. Students are welcome to use the library and soon will be able to attend computer lessons as well.

The centre is, above all, a place for encounter. "Refugees who attend different training courses at RCC are better off than those who stay at home, because they can interact with others," says Ndashborwa. It enables those who come to access information, share their experiences and common interests, discover their talents and tap their potential. The staff at the centre are determined and committed to helping refugees improve their lives, recover from trauma and develop useful skills.

Free internet

"We can see the positive impact of the language and computer lessons we offer here. It helps refugees communicate with others, boosts their confidence and gives them access to information," says Gelila Tesfaye, JRS Education Coordinator. So far in 2010, over 200 refugees have attended English language lessons and 180 have taken part in computer lessons. Moreover, refugees and asylum seekers in the centre can now use the internet for free. It helps them adapt to new technologies, access useful information and keep in touch with friends and family members. On average, the internet service is used by 18 people a day, each one allowed 30 minutes.

A cafeteria run by a Sudanese refugee serves food and non-alcoholic drinks



JRS staff at the Refugee Community Centre in Addis Ababa help refugees recover from trauma and discover their talents.

at reasonable prices. JRS pays the rent, water and electricity bills and the income generated has helped the owner become self-sufficient. Since he opened the restaurant he has used part of the profits to equip the café with a refrigerator and buy a huge supply of soft drinks. Recently, he even hired an Ethiopian national as support staff.

"This project is unique in its kind in Addis. It serves as a welcoming place for asylum seekers and documented refugees, irrespective of their political, social, religious or other background."

Refugees of all ages also become responsible in other areas. "They actively help in planning and evaluating the project, bringing their ideas and making decisions through the Urban Refugee Committee, the Refugee Women's Association and the JRS Youth Association," explains Mulugeta W/Eyesus, JRS director of the centre. Three Eritrean women and a Sudanese man are actively involved in providing different services. Following the initiative of some refugee woman,

a beauty salon will soon open on the premises of the centre. While JRS made the space available, UNHCR sponsored the equipment.

All are welcome

"This project is unique in its kind in Addis," says Seyoum Asfaw, JRS Ethiopia Director. "It serves as a welcoming place for asylum seekers and documented refugees, irrespective of their political, social, religious or other background," he adds. The most vulnerable, such as children, young people, women and girls, people with disabilities and refugees with protection risks are particularly welcome. To help them, JRS relies on a wide network of well coordinated partners, such as UNHCR, ARRA, the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Development Inter-Church Aid Commission's Refugee and Returnee Affairs Department and the local district administration.

The mandate of the project is not limited to providing services within the centre. Staff also visit refugees and asylum seekers at home and organise events, workshops and debates with all stakeholders. ■

Ndashborwa has recently been resettled to the US.

Tekeste G/Kidan coordinates community services and vocational training at the JRS Refugee Community Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

FOCUS ON SOMALI REFUGEES

By Virginia Mumo
JRS Kenya



It is estimated that 43% of Nairobi's refugee population are Somalis.

Deprived of education Somali refugees in Nairobi, Kenya

Although there is a long history of Somali migration into Kenya, refugees from Somalia first arrived in large numbers in the early 1990s, following the collapse of Siad Barre's dictatorial regime. Since then, there has been a steady flow of Somali refugees into Kenya due to the subsequent political and humanitarian crisis in Somalia. In August 2010, the UN Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) reported that 6,500 Somali refugees had arrived in Kenya, though the number of arrivals might have been even greater. By the end of July 2010, Kenya was host to 404,012 refugees of whom 331,843 were Somalis, according to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). This makes it one of the top ten countries in the world hosting the largest refugee populations.

According to UNHCR, 23,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers of Somali origin live in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. However, this figure does not include the many thousands of unregistered refugees. The Refugee Consortium of Kenya estimates that the number of Somali refugees in Nairobi could be as high as 43,000. They are most likely the largest group among an estimated 100,000 refugees and asylum seekers living in Nairobi.

Most Somali refugees live in Eastleigh, a low-income area in east Nairobi, alongside many Somalis of Kenyan

origin. Eastleigh has become a microcosm, a little Mogadishu, and a commercial centre. Veiled women and girls stroll down the streets, men chew khat [miraa], a popular stimulant, and street vendors sell camel milk.

Far from being passive recipients of humanitarian assistance, many Somalis have been able to turn crumbling urban environments into centres of economic activity.

Some even employ Kenyans

Many of the Somalis are successful entrepreneurs. They run businesses that not only provide a living for their families but sometimes also employ members from the local Kenyan community. Far from being passive recipients of humanitarian assistance, many Somalis have been able to turn crumbling urban environments into centres of economic activity. Nowhere is this more evident than in Eastleigh.

Although the busy malls might give a different impression, most Somali refugees in Eastleigh are poor. Some survive by working for other wealthier Somalis. Others, including many women, open roadside stalls and sell small items, such as fabrics, undergarments, scarves, shoes, perfumes, electronic goods or groceries. Many engage in the lucrative business of selling khat. Women in particular do laundry and other household chores for wealthier Somalis. In exchange they earn a small income and get accommodation and/or food. Others run call centers and provide internet services and some are taxi drivers.

Harassed by the police

Despite their economic successes and their exemplary self-sufficiency, many

Somalis whether refugees or not, often become victims of police harassment, extortion and illegal arrests. Almost every Somali refugee living in Eastleigh has a story to tell about being threatened with arrest and detention by the police. In many cases, Somali refugees will offer their hard earned daily wages in order to avoid prolonged detention and deportation or forced return to Somalia. “When it comes to extortion and bribes, there is no better “market” for the Kenyan police than Eastleigh,” says Mathias Mbisu, JRS Social Worker in Eastleigh.

Many are deprived of education

The lack of legal documentation has deprived many Somali refugees of access to education in urban centers. Most aid agencies only offer support in education for officially recognised refugees. On the other hand, following their religious tradition, many Somali parents prefer their children to attend

Islamic education madrasa classes instead of state education offered in public and private schools throughout Kenya.

As of July 2010, only 491 Somali refugees out of a total of 1540 selected refugees from other countries living in Nairobi, received support in education from various agencies including JRS, Windle Trust, Faraja Trust, German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and African Refugee Programme - Great Lakes. Almost half of them took English lessons, while most of the others were supported at primary school or university level (UNHCR/ NGO education statistics). However, this number of beneficiaries is still very low, when compared to the thousands of Somali refugees residing in Nairobi.

However, the Kenyan government recently announced plans to carry out a large scale registration of refugees in

Nairobi in order to provide them with ID cards. If fully realised, this measure will improve protection for Somalis and other refugees living in Kenyan cities, as well as in Eastleigh. ■

Virginia Mumo coordinates the JRS Scholarship Programme in Nairobi, Kenya.

JRS Partners in Nairobi, Kenya

- Government of Kenya – Department for Refugee Affairs (DRA)
- UN refugee agency (UNHCR)
- Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)
- Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK)
- Kituo cha Sheria
- Mapendo International
- HIAS Refugee Trust of Kenya
- Africa Refugee Programme – Great Lakes (ARP)
- Windle Trust of Kenya
- Heshima Kenya
- Hope and Action for Africa (HAFA)
- Medecins Sans Frontieres France (MSF)
- Church World Service (CWS)

The process of refugee status determination in Nairobi

1. The process of refugee status determination in Nairobi is carried out by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). Therefore, asylum seekers have to register in person at the UNHCR office in Westlands. The Kenyan Refugee Act requires asylum seekers to register within 30 days of their arrival in the country. However, many asylum seekers register months after their arrival, and generally, no penalties are imposed by UNHCR for this late registration.
2. During the initial registration, UNHCR will collect the asylum seeker’s and his/her family members’ bio-data and give them a registration certificate. In addition, they are given another appointment date when they will have their refugee claim heard by the UNHCR Eligibility Desk. This date could be months away from the initial date of registration.
3. Asylum seekers in Nairobi often seek assistance from other refugees, host communities or NGOs to help them meet their

immediate needs – mainly food, healthcare, education and legal advice.

4. On the appointed date, the asylum seeker and his/her family members must present themselves at the UNHCR Eligibility Office, where they will be interviewed regarding their asylum case. Further information on what this entails may be requested from the UNHCR office.
5. After the interview, they will be given another date, possibly weeks or months later, when they can return to collect the decision on whether they are eligible for refugee status or not.
6. If accepted as refugees, they are given a UNHCR Mandate Certificate. They are also requested to relocate to one of the refugee camps through the assistance of the Department for Refugee Affairs. However, many remain in urban centres.
7. If they are rejected as refugees, they have the right to appeal within 30 days of the de-



cision. Two agencies – Kituo Cha Sheria and the Refugee Consortium of Kenya – provide guidance to asylum seekers on their appeal process.

8. After the appeal case, the asylum seeker’s case may be accepted for refugee status or rejected a second time. Under UNHCR procedures, a second appeal is not allowed so the second rejection is final.
9. Once rejected, essentially the asylum seeker is meant to leave the country within 90 days, but in most cases, this is not practical or feasible.

Unregistered but tolerated

Somali refugees in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Devastated by political instability, collapse of the government and clan warfare, Somalia has been the epitome of refugee flows in the Horn of Africa for the past 20 years. Around half a million of Somalia's 9.8 million citizens are seeking refuge in neighbouring countries and there is a constant flow of Somali asylum seekers into Ethiopia across the common border. At present, Ethiopia hosts over 67,200 documented Somali refugees, spread over different camps and urban areas, constituting almost half of the refugee population in the country (UNHCR, March 2010).

According to official government estimates 160,000 undocumented Somalis reside in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. They fled the civil war to save their lives and came straight to the city. Some have relatives or friends abroad who they hope will support them and aim to leave the country in order to join them. However, most of them are unsuccessful.

Majority does not register

According to Ethiopian refugee policy, every asylum seeker should register at the Ethiopian government's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) within 15 days of arrival. Those who do register are encouraged to move to designated refugee camps where they will receive general assistance, such as health care, housing and education. In special cases of high insecurity or need for specialised medical care, ARRA allows refugees to stay in Addis and grants them 'urban status'. Asylum seekers who do not register with the government at all are considered illegal. They have no access to medical assistance or education in government health centres and schools respectively, are not allowed to reside in the cities and have no right to free movement within Ethiopia. Documentation also acts as a shield

According to official government estimates 160,000 undocumented Somalis reside in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

against arbitrary arrests and detention, forced return and police harassment, as well as discrimination and xenophobia from host communities.

Most Somalis never register. Many of them rely on remittances and hardly any information is available regarding their economic situation. Unlike

refugees from other African countries the government tolerates them in Addis. At the moment, government authorities are distributing ID cards which identify them as asylum seekers. However, the IDs neither grant them refugee status nor do they give them the right to settle legally in the cities.

There are two Somali community centers in Addis which welcome and support Somali refugees and asylum seekers. JRS is the only organisation to provide a range of services for them. Through two projects, they can access educational, psychosocial and emergency assistance. While the Refugee Community Centre (RCC) provides language courses, library facilities, day-care services, psychosocial support, computer literacy programmes and short-term vocational training opportunities only to those officially allowed to stay in Addis as urban refugees, the Emergency Needs Programme (ENP) offers financial and material assistance to undocumented asylum seekers and refugees residing in the city.

Somali asylum seekers normally share humble homes, located in slum

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Somali women are waiting to present their claim to a social worker at the JRS office in Addis.

Relying on a large network

Somali refugees in Kampala, Uganda

The Somali people have gone through one of the worst and longest humanitarian disasters in Africa and there seem to be no prospects of peace for their country anytime soon. A large number of those who manage to flee the violence go first to neighbouring countries, such as Ethiopia or Kenya. Some, however, move on to Uganda, finding that Kenya in particular is “too crowded” with Somalis.

Once they reach Kampala, they are in a desperate state. “The people who come out there are not normal, they are kind of crazy. We want them to come back to normal life,” says Khadija Said Gurhan, the chairperson of the Somali Initiative for Peace and Development (SIPED), an NGO funded by Somalis to promote education, equal opportunities, health, reconciliation and peace among the Somali community. Most of those arriving are illiterate and without any basic education, according to SIPED. The situation of Somali refugees and asylum seekers in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, has always been different from that of other refugee groups. The Somali community in Kampala generally provides stable support to its members, guiding refugees who have just arrived and offering information, counselling and

Although the majority of Somali refugees fled Al-Shabaab attacks in Somalia, they are now accused of being terrorists and supporters of Al-Shabaab.

even accommodation. These strong ties within the community allow many Somalis to find small jobs or set up their own business, such as butcher shops, restaurants or tailor shops. The houses and neighbourhoods they live in are on average better than those of refugees from other countries. Most Somalis live in Kisenyi, the Muslim centre of Kampala where they can freely live their rather unique culture and speak their own language. Most of them however, never integrate into the local population.



JRS wants to find ways to serve Somali refugees in Kampala better.

By Susi Moeller
JRS Uganda

Their situation was severely affected by the bomb attacks that hit Kampala on the night of July 11, 2010, killing 74 people who had gathered to watch the World Cup final. The Islamist terrorist group, Al-Shabaab, which controls large parts of Somalia claimed responsibility for the attack. They also threatened that the blasts would continue if Uganda does not withdraw their peacekeepers from Somalia.

Somalis harassed after bomb blasts

The blasts have created tension among Somali refugees and the local population in Kampala with Somali refugees becoming a target for xenophobia and harassment. Although the majority of Somali refugees fled Al-Shabaab attacks in Somalia, they are now accused of being terrorists and supporters of Al-Shabaab. As a consequence, they fear to move out of their neighbourhood. Recently, the SIPED football team could not play their scheduled match because the school which was to host them feared their presence.

The Ugandan government has no special policy on Somalis, they face no specific restrictions or regulations and undergo the same process as refugees from other countries. However, after the bomb blasts the Ugandan government advised all Somalis to register with their local chairperson to clarify and, if appropriate, legalise their residence.

There are no reliable figures available on the number of Somalis residing in Kampala. Many do register with the authorities. In March 2010, more than 550 Somalis were granted refugee status by the Ugandan Refugee Eligibility Committee, which makes them the second largest group after the Congolese. Somalis are not the biggest group among the refugees JRS

assists in Kampala either, but their numbers have increased compared to 2009. While by September 2009 JRS had assisted around 90 Somalis; by September 2010 the number had risen to approximately 135. In particular the number of women and children went up.

Other agencies, such as Refugee Law Project and InterAid, also assist Somali refugees. Some Somalis who recently arrived said Ugandan peacekeepers in Somalia had helped them leave the country by giving them information, financial support and assisting them with transport.

Language is a challenge

Language might be one reason for the low turn-up of Somali refugees at the JRS office. "It is always a challenge

for the JRS team to find a reliable interpreter," says Stephen Kuteesa, Project Director in Kampala. "Even the food we hand out is not the same as they are culturally used to," he adds. Some have sold the food they received from JRS and used the money to cater for their needs. Due to the low educational background most of them have, they do not qualify for JRS skills training either. "We get the impression that they manage to survive here thanks to the large international support network they can rely on," says Mr Kuteesa.

JRS is currently trying to find out how to better serve Somali refugees in Kampala. "We are endeavouring to strengthen our ties with the Somali community and their representatives, such as SIPED, to find out how we

can best respond to their needs," says Mr Kuteesa. "To build up a pool of interpreters and adopt a more flexible model of distributing food could be the first steps," he adds. ■

Susi Moeller is a programme assistant in the JRS Urban Programme in Kampala, Uganda.

JRS Partners in Kampala, Uganda

- Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)
- UN refugee agency (UNHCR)
- Refugee Law Project (RLP)
- African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (ACTV)
- InterAid
- Uganda Red Cross Society
- Amnesty International
- Missionaries of the Poor
- Host communities represented through local chairpersons (LCs)
- Refugee groups

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Unregistered but tolerated

areas and the outskirts or in the city centre. Most live in rundown, small, and overcrowded single rooms which cost them between 350 and 600 Ethiopian Birr (USD 21-37) per month. To sustain themselves, they produce handcrafts or sell spices, camel milk, perfumes, incense, tea and bread on the sidewalks of the capital's main streets. However, they can barely earn enough income to feed their children and pay the house rent. Among them are the most vulnerable: single mothers, orphans and people with physical and mental disabilities as well as young and elderly people.

Somalis contribute economically

The majority of the Somali population in Addis live in 'little Mogadishu', around Bole Michael, but thousands of Somalis also live in other parts of the city. These areas boast lots of small businesses such as restaurants, internet cafés and music shops. In particular those Somalis residing in the Bole Michael area have contributed considerably to the development of this area which has had a positive impact on the local community. "A

decade ago there were no shops or transport facilities, the area was sparsely inhabited and people had to cover long distances to go shopping," says Hanna Petros, JRS ENP Project Director. "Now, there are plenty of businesses and transport facilities and local people earn additional income by renting out houses to Somali refugees," she adds.

In view of such positive developments, the local community accepts the fact that most Somali refugees are involved in petty trade. Moreover, despite religious and cultural differences, cross cultural marriages are becoming more common these days, paving the way for some Somalis to integrate fully with the local population.

Almost all Somali refugees are illiterate because the education system collapsed during the long years of war in their home country. "Many do not even know how to hold a pencil," says Mulugeta W/Eyesus, JRS Project Director of the Refugee Community Centre. "But we are happy to see that they are actively participating in language courses, vocational

trainings, sports activities and often go for psychosocial support. After the Eritrean refugees, Somalis are the second biggest group to benefit from JRS services," he adds. ■

Neway Alemayehu works as a counsellor at the JRS Refugee Community Centre while Meron Mengesha and Azale Gulilat are social workers at the JRS Emergency Needs Programme in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

JRS Partners in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- Ethiopian government's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA)
- UN refugee agency (UNHCR)
- Refugee and Returnee Affairs Department of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development Inter-Church Aid Development Commission (EOC-DICAC/RRAD)
- NGO umbrella organisation, the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA)
- Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations (CCRDA)
- Charities and Societies Agency
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat (ECS)
- Archdiocese of Catholic Secretariat (ACS)
- Mother Teresa Centre
- Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMM)
- JRS is currently establishing partnership with the Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

In search of peace and security

My name is Aziza, I am 30 years old. I had a husband and bore him five children. Two of my children died because of diarrhoea while they were babies. The other three, two boys and a girl, are alive.

I was living in Baladweyne town in Somalia with my husband and my children. While I was pregnant with my younger son the Islamist Al Shabaab attacked us. They whipped and tormented me, and I ran and ran to escape them until I fell down. All this highly affected the foetus in my womb and I fell seriously ill. However, in 2002 I eventually gave birth to a boy with great pain and suffering.

Since his birth, my son has been completely paralysed. For me, this is a result of the attack and the general insecurity we had to live with. When I look at him, he seems like a three or four year old while he really is eight. His nerves do not work at all, he cannot move or sit down, he is always lying motionless, like a dead child and he cannot even turn over. His mouth is always open and he cannot speak. He cannot eat any kind of solid food, only milk or other juicy foods and I feed him every day.

Aziza first came to the JRS Emergency Needs Programme on June 7, 2010. The team listened to her story, consoled her and helped her with financial assistance and blankets. They continue to check on her.

Four months ago my husband died of HIV/AIDS. Because my husband was infected with the virus, I am also living with it. Because of the fighting in Somalia I did not feel safe there with my children. In search of security I fled with the children and my aunt to Ethiopia, crossing the border in Wajjalle, in the south-east of the country.

Begging for food

I then left my two healthy children with my aunt in Jijiga town, the capital of the Somali Ogaden region in south-eastern Ethiopia and came to Addis Ababa with my paralysed son. Once in Addis, I stayed with a Somali woman whom I knew from home. She gave me only a sleeping place so I had to gather my daily food by begging from other Somali refugees or local people.

While I was staying with that woman, I secretly began taking life-prolonging

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Of a HIV-Positive Refugee Woman

[anti retroviral] medicines. One day, while I was cleaning the house my medicine fell on the floor, in front of her. She realised that I was HIV positive and immediately chased me from the house.

I moved to another area in Addis where nobody knew me. Moving somewhere where people knew me meant they would neglect or ignore me because of the virus. I met another Somali woman whom I didn't know before. She gave me a sleeping place and I still beg to obtain daily food for me and my son. ■



A young Somali mother with her child in Addis Ababa. Single mothers are among the most vulnerable.



Love to Life

By Nicholas Hatumuza

More tortuous than all else is the human heart
 Beyond remedy, who can understand it
 No love, no company, no peace, no ability
 Treated like wild cards
 Who can feel their feelings?
 Who can willingly accompany them?
 Who can fill enough their need?
 Tell me who will restore love to life

Heal broken hearts, adopt us, support them
 well-wishers
 Praise their names, proclaim their fame
 Why make them long for happiness
 Why limit their basic needs?
 Is that what you do them? Is this the manner
 you treat them

Obtaining meals like scavengers?
 Hard working but like machines
 Their rights stepped on
 Tell me who will restore love to life

Release this bound parent
 Untie thronged yoke guardian
 Share your bread that's worthy
 Shelter and cloth that's what should do to them
 Enjoy their happiness
 Be part of their heart beat
 And never turn your back to them
 Be ready to restore love to life

Nicholas is one of hundreds of children with disabilities living at the centre of the Missionaries of the Poor who take care of refugees as well as locals in Kampala, Uganda.

RWANDAN REFUGEES IN UGANDA

By Stephen Kuteesa
JRS Uganda



Urban refugees often share bare and crowded houses.

Still in exile Rwandan refugees in Kampala, Uganda

Sixteen years after the genocide in Rwanda, tens of thousands of Rwandans still remain in exile. As of June 2010, Uganda hosts more than 22,600 Rwandan refugees, out of a total of 145,771 refugees in the country. The majority of them live in Nakivale, Oruchinga and Kyaka II refugee settlements while the government expects those awaiting determination of their refugee status to stay in the capital, Kampala.

According to Ugandan refugee policy, Rwandan asylum seekers can only move on to the settlements once they are granted refugee status. While the Ugandan government allows Congolese asylum seekers to go directly to the settlements, where they are quickly considered for refugee status and also receive assistance, Rwandans do not have this possibility. They can only seek asylum in Kampala.

Two groups of Rwandan refugees can be identified. One group comprises mostly Hutus who fled as a result of the 1994 genocide or issues related to it. The other, more recent group is made up of both Hutu and Tutsi who have fled the increasing political intolerance of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) party which took over after ending the genocide. These refugees belong to opposition political parties and say they have been harassed by the government. However, according to a tripartite agreement signed in

May 2010 between Uganda, Rwanda and the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) Rwanda is considered safe for return. This has caused anxiety among Rwandan refugees who are afraid of being persecuted by the government again if they have to return.

Rwandans have to wait longer

Compared to other nationalities, Rwandan asylum seekers have to wait much longer to be granted refugee status. On average, it takes up to one year, sometimes even longer, while asylum seekers from other countries normally have to wait no more than five months. Not all applications meet the criteria. In March 2010, only 71 Rwandan asylum applications were handled by the Ugandan Refugee Eligibility Committee of which 39 were granted refugee status.

Unlike refugees in the settlements, they don't receive any assistance

while awaiting the decision about their status. "Even if they are in an extremely vulnerable or desperate situation there is hardly any way they can be relocated to a settlement," says Jennifer Amanio, Programme Assistant in the JRS Urban Programme in Kampala.

However, the majority of those already granted status do not want to move to the settlements because they have no access to land. While Uganda's liberal refugee policy allows refugees to cultivate their own land in the settlements, Rwandans are being denied this option so as to "encourage" them to return home. As a result, many Rwandans left the settlements and moved to nearby villages. Others proceeded to Kampala, fearing they might be forcibly returned to Rwanda.

In fact, on July 14, 2010, 1,800 Rwandans from Nakivale and Kyaka II settlements were forcibly returned to Rwanda. Although the government stated that only persons considered a security threat and thus ineligible for asylum had been returned, fear and anxiety as well as rumours that all Rwandans would soon be returned spread quickly among Rwandan refugees.

Ensure protection for those in need

Since January 2010, UNHCR has issued general figures on the estimated number of refugees in Kampala. This means their statistics do not give a

breakdown of the number of refugees residing in Kampala by country of origin. According to these statistics, no Rwandan refugee arrived in Kampala in May and June 2010. Within the same time, however, JRS assisted 271 Rwandan asylum seekers who claimed they had just arrived in Kampala. "Unfortunately, as reflected in their statistics as well as in their hesitation to speak out about the situation, UN-

HCR has taken no position regarding this difference," says Ms Amanio.

A cessation clause to end refugee status for Rwandans is scheduled for December 2011, as the Rwandan government declares the country safe for its citizens to return. "While it may be true that not all Rwandans

flee for genuine reasons, we call upon the Ugandan government to take the cases of the more recent arrivals into particular consideration to ensure that people who are in need of protection are not excluded from the right to asylum," says Fr Isaac Kiyaka SJ, JRS Uganda Director. ■

Stephen Kuteesa is the director of the JRS Urban Programme in Kampala, Uganda.

Fleeing persecution, seeking freedom

I fled Rwanda in late 2009 because I was afraid of the ruling government, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). I used to live in the Rwandan capital, Kigali, with my wife and four children. Life was difficult for us because I faced many problems with the government.



Most refugees in Kampala live in poor neighbourhoods.

Late one night, I heard a loud bang at the door. When I opened, three strong men grabbed me and pushed me into a vehicle. While we sped off I heard my wife scream for help. I struggled in vain to free myself. Instead the men threatened me with death if I did not keep silent. They drove me to a place that I later realised was a detention facility for the military intelligence.

For several weeks I was detained, interrogated and tortured for associating myself with an opposition political party. Finally, I was released and warned not to get involved with any opposition politics. They wanted me to join the ruling RPF party, but I refused.

However, believing in my political freedom and freedom of association, I

returned to opposition politics, a fact which was not tolerated by the RPF government. I received information that government agents were searching for me and fearing for my life, I went into hiding and eventually fled Rwanda.

Ten people sharing one room

I crossed the border to Uganda and travelled up to the capital, Kampala, where I sought asylum. A week later, my wife and children joined me. A Rwandan refugee accommodated us for a few days while we figured out our next move. The living conditions were not good, as we had to share a small room with the host family of four. Much as I needed my family around, I had no means of looking after them. By the time I was directed

TESTIMONY

to JRS. I had lost all hope. "What is the use of a man who can't take care of his family?", I remember telling JRS staff in Kampala.

The three month JRS support of food and accommodation was a big starting point for me. While JRS sustained me I looked for other means of survival because the aid was only for a short period of time. Since I was trained and had worked as a pharmacist back home, I strongly believed that I could get a job in Kampala as I waited for my refugee status to be determined. I also speak four languages - Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, French and English.

With the help of InterAid, a partner organisation of the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in Kampala, the respective government ministry verified my academic documents. This gave me the opportunity to go ahead and start looking for a job. Luck was on my side and four months after I arrived in Kampala, I was employed as a salesman in a pharmaceutical company.

The minimum income I earn enables me to sustain my family. I can now rent a house in Kampala and feed them. I am an ambitious man, full of energy and far from the devastated impression I made when I first met JRS. I hope to take my children to school next year and enjoy a life free of persecution in Uganda. ■



A Rwandan refugee who sustains his wife and four children by producing crafts made of banana fibre in Nairobi.

Empowering urban refugees

Christine and her husband arrived in Kenya in 1998, after fleeing Rwanda. They came with five children and she has given birth to three more in Kenya. The family now lives around 50km outside the Kenyan capital, Nairobi.

Like them, many refugees opt to stay in urban areas, preferably in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, instead of moving on to one of the four designated refugee camps in northern Kenya. Most of them end up living among the Kenyan poor, in disadvantaged locations with regard to housing, sanitation and security. Although refugees face similar challenges to poor Kenyans, their situation is aggravated by the fact that they have no social network to rely on, often do not speak the local language and sometimes face hostility or harassment.

Unlike those who move on to the camps, refugees who reside in urban areas receive no assistance and are expected to look after themselves. However, their prospects of acquiring legitimate work permits are restricted by government legislation, policies and practice. Yet they still work in the

informal labour market doing casual jobs, for instance as domestic workers, tailors or selling handicrafts or foodstuffs.

“We borrowed money from friends, rented a house and started making doughnuts which we sold through shops in our area,” says Christine. “With the money we earned, we managed to pay our rent, food and education for the children,” she adds.

Loans to promote economic independence

However, in March 2009 Christine asked JRS for financial assistance because her business was about to collapse. Her husband had fallen into a deep depression and she was left as the sole bread winner. Two months later JRS granted her a loan of KSh 15,000 (USD 190).

Christine used the JRS loan to buy some equipment for her business which soon picked up. Every day, she would wake up early in the morning, prepare the doughnuts, help her children get ready for school and look after her husband. Then she would deliver the doughnuts to the retailers, most of whom are a long walking distance away. “From what I earned I could pay all expenses for the family, without depending on anyone,” she says. In March 2010 her husband died. Still resilient, she continues running the business and paid back her loan in June 2010.

Through its income-generating activities programme in Nairobi JRS provides training and small loans to between 30 and 40 people per year. “Many refugees acquired skills like tailoring, carving or crocheting in their country of origin. An initial assistance can help them become economically independent,” says Agnes Asiimwe, the Assistant Programme Coordinator.

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In 1993, JRS opened Mikono (Kiswahili for 'hands'), a craft shop in Nairobi where 70 refugees from different nationalities sell their products. Over the years, many refugees have been able to meet their daily needs with the income generated by the shop. Between January and September 2010, products worth USD 34,846 were sold. The refugees who supply crafts to the shop are aged between 20 and 60, most of them come from the Great Lakes region and almost 50 of them are women.

Single mothers are less respected

Refugee women, and single mothers in particular, are the most vulnerable

among refugees. In most cultures a single mother is less respected than a married woman. This attitude does not change after being uprooted and displaced to another country. On the contrary, single mothers often have to carry a double burden in exile because they are disrespected by both the refugee community and the local population.

Most single mothers depended financially on their husbands before they were left behind. Being on their own, they find themselves in a precarious situation. Since they have no one to rely on, they often get depressed, unable to move on. Some develop psychosocial problems, others go into prostitution. They become an easy prey for men who not only abuse and

Since they have no one to rely on, they often get depressed, unable to move on.

exploit them sexually but also physically and mentally. Many become infected with HIV/AIDS and hence are unable to take care of their families.

However, once given an opportunity, there are many who learn how to handle the situation. "We see how their hope is revived and their dignity restored," says Irene Waweru, Director of the JRS Urban Emergency Programme in Nairobi. Like Christine, they manage to transform their lives and no longer depend on anyone, despite the tremendous challenges they face. ■

Mercy Muchai is JRS Eastern Africa's assistant regional programmes officer in Nairobi, Kenya. From 2005 until April 2010 she coordinated the JRS Income Generating Activities Programme.



Seventy refugees from different nationalities sell their products at the JRS Mikono craft shop in Nairobi.

Creating employment in displacement

I was 17 when I escaped the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo's South Kivu region about two years ago. My father had been killed when I was nine and since then I had been separated from my brothers and my mother. I still today do not know where they are.

Timber traders helped me to reach Nairobi where I arrived in October 2007. I contacted a Congolese guy, the only person I knew in Nairobi, and he hooked me up with someone I could stay with. He took care of me and shared what he had with me.

But he soon left Nairobi and was resettled to the US. I could not stay at his place any longer and moved in with another person who helped me survive. Then I turned to JRS for help. Someone had told me to go to St. Vincent, one of the parishes where JRS reaches out to refugees. They gave me food and blankets. I talked to the social worker and told him I wanted to start a project. He informed the office and two weeks later two JRS staff members visited me.

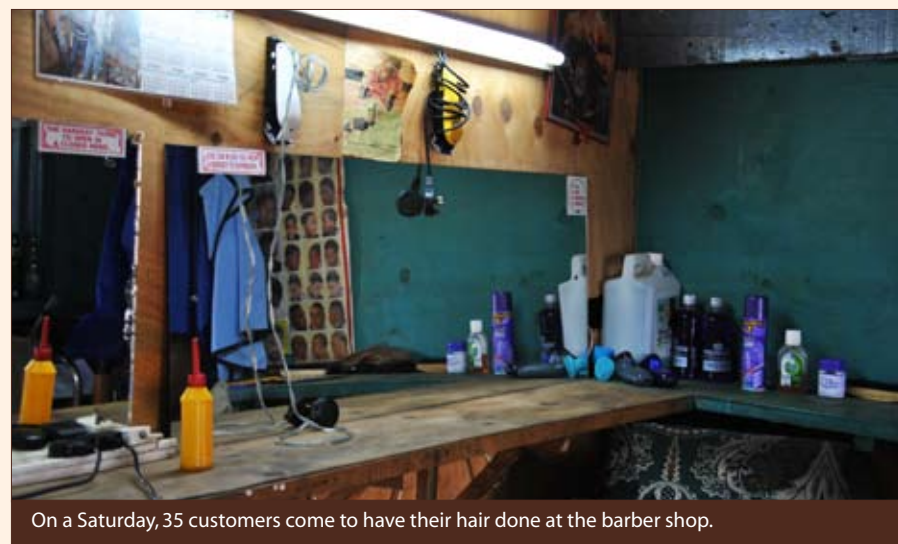
With a JRS loan of KSh 15,000 (USD 190) I started a barber's shop in April 2009. Since JRS normally does not give loans to young single men they asked me to find the premises and raise the money to pay rent as a compromise. For two months I looked

for a suitable place and finally found one that I rented for KSh 2,500 (USD 30) per month. Additionally I had to pay the same amount as deposit. Friends helped me with another KSh 10,000 (USD 125).

It was difficult at the start because I only had one hair clipper. Altogether I spent KSh 30,000 (USD 375) on equipment, such as towels, hair clippers, treatment, chairs, bowls etc. I bought these items one after the other. Now I have four hair clippers but they are not good quality.

Training 16 young men

When I first started the salon I trained two students for one week, so that they could help me do the work. Others started coming soon. Now I am training 16 students, two are Kenyans and the others refugees from Burundi, Rwanda and Congo. Most of them came without their parents. They train for two months before they can start working on their own. Some stay here, others move on to work at other



On a Saturday, 35 customers come to have their hair done at the barber shop.

TESTIMONY



Kenyan and young refugees from three different countries are trained at "Upendo Kinyozi" barber shop in Nairobi.

salons. At the end of the day I just share with them whatever we earned over the day.

I am a barber. I picked it up from watching other people. JRS trained me in business skills. I keep a receipt book where every team member has to write down what jobs they did over the day and how much they charged.

On a weekend we have up to 35 customers per day which means we earn about KSh 1,000 (USD 12) whereas during the week we might earn only KSh 600 (USD 7) per day.

Although it helps me sustain myself it is not enough. We have no soap for the boys to wash their clothes with after work. We also need more hair clippers, chairs, treatment and music. I would like to expand and train more students.

I don't think I will go back to my country. The people who killed my father are still there searching for his children and I don't know if I can stay with them. ■



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