

Learning from Disrupted Learners:

REFUGEE EDUCATION COUNCIL 2022 REPORT

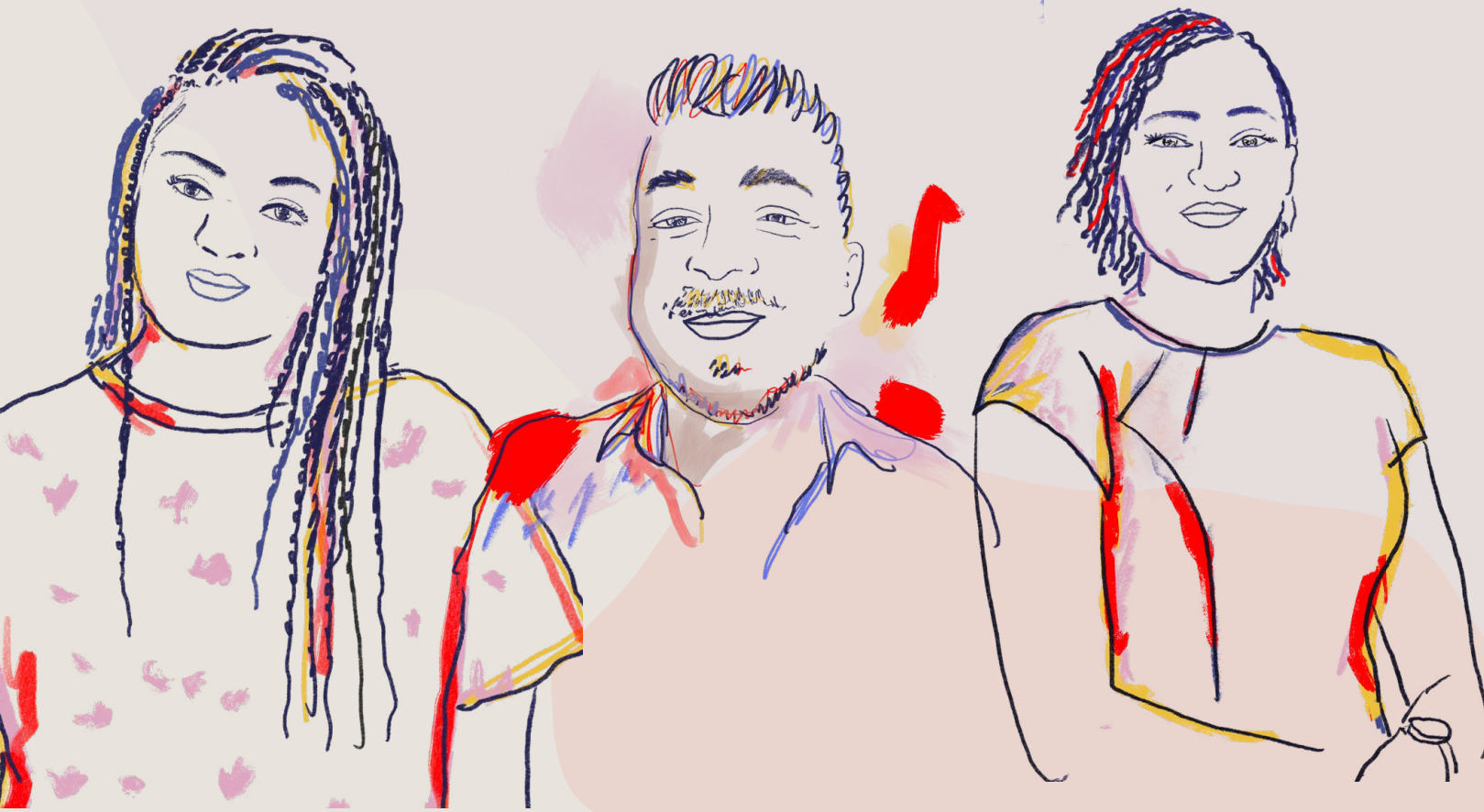


Table of Contents

Introduction

- 4** Letter from Minister Sajjan
- 6** Letter from the Council
- 8** Meet the Refugee Education Council
- 18** About Education in Emergencies
- 21** Vision for the Education of Refugee and Displaced Learners: A Manifesto

Testimonies

Gender Equality

- 28** Introduction
- 32** Missing, Mwongera Christine
- 36** Girl, Wife, Mother: An Interrupted Education, Istarlin Abdi
- 40** The Refugee Diaries, Elizabeth Achol Maker Deng
- 42** Changing my World, Changing our World, Laura Barbosa

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

- 45** Introduction
- 49** The New Arrival, Christian Baobab
- 53** What do we do as Teachers, Mwongera Christine
- 56** Building Bridges with Stories, Anojitha Sivaskaran
- 63** Vacant, Hawa Abdiaziz Abdi

Inclusion

- 65** Introduction
- 69** Inclusion Against All Odds, Moriom and Rashel
- 72** Everything and Anything, Suleman Arshad
- 74** Not Waiting for Help, Nhial Deng
- 77** Putting People First, Foni Joyce
- 83** Included, Istarlin Abdi

Technology and Digital Learning

- 84** Introduction
- 88** Virtual Reality, Nhial Deng and Yvana Portillo
- 91** Connected, Istarlin Abdi
- 92** One Step Closer, Qais Ghasan Abdulrazzaq
- 94** Passion to Livelihood, Paul Padiet
- 96** Gender Online, Laura Barbosa

Accountability

- 105** Introduction
- 108** Bull by the Horns: The Need for a Collective Effort for the Education of Refugee and Displaced Girls, Bikienga Odessa
- 110** Assets and Liabilities, Anojitha Sivaskaran
- 112** From Fish to Rod: Dignity through Education, Nabaloum Pascaline

114 *Call to Action*

115 *Acknowledgements*

116 *References*

For more information, please visit:

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Canada.ca/ensemble-apprentissage



Canada

World Vision

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Letter from the Minister

In 2021, as part of its 3-year Together for Learning campaign, the Government of Canada created the Refugee Education Council. The council is made up of 15 young leaders from around the world who either have been forcibly displaced or live in communities that host forcibly displaced people. Learning from Disrupted Learners brings together their stories.

These young people have written poignantly about their lives and families, communities, successes and struggles, and hopes for the future. Their stories of getting education and finding opportunities in the midst of conflict, family tragedy, and hunger demonstrate the resilience and leadership of young people.

The essays, stories, and poems that make up this anthology, as well as the council's Youth Manifesto, remind us about the need for inclusive decision making. Because, as one council member writes, "There can never be an effective solution without involving the communities that have been affected".

The education of women and girls is a thread that runs through the anthology. A council member from Sri Lanka writes that many families consider boys to be assets and girls to

be liabilities. A teacher from the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya tells us that in the camp's student population of 3,000 only 300 are girls.

Harmful societal barriers that prevent girls from attending school in refugee camps include female genital mutilation; child, early and forced marriage; gender-based violence; teenage pregnancies; high levels of poverty leading to transactional sex; lack of sanitary facilities; and stigma. Too many girls must work in or outside their homes to ease their families' financial burdens. Sometimes a 15- or 16-year-old will marry because they feel it's their only choice.

A single mother of girls writes, "Everyone is undermining you because you are a woman. But you have to be strong, you have to fight for them. You have to let them know: 'These are my girls. They need to have quality education. They need to do whatever they feel like doing. They have the right.'"

Contributors also highlight the need for mental health and psychosocial support and the need to address the stigma that displaced youth carry, particularly those who have been marginalized because of disability, pregnancy, or motherhood.

Suicide is a tragedy too often present for those facing forced displacement or marginalization. We must address the needs of those who have faced, and live with, trauma. Teachers play a vital role in breaking down barriers to learning, particularly for women and girls. Those educators are also agents of change who need support in addressing the needs of traumatized learners.

The importance of digital tools is underscored as a way to learn, to share and to connect with people around the world. One council member, who has not attended any classes since the COVID-19 pandemic began, laments the lack of access to computers, phones, tablets, and the Internet. Those who can attend school face crowded classrooms and inadequate buildings and resources, including textbooks, desks and chairs.

The positive tone of this anthology is inspiring. As one council member explains, "Proper education will allow citizens to become change makers. They can make changes in their families, in their traditional practices and in their communities."

This is why Canada's goal is to ensure all children have access to quality education that is safe, equitable, inclusive, gender-responsive, conflict-sensitive, and locally driven. By working with people with lived experience, we are better able to respond to the crisis of education in emergencies.

As Canada's minister for international development, I hope others will read this anthology and understand, as one council member writes, "It is time to work more with refugee youth leaders as partners. Trust them. Invest in their leadership. Instead of waiting for the right time, the time is now."

I could not agree more. I look forward to joining you as a partner over the coming weeks and months.

**The Honourable Harjit S. Sajjan,
Minister of International Development
and Minister responsible for the Pacific
Economic Development Agency of Canada**



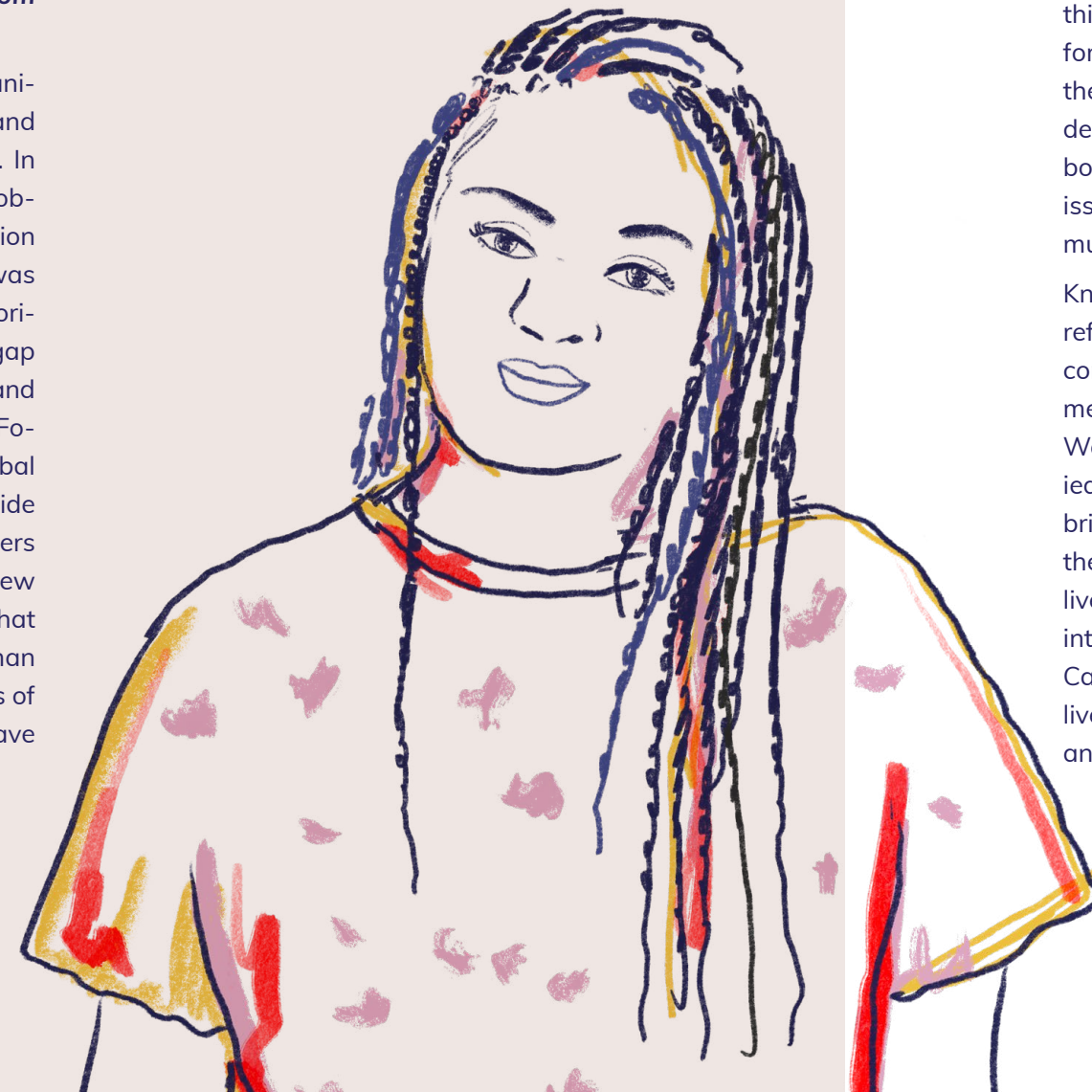
Letter from the Council

Foreword on behalf of the Refugee Education Council

Dear readers,

On behalf of Canada's Refugee Education Council, I am pleased to share the first edition of our annual report titled **Learning from Disrupted Learners**.

In the past five years, the global community has galvanized significant momentum and support around global refugee education. In 2016, Education Cannot Wait, the UN global fund specifically focused on education in emergencies and protracted crises was founded; in 2018, G7 leaders made a historical commitment at Charlevoix to close the gap in education for refugees, especially girls, and in 2019, following the first Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, the UNHCR released a Global Framework for Refugee Education as a guide for national and international stakeholders to attain SDG4 for refugees, to name a few examples.^{1,2,3} These efforts recognize that access to education is a fundamental human right and that we will not achieve the goals of SDG4 without ensuring that all refugees have access to quality education.



At the same time, the world changed a lot! Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic left the world fatigued and craving life as it was before mandatory isolations, lockdowns, and masks. For most, the end of the crisis is near and life will resume to a new type of normal. However, for refugee and displaced youth, the pandemic risks reversing progress that has been made for refugee education. The UNHCR estimates that "refugee learners lost an average of 142 days of school up to March 2021 because of closures ...". This deficit will be enormous to recover.⁴ Moreover, estimates show that from 2018 to 2020, almost a million children were born as refugees.⁵ What does this mean? (1) The existing education gap for refugees may have been exacerbated by the pandemic; (2) there will be an increased demand for refugee education once the newborns reach school-going age; (3) and these issues come at a time when the global community is fatigued.

Knowing this, I cannot stop advocating for refugee education and I am more inspired to continue this work alongside the incredible members of the Refugee Education Council. We are a group of 15 individuals with varied lived experiences of displacement. What brings us together is a fundamental belief in the power of education to change peoples' lives, no matter the circumstances one is born into or finds oneself in. The Government of Canada has asked us to share our stories and lived experiences to inform education policies and solutions that are catered to those they

are meant to serve. For the past year, despite individual busy schedules and grappling with the realities of the pandemic, we got to work.

We identified the following thematic areas: (1) **inclusion**, (2) **mental health and psychosocial support**, (3) **technology and digital learning**, (4) **gender equality**, and (5) **accountability** as main inequalities that we need to address in refugee education. In a short amount of time, we've developed practical recommendations under each theme. Beyond that, members of the council have participated in various fora including INEE podcasts, UNHCR reports, and the Dubai Expo to continue highlighting the need to address the refugee education gap.

We participate in these efforts because we believe in the power of storytelling to incite empathy, to unite people around a cause, and to compel them to action. It is in the same vein that the council wrote this report. In these pages are stories and compelling arguments for why the global community should continue to work harder and urgently for refugee education. The report will leave you inspired, but also equipped with focus areas that international education stakeholders can begin to address the gap in refugee education.

I invite you to read the report, consider our recommendations, and take bold action towards closing the widening gaps in access to quality education.

Yours sincerely,

Amelie Fabian
on behalf of the Refugee Education Council.

Meet The Refugee Education Council

2021-2022

Forcibly displaced youth, teachers, parents, and community leaders are among the most credible experts to address the growing global education emergency.

The Refugee Education Council brings together forcibly displaced youth and youth from host communities around the world with a diverse range of skills, experiences, and knowledge. Hosted by World Vision Canada in partnership with the Canadian International Education Policy Working Group (CIEPWG), the Council was formed to advise the Government of Canada's *Together for Learning* campaign – an

international campaign to ensure that all refugee and displaced children can access the education they need and deserve. Together, council members work to inform the Government of Canada's commitment to global education, co-create solutions, and ensure that the education of refugee and displaced persons, especially girls, remains a top priority for citizens and decision-makers globally.

Istarlin Abdi, Somalia & Kenya

Istarlin is a single mum of two girls, an advocate for human rights, a storyteller and a photographer. In 2017, she co-founded Dream Studio, a refugee-based media company focused on creating space for fellow refugees to tell and share their own stories with the rest of the world. She has worked with Filmaid International and Refunite as a content creator and photographer. She has also worked with Windle International Kenya as a community worker for five years, working with vulnerable schoolgirls, parents, and the community at large.

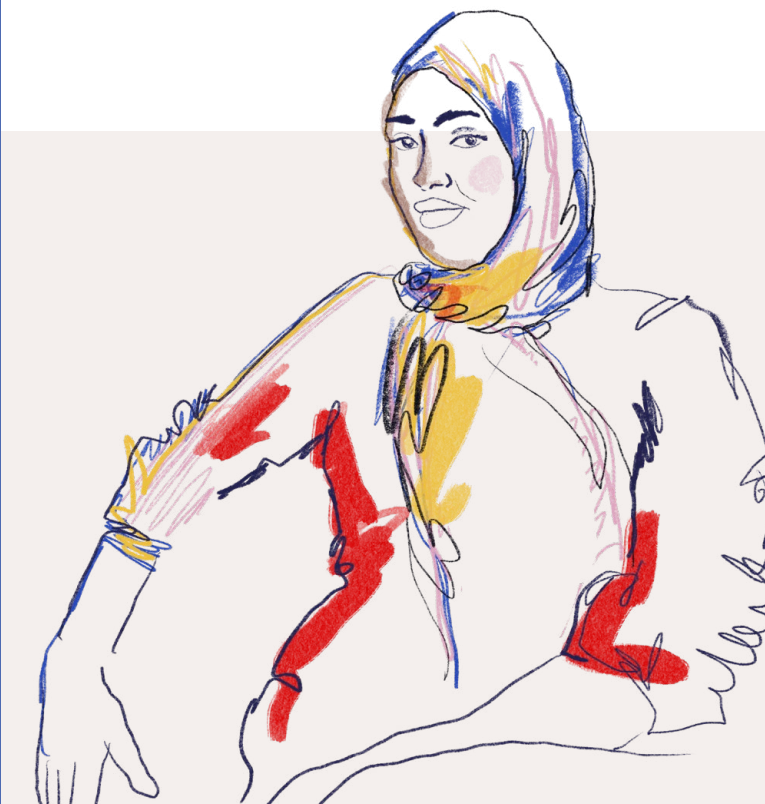
As a refugee from Somalia who has experienced displacement for over 20 years, Istarlin has long struggled with her sense of identity, self-worth, and belonging. She fears that her daughters, caught in the same circumstances of displacement, are beginning to struggle with this too. Istarlin believes that education is a great equalizer. She has joined the council to help break the generational curse of displacement by making education a global priority.



Bikienga Amdiatou, Burkina Faso

Bikienga Amdiatou is from the central-northern region of Burkina Faso. Fragility and insecurity in her area has led many students to drop out of school due to classroom closures. In fact, Bikienga herself almost dropped out of secondary school due to a lack of funds. Luckily, she received support from NGOs which enabled her to continue her education. Now, at 20 years old, she is a second-year university student studying human resources.

Bikienga is a former fellow of the Promoting Equality And Safety in Schools (PEASS) project, the winner of the Excellence Award of the President of Burkina Faso, and among the top five highest academic achievers nationally for her grade level in 2019. Beyond excelling in her own studies, Bikienga wants to make sure that more girls can become their best selves despite conflict and internal displacement. She is an active member of several school and community initiatives that are concerned with access to education and hopes to advocate for girls who have had to drop out of school on a global stage.



**Suleman Arshad,
Pakistan**

Suleman is a visually-challenged youth activist from Pakistan who advocates for the rights and development of his community. At 12 years old, Suleman started to lose his sight and was enrolled in a school for people who are visually impaired. In his community, children and youth with disabilities are discouraged from getting an education alongside able-bodied children, and are often pushed aside in society.

Suleman has been working to fight the stigma and challenges faced by marginalized students. He founded School of Inclusion, a youth-led organization which promotes inclusive and quality education for youth with disabilities. He is a member of the Commonwealth Children and Youth with Disability Network, which seeks to provide quality education to children and youth with disabilities. In 2016, he received the Commonwealth Youth Worker Award. As a member of a host community, Suleman has witnessed the challenges and hostility faced by refugees from Afghanistan. He hopes to use his experience and skills to make schooling more inclusive for refugees, especially refugees with differing abilities.



**Laura Barbosa,
Colombia & Canada**

Laura is an educator, a community worker, and a human rights advocate. Born in Colombia with limited access to education, forced displacement by the military or paramilitary was common. At 18 years old, after losing both of her parents, Laura fled to China looking for a better future. She worked as a Spanish teacher and volunteered with refugee children from Myanmar who had been recently displaced to Malaysia.

Today, Laura lives in Canada and works to encourage those who have been forcibly displaced to be brave and fight for their dreams. She is the program coordinator at a student-led charity that strives to create positive learning environments to help youth reach their full potential. Laura is passionate about community development and wants to continue to support safe and sustainable environments for youth facing forced displacements.



**Malual Bol Kiir,
South Sudan & Canada**

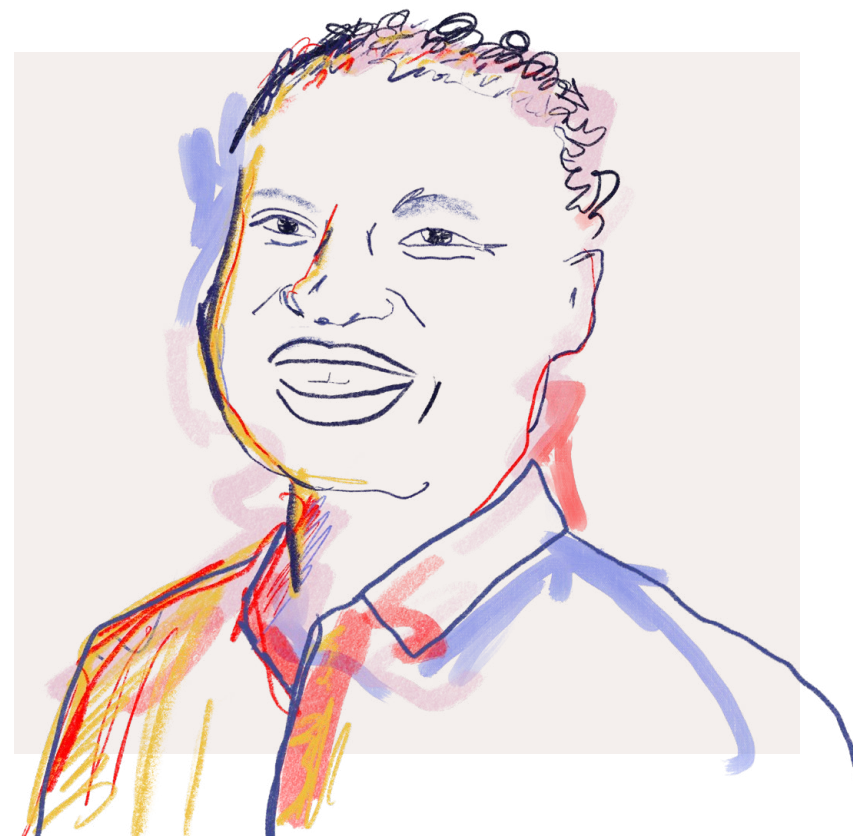
Malual Bol Kiir is a South Sudanese Peacebuilder and a former refugee. He co-founded the African Youth Action Network (AYAN), a leadership and peacebuilding organization that recruits youths to work together as agents of peace and conflict prevention. He is a founding member for the Search for Common Ground's Global Youth Leadership Council (GYLC). In 2015, he was a member of the advisory panel of experts to the UN Secretary General on UN Security Council's Resolution 2250 mandated progress study on youth, peace, and security with the final report "The Missing Peace". In 2017, he was honoured with the Women's Refugee Commission's 2017 Voices of Courage Award. Malual is a member of the Refugee Advisory Network and a committed advocate dedicated to promoting refugee education.



**Nhial Deng,
Ethiopia & Kenya**

Nhial moved to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya in 2010 after fleeing an armed attack of his village in Ethiopia. With this first-hand experience, the 23-year-old firmly believes that education is critical to helping young refugees secure a more hopeful and brighter future, for themselves, and their communities. Nhial is a powerful advocate for refugees and has spoken at several forums including the UNHCR 12th High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges. He has participated in several youth networks and initiatives including the Global Changemakers, the ONE Campaign Champions for East Africa, and the Women Deliver Young Leaders Program.

Nhial heads the Refugee Youth Peace Ambassadors, a refugee youth-led initiative in Kakuma which works towards promoting peaceful co-existence between different communities in the camp. The group focuses on empowering young people as peacebuilders and social entrepreneurs. He is also an Education Consultant for Kakuma Innovation Lab School and a member of the Amala's Youth Advisory Group.



**Amelie Fabian,
Rwanda & Canada**

Fearing persecution following the Rwandan genocide, Amelie's family fled from Rwanda to Malawi where she lived as a refugee from the age of six to 18. She came to Canada in 2014 through World University Services of Canada's (WUSC) Student Refugee Program to complete an undergraduate degree at McGill University. Since arriving in Canada, Amelie has been dedicated to improving access to education. She has volunteered as the co-chair of WUSC's local committee, as a member of the WUSC Board of Directors and as a member of the CIEPWG's youth council. Amelie has met with Canadian MPs and policy advisors to advocate for the prioritization of education and has participated in speaking engagements on refugee education such as the 2018 UN General Assembly and on a roundtable with Minister Gould on the impact of COVID-19 on refugee education.

Amelie has completed her Master of Public Policy and Master of Global Affairs as part of a dual-degree program between Sciences Po Paris and the University of Toronto. Her main passion is in education policy and its role in facilitating the inclusion of marginalized communities such as refugees to reduce inequality. Amelie hopes to use her education, lived experience, and connections to help more refugees and displaced youth obtain an education.



**Qais Ghasan Abdulrazzaq,
Syria & Jordan**

During the Syrian civil war, Qais and his family fled their home in search of safety and opportunity. The journey to Jordan was not easy and things didn't get easier once he arrived at the refugee camp. Qais quickly recognized the unique importance of education for refugees who are already at a disadvantage in their host communities and often faced with low job prospects and high rates of unemployment. He saw education as a means to empower himself to support his family and his community.

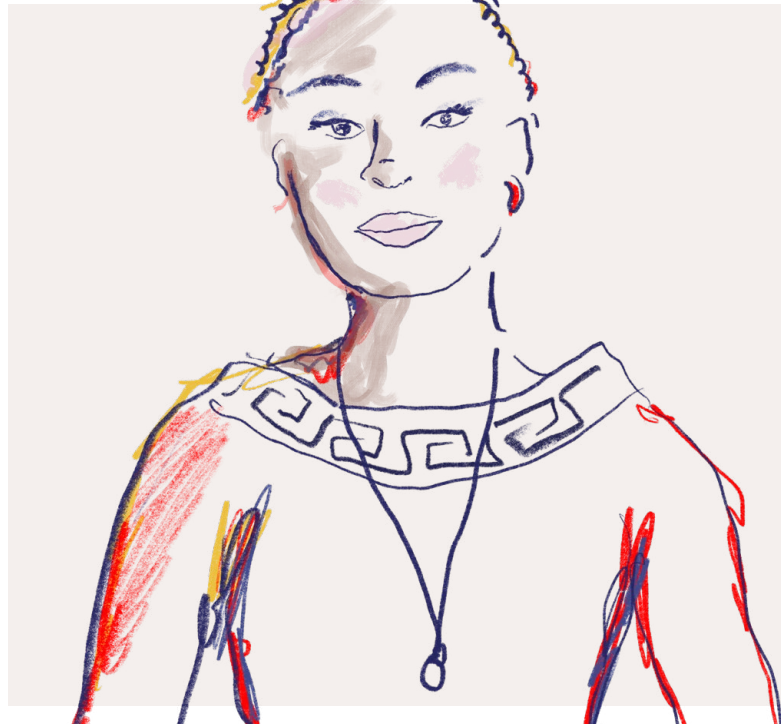
Qais studied Press and Media at AMITY University, and from there, joined the Zaha Cultural Center as a Robotics trainee through World Vision's Youth Career Guidance project. Now, while still living in a refugee camp in Jordan, the 24-year-old has improved his technical skills and is teaching other youth as a robotics trainer. Qais is a life-long learner and is passionate about seeking out opportunities that will continue to help him learn more, grow, and enrich his community.



Mwongera Christine, Kenya

Christine Mwongera is a high school teacher with experience working with refugees and teaching in an emergency setting. She is passionate about providing quality education for all children in her community, especially girls. To that end, she started a girls' mentorship program, a life skills club and a peer counselling initiative at the secondary school where she works to provide psychosocial support for all learners. Christine has also worked closely with the local radio station to sensitize the community on girl child education and to talk about the dangers of harmful cultural practices.

Christine has helped bring young girls who experienced child marriage back to school. She has worked to help out-of-school girls and teenage mothers and has challenged the stigma faced by girls who get pregnant while in school. She hopes to use her experience as a teacher and advocate to make education more inclusive for all children.



Nabaloum Pascaline, Burkina Faso

22-year-old Nabaloum is acutely aware of the challenges faced by young people navigating fragility, uncertainty, and displacement. In 2019, she was internally displaced from her home in Burkina Faso. Not long after, Nabaloum lost both of her parents and moved with her sisters and brothers to live with their grandpa.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, she joined an initiative with Fondation Hiron-delle to receive training and raise awareness in her community about the virus. As part of the project, Nabaloum conducts interviews with different stakeholders in the community that are broadcasted across radio programs. As a result of her work, Nabaloum has developed strong communication and advocacy skills that she hopes to use to continue to connect with other advocates from around the world and uplift her peers who have been forcibly displaced.

Yvana, Venezuela & Peru

Yvana is a 15-year-old student, advocate, and refugee. In 2017, faced with the crisis in Venezuela, her parents sold their car and her family fled to Peru by bus. Yvana was forced to start at a new school while navigating uncertainty, hunger, and a lack of money. Despite this, she quickly became a leader in her grade. Now, she leads sessions in her classroom and is an emerging advocate for accessible and quality education. Yvana's favourite subject is communications, and she wants to continue to improve her capacity to express herself and ask for what she needs. As a team player, Yvana hopes to learn from other members on the council while offering her perspective on global education based on her lived experience.

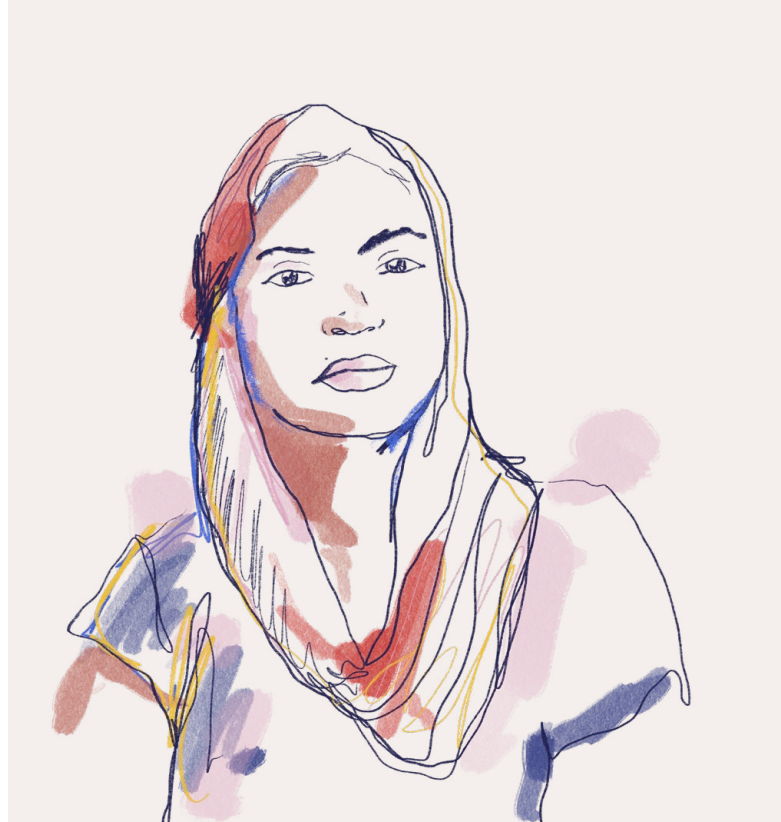


Rashel, Myanmar & Bangladesh

Rashel is a Rohingya teenage student who was born in Myanmar. In 2017, the military torched Rashel's home and his family hid out in a nearby jungle until things calmed down. Without any of their belongings, he and his family fled to Bangladesh by foot, which took two days. Rashel and his two sisters now live with their parents in a refugee camp in Bangladesh. Despite his hardships, Rashel has not given up hope. He loves learning and enjoys reading books and having intellectual discussions with his teachers in the camp. Rashel dreams of becoming a journalist and wants the world to see the joy, culture, and traditions of refugees instead of just their sorrows. He is excited to join a global platform where he can represent his community, support others in accessing quality education, and be an example of the positive impact of education.

Moriom, Bangladesh

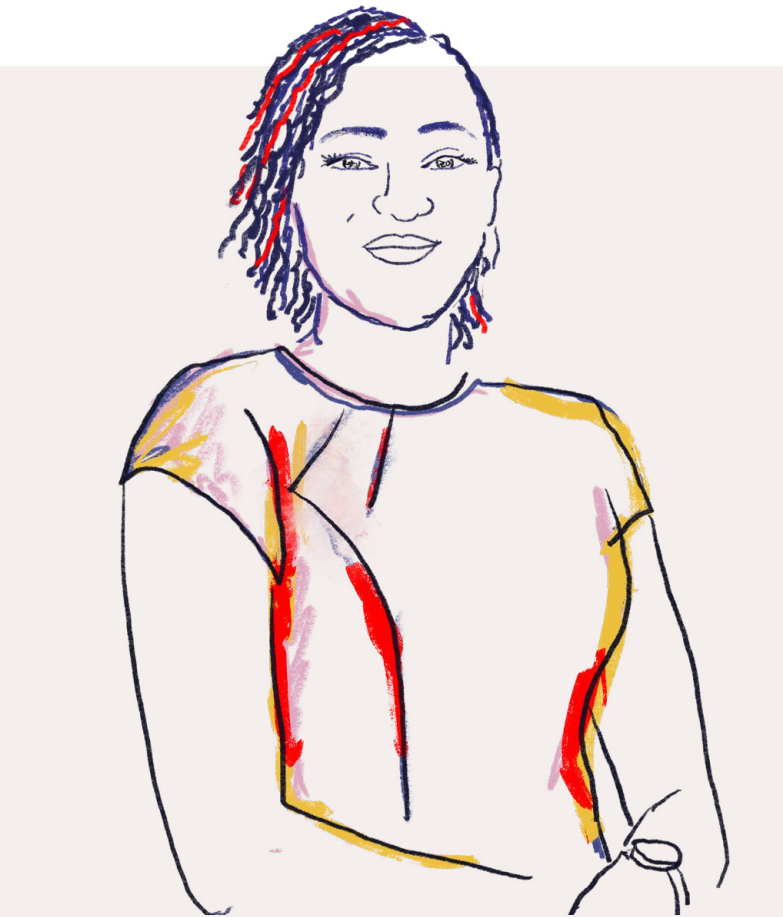
Moriom is a 16-year-old student and leader in her community in Bangladesh. She is a member of her local adolescent club and Community-Based Child Protection Committee. Moriom has a deep understanding of issues related to child protection, and she plays an active role in advocating against harm to children, adolescents, and her community at large. In 2020, after receiving training from World Vision, Moriom led initiatives to disseminate life-saving information about COVID-19 to adolescents in her community.



Foni Joyce Vuni, South Sudan & Kenya

Foni Joyce is a communicator and advocate. She graduated top of her class from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology with a degree in Mass Communication, majoring in Public Relations. Her family fled conflict and war in South Sudan, and for the past 25 years, she has lived in Kenya, forced to navigate the stigma associated with being a refugee.

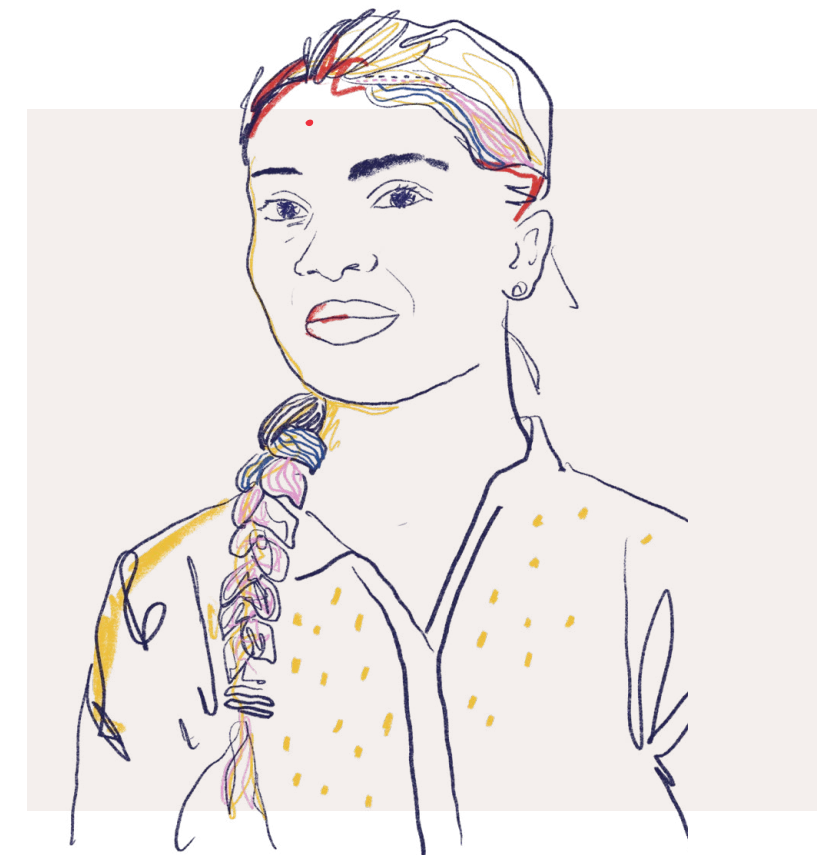
Today, Foni Joyce uses her experience as a refugee and her expertise in communications to shift the narrative of refugees from beneficiaries to partners. She advocates for greater inclusion of youth, women, and girls in the decision-making processes that are important to them. Foni Joyce has advocated for refugee youth issues at UNHCR-NGO Consultations, the High Commissioner's Protection Dialogue, the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, the 2016 and 2018 UN General Assembly, and through her role on the UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council. Foni Joyce hopes to use her experience and expertise to improve refugee education.



Anojitha Sivaskaran, Sri Lanka

Anojitha is a youth activist based in Sri Lanka. Growing up in northern Sri Lanka during a decades-long civil war, Anojitha experienced displacement, food shortages, insecurity, injustice, and inadequate shelter. From this first-hand experience, a passion for sustainable peace grew. Anojitha obtained her Bachelors in Peace and Conflict Resolution from the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka and has completed diplomas in Human Resource Management and Transitional Justice. She has worked with the United Network of Young Peacebuilders, Tomorrows' Futurism, AIESEC, the Inter-University Gender Festival, and several other initiatives committed to conflict transformation.

Currently, Anojitha works at the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka as a project officer. She works with students to raise awareness and positively influence the public discourse about pluralism to strengthen the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka. Anojitha strongly believes that including young people is a critical component of effective, wide-reaching, and sustainable efforts to overcome conflict and fragility.



Learn more about the Refugee Education Council at:

English: canada.ca/together-learning

French: canada.ca/ensemble-apprentissage

About Education in Emergencies

Ashlyn Nguyen on behalf of the World Vision Canada Youth Council

Who is a refugee or internally displaced person?

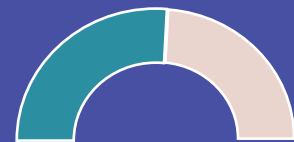
A refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their country due to conflict, persecution, natural disaster, violence, or another type of crisis. An internally displaced person is someone who has been forced to leave their home to seek refuge from conflict in another region within the same country. Oftentimes, refugee and internally displaced peoples have experienced trauma, can be separated from their loved ones, risk their lives trying to find a safe place to settle, face challenges accessing their basic human rights, and may experience stigma and discrimination in their host communities.

What is going on?

84 Million

84 million forcibly displaced peoples:

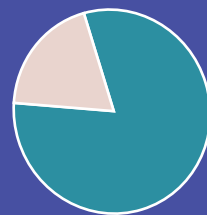
More than 84 million children, adolescents, and adults were forcibly displaced worldwide in 2021. There are more refugee people in the world now than ever before in history.⁶



42%

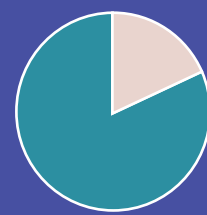
Are Children:

Children make up 42% of all forcibly displaced peoples.⁶



70%

of internally displaced peoples are girls and women: According to UNESCO, girls and women represent 70% of the internally displaced peoples worldwide.⁶



23%

23%: 23% of the world's refugee population live in refugee camps.⁶

1 Million

babies born as refugees:

1 million babies born as refugees: In prolonged protracted situations, refugee people may spend upwards of five years and even decades living in refugee camps. It is even common to have entire generations of families born and raised in refugee camps. Between 2018 and 2020, nearly 1 million newborns were born as refugees.⁶

2 / 3

from five countries:

2 / 3 from five countries: 2/3 of refugee people come from five countries: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar.⁶

How does displacement affect learning opportunities?

3.5 Million

out of school:

3.5 million out of school: In 2017, more than 3.5 million refugee children and adolescents were out of school.⁷

27%

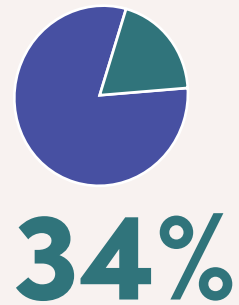
of refugee girls in school:

Only 27% of all refugee girls attended secondary school, compared to 36% of all refugee boys.⁸

48%

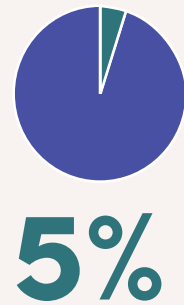
remain out of school:

In 2021, 48% of all refugee children remain out of school.⁴



enrolled in secondary school :

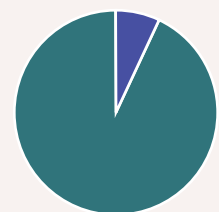
In 2021, only 34% of refugee adolescents are enrolled in secondary education.⁴



enrolled in higher education:

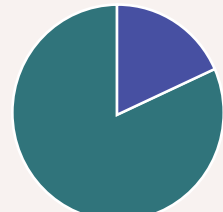
In 2021, only 5% of refugee youth are enrolled in college or university.⁶

What is possible with education?



decline in child marriage :

UNHCR estimates a decline of 14% if all refugee girls completed primary school and 64% of girls completed secondary school⁹



improved long-term socioeconomic status:

One year of education can increase a girl's income earning by 20%¹⁰



reduced violence in communities:

Research shows that regions with low rates of education are 50% more likely to experience violence and conflict.¹¹

Vision for the Education of Refugee and Displaced Learners:

A Manifesto

Introduction

As part of the **Together for Learning** campaign, the Refugee Education Council, hosted by World Vision Canada, was created in consultation with the Canadian International Education Policy Working Group. Made up of youth, teachers, parents, and community leaders with experience in forcible displacement, the council will ensure that solutions and approaches are shaped by lived experience and knowledge.

Refugee education is vital not only to build skills and confidence among displaced persons, but to promote successful independence and integration in host communities. However, the voices of those who are most impacted by global education decisions have been historically excluded. We hope that this manifesto will amplify the demands of Canada's Refugee Education Council members in order to strengthen the global commitments to addressing the growing displacement crisis.

Manifesto

We believe in a world where all children have access to quality education and lifelong learning. This vision is underpinned by our five core themes of inclusion, mental health and psychosocial support, digital learning, gender equality, and accountability.

Inclusion

Education must be **informed by** and **accessible to** refugee and displaced youth across different backgrounds.

We believe:

- Refugee and displaced youth need to be included at all levels of global decision making related to education.
- Refugee and displaced youth must have access to quality education regardless of their ability, legal status, gender, psychosocial needs, marital status, sexual orientation, caretaker role, or any other discriminating factor. This includes integrating youth with differing needs into schools and ensuring they have the proper accommodations needed to participate fully.
- All legal barriers that prevent refugee and displaced youth from accessing education should be removed. This includes ensuring qualifications are portable and can transfer with children and youth who relocate.
- Community inclusion initiatives are critical to help integrate refugee and displaced peoples into society and overcome stigmatization.
- Inclusive curricula that teach gender equality, inclusion, peace, and are inclusive of and responsive to the needs of refugee and displaced youth, especially the most marginalized, are critical to strengthen the quality of education for all learners.
- Refugee educators should be able to have their teaching qualifications recognized to enable them to teach learners in the host country.

- The international community must develop laws or legal instruments to ensure the right to education integration in all host countries.

- While shift scheduling is sometimes necessary, all shifts must be of equal quality in teaching, staffing, materials, etc., and include a mix of refugee and host students. This may include additional resourcing of schools willing to accommodate refugee students on par with nationals to incentivize teachers and reduce financial discrimination.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Refugee and displaced learners are highly vulnerable to factors that can lead to trauma and mental health issues. Mental well-being is vital to students' capacity to access and fully participate in quality learning yet mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) remains one of the most neglected areas of health and education systems with large gaps in data about the mental health needs of refugee and displaced youth, ongoing stigmatization, and few sustained interventions that consider MHPSS as part of approaches to improving access to education.

We believe:

- Mental health and psychosocial support must be included as part of any approach or program aimed at improving access to quality education for children, especially girls and boys who have been forcibly displaced.

- It is essential to destigmatize mental health issues and encourage open, safe, and supportive dialogue that promotes mental well-being and reduces experiences of isolation for refugee and displaced learners and teachers.

- Schools should be equipped with trained counselors and all educators and staff should receive training on how to identify trauma, respond to students' mental health needs, and address prejudices based on country of origin to create safe learning spaces for all.

Digital Learning

Digital learning is central to refugee education. Technology is key to closing the digital divide economically, geographically, and generationally, specifically in the context of unstable situations and where host country schools are at capacity.

We believe:

- Technology has the potential to engage hard-to-reach students, break down language barriers, improve engagement, enable knowledge sharing, facilitate personalized learning, and help displaced youth feel connected to diasporic communities.
- Refugee children should have the ability to access digital educational resources that will allow them to enhance their skills, increase employment opportunities, and develop global connections. This requires reliable infrastructure that ensures the participation of remote communities in digital learning.

- Education opportunities need to be offered in both online and offline formats to reach more students and make learning accessible to different contexts and learning styles. Online delivery should be recognized and accredited on par with offline delivery options, and digital learning should be integrated throughout the curriculum beginning with primary.

- Cultivating strong partnerships with education experts and ethical technology companies is critical to providing technology to the hardest to reach, and ensuring teachers are trained in the use of educational technologies.

- Technology should be aligned to national curricula and education systems to have the most impact. Technology should be leveraged to boost school readiness and increase literacy rates at primary and secondary level.

Gender Equality

Refugee and displaced girls continue to be disproportionately disadvantaged in accessing quality learning opportunities, despite the impressive commitments made at Charlevoix towards girls' education.

We believe:

- Gender equality should be implemented into all class curricula and teacher training. It is essential to challenge gender stereotypes and norms to achieve true equality.
- Education and awareness-raising on sexual and reproductive health and rights must be provided in school and in the community to overcome misconceptions about pregnancy and STDs, and help keep more girls and young women in school.

- Short, medium, and long-term solutions must be devised to create safer spaces for girls and LGBTQI+ youth going to school. These solutions should focus on reducing gender-based violence, bullying, early marriage, pregnancy, and stigmatization, while also and promoting mental health, higher emotional intelligence and cultural understanding of gender equality and LGBTQI+ inclusivity, including among the broader community. Governments should ensure legal protections for LGBTQI+ people and outlaw child marriage and spousal abuse, so that there is a legal backstop for advocacy work.

- All schools should provide the basic facilities and tools needed to ensure that students are not excluded from school on the basis of their biological sex. This includes increasing access to washrooms, childcare, mental health support, contraception, and menstrual hygiene products on-site, and to safe spaces for online learning opportunities off-site.

- Educating parents and community leaders is critical to updating cultural beliefs about the value of girls' education, women's rights, and the dangers of sex work, early marriage, and child labour.

- Cash support to families can help them afford to keep their girl children in school. These supports should be combined with additional measures including gender equality training and secured personal identification numbers to ensure its proper use.

Accountability

Governments and organizations working in global education have a duty to remain

accountable to the refugee and displaced learners that are impacted by their decision making. This includes adequately funding and implementing projects that:

- Are informed by and/or collect and leverage data disaggregated by social identity factors (sex, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion) on education needs, including mental health needs, of refugee and displaced youth.

- Are led or, at minimum, informed by women, youth, and/or refugee and displaced networks and organizations.

- Are responsive to and inclusive of the expressed needs of refugee and displaced youth across experiences, especially for those in rural communities and the most marginalized.

- Provide access to academic guidance counseling at secondary level for post-secondary opportunities and promote access to universal higher education and training.

- Assist refugee and displaced learners in their transition from learning to working. Poor transitions and lack of post-education employment with dignified salaries can discourage refugee and displaced youth from completing a full cycle of education. Education and employment should be planned in tandem to increase self-reliance and full participation in society.

- Are sustainable to enable long-term capacity for education systems to meet the needs of refugee and displaced learners.

- Have explicitly planned to minimize or eliminate corruption, especially corruption related to the siphoning of funds earmarked for refugee education initiatives by government and implementing entities.

The Time To Act *Is Now.*

We call upon donor governments, education ministers, multilateral and non-governmental organizations, private sector partners, and everyday citizens to do their part to prioritize the education of refugee and displaced girls and boys. More specifically:

We call on donor countries, including the Government of Canada, to prioritize education in emergencies through responsive, sustainable, and transparent solutions that are informed by refugee and displaced youth. This includes:

- i) creating new or adapting existing international assistance policies to ensure that development frameworks include approaches to mental health and psychosocial support and actively confront systemic and individual exclusion across areas of focus,

- ii) establishing a permanent, paid advisory position or committee made up of refugee and displaced youth to inform decision-making in education at the government level,

- iii) reaching and maintaining an investment of at least 15% of Official Development Assistance towards education, and

- iv) clear and transparent reporting on funding distributions and their impact, which can be easily accessed by the public.

We call on education ministers in host countries to implement curricula that are inclusive of and responsive to the needs of all learners, including refugee and displaced youth and especially for those most marginalized. In particular, we call on ministers to create new or revise existing curricula that:

- i) teach inclusion, tolerance, and peace at early grades,

- ii) promote learning about gender equality and provide age-appropriate information on sexual reproductive rights and health in classrooms,

iii) help all students transition into host country curricula, including offering language courses, disability accommodations, catch-up and accelerated courses to enable learners to rejoin age-appropriate classrooms,

iv) include cross-cultural competencies to facilitate integration with national peers, and

v) are regularly assessed and improved upon to ensure that curricula remain responsive to the specific learning needs of the refugee and displaced students in their communities.

We call on civil society organizations and multilateral entities to engage in community-driven knowledge-sharing that breaks down silos and creates space for greater collective capacity. In particular, we call upon organizations to:

i) establish a permanent position at all levels of their governance structure reserved for a forcibly displaced young leader,

ii) work with partners to collect, leverage, and maintain data disaggregated by social identity factors (e.g. gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity) on refugee and displaced youth experiences, and specifically, on mental health needs, and

iii) ensure transparent reporting in funding allocation and impact that can be easily and publicly accessed.

We specifically call on Education Cannot Wait to create a working group composed of education ministers from host countries, teachers in emergency contexts, refugee and displaced youth leaders, and mental health and psychosocial support professionals to support ministers in the development of context-specific, inclusive, and responsive curricula.

We call on private sector organizations to collaborate with global actors in education and leverage their resources towards improving access to quality learning for the world's most marginalized youth. This includes:

i) reaching and maintaining an investment of at least 10% of profits towards the global education crisis,

ii) working with education ministers in host countries to deliver post-secondary scholarships, internships, and post-education job opportunities directed towards refugee and displaced youth, and

iii) bridging digital divides through cash and in-kind resources that improve internet connectivity in host communities, especially rural communities and refugee camps, and increase access to digital literacy, online learning platforms, and devices for students and teachers in host communities.

We call on everyday citizens across host and donor countries to commit to not leaving refugee and displaced people behind. This includes:

i) encouraging local governments to prioritize and invest in closing the widening gaps in global education,

ii) learning and sharing information by and about the experiences of refugee and displaced learners to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and break stigma, and

iii) proactively championing the inclusion and integration of refugee and displaced youth in schools, communities, and/or workplaces.

We call on all stakeholders to enact tangible steps in place towards the implementation of these actions by the end of the Together for Learning campaign in 2023.

We believe that everybody has a responsibility to help reduce disparities to address the devastating global education crisis, which grows more severe each year.

We, the members of the Refugee Education Council, have composed this Manifesto to **speak with one voice on the urgency of these issues to refugee education.** We hope the anthology that follows will illuminate our stories and inspire change.

Signed:

Istarlin Abdi, Qais Abdulrazzaq, Bikienga Amdiatou, Laura Barbosa, Malual Bol Kiir, Nhial Deng, Amelie Fabian, Foni Joyce Vuni, Christine M'wongera, Nabaloum Pascaline, Anojitha Sivaskaran

Gender Equality

Gender Equality

Access to education is not only a fundamental human right, but often essential to building the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to work, speak out for oneself, gain financial independence, and move up in the world. However, for millions of girls worldwide, especially refugee and displaced girls, there are countless barriers to accessing, participating, and completing quality education. Some of these barriers include: harmful gender norms, gender-based violence and exploitation, cultural norms that promote early marriage, lack of sexual education and early pregnancy, stigma, shortage of safe sanitary facilities, lack of financial support or transportation, few mentorship opportunities, and not enough women represented in leadership roles.

More girls than boys still remain out of school. This is because girls' education is often not considered to be an investment, and many families choose to prioritize educating boys instead. Such harmful practices reinforce cycles of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and child exploitation. However, girls who receive an education are less likely to marry young and more likely to lead healthy and productive lives. They also have the opportunity to earn higher incomes, speak out for their rights, gain independence, and build a future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

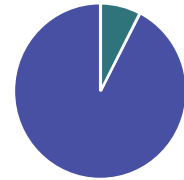
Most importantly, educating girls reduces global inequality and allows more young people to become everything they ever wanted and hoped for themselves.



1 in 5

The United Nations Population Fund estimates that globally, one in every five girls is married or partnered before the age of 18.¹²

14%



According to UNHCR, if all girls completed primary school, child marriage would fall by 14%.⁹

129 Million Girls

Since 2002, good progress has been achieved to boost girls' enrollment in school. However, an estimated 129 million girls worldwide remain out of school and face multiple barriers to education.¹³

16 Million Girls

16 million girls will never set foot in a classroom.¹⁴

750 Million Adults

Women account for two thirds of the 750 million adults without basic literacy skills¹⁴

"We have to change the curriculum. In many books, the girl is cooking but the boy is playing. These stereotypes are not good. Don't categorize us - this is not fair."

Hiba Ammar, refugee woman from Syria currently living in Lebanon

Refugee and displaced girls continue to be disproportionately disadvantaged in accessing quality learning opportunities, despite the impressive commitments made at Charlevoix towards girls' education. **We believe:**

- Gender equality should be implemented into all class curricula and teacher training. It is essential to challenge gender stereotypes and norms to achieve true equality.
- Education and awareness-raising on sexual and reproductive health and rights must be provided in school and in the community to overcome misconceptions about pregnancy and STDs and help keep more girls and young women in school.
- Short, medium, and long-term solutions must be devised to create safer spaces for girls and LGBTQI+ youth going to school. These solutions should focus on reducing gender-based violence, bullying, early marriage, pregnancy, and stigmatization, while also and promoting mental health, higher emotional intelligence and cultural understanding of gender equality and LGBTQI+ inclusivity, including among the broader community. Governments should ensure legal protections for LGBTQI+ people and outlaw child marriage and spousal abuse, so that there is a legal backstop for advocacy work.
- All schools should provide the basic facilities and tools needed to ensure that students are not excluded from school on the basis of their biological sex. This includes increasing access to washrooms, childcare, mental health support, contraception, and menstrual hygiene products on-site, and to safe spaces for online learning opportunities off-site.
- Educating parents and community leaders is critical to updating cultural beliefs about the value of girls' education, women's rights, and the dangers of sex work, early marriage, and child labour.
- Cash support to families can help them afford to keep their girl children in school. These supports should be combined with additional measures including gender equality training and secured personal identification numbers to ensure its proper use.

Missing: The Girls Who Have Disappeared from my Classroom

Mwongera Christine

There was never a question as to what I wanted to do with my life and what I wanted to become. Teaching was my first, second, and third option.

During my teaching studies, I met five students on scholarship from Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. Four of them were men and only one was a woman. I was curious and asked why there were no other girls that were considered for the scholarship. They explained to me the devastating challenges girls faced in the camp. Somewhere in the process of listening to them, I became convinced that I was meant to teach at Kakuma refugee camp.

When my fellow classmates explained the challenges that girls from their camp faced to getting an education, it resonated with me because I had seen a glimpse of it in my own educational journey. Growing up, I witnessed many children drop out of school and girls especially faced a lot of stigma from the community that I came from. A lot of academic comparison was made between boys and girls. For example, if there was an exam, it was always expected that the boys should score higher than the girls. If a girl scored highly in the exam, then they would consider the exam as easy. Girls were always made to feel as if they were not enough. Girls needed to work twice as much as the boys so as to be seen and heard.

After finishing my degree in Education from Catholic University of East Africa, I immediately started looking for a job in the refugee camps in Kenya.

The Challenges of Education in Kakuma Refugee Camp

Kakuma refugee camp is located in Turkana County, one of the poorest counties in Kenya with extremely hot weather throughout the year and receiving very little rainfall. There is severe poverty and vulnerability for both hosts and refugees living in the Kakuma area. Kakuma camp alone hosts about 150,000 refugees from different countries including Somali, Ethiopia, Uganda, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo.¹⁵

I have been working as a teacher here for the past five years, instructing on Religious Studies and History in one of the high schools managed by Windle International Kenya. I got into this work because I wanted to make an impact and help some of the most vulnerable people to find hope and learn, especially refugee girls. However, I never could have predicted how challenging teaching in one of the world's largest refugee camps would be.

Classrooms are congested. There are about 100 to 120 students per teacher, which means that the teacher is not able to give the attention that each student needs to learn. More than that, there are also inadequate resources

in the schools; one text book is shared among five to seven learners. Desks and chairs are not available to all students, and some are forced to sit on the floor, which is not conducive to productive learning.

The weather is normally hot throughout the year, which also makes teaching and learning difficult. There is either minimal rain or very heavy rains that can cause floods in the school. On such days, we are unable to go school, which derails our syllabus coverage. The classrooms are made out of iron sheets, which is also affected by the weather. Sometimes the iron sheets get carried away when it's too windy and we are left with no physical classroom.

There are times when a student can attack a teacher and injure them. This is because they are emotionally, physically, and mentally traumatized learners, and teachers receive little to no training in mental health support and counseling.

Teachers in Kakuma refugee camp must also grapple with inter-community clashes. For example, there have been conflicts between the Dinkas and Nuers, or the Nuers and Nubians of South Sudan. This may happen any day and time, and it's a risk for the teacher and learners. In fact, on such days, we don't go to school, which again further delays our teaching and the students' learning.

And while there are unique and shared challenges to quality learning that I face for each of my students, I face the most challenges when it comes to keeping my girl students in the classroom and engaged.

Here are a few:

Harmful cultural practices affect the girls especially. For instance, a family can decide to marry off their underage daughter instead of allowing them to go to school. They see their daughters as a source of wealth in terms of marriage dowry. Marrying their daughters off also reduces the financial burden of taking care of many children. Oftentimes, girls and adolescents will be forced into marriage and made to focus on their husband and their home duties, causing them to **drop out of school**.

There is a lot of anxiety and restlessness that is observed among teenage mothers after they report to school, especially those with babies below nine months. They come to school late because they need to tend to the baby and also find someone to take care of the baby while attending school. Some find it difficult to balance school and house chores plus a baby, which means that eventually, they end up missing school for a month or so. They become chronic absentees. They miss out on so much in school that they become hopeless and eventually must choose to **drop out of school**.

I see that older girls are often stigmatized if they are not yet married, and that causes a huge pressure on the girls to find a husband and **drop out of school**.

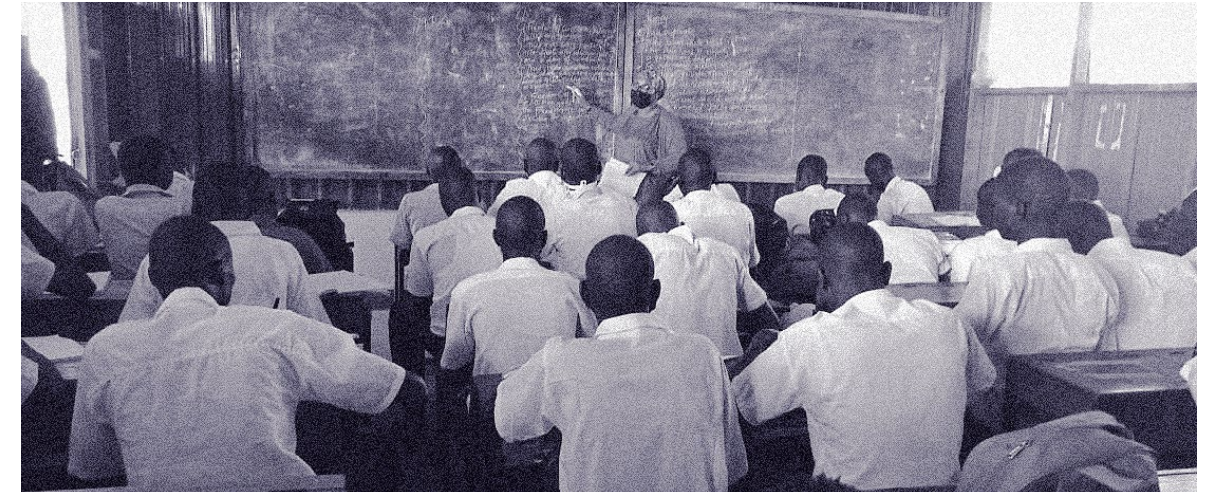
There is limited water supply in Kakuma. Water is only available at specific times and on

specific days. There is lack of water which contributes to poor hygiene, exposure to infections, and water-borne disease. Oftentimes, there are few WASH facilities for girls to use, especially during menstruation, which can cause girls to be regularly absent or even **drop out of school**.

The lack of job prospects often results in many university and college educated graduates returning to disadvantaged communities to earn below the minimum wage. Women especially face lower job prospects because of gender inequality, and therefore have less incentive to complete their studies. This can lead girls to **drop out of school**.

The Kakuma camp also has a high level of insecurity due to its geographical location. Kakuma camp borders three countries: Uganda, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. Girls are frequently physically attacked and/or sexually assaulted by their community at nighttime if they attend schools, or if they do not yet have a husband or children.

Girls are also highly vulnerable to gender-based violence at home, especially when it comes to the harmful cultural beliefs that frown upon girls going to school. We have had cases of girls hiding their uniforms in bushes along their route to school so that they wouldn't be identified as students and could attend class without being harassed. We have also resorted to admitting them in the girls-only boarding school in the Kakuma



camp as a child protection case. In a case of one of the child-headed households, we had unknown members of the community attacking the girls for attending school and also for not being married. These young girls were beaten up with thorny branches bruising their bodies badly. Oftentimes, this violence forces them to **drop out of school**.

Another case I dealt with involved a student who was continually beaten by older siblings and relatives for refusing to get married while raising a baby and preferring to stay in school. The family argued that her value would go down because she was getting older. They feared that she would be pregnant again and they would have to be responsible for her since no man would marry her. She came to me with the case and I went to report it to the child protection officers. We were attacked by a crowd of community members. With the help of security officers, she was rescued and put in a safe haven in the community until the matter was resolved and the girls were allowed to be in school.

I have observed how these realities have resulted in drop outs, chronic absenteeism, idle-

ness, drug abuse, social isolation, anxiety, depression, violence, hopelessness, trauma, low engagement levels, and hostility for many of the young women and girls that have passed through my classroom.

As the number of refugee and displaced peoples in our world continues to rise, so too do the gaps that girls face in accessing and staying in school.

I see 1000 girls walk into the classroom at the primary school level. By the time secondary school starts, that number is reduced to about 200 girls enrolled in class. At graduation, I can expect to see, at most, 20 girls who have finished their studies.

My mission for becoming a teacher and for joining the Refugee Education Council is to continue to see that number rise. To help provide quality education and make sure that girls feel confident knowing that they are important and can make something incredible out of themselves. Governments, education ministries, and civil society organizations need to continue to prioritize girls in education systems, swapping out the inequalities that cause so many to drop out of school with solutions that allow them to stay in.

Girl, Wife, Mother: An Interrupted Education ¹⁶

Istarlin Abdi

The first time I dropped out of school it was so that my brother could continue his education. My family could only afford the tuition fees for one of us at the time. The second time I dropped out, it was so that I could take care of my husband and become a mother. In both cases, the needs and potential of the men in my life were treated as more important than my own.

One day I went to school as I usually do, and when I came back home, I discovered I had become somebody's wife.

Coming from a Somali community, this is just the norm. Girls will be made to marry between the ages of 15-18. Growing up, I was used to seeing these marriages happen around me, but I never thought it was going to be my fate. I always believed that I would never get married young because I needed to finish school, go to university, and do my own things.

The agreement to marry me off happened while I was in my first year of high school at a boarding school. My classmates were whispering behind my back and pointing fingers. Then two of my very close friends told me the news: I was married. I thought they were joking because I didn't think my parents would do that to me. They knew how much I valued school. When I got home from school and could finally ask, my parents confirmed the rumors. They told me I would not be going back to school. It crushed me and there was nothing I could do about it.





At the time, I was still 15 years old. I did not know anything about being a wife. I never even had a boyfriend. My parents said, "We are all here and we'll guide you through it." I asked if they even received any dowry in exchange for the marriage. That's when my mom started crying, and she told me it was out of her control. There was nothing she or I could do, and we did not have a choice. I told her, "Mum, you should always have a choice. Every human being has a choice in life. And for you, you are my mother. You have every right to say no because I'm your child."

I became a single mother in 2008 when my husband died in an accident. Raising children, especially girls, as an unmarried woman in a refugee camp is one of the toughest things I have ever done in my life. I had to be strong to protect them, lead them, and to fight cultural

norms. Everyone constantly undermined me because I am a woman, but I stayed firm. I would let everyone know: "These are my girls. They need to have quality education. They need to do whatever they feel like doing. They have the right."

In Kakuma refugee camp, early marriage and pregnancy are common challenges that girls face, just like I did. Sometimes, they feel like they don't have enough role models in the camp. They feel that, if they are girls, they don't need education because when they get married, a man will provide and take care of them. That's a big concern that I see in the camp. I'll see a 15- or 16-year-old girl getting married, sometimes, of her own choice because she feels like it's the only or best option. Gender equality is very personal for me because I come from a community where wom-

en and girls have to fight for everything that's rightful theirs. I have seen firsthand the deep inequities between the genders and I have learned important life lessons to overcome it. As a young girl, I witnessed how boys were treated better than girls in everything. Every child needs to be treated equally for there to be balance in the world.

As a mother of girls, I don't want what happened to me to happen to my daughters. I am an advocate for them and for all girls. Though we are each different, I can see a lot of myself in the young girls at the camp because I was once just like them.

Girls who receive an education are less likely to marry young, more likely to lead healthy and productive lives, and build better futures for themselves and their families. Gender equality in education benefits everybody and investing in girls' education transforms entire communities and countries.

As a photographer, I wanted to capture and share a version of gender equality through my eyes. To do so, I walked with grade six students from Mogadishu Primary School to their homes and spent time with them as they did their homework and played.



The Refugee Diaries: Last Girl Standing

Achol Maker

My name is Elizabeth Achol Maker Deng. I am a 23-year-old female. I am a refugee from Kakuma refugee camp in northwest Turkana District, Kenya. I came to Kakuma as a baby with my mother, sister, and relatives. They were fleeing war in South Sudan, so my life has been revolving around the camp. Over the years, I have had opportunities to study in and out of the camp. Even though life in the camp is tough, I have had some beautiful moments: interacting with my peers, indulging in community activities, and learning different cultures from my fellow refugees. The journey in the camp has been a roller coaster.

“...1, 2, 3, 4... 4...”

Her gaze shifts from one empty seat to the next. Though accurate in her counting, she repeats the process. Double checks. No change. Her mind is trying to make up reasons for the empty seats. “Halima must have been sick today. That’s why she didn’t make it to school. Mzaliwa mmmh... Mzaliwa must have found it hard to cross the laga¹ – it has been raining so heavily of late! And Benitha? She probably must be tending to her ill mother.”

One after the other, she found something to say for each empty seat. The number accu-

mulated to twenty. Her mouth was dry and her nerves failed to formulate more sparks of excuses. Yes, 24 girls in a class of 64 students in her stream, and only four were present. The numbers were sickly low.

It was break time and all that was on Achan’s mind was tomorrow. Tomorrow – so near, yet far. What is education tomorrow? Class, family, South Sudan, being a mother, Kakuma – the word salad was real. Tomorrow is slower in her world, tomorrow far beyond reach. “I hope tomorrow will be good,” she whispered to herself and gave a hopeful smile.

“Eei Achan! The sun in Kakuma² is already scorching. Almost turning the area into flames! That smile is on fire my friend. What is making you this happy?” Fatuma, a girl from the next class approached her. “Isn’t it such a beautiful thing to be in school? To learn math, science, poetry, and history for our tomorrow?” replied Achan. “Aren’t we lucky to be amongst the few to acquire all of that?” Fatuma agreed.

“Are we really lucky though? To be here without our friends?” Achan added. Their faces became gloomy, almost dead, as if they knew of the darker days ahead. A group of girls had gathered up under a tree having fun. They joined them in singing games.

That evening, she stepped her foot out of the meshy red gate of Kakuma Secondary School and the air suddenly became tense, hot, sullen. Her face became long as the atmosphere changed automatically. She brought out the second foot and from a distance, she could see Fatuma disappear in the corner, and, on the other end, a shadowy figure of Brutukan that was barely visible. It was home time. She crossed the road from Yuzu Park³ and walked past the main hospital opposite Group 8⁴ at Kakuma 1 and into her community.

“Loikadi malen, (how are you aunty),” asked a young girl carrying a water bottle on her head as she walked by briskly. She tried to balance it, but fell a few meters from Achan. She stared at her for a while as she wailed on the ground. An old lady walked up to her and helped her up, then looked at Achan in disdain.

“Is that Athiei? Aduk’s daughter? She can talk already? And walk? And even carry a water bottle on her head?” Achan thought to herself. Aduk was her classmate back in primary school. She got pregnant, dropped out of school, and moved to her husband’s place. It had been three years since she last saw Aduk with her daughter and from the little girl’s face, Achan could see that she was a carbon copy of her mother.

“Move! Move! Move! Young girl, move out of the way!” She was snapped back to reality by the words from Mading, a popular youth community leader. There was a huge bull being dragged into the group. It had such long horns, built to the bone and with such healthy skin. It was a beautiful bull. “I’m sure the buyer must have already composed a song for it,” she thought to herself.

“So when will we be feasting on your bull, Achan?” expressed a young boy who came out of nowhere. She calmly let out a sound of disgust. “Akur just made us proud! Now we are waiting for you,” he continued and she let out a hiss and put the boy on a leash. Yes, she knew. She knew Akur was getting married on that day. Akur, her classmate. She suddenly stopped going to school and now she is getting married. It was nothing new to the people around her. To them, a girl was meant for marriage and the moment they felt she was flourishing, she was introduced to suitors. Marriages were common every weekend. “Unions” they would call it.

The previous week it was Adut. That week it was Akur. The next week was definitely not going to be her, but surely, someone was in line. She arrived home and found her grandmother laying under a tree breathing heavily. She had nothing to eat the entire day. Still in her school uniform, Achan starts to prepare a meal.

At a quarter past ten, she would prepare some sacks for the next day. She dusts off her mat, spreads it on the floor, lays down, and drags a five liter jerrican beneath her head and drifts off to sleep. She was to wake up at 4:00 a.m. like the other girls to be amongst the first to be served in order to make it to school on time. The next day was ration day!⁵

1 Laga: A seasonal river. It is dry sand when it hasn’t rained in places like Nairobi.

2 Kakuma: Kakuma Refugee Camp located in Northwestern Turkana District, Kenya

3 Yuzu Park: a park, or rather, a plain field near Kakuma Secondary School.

4 Group: Distinct partitions where each community stays. There are many groups in Kakuma, each shared by a community of either the same ethnic group or nationality.

5 Ration: Food rations given once in a month by UNHCR.

Changing My World, Changing Our World

An Expecting Mother's Journey for the Next Generation

Laura Barbosa

I am Laura Liceth Barbosa Florian and I was born in Bogotá, Colombia. Colombia is a country where, despite the circumstances and constant conflicts, people do everything possible to be able to live and get ahead.

I am from a family of warriors. Most of my uncles and aunts are academic teachers. Education is very important in our family. The dream of my grandmother, Blanca Moreno, was that her nine children had access to education even though her husband, my grandfather Carlos Barbosa, did not agree with her. Her struggle to provide opportunities for all of her children, regardless of their gender, was a wish that was not only kept and fulfilled, but was also passed on to her grandchildren.

Esteban Barbosa, one of her sons, is my father. He married my mother, María Florian. Together they had two daughters, my sister Jhoana Barbosa and me. Our parents always supported us, their dream was to see us graduate, supporting the community and, above all else, working to improve the society in which we lived.

Unfortunately, my mother was murdered in 2006 and my father disappeared in 2007. My parents, my sister, and I lived in what is known as the "Red Zone" in Colombia. In other words, an area where there is a constant presence



of the Colombian illegal armed groups known as "Las Farc". Many efforts were made to understand what happened to our parents. Unfortunately, the only thing we know is that illegal groups in Colombia are responsible for what happened.

Since we lost our parents, Jhoana and I had to face different challenges. Unfortunately, Colombia has a system that provides few resources to helpless women and children. Although it is not the case for all of society, it is the case for much of it.

Fortunately, with constant support from my family and the savings left by my parents, my sister and I were able to continue studying. There were limitations, but the most important thing was to move forward despite what was happening around us.

On many occasions, I had to change schools.

I studied in public and private schools in Colombia. In public schools, I saw how the teachers made an effort so that their students could learn even when they lacked the necessary resources to do their job.

The infrastructure in public schools is weak with the scarce availability of tools such as computers. The curriculum is limited and not very inclusive and the number of students compared to the number of teachers for each subject is high. As a result, this decreases the opportunity for continuous and meaningful learning. In addition to the lack of resources, public schools face other types of problems with students lacking financial resources, grappling with early pregnancy, and struggling with family conflict.

Private schools, on the other hand, come with their own set of issues. Though they have an excellent curriculum with great infrastructure and resources, they are not very financially accessible. The monthly payments for tuition and additional costs end up being more than what a person earning a minimum wage can pay.

Because of these challenges, studying in Colombia has become a privilege and not a right. Due to this and other additional factors, my family supported me to leave Colombia in 2011.

My Travels Across Asia

China was the chosen country. My goal was to learn Mandarin, get a job, and study for my university degree. I was always aware of the

value that education has in the life of a person and that is why I tried to make the most of every opportunity that was given to me. After six months, I began to work and my job allowed me to travel to other Asian countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Turkey.

Thailand, Cambodia, and Turkey are wonderful countries, with extraordinary cultures and people who are truly an inspiration. Unfortunately, as in Colombia, they face similar challenges and issues that increase poverty and inequality. Education is a privilege, not a right. I saw these challenges and the struggles people faced firsthand.

Thailand is the home to over 91,000 refugees who come from Myanmar and other South-east Asian countries with which it borders.¹⁷ I saw children selling goods on the streets so they could support their family economically. There are also high rates of prostitution among young girls, especially in tourist cities like Pattaya.

Cambodia faces high rates of poverty, physical and mental weaknesses, violence, abuse, and migration. On one occasion I had to witness how a mother sold her daughter to foreigners in order to feed the rest of her family.

Turkey became home to many refugees from Syria. I saw children begging in the street and with little chance of being able to attend school.

These experiences, together with those I had already experienced in Colombia, increased my commitment to change the society in which we live and to fight so that children all around the world have the right to education. In 2014, I decided to move my career to Kua-

la Lumpur in Malaysia where I worked as a Spanish teacher for children, youth, and adults. Learning a language is not only about grammar and vocabulary (although these are important!), it is also about the culture from which the language comes from. Spanish, like the countries and the people who speak it, is a language where expression, charisma, and affection shape the language.

During my time in Kuala Lumpur, I also volunteered in a community to work with refugee children who had fled from Myanmar. I taught them science. The center was the home and the school for these families. It is worth mentioning that in my class, I had nine boys (between the ages of 8 to 15) and only one girl attending. This is because girls living at the Myanmar refugee center were often expected to get married at a young age. Many had other responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children, and some were single mothers who had to go to work. Many of these children and their families are living in constant fear. They fled their country due to civil war and in the process of doing so, they have lost family members, personal belongings, and legal documents.

Despite the constant challenges they face on a daily basis, they always show a positive and generous attitude.

Change for the Next Generation

I moved to Canada in 2019 with my husband. This was also my chance to reunite with my sister and be together after nine years of being apart. Reuniting with my sister was a

dream come true. We had always longed to live in a country where we had peace, where there was no fear, and where together we could set roots and build families of our own.

In May 2019, the three of us – my husband, my sister, and I – decided to live together. We are always there for one another, especially when one of us needs it the most. It feels good to know we have one another when one of us has had a bad day or when we simply need a shoulder to cry on. I thank God and my parents for giving me the honor of having my sister.

Not only did I meet my sister in Canada after being separated for many years, but I am also married to a man who constantly supports my passion and with whom I will have my first daughter.

This next chapter of my life is motherhood and I am filled with hope. I hope that my daughter will be healthy and happy. I hope that she becomes an agent of change one day too. I hope that she is aware of and speaks out against the struggles that many girls still have to go through to access opportunities that lead to a higher quality of life.



Mental Health And Psychosocial Support



1 in 5

Adults, children, and youth who are forcibly displaced often witness or experience severely traumatic events such as violence, sexual violence, exploitation, kidnappings, poverty, and much more. Their journeys of forcibly leaving home and settling into a new community can be traumatizing – with experiences of isolation, loneliness, grief, discrimination, and exclusion being reported by many. And those with preexisting mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and psychosis, often face greater challenges when trying to navigate asylum systems.

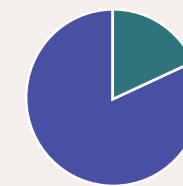
With so many overlapping barriers, capacity to access and fully participate in education systems poses an enormous challenge. Despite this, mental wellness has been and remains one of the most neglected areas of health and education systems, with few sustained interventions and little data about the mental health needs of refugee and displaced youth. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused even further disruptions to mental well-being

on a mass scale and with lasting impacts that have yet to be revealed. This is especially true for refugee and migrant individuals, particularly those who face higher levels of marginalization, discrimination, and life stressors.

Refugee and displaced learners might not know anyone, and they may not speak the local language in their host communities. They may face stigma, discrimination, isolation, and loneliness. They may also be silently mourning friends or family members that they lost due to distance, violence, or illness. Host schools rarely provide adequate resources or accommodations and teachers in host communities are often untrained to provide appropriate mental health or psychosocial services, and they may also be navigating their own untreated mental illness and trauma.

Physically being able to attend school loses its transformative power if students are mentally and emotionally not well enough to concentrate, learn, and socialize.

One in five – 22.1% – of the adult population in conflict-affected areas suffer from mental health problems. We don't have data on children, but we can assume that number is higher because children are more vulnerable. That baseline is around two to three times higher than the level found in society at large, according to other studies.¹⁸



27.3%

A 2015 report published in the Asian Journal of Psychiatry found that **27.3% of the refugee population in Nigeria reported suicidal ideation** compared to 17.3% of the non-refugee population.¹⁹

In addition to post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression, the proportion of refugees with severe mental health conditions such as schizophrenia or manic depression is on the rise in displacement.¹⁸

"It makes me sad to know that many of my students don't see school as a safe space where no one can harm them. I see how most will sit at the edge of their chairs and panic at the smallest mistake. When I asked why, they told me that it is because they are ready to run. It's something they have done during most of their childhood and early teenage years."

Mwongera Christine

Mental Health And Psychosocial Support

Refugee and displaced learners are highly vulnerable to factors that can lead to trauma and mental health issues. Mental well-being is vital to students' capacity to access and fully participate in quality learning yet mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) remains one of the most neglected areas of health and education systems with large gaps in data about the mental health needs of refugee and displaced youth, ongoing stigmatization, and few sustained interventions that consider MHPSS as part of approaches to improving access to education.

We believe:

- Mental health and psychosocial support must be included as part of any approach or program aimed at improving access to quality education for children, especially girls and boys who have been forcibly displaced.
- It is essential to destigmatize mental health issues and encourage open, safe, and supportive dialogue that promotes mental well-being and reduces experiences of isolation for refugee and displaced learners and teachers.
- Schools should be equipped with trained counselors and all educators and staff should receive training on how to identify trauma, respond to students' mental health needs, and address prejudices based on country of origin to create safe learning spaces for all

The New Arrival : Excerpt from the 'Refugee Chronicles'

Christian Baobab



My name is Christian and I am a 26-year-old refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo living in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. I am a refugee advocate, filmmaker, and writer who learned about storytelling in my camp with FilmAid Kenya. I find my inspiration in refugee stories and I am currently writing a fictional book inspired by mine and my peers' experiences in Kakuma refugee camp. My book emphasizes the capacity and importance of seeing refugee people as the main actors of their own well-being and future, and education as the key to make this possible.

Here is a short excerpt from my creative work:

Lumumba is in a bus driving to Kakuma refugee camp. This place is somewhere he has heard about but has never seen before in his life.

He was born and raised in the middle of a civil war's battlefield between the sounds of AK47s, hand grenades, and bombing machines, with heartless villagers determined to exterminate their fellow neighbours. He grew up scared of nothing, not even the repeated start of wars and tribal conflicts that reduced villages into seas of blood, transforming the whole country into a cradle of misery for the ones that escape death.

Now, in his twenties and on his way to an entirely new life, it was hard for him to imagine a different future – not to mention that he had never really allowed himself to think about his future before. Dreams feel almost impossible to reach for a person forced to move from place to place their entire childhood.

They say education is everything. It's the future. Well, maybe Lumumba's home country does not want a future. Why else would he be more likely invited to a battlefield than a classroom? Or be more likely to access a weapon than a textbook? They say that his generation is the hope for African countries. Are they talking of hope that is brought by gunshots? He doesn't want to run from his home but he feels like he has no choice. What is home anyway? Who even is he anymore?

"Refugee is a word that describes someone who is nothing more than a burden for governments and international organizations," he thinks to himself when he sees a signboard through the bus window. It reads: "5 kilometers to Kakuma Refugee Camp, 87 kilometers to South Sudan".

Now, at least he has an answer to some of his questions. He knows who he is, who he is going to become from the moment the bus stops. A refugee. People will be calling him that for the rest of his life. Is there a big difference between the despair he is walking into and the despair he has already experienced?

With his earphones in his ear, he is listening to a French song called "Le Pire" by Maître Gims, a Franco-Congolese R&B rapper living in France. Lumumba is sitting somewhere near the window of the bus with a clear view of the new world he is exploring. With him on the bus are many other people traveling.

"Are they all refugees?" He wonders while looking around. He notices that a girl in her twenties is sitting right beside him and staring. He does not pay attention to her because the last thing he is worried about is that someone might recognize him in this place. A few moments later, he brings his attention back to the girl and finds that she is still staring at him. This time, she almost smiles at him. Lumumba is confused and before he can smile

back, the woman murmurs something that Lumumba does not hear until he removes his earphones.

The woman repeats herself.

"J'aime la chanson que tu ecoute la... (I like the song you are listening to...)"

"Oh c'est vrai? C'est un tres beau morceau en tout cas. Mais attends, tu parle francais? (Oh, really? It is a very good track indeed. But wait, are you speaking French?)"

To that question, Lumumba removes the other side of his earphones. They both smile and the woman brings the conversation back to life again.

"Excuse moi, je suis Ketsia, je suis burundaise on apprend francais a l'ecole au Burundi. (I am sorry. My name is Ketsia. I am a Burundian, and we learn French at school in Burundi.)"

Lumumba gives her his hand that she shakes. In a very articulated French, while holding her hand, Lumumba says:

"Ravi de faire ta connaissance. (So glad to meet you.)"

"You must be a Congolese. Is it your first time?" she replied back.

Lumumba, who is still shaking the woman's hand, playfully replies, "First time doing what? Traveling? No, I have traveled to many places."

"I mean, are you new to the refugee camp? Are you a new arrival?" she replies.

The question shoots him right in the heart, bringing him back to reality. His enjoyment of the conversation fades away and, after a long pause, pulls himself together and breaks the silence, "Yes this is my first time. I have never been in a refugee camp before. But I have

heard stories. What about you?"

"Well, I've lived in the camp for almost 5 years now. What kind of stories have you heard exactly?"

Lumumba, who had done lots of research on the lives and experiences of refugees in preparation, is not quite sure of what to tell this woman. After all, this woman should be telling him about refugees because she is one herself. Instead of asking her to describe her experience, he looks at her with pity in his eyes imagining what she has been through for the years she has spent living in the refugee camp.

"Refugees are the most miserable and needy people in the world. That's what I see on social media and all over the television. They suffer from a lack of everything, including water and food. They spend years under a tent that they call houses, depending on humanitarian aid to survive. Most refugees don't get to go to school and the quality of education is really low in the camp. Only a few refugees are helped by humanitarian organizations and are able to finish secondary school but nobody in the camp ever goes to university. I even heard that in Kenya, they do not allow refugees to work to earn their own living or to travel. They are supposed to stay in the refugee camps until...I don't even know when. I heard being a refugee is terrible but I've already been through so much, nothing scares me."

He is waiting for a response from his new friend and is surprised that she breaks the tension with a chuckle, as if I just told a ridiculous joke.

“The stories of despair you heard might be true, but what about the stories of hope? Look at me. For the past five years of my life, the camp has been my home. I am traveling with you right now coming from Nairobi where I am on a scholarship pursuing a bachelor degree. I am going to be a lawyer. Not everybody gets to go to school, but the people who do have a bright future ahead of them.”

Lumumba is surprised and confused by this information. He’s still doubtful but he knows that it is more trustworthy to hear information from someone who has firsthand experience over people who have never been displaced or lived in a refugee camp.

So many questions were swirling in Lumumba’s head. When he started this journey, he thought he knew everything about the life he was stepping into, but after talking to Ketsia, he felt more hopeful about his potential future.

Lost in his mind, he almost forgot he was talking to Ketsia. “Now, shall we?” she asks, grabbing his attention.

She points to the earphones still playing in Lumumba’s hands. He takes a second to understand what she means before he remembers her saying that she likes the song he is listening to. Opening back his mobile application, Lumumba starts the song over, and hands the earphones to Ketsia. She takes one side of the earphones to her ears and gives the other side to Lumumba so that they can both listen.

Lumumba looks at her and smiles as they enjoy the music together. The bus is still moving. On a two-way roundabout not too far in the distance, a sign reads LOKICHOGIO HIGHWAY on the straightforward way and KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP to the right...

“The stories of despair you heard might be true, but what about the stories of hope? Look at me... I am going to be a lawyer. Not everybody gets to go to school, but the people who do have a bright future ahead of them.”

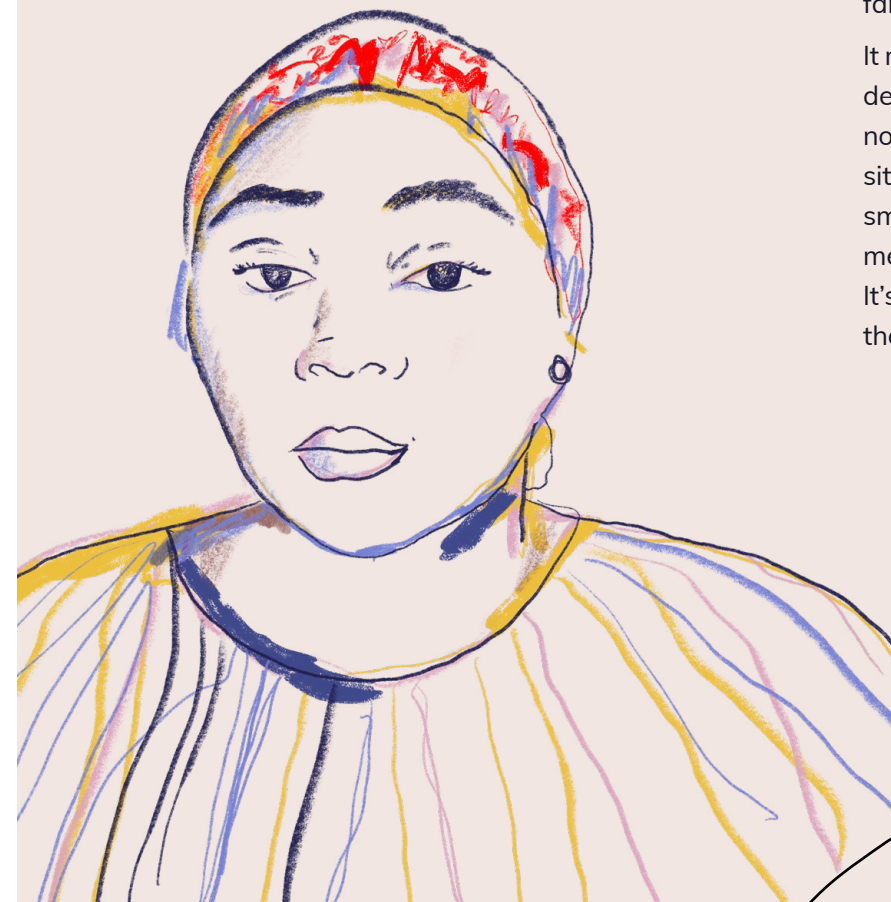
What We Do As Teachers: Supporting Mental Health in Refugee Camp Classrooms

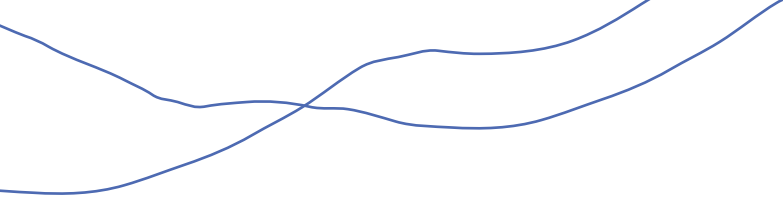
Mwongera Christine

**Trigger warning: Text includes reference to sensitive content including suicide.*

A motorbike’s tire burst near the school fence and the sound caused my students to panic, jumping and running out of the class. I stood there confused because I was certain it was just a tire burst. I didn’t realize that most of my class was associating the noise with the familiar and traumatic sound of a gunshot.

It makes me sad to know that many of my students don’t see school as a safe space where no one can harm them. I see how most will sit at the edge of their chairs and panic at the smallest mistake. When I asked why, they told me that it is because they are ready to run. It’s something they have done during most of their childhood and early teenage years.





As a teacher in Kakuma refugee camp, this type of response is not uncommon coming from students, but despite working here for the past five years, it is still not easy to hear. I have experienced firsthand the harmful effects that mental health has on children of all ages, which often comes in the form of stress, anxiety, and/or depression. Refugee and displaced youth are often extremely vulnerable to the common risk factors that can result in poor mental health outcomes such as child abuse, trauma or neglect, social disadvantage, poverty or debt, or discrimination.

When one sinks into depression or is unable to manage their emotions, it may result in unhappiness, violence, decreased enjoyment of life, social, domestic, and family conflict, social isolation, drug abuse, legal and financial problems, eating disorders, or the inability to keep up with school work or maintain a job. Further, if mental health conditions go untreated, it may lead to more devastating consequences, especially for refugee and displaced youth navigating mental illness with limited support networks and resources.

Last year, towards the end of October, a student committed suicide in my school. He should have been promoted to the next class, but his mother found his lifeless body hanging from the roof of one of their rooms. The previous day, he had told his mother that he felt bad that she was struggling to take care of him and his siblings. He could not stand the poverty at home and also complained that COVID-19 had taken away his excitement to be in school. His mother had been persuading him to go back to school but he said he had lost hope since his peers were two terms

ahead of him and he felt left behind. This was the third student in my school to take away his life.

Beyond the school that I teach at, suicide is a devastating issue that affects our entire community. Before finishing this article, another student in a neighbouring primary school committed suicide. He no longer felt motivated to be in school and claimed to hate that he was a refugee. He was barely in his pre-teen years. In the beginning of this year, two men and a woman had taken their lives a kilometre away from the school. Another man, whose homestead was few minutes from our school, also committed suicide leaving behind eight children.

Almost one million people die due to suicide every year, and it is the third leading cause of death among young people. According to the World Health Organization, refugee and immigrants are among the most vulnerable groups for risk of suicide, especially for those who also identify as LGBTI. Suicide is a serious yet preventable public health issue. Despite the fact that it can often be avoided with simple and affordable solutions, right now, less than 40 countries around the world have a national suicide prevention strategy and even fewer treat suicide as one of their health priorities.

What do we do as teachers? We try to solve some of these issues in every way we can with the help of the organizations available to support. We are not quiet about these issues.

Not only do teachers often lack the training and resources to provide appropriate psycho-social support to students, they themselves are often navigating their own mental health trauma. Incentive teachers from the local camp often carry their own traumatizing histories while most national teachers who come to work at the camp must cope with the stress of being so far away from their homes and families for prolonged periods of time.

When I realized why my students sat at the edge of their seats, I volunteered to attend several training sessions in guidance and counselling at the certificate level. With the help of the Japan Association for Aid and Relief (AAR Japan), we trained peer counselors to help the teacher counselors. Counselling sessions are done at every lunch break and follow-ups are done every late afternoon. We invited a nurse from the International Red Cross to talk to students about health issues, sexuality, and hygiene. We also asked students to choose a topic and invited FilmAid to air short films on the topics that students were interested in to make learning more enjoyable.

I also started a life-skills club that meets every Tuesday and Thursday to empower youth, especially the girls, on how to make a livelihood during their free time. With the training that World Vision provided to teachers on peace-building, a peace club was even started in our school.

We involve parents in solving these issues because I believe in the English saying that “charity begins at home”. We let the parents know if we see that the child is troubled or isolated so that they too can be involved in

problem-solving. We also refer students to Jesuit Refugee Services, an organization that offers psychosocial support to everyone in the camp.

My final reflection on this is that there are some identified gaps in offering psychosocial support. Data is a huge problem. Though I have seen up close how untreated mental illness has terrorized my classroom, it is very difficult to find information and data about how mental illness is effecting young refugee and displaced populations and at what rate. Another gap is the lack of organizations that provide mental health and psychosocial support; in Kakuma refugee camp, for example, we only have one. Also, governments are not employing enough (and in some cases, any) mental health professionals that can assist educators.

To support teachers, there must be comprehensive training on psychosocial issues and how to deal with children’s mental health, as well as training on how to provide counseling both in-person or on the phone. Additionally, there must be more extracurricular activities that support children in overcoming their trauma, especially in communities that host refugee and displaced youth. Finally, there must be more policies put in place, informed by stakeholders and students, to reduce the factors that contribute to poor mental health outcomes and to incentivize teachers to take these programs.

Building Bridges with Stories

Anojitha Sivaskaran, Sri Lanka

Building bridges among divided communities in a post-war context is not an easy process. It requires a long time and continuous effort.

As someone who has directly experienced the last phase of the Sri Lankan civil war, I always have a thirst to live a peaceful life and to empower communities towards sustainable peace and reconciliation. In my county, we have gone through a brutal civil war that has spanned three decades. It only ended in 2009, and we are still haunted by the impacts of war. I personally lost proper education for several months because of continuous displacements and life at a welfare camp.

After the war, I studied at a university in the southern part of the country, although I myself come from the northern part of Sri Lanka and belong to the minority Tamil community. At the beginning, I sensed a differ-

ence: I didn't speak English as well as many of my peers, I didn't have as many outstanding records of achievements, and I was lacking in knowledge and many life facilities. This severely impacted my studies.

However, I was given an opportunity to share my lived experiences of war with the population's majority: the Sinhalese. They were not aware of what my community had gone through, and one of my Sinhalese friends started to cry while listening to me. That moment was life changing. It made me realize the power of storytelling and how I can contribute and commit myself towards connecting divided communities as an individual.

I believe that storytelling is a powerful tool to connect divided minds and to transform deep-rooted prejudices, hatred, negativity, mistrust, and unknown fear against each other into mutual understanding and mutual empathy. I have witnessed and experienced the physical and emotional benefits of storytelling in my life. It has the capacity to help one go beyond the realm of looking at others with their own opinions, by making them empathize with the storyteller. It helps increase

knowledge sharing and supports collaborations across differences.

By sharing my personal experiences and stories of war, I strongly believe that people will understand and empathize with what my community has endured throughout many years. I hope that such mutual understanding, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment will create a stronger bridge of understanding whereby more refugee and displaced youth can feel accepted, included, seen, and cared for in their new communities.

The following five short stories, which I call "Unknown Pains", is my attempt to create collective emotional healing and to promote dialogue and awareness for peace and unity among divided communities.

Unknown Pains

Anojitha Sivaskaran Modern art by Inthushan Pararajasingham.

CHILD! Give me some water, will you?

I was running, walking, and following my mother, carrying whatever bags my little hands could bear. Bombs were falling in the distance. Amid all that commotion a voice that cried out loud, "CHILD! Give me some water, will you...?" I turned toward the direction from which that voice seemed to be coming from.

A young woman lying below a machine box stationed by the roadside, severely injured, crying. Blood flowed down from the bandages wrapped around her abdomen.

I hesitated. Suddenly, I felt my hands being grabbed and being told as I was led away, "Looks like an injury caused by shelling. If her stomach is wounded she mustn't be given water. Let's go! Let's go!" I crossed over that day.

Even today, the question of what happened to that woman gnaws at me inside.



Barrel

War time...

The struggles encountered after the inhabitants of two vast districts of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu were displaced and finally gathered into four villages were not few. Shell attacks. Death. Severe hunger. Beyond these though, nature never missed a beat. It didn't matter so much for men – they could hide away on the side of the road. But poor women. That in itself was a big struggle.

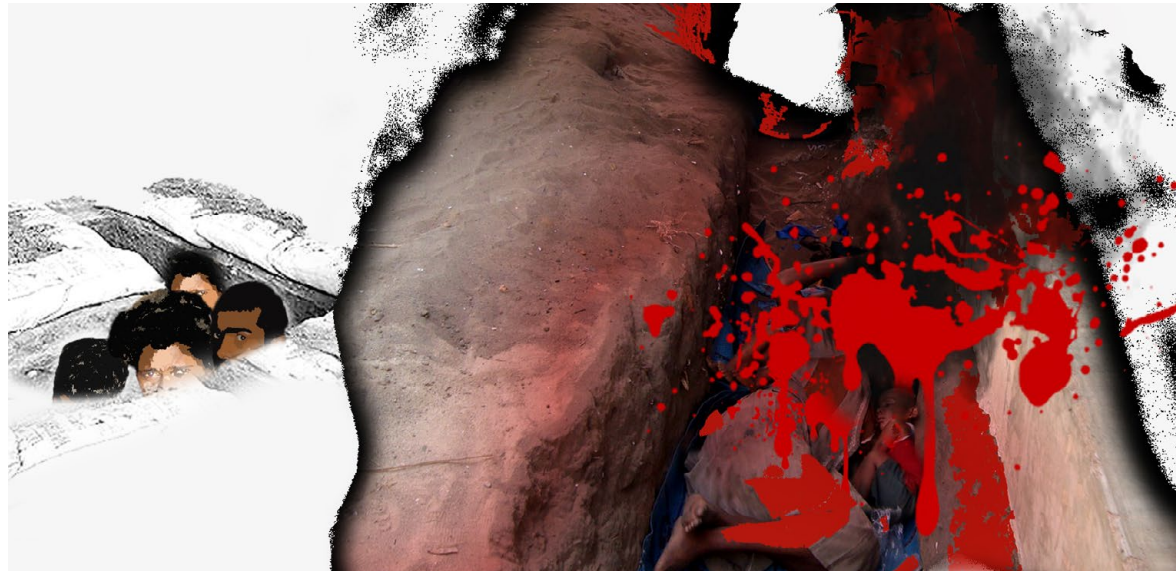
A toilet was like a luxury for people who had to live under a tarpaulin tied to sticks. At such times, these barrels were what came to our rescue.

These barrels were what protected our dignity. We would cut these blue plastic barrels in half. Every morning, we would have to go to the beach before dawn. If not, that day might turn out to be quite challenging. Like fireflies in the night sky, these plastic barrels sprouted up early in the mornings on those beaches.

Only those barrels know the pain and the lives of the people who lived there!



A Bunker Story



We were passing by Mullivaikaal. The shell attacks began abruptly. We knew the bombs would fall on this side when the aircrafts passed.

My mother dragged us both into a nearby bunker and seated us there. It was a small open bunker. Many people started coming towards it. In that cramped space, an infant in the hands of a young woman started crying. She had two younger brothers alongside her. A few others too.

All of a sudden, my mother stood up and pointed towards another bunker just 15 to 20 feet away. "Let's go there. This one's too

crowded," she said and we went there.

Not even 5 minutes later, a deafening blast! "Iyo Pillaiyarappa!" I shouted as I shut my ears and bent down.

That bomb had fallen into the bunker from which we had just left. All I could see there was blood and flesh.

That young woman...the crying infant...the two young boys...a grandmother...that man with the big belly. I couldn't spot any of them. Where did they all go?

Come In The Queue



Welfare camp. It's name was good, but that life was hell. Countless numbers of people behind barbed wires, waiting every day for someone to come and rescue them out of that hell.

Life was confined to a tarpaulin tent donated by some relief organization. The struggles would start as soon as you woke in the morning. Those NGOs would come and give us food parcels or balls of Samaposha wrapped in polythene lunch sheets. After waiting in line for two hours, each person would get only one parcel. I would get that, hand it over to my mother, and run to join the next queue to get one for my sister. Standing in a queue like this for all 3 meals.

There was a queue even to use the toilets.

Within less than a minute of entering the toilet, the others in the queue would start knocking on the door and shouting, "Come out soon...".

A queue for drinking water. You had to quickly fill your pots and buckets early in the morning from the water pumped from the tanks. If not, you would have no water that entire day.

Sometimes, the army would instruct everyone in the camp to get into queues for security checks.

Once in a blue moon, a lorry would come with essential goods. We were given a thousand rupees, with which we could buy a packet of milk powder, a little sugar, a pot. Even there, a man standing on the roof of the lorry shouts out ...

"Come in the queue."

Unsalted Porridge

‘Where do you suppose they must be serving porridge today?’

Most of their mornings dawn with this question. Waking early, standing in line, pot in hand. That steaming hot unsalted porridge. Water with grains of rice barely to be found. It was precious ambrosia to the helpless.

“Those in the neighboring cottage gave their motorbike for five coconuts, it seems.” A myriad of incidents like this.

“If you fill a plastic bottle to overflowing, close it tightly and heat it, then the bottle won’t melt, later we use the hot water for making tea in the morning.”

Unsalted porridge, roasted Mullivai-kal sprats, silver date palm leaf, pittu¹ without scraped coconut, ‘Vaipan’² flour ball...these were things that our people came up with to survive.

¹ Pittu is traditionally eaten for breakfast in Sri Lanka. It is a steamed dish with rice flour and scraped coconut.

² The cheapest rural sweet treat made of plain flour and fully ripened banana. ‘Vaipan’ made solely from flour gradually became the main meal for many families during the war.

Note: During the last war, people had gone through several displacements and carried limited things while moving to the next place. Because of a food shortage, they made the maximum effort to buy ingredients by exchanging the expensive items they had, finding alternative ways to cook, using available ingredients, and waiting in long queues to get milk powder and sugar. The above story explains such an experience.



Caption: Hawa Abdi in 2020 practicing photography in a park in Istanbul, Turkey after her photography class in college.

Vacant: Mental Health Challenges Affecting Refugees in Camps

Hawa Abdiaziz Abdi

Hawa Abdi is a 24-year-old Somali refugee born and raised in a refugee camp in Kenya where her parents settled after fleeing the Somali civil war. She is passionate about writing, mental health, gender equality, women’s empowerment, refugee advocacy, and mentorship. Today, she is pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Media and Journalism at Nisantasi University in Turkey. Occasionally, she also travels to refugee camps in Kenya where she organizes mentorship sessions for young women and girls.

Mental health issues are undoubtedly the most severe adversities affecting the overall health and wellness of refugees in the camp. A significant percentage of refugees, particularly students, experience unbearable and severe challenges that affect their mental health and stability adversely. Amongst the many mental health challenges affecting refugees, post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is typically identified as one of the most common mental health problems.

I personally lived with a mother who suffered from PTSD after giving birth to eleven children with no financial assistance and an absent husband. I often saw my mother crying and vacant because no one was there to help or even just to talk to her. The community neglected her because she had eight girls in the

house with no present father. This disorder that my mother had is attributed to the fact that many refugees experience trauma as a result of war, violence, and different forms of abuse. These experiences trigger health conditions accompanied by depression, stress, and panic attacks.

From my own personal experience as a Somali refugee who lived in the Kakuma refugee camp, I have seen firsthand how mental health issues have affected most refugees regardless of age, gender, or nationality. Despite how common and widespread this issue is, everyone avoids addressing these concerns because of the shame that comes with sharing these problems. Mental health is stereotyped as the “evil eye” or “black magic” by several communities in the camp. Creating awareness is undoubtedly one of the most effective strategies to help overcome issues of mental health and stability affecting refugees. This would involve educating refugee communities on the causes of such conditions to end the shame and stigma, as well as lessons on how to manage issues like stress, anxiety, and depression effectively.

Mental health is one of the most overlooked fields in humanitarian and emergency contexts like Kakuma. However, schools can provide a great space to promote mental health. There is a need to introduce mental health education in extra-curricular activities at the camp in both primary and secondary schools. This should include building safe spaces in schools where young people can learn about mental health, fight stigma, and support each other. Community engagement is also a key to promoting mental health in refugee camps. This can be done through workshops and events in community centers, which should involve community elders and religious leaders.

Overcoming issues of mental health will help deal with various challenges, including the high suicide rates that are reported annually in the camp. After all, we know that issues such as stress and depression are the leading causes of suicides in most refugee camps worldwide.

Despite being aware of this pressing problem, most people and institutions, including governmental and non-governmental organizations, have failed to uncover better measures and approaches to deal with mental health issues facing refugees in the camp. Providing employment opportunities and better education, for instance, will considerably help with the serious underlying issues that contribute to mental health instability.

Education is like an engine for the mind. It builds your mental know-how and ways to do things in life. Education is often linked to mental well-being because one main aspect of education is problem-solving, which incorporates how to deal with challenges life throws at you each day. To me, this is the main connection between mental health and education. Schools help kids build growth mindsets as it is a space where you can see hope and possibilities for a brighter future out of your everyday circumstances.

More governments and non-governmental organizations should also provide additional resources to improve refugees' social, economic, and mental health. Non-governmental organizations should create more safe places for these people, especially women and children in the camp who are more vulnerable. Individuals and organizations alike should unite their efforts and consider implementing better and more effective strategies to help overcome mental health issues impacting the lives and well-being of refugees.

Inclusion

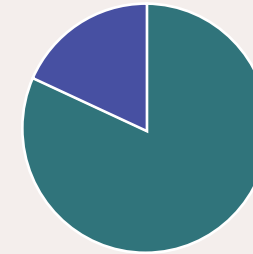
Inclusion is not binary, it exists on a scale. Too often, the topic of inclusion for refugee and displaced learners refers to minimum inclusion: all children should have access to school. This statement is especially relevant now as we witness the biggest global education crisis the world has ever seen due to COVID-19.

According to the UNHCR, 84% of adolescents around the world have access to a secondary education while only 24% of their refugee and displaced counterparts have the same opportunity.²⁰ Further, the Malala Fund estimates that 20 million more adolescent girls are at risk of not returning to school even after the crisis has passed.²¹ We also know that youth who are out of school are more vulnerable to violence, exploitation, abuse, and face additional challenges to breaking cycles of poverty and trauma. So of course, minimum inclusion is critical. All children have the right to an education and should have access to school.

However, we don't just want minimum inclusion. We want *meaningful* inclusion. Many refugee and displaced youth report experiences of discrimination, isolation, and non-belonging in their host communities and schools. Factors like ability, ethnicity, religion, race, language, sexual orientation, and gender expression can lead to further stigmatization and harmful exclusionary realities. As such, our definition of

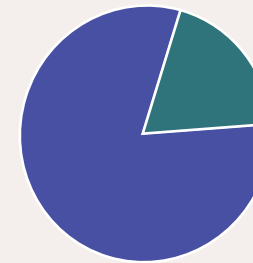
inclusion also calls for appropriate accommodations, destigmatization, and their full integration regardless of difference.

Beyond being physically included in educational institutions, the inclusion of refugee and displaced learners should also extend to the inclusion of their perspectives in decision-making processes. **Historically, the voices of the people most impacted by global education policies and programs have been chronically underrepresented at decision-making tables, thereby creating a divide between our needs and the solutions being created to assist us.** Young people from around the world who have lived experience with forcible displacement are among the most credible experts in informing global refugee education.



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only 24% of their refugee and displaced counterparts have the same opportunity.²⁰

Further, the Malala Fund estimates that:

20 million

more adolescent girls are at risk of not returning to school once the Covid-19 pandemic has passed.²¹

“Refugee children and youth represent almost half of the refugee population. Their education needs, which have a direct impact on their ability to participate in society, cannot be ignored and should be a priority.”

Amelie Fabian

Inclusion

Education must be *informed by* and *accessible* to refugee and displaced youth across different backgrounds.

We believe:

- Refugee and displaced youth need to be included at all levels of global decision making related to education.
- Refugee and displaced youth must have access to quality education regardless of their ability, legal status, gender, psychosocial needs, marital status, sexual orientation, care-taker role, or any other discriminating factor. This includes integrating youth with differing needs into schools and ensuring that they have the proper accommodations needed to participate fully.
- All legal barriers that prevent refugee and displaced youth from accessing education should be removed. This includes ensuring qualifications are portable and can transfer with children and youth who relocate.
- Community inclusion initiatives are critical to help integrate refugee and displaced peoples into society and overcome stigmatization.
- Inclusive curricula that teach gender equality, inclusion, peace and are inclusive of and responsive to the needs of refugee and displaced youth, especially the most marginalized, are critical to strengthen the quality of education for all learners.
- Refugee educators should be able to have their teaching qualifications recognized to enable them to teach learners in the host country.
- The international community must develop laws or legal instruments to ensure the right to education integration in all host countries.
- While shift scheduling is sometimes necessary, all shifts must be of equal quality in teaching, staffing, materials, etc., and include a mix of refugee and host students. This may include additional resourcing of schools willing to accommodate refugee students on par with nationals to incentivize teachers and reduce financial discrimination.

Inclusion Against All Odds: Statements from Disrupted Council Members

Moriom and Rashel

Moriom and Rashel are two young people living in the world's largest refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh. In 2021, they were selected to join Canada's Refugee Education Council. However, the pair faced significant connectivity and technological barriers to participation. As such, accommodations were arranged early on to facilitate their meaningful engagement on the Council. Most notably, it was decided that each Refugee Education Council meeting would be recorded and shared with local Bangladesh staff from UNICEF and World Vision. The staff would then bring the recordings to Moriom and Rashel and, in turn, record their responses, questions, and discourse. The staff would also support Moriom and Rashel in reviewing materials, completing activities, and creating content for the Together for Learning campaign in an offline format.

Unfortunately, when COVID-19 hit the crowded refugee camp, strict and prolonged measures were put in place to reduce the spread of the virus. As a result, entry and exit to the camp was limited and the local staff supporting Moriom and Rashel's participation were no longer able to access them, disrupting these members' capacity to contribute to the Refugee Education Council in 2021. Moriom and Rashel's inability to participate and contribute to the Council this year despite having the knowledge, skills, and will is a testament to the lost potential that can occur when youth are excluded from participating.

Luckily, we were able to obtain a contribution from both Moriom and Rashel. The below was shared in Rohingya, the members' first language and translated into English.

Rashel

My name is Rashel. I am 15 years old. I am from Buthidaung in the northern Arakan State of Myanmar. I am a Level 4 student at a learning center in Cox's Bazaar refugee camp. There are six members in my family altogether. There are four siblings in total in my family. I am the eldest son of my parents. My other siblings are my younger sisters.

When I was in my country of Myanmar, I used to study in class-2 at the primary school of our village. I come from a middle class family. When we were in Myanmar, my father was a farmer and my mother was a housewife. On holiday, I used to go to the farm with my father to help him with the activities of farming. All the members of my family used to enjoy the fish curry in our meals. It was a wonderful time in my life!

On 25 August 2017, there was a campaign of brutality by the Myanmar military to forcibly displace the Rohingya minority out of our country, victimizing nearly a million of our people. We were scared and didn't know what awaited us but still we started a journey to save our lives. It took several days for us to get to Bangladesh.

There is a saying by our forefathers that education is the backbone of a nation. With an education, we are better able to make the right decision in critical situations. This is why I am passionate about refugee education. I joined the Refugee Education Council because I wanted to report to the council about the children of our persecuted community who are deprived of proper education. I want-

ed to also share the Council's message with the children in my community so that they too can realize the importance of education.

I have lost two precious years of my education while taking shelter in the camp. This is one of my biggest losses. When we were still living in our country in Myanmar, we were not able to acquire quality education. We were unable to understand the language of most of our school teachers as they were from the Buddhist community. Moreover, I couldn't sit for the final examination of my academic year because of the cruel events that took place on 25 August 2017.

This is the biggest challenge I have faced. For a long time, I could not forget the view of our houses burning, our fathers and brothers being shot, our mothers and sisters being raped, and baby children being thrown in the burning fire by the brutal Myanmar military. After arriving in Bangladesh and studying in the school for about four years now, I can't remove the tragic view of the inhumane operation.

There are billions of people living in the world. All of them are human beings. I would like to send a message to the world that everyone should be treated as human beings and children should be treated as children. Everyone should be given equal rights, including and especially access to education for children. Most importantly, host governments should never discriminate against children or turn them away from an education because of their religion or race.

Moriom

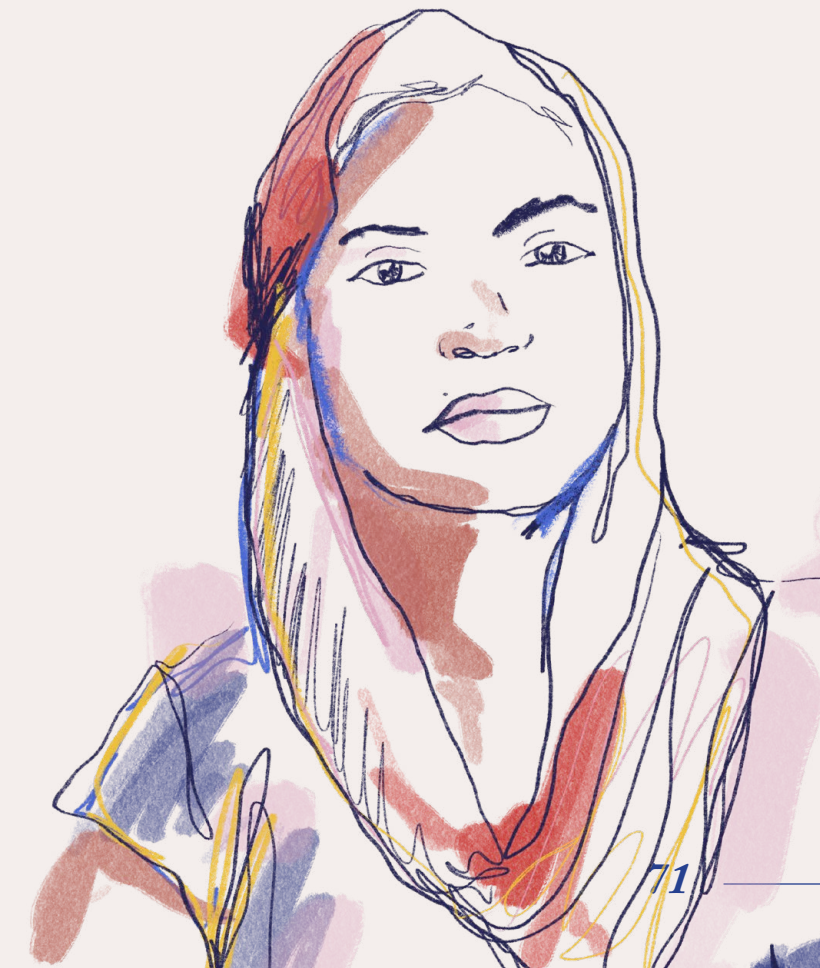
I'm Moriom from Cox's Bazaar Refugee Camp in Bangladesh's Rohingya community. I'm 17 years old. I live with my parents and four sisters. I was born in Myanmar but now I live in Bangladesh. When I was in my country, there weren't many opportunities for girls to study. That's why girls were always far behind from the boys. My dream is to be educated – not only myself, but all the children from Rohingya communities. My dream is that there will be no more discrimination based on color, race, religion, language, and gender, and instead, we are all educated and protected. I am also dreaming of becoming a teacher in the future. I joined the Refugee Education Council so that I can learn from others who live on another side of the world, to learn how they overcame the barriers in their life, and so that I can share my story too.

When my family and I came to Bangladesh from Myanmar, we didn't know what uncertainty was waiting for us, but after some days, we realized that we are safe here. We have gradually gained access to education along with all basic needs. Here in Bangladesh, we have the opportunity to go to school where we learn so many things that we didn't have the opportunity or access to learn in Myanmar.

But it's not enough for us just to have a school. Beyond this, we would like to have formal education that is inclusive for all children. We face a big challenge in our communities for

girls' education. Girls and children in our communities who have disabilities face even more challenges to studying because our schools do not provide accommodations for different needs.

Our family and community leaders discourage us from going to school, but our teachers continue to communicate with our parents and community leaders and raise their awareness on the importance of education for girls. As a result of this, they are now allowing us to study. We need inclusive education because so many of us are unable to go to school. My hope is that one day I can be educated, go back to my home country, and live a full life of dignity and joy.



Everything and Anything: Recognizing the Potential of Youth with Disabilities

Suleman Arshad

I started to lose my sight due to glaucoma. Although the loss was gradual, it was still a big shock to me that I would not see again, and it took me a long time to get over the fact that my world was fading into darkness. My sight was deteriorating at a fast rate and by the time I was 17, I had lost 70% of my vision.

I struggled a great deal during my school years, as I had to shift to a special education system. Leaving behind a certain part of me wasn't easy. Losing my sight and not being able to study or experience learning in a "normal" way was heartbreaking for me, which is why I often chose to isolate myself. I used to be angry at everything and one question used to haunt me: why me?

After my disability, my whole education experience became difficult. The teachers in the public education system here in Islamabad, Pakistan didn't know how to accommodate my needs and they were not aware of how to include me in class. One time, I requested to be seated at the front of the class because I couldn't make out clear images on the blackboard from sitting at the back of the class. The teacher accused me of being a liar. He

claimed that I could see everything and that I was only lying to gain sympathy. It hurt me a lot and after that, I preferred to be alone. It took me years to come out of my shell and embrace myself.

Because the general education system could not help me in learning, I had to shift to special education, which was extremely accommodating. The teachers were really helpful and understanding.

There shouldn't be such a big difference between the two educational systems. A child with a disability should not have to leave everything they know and adjust to a new and different system simply because of their disability.

Lack of teacher's training and lack of expertise regarding inclusion made my experience quite tough. It was during this time I decided that I would not let others like me go through the same struggles. Teachers should be given training so they can make classrooms more inclusive. A child with any disability is often more vulnerable and needs understanding, as well as support to grow and thrive. To make

classrooms, learning materials, and the educational system more accessible and teachers more aware, better policies must be implemented. Most importantly, these inclusive policies must have input from direct stakeholders who are affected – namely, people with disabilities. Nothing about them should be decided without including them.

This is especially true when it comes to refugees with disabilities. In recent years, millions of refugees have come to Pakistan to find safety due to regular conflict in neighboring Afghanistan. Today, there are about 1.4 million refugee people on record still in Pakistan

and countless others who aren't registered. Additionally, complex emergencies in the country have also caused a rise of internally displaced peoples.

Refugees live very challenging lives, as they have left their countries for various reasons, and they are trying to settle in a foreign land for their basic rights. Refugee youth are already a marginalized community, and many of them also have disabilities which makes barriers to inclusion even higher. Being a disabled person and having experienced these struggles on a personal level, I am working to make sure that displacement and disability doesn't affect young people's educational opportunities and learning experience.

Now, at 28 years old, I have done my Bachelor of Science of Honors in Management Sciences from the University of Punjab and I have risen as a youth activist. I joined the Refugee Education Council because I believe we can make a positive impact when we consider and celebrate people's different experiences.

My message to able-bodied **people in the world is that people with disabilities can do everything and anything.** Instead of pitying or sympathizing with us, you should do the work to remove barriers so that we can be fully included. We are very capable. And to any person with a disability reading this, you are not alone. The rough time will pass and it will all be worth it. Believe in yourself because you're not the problem, the world that excludes you is.



Not Waiting for Help: Refugee and Displaced Youth Designing Solutions

Nbial Deng

As a kid, I had a beautiful childhood. I would go to school in the morning, play in the nearby river with children from my neighbourhood in the afternoon, and sit down on my shoes in the evening as my father narrated stories of his childhood at a small village by the Nile in South Sudan. My father owned a small Panasonic radio and most of the evenings, men from the neighbourhood would join him to listen to a local radio in South Sudan. I would listen in closely as they analyzed the news and asked each other questions. *When is the war going to end? When will we ever get to return home?*

In some instances, my father would tune into the BBC and I was always amazed by the news broadcaster. In a way, my father's radio introduced me to the world outside of myself

and aroused my passion for storytelling. I dreamed of becoming a journalist. My father knew what my dreams meant to me, and he worked multiple jobs at a time to make sure I could go to a good school, while putting food on the table. My father told me that I must master the English language to be a BBC journalist and I promised that I would not let him down. I worked hard at school to improve my English.

One morning in 2010, the life I knew vanished in the span of a few minutes. My father woke me up and told me to stuff some clothes and a water bottle into a small paper bag. I heard gunshots and someone screaming outside. A militia was attacking our village.

My family has been affected by war and conflict across generations. I was born in Itang, a small town in the Gambella region of Ethiopia where my father had settled after fleeing the first Sudanese civil war more than five decades ago. And now, I too was being forced to flee.

When my father saw me shaking, he embraced me and told me I had to go to Kenya where I would still be able to attend school. The promise of school, which my father knew was one of the most important things in my life, calmed me enough to continue packing.

I arrived in Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp two weeks later, devastated, frustrated, and lost.

My life took a turn when I resumed school. It was there that I was able to find solace, healing, and hope. In 2017, during my third year of high school, I created the Refugee Youth Peace Ambassadors to provide a space for young people in the camp to heal, share stories, learn important life skills, and play together. When I graduated from high school one year later, I started getting involved actively in community projects aimed at helping young people build better futures through education, mentorship, and social entrepreneurship. I also started advocating for more educational opportunities for young displaced people like myself whose education was like a second kind of citizenship. It allows us to thrive and secure more hopeful and brighter futures. I joined the Refugee Education Council because I firmly believe that young refugees should be involved in solution-designing discussions about issues that affect them.

I am proud of the impact that I have been able to achieve, but I am even more proud when I look around at the totality of the impact that refugee and displaced people are individually and collectively making. For the past 12 years, since I first moved to Kakuma refugee camp, I have had the immense pleasure of knowing, learning from, and collaborating with impressive changemakers who are leading solutions to transform their communities.

After all, there can never be an effective solution without involving the communities that have been affected.

Abdullahi Mire in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya and John Jal Dak in the Rhino refugee settlement in Uganda are great examples of two inspiring young leaders I've come across along my journey. Their stories and work, like mine, bring to light the many ways young displaced people are driving real positive change in their new communities and affirming the notion that young refugees are experts of their own experiences and challenges.

Abdullahi Mire's family fled to the Dadaab refugee camp when he was just three years old. He was educated in Dadaab and spent all his life in the camp.

Today, Abdullahi runs the Refugee Youth Education Hub in Dadaab. The organization created the Dadaab Book Drive initiative, which is a library with over 60,000 books to help refugees stay informed and continue learning during the pandemic, a time when schools were closed and livelihood activities put on hold. During the school shutdown, the organization also hosted a local radio show to ensure refugees and children from host communities can continue to learn and battle a surge of misinformation about the virus.

In 2020, the Refugee Youth Education Hub was selected as one of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Innovation Award winners for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region.

John Jal Dak fled to Uganda in 2013 following the outbreak of the current civil war in South Sudan. Three years later, using his expertise and drawing from his lived experiences in South Sudan, he founded the Youth Social Advocacy Team (YSAT), a refugee youth-led non-governmental organization which works towards promoting peaceful coexistence among the refugee communities in the Rhino refugee settlement in Uganda and improving their self-reliance. They empower the local community through skills development, conflict transformation, adult literacy, and social development. To date, they have provided training to more than 10,000 young people in the Rhino refugee settlement and John recently traveled to South Sudan to open YSAT's first branch office in the country.

In their unique context, John and Abdullahi highlighted the limited funding and partnership opportunities for refugee-led organizations, capacity building, and barriers in seeking legal registration.

Despite the major limitations that both Jal and Abdullahi, and I encountered, the organizations that we have founded and programs we've created speak to the immense wealth of experiences and expertise displaced young people have in finding solutions to challenges facing us. We did not wait for help. I believe our stories and work should raise the alarm that young displaced people should have the space and opportunities to lead in their com-

munities and beyond. A call that all governments, UN agencies, international organizations, and other stakeholders should heed!

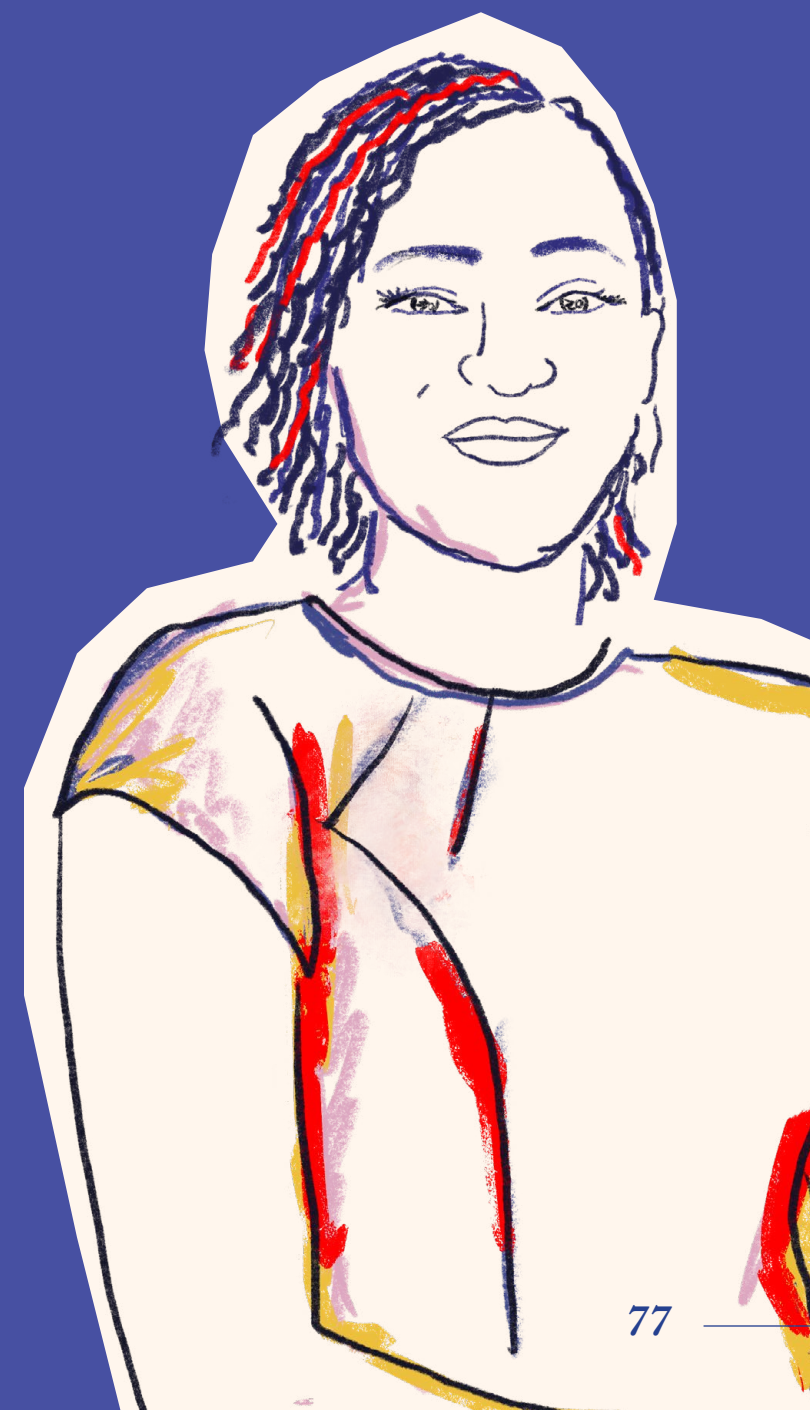
From inspiration and ideation to implementation and evaluation, we are proof that refugee and displaced people can and should be included at every single step of the process to create change.



Putting People First

Foni Joyce

The first person who taught me the importance of putting people first was my father. As a journalist, he stood for the truth and would always highlight injustices in the community. He worked for the community. Regardless of the danger involved in his work as a journalist during an ongoing conflict, he stood for justice. It did cost him his life, but it also left a lesson about the importance of valuing others and seeing yourself in others. This means standing for something, standing up for others, and supporting those who are not able to stand on their own feet. My father's work for the community highlighted the importance of speaking up for others regardless of the challenges you encounter personally. His work influenced me to care for others in my community and to put people first.



“Putting people first.” What does this really mean? For me, this means supporting my community, appreciating our unique cultural diversity, being creative in finding solutions, and working with others to lead the way in bringing the solutions we need. It means being able to go an extra mile to ensure that others are able to sleep peacefully, live in a humane and dignified way, and be able to have access to basic needs such as food, shelter, documentation, and education.

In our community, I have seen many other young refugee leaders putting people first. They have chosen to step up to help where they can. I hope to share their stories with you.

Foni Joyce

Reflecting back on how my journey started in advocacy and amplifying of refugee voices, I see how my parents impacted my work today. The work my father did influenced my choices to speak for others. My mother also worked in the community where she shared her expertise and trained women on crafting. Both my parents demonstrated the importance of working first within the community you live. I took it up and the first leadership role I had was as a student leader for the DAFI Kenya student organization. My role was to lead the team and support different projects we had on career guidance for students in Nairobi, Kakuma, Dadaab.

In our community, I have seen many other young refugee leaders putting people first. They have chosen to step up to help where they can. I hope to share their stories with you. Adhieu, Grace, and Faridah have put their community first by using their own experiences and expertise to lead solutions. They do this because they are part of these communities. They have experienced the same needs and challenges as the community members, and have been flexible and resilient to develop solutions for their communities.

Adhieu Achuil Dhieu: **Supporting Women and Girls' Access to Education**

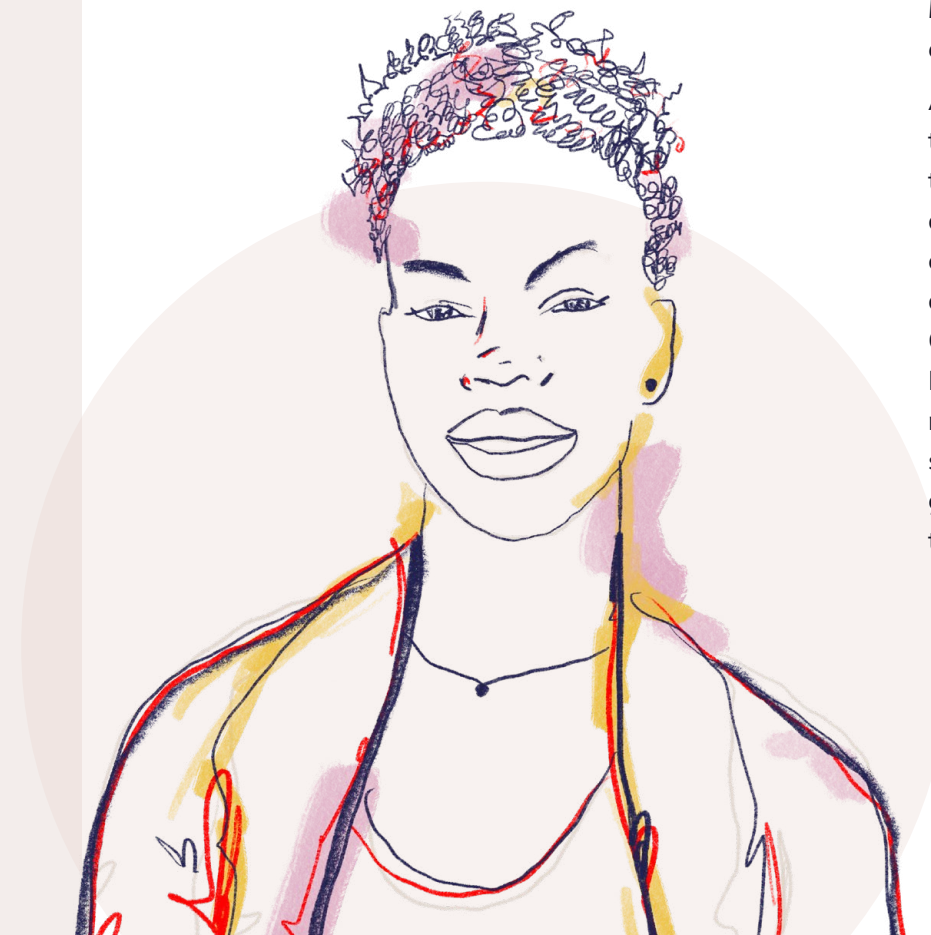
Adhieu Achuil Dhieu is one of the great young leaders in my community putting others first. Women and girls in our community encounter challenges in accessing education, experiencing early marriages and teenage pregnancies, and struggling with mental health needs. In response, Adhieu has become a passionate activist of girl child education and has been supporting women and girls in Nairobi, Kakuma, and Dadaab. She has participated in advocacy around girl child education, early marriages, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, and psychological

support. She has been mentoring teenage mothers and teaching them entrepreneurship skills, as well as encouraging them to go back to school despite their circumstances.

She is the founder and CEO of Monicadow Enterprise, a startup that deals with the manufacturing of hair oil products, shampoo, bar soaps, hand wash, liquid soaps, and detergents. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she produced over 3000 masks and bar soap to support her community.

“Through this support, girls and boys were able to continue with their studies and couldn't miss class due to lack of masks, and others within the community were not harassed due to lack of masks,” said Adhieu. “The masks ensured that my community (refugees and host community) had access to protective equipment during this hard time.”

Adhieu has continued to highlight the importance of supporting women and girls' access to education, their right to earn a livelihood, as well as the need for peer-to-peer psychosocial support. She, herself, is currently a third year student pursuing a Bachelor of Commerce (Marketing Option) at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) under the Windle Trust/Dafi scholarship. Adhieu has been showing how to give women and girls access to an education through the practical support she is giving.



Grace Gasiga:

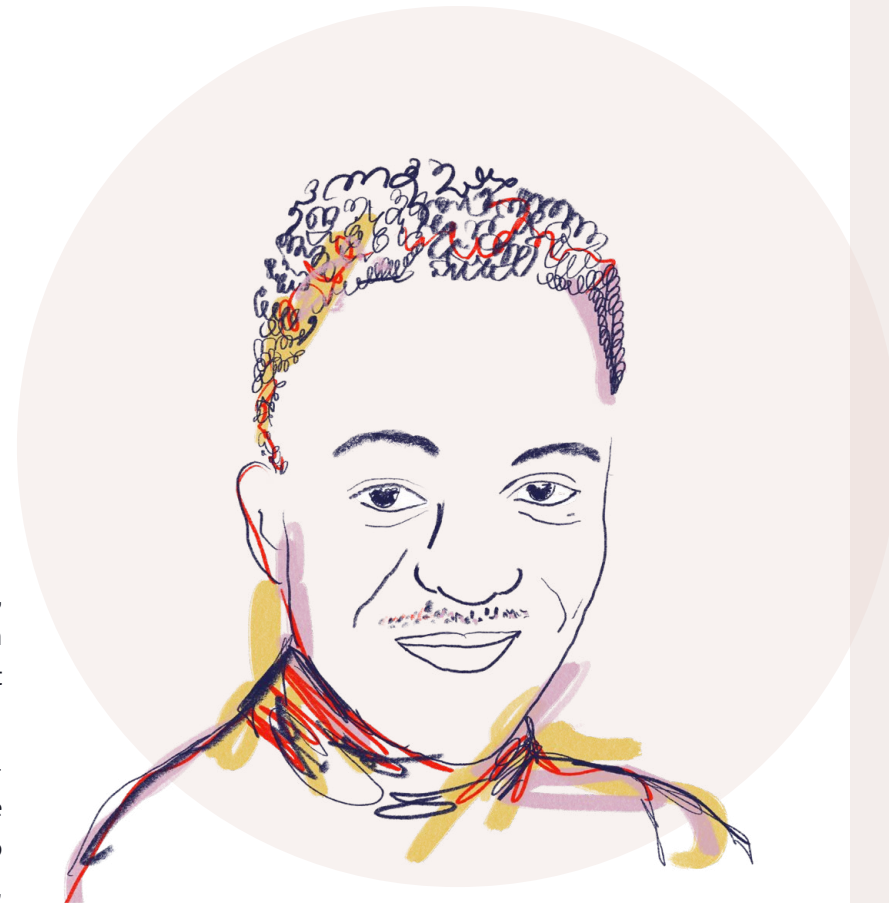
Encouraging Youth to Study in the Midst of COVID-19

In Uganda, Grace Gasiga, a refugee youth, chose to start an organization called Youth and Women Engaged for Development (YWED).

Grace says, “As a refugee youth living in Kya-ka II refugee settlement in Uganda, I have seen how young people were struggling to access the limited educational opportunities, struggling to provide for their own needs. My aspiration is to help others in my community; these are refugee youth, people with special needs and children. We need to help each other as we can not progress alone.”

Together with other young people, they convened to help and advocate for refugees, especially people with special needs (PSNs) and to work towards ensuring that young refugees can be self-reliant.

YWED has been carrying out poultry-keeping activities, as well as fighting against illiteracy of children. They have led sessions with children to encourage them to go back to school after the first school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through their work at the community level, YWED has encouraged children and motivated them to go back to school, creating the opportunity for future livelihoods for the young people.



“It’s important to ensure women and youth are empowered to be self-reliant. To reduce idleness amongst youth, it’s important to ensure they have access to education – formal or informal – as well as other activities that encourage their well-being,” said Grace. “As we await schools to be reopened, it’s important to also support financially. The schools need furniture, books, and many other things to make the experience for the students wholesome.”

The work that Grace and his group are doing reminds me of my own experiences with DAFI Kenya, a refugee students’ association of which I am an alumni. DAFI Kenya decided to donate money from their DAFI scholarship stipends – that is, the allowance they receive from the DAFI scholarship – and put it together to support students who could not afford to complete their secondary school through diplomas.

Faridah Luanda:

Building Potential and Creating Livelihoods

Faridah Luanda who is now based in Sweden, founded Davision Youth and Women Group, a refugee youth-led organization.

“I was motivated to create this group from my own experience being a survivor of child marriage, SGBV, and a teenager mother. This pushed me to break the silence and start talking about this experience as a girl to try to stop child marriage and teenage pregnancy in the refugee community and promoting girls’ education,” explains Faridah.

Davision Group works at multiple levels to address child protection concerns, while also supporting and empowering young people, especially girls out of school and child mothers. They do this through music, dance, drama, and education. They have been listening to the needs expressed and looking for creative ways to help the community.

While Faridah has been working successfully with the community, it has not been without challenges. “One of the biggest challenges at Kyaka II refugee settlement is child marriage,” she says.

Davision Group has been educating the community about the negative impacts of child marriages and the harm it causes by sharing stories of their own lived experiences. They have also been training the victims of gender-based violence and child marriage on practical skills like tailoring and sewing, hair dressing, shoe-making and soap-making, while also providing important information around sexual and reproductive health rights and self-care. By doing so, Davision Group empowers women and girls to become mentors and to have the confidence to reach their full potential.

They have also increased the coordination and support amongst young people of different ages and diversities to use their potential skills to be resilient, self-reliant agents of change by focusing on life skills, livelihoods, and recreational activities that build solidarity. Working together has helped the young people to reduce their stress, anxiety, and worry, while also improving their coping capacity.

Farida says, "There's a need to develop young people's organizational capacity and their initiatives so they can become actors in community-based projects. We can do this by providing funding opportunities that refugee-led organizations can access without complicated bureaucracy and supporting them to develop financial and project management skills".

Change Through Community-Led Solutions

The resilience and creativity of refugee leaders is seen with the innovative programs and strategies they develop to solve the challenges in their community. There are many other young people leading solutions in their community and it's important to provide spaces where they can share their experiences and expertise. This means listening to them, trusting them, and supporting them to develop their skills and capacity in advocacy.

As Faridah says,

"Everyone wants a safe place to feel at home. It is time to work more with refugee youth leaders as partners. Trust them. Invest in their leadership. Instead of waiting for the right time, the time is now."



Included: Being Part of the Decision-Making Process

Istarlin Abdi

I am Istarlin Abdi from Somalia. I have been living in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya for more than 20 years. I came to Kakuma as a child and am now raising two girls as a single mum. Photography is a form of therapy for me. Expressing myself through the lens gives me peace of mind. Telling human stories, especially refugee stories, is my passion. As they say, a photo is worth a thousand words. As a refugee Somali female photographer, I represent all young girls/women. If I can be a photographer, so can they.

I hope to share my message of the importance of prioritizing refugee education through my passion for photography.

As a refugee, education is our main hope. Having a good education gives us more chances and opportunities to better our lives. I joined the Refugee Education Council to express my voice and fight to make education better for the future generation. I urge world leaders to make refugee education a number one priority, as well as passing employment policies that are favorable for refugees. After all, what is the point of having a good education if you are later unable to find suitable work due to the limitations imposed by your status?

Inclusion, for me, means being part of the decision-making process in everything that affects my life, directly or indirectly. Having lived the refugee experience for the better part of my life,

I understand the struggles refugees encounter due to the lack of inclusion in important matters like education, health, and employment. These are areas where refugees are still fighting for maximum inclusion. I believe everyone has knowledge about these issues and a solution to their problem, which is why it's important to have everyone involved in the discussion when decisions that concern them are being made.

When I am included in the decision-making process, I am empowered to be active in contributing to the greater good because I see how my ideas, opinions, and knowledge are able to influence the outcome of these conversations. Being a part of the decision-making process also gives me a chance to air out my problems and brainstorm with others to find suitable solutions. When refugees are included in the discussions affecting their lives, there's a chance for change, a chance to turn things around and improve, but most importantly, inclusion gives equal power to each one of us to take charge and contribute to matters that not only influence our individual lives, but also contribute to the greater good of humanity.

Every person is unique and every person's individual rights must be respected. Refugee rights are human rights too. Including refugees and providing spaces for them allows refugees to fully participate in their community and foster peaceful societies. Inclusion for a refugee means seen, heard, and supported.

Being a refugee, all I ever want is a life of dignity and inclusion means dignity.

The refugee crisis is huge and growing, and it affects us all. But it is also people that created this problem and so people can also solve this problem. It's more than possible to ensure that refugees are included and dignified. There just has to be the will to make it happen.

Technology And Digital Learning

Technology And Digital Learning

Global school closures in 2020 due to COVID-19 resulted in a rapid and unprecedented move to remote learning for thousands of learners including displaced learners. COVID-19 has deepened an existing global learning crisis with disproportionate effects for displaced learners who already faced access challenges. In response to COVID-19 impacts on schooling, many lower-income countries and those hosting large refugee populations, deployed a wider range of technologies for delivering education, including radio, SMS, Interactive Voice Response (IVR), online/offline learning and paper-based resources. These education technology (EdTech) interventions combined with other initiatives kept learning alive for displaced learners, including for vulnerable groups of learners such as girls and learners with disabilities. The new remote learning conditions under COVID-19 required teachers to rapidly adopt new ways of teaching and to assume greater responsibility for supporting student well-being while also managing their own well-being.

Just like all other learners, displaced learners too are part of the digital generation. Digital learning, with checks and balances in place, can provide us with the opportunity to reimagine equitable, inclusive, and quality learning opportunities for displaced learners globally. Digital learning can enable displaced learners to catch-up, address learning loss, and connect with peer learning networks and with a global community.

Navigating technology is also a critical skill in today's world. The provision of technology skills, vocational education, non-formal learning, socio-emotional and life skills through a

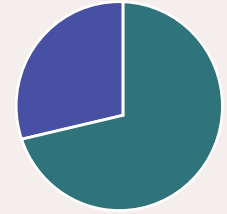
range of no tech and low/medium and high-tech platforms can provide pathways for displaced learners to livelihoods, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities in the future. Importantly, digital learning can support duty-bearers to respond to future shocks to education service delivery.

However, displaced learners in crisis-affected and low-income countries face significant access barriers to digital learning due to poor technological infrastructure, lack of electricity, and limited access to the internet and digital learning devices. These barriers are more significant for girls and learners with disabilities and displaced children from poorer households. Digital literacy challenges among learners and teachers may also present an additional barrier. Furthermore, EdTech modalities may present increased security risks for children and should include a risk assessment for child safeguarding.

It is critical that these and other barriers are addressed through contextually relevant EdTech solutions that reach all displaced learners and empower teachers. EdTech modalities should engage local partners and offer low/medium/high-tech solutions together with other contextually relevant learning modalities. The sustainability of EdTech interventions can be ensured through real-time data-driven strategies to inform local and national policies and programs.

Contributed by Samiera Zafar, Save the Children

Technology And Digital Learning



78%

78% of refugee children and youth had limited to no access to learning opportunities during pandemic-related school closures.²²



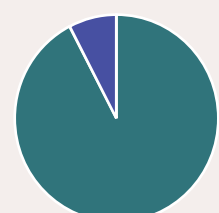
57%

Based on a recent analysis of UNHCR data, an estimated 57% of refugee or displaced learners who were enrolled in school prior to COVID-19 pandemic were not supported by any digital or home-based learning programme during school closures.²²



32.9%

The gender digital divide in access to the internet remains largest in the world's least developed countries at 32.9%.²³



90%

Over 90% of jobs worldwide already have a digital component and most jobs will soon require sophisticated digital skills.¹⁸

**600
Million**

If 600 million more women are connected to the Internet in 3 years, this would translate to a rise in global GDP of between US\$13 billion and US\$18 billion.²³

Technology And Digital Learning

Digital learning is central to refugee education. Technology is key to closing the digital divide economically, geographically and generationally, specifically in the context of unstable situations and where host country schools are at capacity.

We believe:

- Technology has the potential to engage hard-to-reach students, break down language barriers, improve engagement, enable knowledge sharing, facilitate personalized learning, and help displaced youth feel connected to diasporic communities.
- Refugee children should have the ability to access digital educational resources that will allow them to enhance their skills, increase employment opportunities, and develop global connections. This requires reliable infrastructure that ensures the participation of remote communities in digital learning.
- Education opportunities need to be offered in both online and offline formats to reach more students and make learning accessible to different contexts and learning styles. Online delivery should be recognized and accredited on par with offline delivery options, and digital learning should be integrated throughout the curriculum beginning with primary.
- Cultivating strong partnerships with education experts and ethical technology companies is critical to providing technology to the hardest to reach, and ensuring teachers are trained in the use of educational technologies.
- Technology should be aligned to national curricula and education systems to have the most impact. Technology should be leveraged to boost school readiness and increase literacy rates at primary and secondary level.

Virtual Reality: How to Keep Learning During a Pandemic

Nhial Deng and Yvana Portillo

Originally published in UNHCR 2021 Education Report ⁴

To understand the challenges refugee students faced as COVID-19 swept around the world, we asked two members of the Canada-based Refugee Education Council – one in Lima, Peru, and one in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya – to quiz each other about how they had reacted, adapted, and persevered despite the constant disruption to education.

Nhial Deng

Nhial Deng, aged 22, fled to Kakuma in 2010 after an armed attack on his village in Ethiopia. Among his many other projects, he heads the Refugee Youth Peace Ambassadors in Kakuma, an initiative promoting peaceful coexistence between communities in the camp and empowering young people as peacebuilders and social entrepreneurs. He will start university in Canada this academic year.

Yvana Portillo

Yvana Portillo, aged 15, fled Venezuela with her family in 2017. Now in Lima, Peru, she has thrived in her new surroundings, overcoming hunger and a lack of money to shoot to the top of her class in high school, emerging as an advocate for accessible quality education.

Yvana: Hi Nhial! Where are you at the moment, and how are your studies going?

Nhial: I'm in Kakuma refugee camp, preparing to go to Canada in August to start at Huron University College the following month. [Nhial has now arrived at Huron.] I hope to pursue Global Rights Studies with a minor in English and Cultural Studies. I haven't been in school since January when I finished a year-long course in filmmaking and journalism run by an organization called FilmAid. It was supposed to end in December but our studies were disrupted by COVID and all our classes were suspended. We were sent home but I didn't have internet access or electricity there, and I live in a compound with more than ten other people – so finding a private, quiet place to study was not easy. How about you, Yvana? How are your studies going?

Y: I'm still studying in my bedroom. At first, I thought the virus and the restrictions wouldn't last long – one or two months, maybe. But after a couple of weeks at school we were sent home, so I saw it wasn't going to be over so quickly. The hardest thing was adapting to remote classes – for me, that was even harder than not being able to go out or see my friends.

N: Did you have what you needed for virtual classes?

Y: Not at first. We had a cell phone and a laptop but my parents are teachers and they needed the laptop to teach classes and share their screen and all that. My brother and I just

had the phone. Then there was a week and a half when we didn't have electricity. We went to my mother's friend's house so we could attend class and my parents could teach. Luckily, they were able to buy another phone. How about you? You said you had no internet or electricity...

N: I would go to a cyber café – they [the course organizers] set up a Google classroom and sent us content, documents and videos, so we could download it and watch offline – I was lucky enough to have a computer, which most refugees here don't have, and FilmAid provided us with data bundles. So I would download that content and wait until everyone was sleeping at home so I could take time to study. Did you manage to adapt to online learning?

Y: We have a tutor who guides us through online classes. But our teachers were the ones having issues – they were not as used to online life as us [students], they weren't sure how to turn on their microphones or cameras or share their screens. But they've learned. They may not be as used to technology as we are, but it's been over a year now so they are more used to it. How did you manage to stay motivated?

N: My journalism course trainer helped me a great deal – she is Kenyan and I was very close to her. I like to reach out to people I trust, who I know can help me navigate any challenges. So I would give her a call or send a text every day. One of the pieces of advice she gave me, which was very valuable, was that there are very limited opportunities in this world and everyone is competing for them. So she told me to be very forceful, go for the best in every situation. And that's what I've been doing, trying to find ways of propelling myself to new heights. Are you looking forward to going back to school?

Y: Yes! I would choose to go to school 1,000 times over virtual learning. You study more. Or the internet connection [at home] sometimes drops and that stops you. But I have to say I'm getting better grades now than when I went to school! I think it's because I can do more research on the internet, look for videos on YouTube that explain the things I have to study. I have my parents close to me and they can help with my homework. So I'm able to find information better.

N: So should digital learning play more of a role in education, even after the pandemic?

Y: Yes – learning should be “dual”. Digital tools can help us a lot in school. If I could make a recommendation to governments, it would be to provide refugee learners with the resources they need, and that includes access to digital information.

N: I agree, though I look at this from two angles. First, I think school should continue – thinking of my own journey, when I first got to Kakuma I was lost, I was devastated, I was frustrated. I had nightmares about the violence I'd witnessed when fleeing my village in Ethiopia. In school, I was able to find solace, to find hope and healing. It was a safe place where I could think about a glowing future. And I saw so many other young people from different places and who had endured so much, and they were getting an education because they believed it was their ticket to a brighter future. So I believe that physical school is something that should be [available]. But I also think there is a need for an element of digital learning. Education should be an opportunity for people from different parts of the world to gather and learn together. An opportunity for someone in North America to get to know someone who is in Kakuma, someone in Kakuma to get to know someone in Europe. Every single school should be connected to the Internet, to enable people from different backgrounds and places to share ideas and knowledge – and to make friendships.



Connected: Digital Learning in Action

Istarlin Abdi

Digital learning is meant to enhance learning experiences, and it plays a significant role in improving access to education. The world is well-connected through technology, and refugees should be part of it too.

Most children living in refugee camps don't have access to digital learning technologies. In fact, most schools do not even have electricity. In Kakuma refugee camp, phone tablets are shared between five to eight students in very few schools, which is a privilege and a struggle.

Leaders and international organizations should make digital learning part of daily learning. It is sad to see a high school graduate not be able to use a computer because they have never seen or had access to one before.

I spent an afternoon at URISE Initiative for Africa with high school students who were doing their basic computer training course, since there is no computer training in schools. Computer training is beneficial for them when they are looking for employment or going to college/university.

URISE Initiative for Africa offers innovative and blended learning with a mission to develop the talents of Kakuma refugee youth between the ages of 16-25 years old. They offer technical and life skills that enable young refugees to develop their personal capacity-building.

One Step Closer: Harnessing Technology to Fight Unemployment

Qais Ghasan Abdulrazzaq

Adapted from a piece originally published by World Vision International in 2021²⁴

Young people in Jordan are very often well-educated, but they still struggle to find job opportunities since there is a mismatch between the education they receive and the skills required by the labour market. This circumstance has been causing high unemployment rates – even among university graduates. I am one of the young people in my community who, despite obtaining my bachelor's degree, has been struggling to find a job after graduating from college.



Since my family and I fled the war in Syria, we have been living in a refugee camp in Mafraq. My family consists of seven people; four siblings and my parents. Truthfully, the journey from Syria to Jordan was so difficult – I can't forget how scared and sad we were to be forced out of our country. If it were up to us, we wouldn't have left. The worst part of our journey was when we had to walk for two hours at the border and the shooting was happening everywhere.

After arriving in Jordan, I continued my education remotely in two majors: Information Technology and Journalism and Media. I was so happy to be able to continue my education, I felt that I was one step closer to achieving my dreams. I also studied English through one of the programmes run at the camp, which offered an opportunity to undertake college studies. However, I really needed career guidance and lacked vocational skills in order to follow the suitable and most effective methods for job-hunting.

Along the way, I found out about World Vision's livelihood programme, funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in Germany (BMZ) through Facebook. I was excited when I checked out the training courses that were offered by World Vision's partner, Zaha Cultural Centre. I've always been passionate about technology, and so robotics caught my attention. The Livelihoods Planning and Guidance for Youth in Amman, Mafraq, Irbid and Zarqa Governorates in Jordan programme supports Jordanian and Syrian youth between the ages of 15 and 26 by providing them with vocational training and one-on-one counselling sessions to help

them identify the necessary options for creating livelihoods.

So, I applied and, at the centre, I attended a career guidance course for the first time in my life. This course greatly helped me in improving my personality and skills, and the sessions encouraged me to follow my personal interests. The robotics course, especially, improved my personality and made me stronger. I was one of the best participants, and Zaha Cultural Centre offered me a position as a robotics trainer. I was very surprised by this wonderful opportunity. Being a robotics trainer has allowed me to meet other friends and trainers in different fields. This really built my confidence and social skills, especially since it was very difficult to make friends within the limits of the camp.

The practical and technical competences I have earned have enriched my CV, opening new job opportunities for me in the future. Before I enrolled in the robotics course, I used to apply to jobs in a non-effective way. But after attending the course, I've gained experience that guided me through finding suitable job opportunities.

With new confidence and a stronger CV, I now want to specialize in the field of robotics. My future plan is to major in robotics so that I could find a job dedicated to this field.

Passion to Livelihood: Self-Guided Skills Building in Kakuma

Paul Padiet

@padi.pictures

I am Paul Padiet, a 25-year-old male from South Sudan, residing in Kakuma refugee camp. I was forced to move to the Kakuma refugee camp in 2017. It took a lot of adjustments before I could get a handle on the camp and to get to know the landscape and feel comfortable around other people there. I like culture, football, and nature.

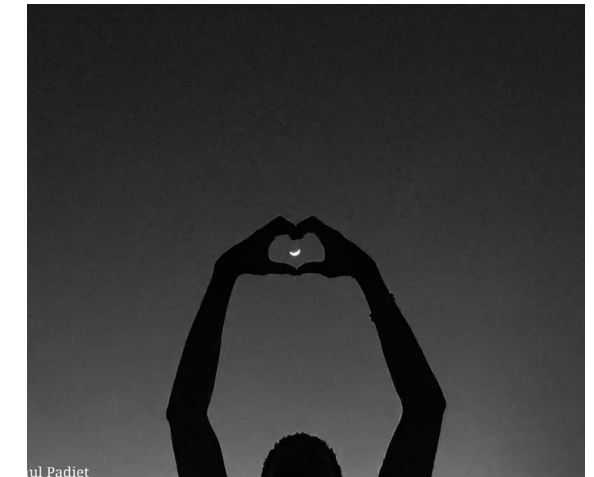
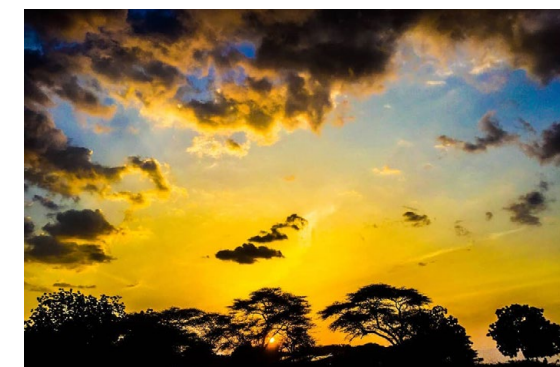
The same year I moved to the camp, I developed my passion for photography. During one of my evening walks with friends, I took pictures. I capture images of nature, clouds, and the sunsets. I started taking pictures every day that I went outside. I would edit them and post them on my WhatsApp status. I loved the encouraging comments I got from people impressed by the photos I captured.

Two years passed and I was still practicing mobile photography. I was getting fond of it because it helped me tell stories and show the beauty of Kakuma refugee camp. From there, I created an Instagram photography account to help showcase my work and art to the world. A friend reached out to me and gave me a digital camera to use. That's when I taught myself how to use a digital camera.



I met an amazing photographer named Joelle. We had a common interest in photography and she had a lot of experience. She has a Canon 7D and I was mesmerized to see her operate the camera, from turning it on to switching to the viewfinder. She gave the camera to me to take her picture, not knowing that I had never used a DSLR camera. After learning from her and with my courage, I took an amazing picture of her and she told me I have skills. I saved the picture and have kept it since. Joelle would trust me with her camera whenever there were events in the camp to go and take pictures and videos. That's how I kept teaching myself the art of photography.

Time went by and I met two amazing filmmakers and photographers named Allan and Joseph during a training session about Microsoft. Allan and Joseph worked for FilmAid Kenya and were capturing our training sessions. After seeing their amazing work, I just told myself that this is what I want to do. On the last day of our session, I went to sit down with them while they were packing up their equipment. I showed them my work and asked for advice for my pathway. They both recommended that I apply for the media training offered by FilmAid Kenya to pursue filmmaking and photography. I applied, was called in for an interview, and I was happy to be enrolled for the media training class of 2020.



During this class, I met Mercy who is an amazing filmmaker and a great mentor. She believed in me since the first time I showed her some of my work. She helped me harness the power of storytelling and become a film editor. We made a promise to each other that we would pursue directing together. I did two projects while I was still a student, covering behind-the-scenes and getting to learn more in the action. I have since created and co-created five short films in Kakuma.

Kakuma is a place of opportunity for those who are seeking. This place helped me find and develop a passion. From a passion, photography and videography turned into a career and then into a source of income for me. It feels amazing to earn a living from what for many remains a hobby.

Kakuma is a place of learning and opportunity for those who are seeking. Many strive to get vocational and formal education in Kakuma. The individuals who succeed are the change-makers in the community. If you're lucky and a fast learner, you can get training and build your pathway to joining tertiary education abroad or earning income from your passion. Kakuma is home to many and for some residents, including myself, it is the place where you can explore your dreams.

Gender Online: Access to Education for Indigenous Communities in Guatemala

Laura Barbosa



When I first moved to Canada, I worked in different jobs that helped me improve my communication skills and understand Canadian culture, which is so important when going to a country different from your own. As a refugee from Colombia with experience working with refugee and displaced peoples in parts of Asia, I continued to feel passionate about and committed to fighting for education, youth, and community outreach.

It was in June 2020 when I first learned about Students Offering Support (SOS) and their Guatemala Groundswell Program. I knew I wanted to work with SOS because of the organization's approach to facilitating exchange and collaboration across cultures and supporting education in vulnerable communities of Latin America. This was a mission that I had experienced in my own life and this role is a dream come true for me.

Ever since I joined SOS, I have been working as the coordinator of the Guatemala Groundswell (GG) program. What is this program about?

The Guatemala Groundswell program is an initiative designed to empower youth to be mentors and leaders in their community. In each community, mentors (aged 14-20) have been selected and supported with training, scholarships, and access to technology to facilitate weekly learning circle sessions for younger students. Through these sessions, they help students academically and socially, in order to achieve educational attainment, gender equality, and sustainable community development. Of great importance to the program is that 60% of our mentors are young girls and women, with a strong focus on gender equality included in all aspects of planning and running the program.

Three main components of the program are:

Peer-to-peer tutoring or "learning circles":

Selected mentors (aged 14-20) have been supported with training, scholarships, and access to technology to facilitate weekly learning circle sessions for younger students. Mentors are supporting students from 4th, 5th, and 6th grade. Each mentor has an average of seven or eight mentees that they meet with for up to ten hours per week

Digital learning tools:

Each mentor is loaned a tablet that includes various resources in an offline format. Mentors are also using tablets to assist mentees with their studies.

Scholarship:

To reduce the financial barriers for our program participants' families, we provide a modest monthly scholarship of \$45 CAD.

I have seen firsthand the impact of this initiative on Indigenous Mayan youth living in Guatemala. Thanks to the modest scholarship, the tablets, and training programs our Guatemalan mentors are receiving, their parents have agreed to let them continue studying.

Communities we worked with were located in the departments of Quiché and Alta Verapaz, two regions of Guatemala with among the highest levels of poverty, lowest levels of educational performance, and the strongest presence of Mayan culture.

Miguel Us Castro, a mentor in Ojo de Agua said, “The use of the tablet is very simple and more entertaining...I like math videos. I would like the tablet to bring some constructive movies, some reading, culture, or even dynamic history.”

Efren Mus Cal, the Director of the Telesecundaria School in Las Arrugas also confirmed these positive changes. “The program has significantly helped Telesecundaria students to reinforce their knowledge. It has helped them be more responsible. In addition, they become a motivation for the rest of the students. Now young people work through technology, it is something that teachers value very much.”

“I continued learning despite the virus, I was able to strengthen myself in math through the videos and I improved in communication and language,” commented 13-year-old Francisca Cojoc Suram.

The program is changing the lives of our youth participants, but it’s also changing mine. Being a new immigrant to Canada hasn’t been easy, it has its ups and downs. **But working towards a greater good inspires me to continue fighting for what I believe can change our world... and that is education.**

I want to introduce you to Glenda Josefina Lem Ical and Maria Nohemi Gomez, who are

both participants of this initiative. Through online interviews, Glenda and Nohemi shared with us their struggles to access education and how implementing initiatives like GG can contribute to the sustainable development of a whole community.

Maria Nohemi Gomez is 18 years old and is in the third grade of high school. Her mother encourages her to continue studying as she wants her daughter to work hard, pursue her dreams, and have a better future.

“In my community, women have neither voice nor vote. My mother could not study and that is why she always tells me that I have to show everyone that women are capable of fulfilling our dreams,” says Nohemi.

Nohemi decided to participate in the Guatemala Groundswell program because she wanted to gain more knowledge and new experiences.

Nohemi dreams of becoming a mechanic someday but it will not be an easy task. First, Nohemi will have to break the stereotypes imposed by her community. Second, she will need financial stability to pay her college fees. This is why Nohemi decided to save her GG scholarship and pay for her tuition at the Technical Institute for Training and Productivity (Instituto Técnico de Capacitación y Productividad Guatemala next year.

Glenda Lem is 18 years old. Glenda wanted to be part of the GG program so that her mother would no longer have to think about how to pay her tuition and would worry less. Glenda wants her mother to take care of herself and not worry about anything else. The scholarship is helping Glenda pay her tuition so she doesn't have to stop studying to start working. She is currently in the third semester of nursing and is the first in her family to continue her studies. Now, she works as a doctor's assistant in her community health centre.

A Conversation with Nohemi and Glenda

Laura: Hi, Nohemí and Glenda. I want to start by asking, where are you from?

Nohemi: I'm from San Felipe Chenlá, Municipality of Cotzal and Department of Quiché.

Glenda: From Las Arrugas, San Cristóbal, Alta Verapaz.

L: Can you tell me a little bit about Guatemala? What's the economic and social context like in Guatemala?

N: Well... Guatemala is a beautiful country. But [in] Guatemala, education is not too good, we're not so updated. Sometimes we need many tools to study and many people don't have enough income for their children to study. But if all of us were able to study, Guatemala could be a better country.

G: In Guatemala, there is a lack of employment. You can still study, but you don't get a job immediately after studying. When you graduate you don't have a job, you have to wait a year, two years, three years.

L: And why do you think this happens?

G: For lack of gender equality because sometimes people think that women have fewer opportunities than men.

L: Are you currently studying? Is education affordable right now in your community?

N: Well, in my community, not so much because we don't have the right tools such as computers, telephones, or the internet. Probably because it is a small community and we study with what the government provides, which are books. But the books are not updated. Additionally, all the books are from Mexico not from Guatemala, I think we need to know more about our own country.

L: What can you tell me about education in Guatemala, about education in your community, Glenda? Does everyone have access to it?

G: Not everyone. In my community, almost all boys have the opportunity that girls don't. In my community, the girls only have...the opportunity to study sixth grade. And the boys continue studying as long as they can.

Education for Indigenous Communities in Guatemala

In Guatemala, less than 37% of Indigenous youth study past grade nine. Mayan girls face the greatest challenges of all. Glenda and Nohemi are part of the Indigenous communities.

L: How are schools in Indigenous communities? Do you have access to books? Transportation? Computers?

G: It'd be just books, not computers.

L: And how are the books? Are they books that are modernized, that have good content? How is the content handled in the school?

G: Books hardly have the most necessary content.

L: And have there been any campaigns implemented in which the government supports schools in Indigenous communities to implement computers, books with updated content or not?

G: No.



Gender (In)Equality in Education



L: Tell me something, Nohemí. How many women in your community get to higher education?

N: Well, in my community only 30% of women get to higher education. And 20% get to the university.

L: And why is this?

N: In my opinion, it is because parents believe that a woman has no right to study, or maybe it is because they believe we should get married instead. Or maybe it's because of the lack of income. Maybe some parents want to give their children an education, but they don't have enough money.



L: You also mentioned that parents ask their daughters to get married. How old have you seen your friends or the women in your community get married?



N: Well, I have seen many girls from the age of 14 already living with their boyfriends. Not married yet, because here in Guatemala it is not allowed by law. So, at 14, 15, 16, 18 they already have a child. It is rare to see a person at the age of 30 still single, continuing her studies.

The Impact of COVID-19

As expected, COVID-19 affected rural communities in Guatemala even more than urban populations. Schools were closed, children and youth didn't have access to a computer or the Internet, and teachers didn't have the resources needed to support students.

L: There is a lack of technological tools in rural communities. COVID-19 has created an even bigger gap. Tell me what happened during the pandemic and how it affected education in your community?

G: The classes were online and not in person. And what made it difficult for us was the signal and that we didn't have computers to connect. There were only a few hours of classes and it made it so difficult for us.

N: It affected us because we had to study from home, no more in person classes. When we received in person classes, it was better. In case we had any doubts or questions, we were able to ask. But, as I said before, we only have books and it is very difficult for us to understand them. The teachers are trying to find new ways and strategies so that we would not be left behind but it has been hard.

L: How did you manage to attend virtual classes?

G: I talked to the teachers and explained that I didn't have the Internet. They would send me brochures to catch up with the classes, or else I would talk to professor Noé so he could share the Internet with us.

L: I understand... So at home, you don't have internet access.

G: No.

L: Did you have virtual classes, Nohemi?

N: No, since COVID-19 I have not received any classes...

L: Why do you think you didn't have virtual classes?

N: Lack of tools. We don't have access to computers, phones, tablets, or the Internet. Here in my community, if you say "we need to install internet", parents will say, "No, that's too much money." Why? Because of lack of income and also because of lack of materials given by the government.

L: What can be done for children and youth living in very rural communities who may not have access to these tools? What would your advice be for the government of Guatemala?

N: Well...they should send teachers to give classes to those people who need it because perhaps there are very small areas where not many people study. So, even three or four teachers would be good. Or, if not, hire a bus to bring them to receive classes in the other urban areas.

L: Not only do they lack technological tools, but they also have problems with access to transportation to be able to go to school?

N: Yes.

L: And what are the difficulties or challenges that teachers have? Say, how many students are there in a classroom? Do you think there are enough teachers?

N: Well, no, not for me. Here, where I study, we had 43 students in one classroom, so I couldn't adapt very well. Sometimes I wanted to give opinions and I couldn't. Sometimes teachers didn't have time to grade all the assignments because there were too many of us, but during the pandemic there were only 22 of us left. This is now normal. But 42 students and one teacher makes it very difficult.

L: With the pandemic, how many students dropped out of school to go to work?

N: Some of them. In my school, about 22 students, but in the community in total, about 70 students stopped studying. Some got married and are working, and say, "I'm not go-

ing to continue because it's too hard for me. Besides, I want to attend classes and not be given books. And we can't understand those books. The books don't talk about Guatemala, they talk about Mexico. So no, I'd rather not go."

Change Through the Guatemala Groundswell Program

L: How has the Guatemala Groundswell program impacted your learning?

N: I wasn't sure about going to college and being a mechanic, but GG empowered me. Now I feel more confident.

G: This program is creating changes in my family and community. In the community, my neighbors are very grateful to SOS because they are training young people to help children with their homework. Some parents did not have the opportunity to study but we (mentors) are creating positive changes in education. In my family, I have the opportunity to help my nephews by sharing my experiences and knowledge.



Accountability

Overcoming Challenges

My story and that of Glenda and Nohemi's are just some examples of how important education is to achieve a better world.

Nohemi is fighting against the stereotypes of her own community since she wants to study mechanical engineering. According to her family, this is a job only for men. Even so, she continues insisting and working to enroll in a mechanics course. Glenda is also breaking with tradition. She is in the third semester of nursing and is the first in her family to continue her studies. Now, she works as a doctor's assistant in her community health center.

As for me, I am working on what I am passionate about. I know that to achieve my dream of witnessing all children, especially those who once had to forcibly leave their country, studying in a world free of discrimination and open to endless opportunities will require great effort and dedication. I believe that just as I am overcoming obstacles, all those who are called "refugees" will be the ones who will bring great changes to our world.

When it comes to global investments in improving access to education of refugee and displaced learners, large and pervasive accountability gaps can often undermine the potential, efficiency, and impact of these commitments. We identify four core accountability gaps commonly found in global education decision-making. First, a lack of data on refugee and displaced youth on the move, especially up-to-date data disaggregated by gender, can make evidence-based decision-making challenging. When critical information is missing, investments, programming, and policies may overlook the most vulnerable in society or employ strategies that aren't appropriate for the context.

Second, the lived experiences and expertise of the refugee and displaced peoples most affected by decisions have largely been missing from meaningful decision-making processes. As the young advocates who make up the Zimbabwean National Junior Councils stated, "anything for us, without us, is against us."

Third, there is an immense need for community-driven solutions that extend beyond a short period of time. We know of countless incidents of students finally gaining access to school only to have their education disrupted once again when a project is concluded or an NGO is no longer on the ground. Investments must be capable of creating transformational change that equips stakeholders with the conditions, tools, skills and resources to continue accessing quality education in the long-term, beyond the duration of a project.

Fourth, transparency is vital. We must be able to track and monitor the allocation and impact of disbursements made for the development of refugee education. Accountability in global education requires clear mechanisms that publicly report on how much education funding was distributed, to who, how, and to what effect.

"When community funding does not reach the places it is supposed to go, it creates barriers for young girls and young boys. Where there's corruption, there is no access to education or health, and there is increased violence in the country"

Laura Barbosa

Governments and organizations working in global education have a duty to remain accountable to the refugee and displaced learners that are impacted by their decision making. This includes adequately funding and implementing projects that:

- Are informed by and/or collect and leverage data disaggregated by social identity factors (sex, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion) on education needs, including mental health needs, of refugee and displaced youth.
- Are led or, at minimum, informed by women, youth and/or refugee and displaced networks and organizations.
- Are responsive to and inclusive of the expressed needs of refugee and displaced youth across experiences, especially for those in rural communities and the most marginalized.
- Provide access to academic guidance counseling at secondary level for post-secondary opportunities and promote access to universal higher education and training.
- Assist refugee and displaced learners in their transition from learning to working. Poor transitions and lack of post-education employment with dignified salaries can discourage refugee and displaced youth from completing a full cycle of education. Education and employment should be planned in tandem to increase self-reliance and full participation in society.
- Are sustainable to enable long-term capacity for education systems to meet the needs of refugee and displaced learners.
- Have explicitly planned to minimize or eliminate corruption, especially corruption related to the siphoning of funds earmarked for refugee education initiatives by government and implementing entities.

Bull by the Horns: The Need for a Collective Effort for the Education of Refugee and Displaced Girls

Bikienga Odessa

Let's build a new dawn together!

My name is Bikienga Odessa, and I am a 20-year-old student in human resources management at Aube Nouvelle University in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

As a refugee rights advocate, I can say that the inclusion of refugees remains a major challenge. Indeed, refugees are sometimes stigmatized in societies, and this is not conducive to their educational development. Personally, being called a fugitive, being seen as homeless pained me a lot. Some classmates laughed in my face all day long, to the point where going to school was my biggest burden.

In 2019, I was forced into insecurity. Repeated terrorist attacks have forced many people to leave their localities. However, when I arrived in Ouagadougou, things were far from easy. The living conditions alone were not easy, and the integration into the new society caused further problems because of the stigmatization of being a refugee. I was personally stigmatized by certain comrades who called me a fugitive or uncivilized. It was heavy for me and I thought many times about not going to school anymore.

More than ever, it is imperative that each of us take the bull by the horns so that priority is given to the planning of adequate measures that allow access to education for refugees.

The education intended for refugees must serve their development, citizenship, and future responsibilities. Therefore, this education must be adapted to each case and each level. It is necessary to establish coordination between countries so that specific education measures are implemented according to cultures and languages for a more poignant impact.

The education of refugees is a lever for inclusion, peace, life in society, and mutual tolerance. This is why it must be at the heart of development discussions

It is also important to emphasize that access to education is especially for a girl. In fact, in our communities, boys are given too much weight in terms of education compared to girls. The latter just have to make sure to grow up to become a good wife and get married to be a source of income for the family. Because of this, all my dreams of professional development fell through. I knew that sooner or later I was going to stop studying.

Many refugee girls are increasingly dropping out of school. The most recurrent reasons are stereotypes and lack of means. Our societies have always given pride to the boy by considering him "better" than the girl. In a context of crisis and insecurity, these mentalities greatly handicap the education of girls. When faced with a choice of who to send to school, parents often decide that only the boy should attend. These parents believe that a girl who

has dropped out of school can either work to help the family or be given in marriage to acquire the means of survival. These, and other reasons, increase the number of refugee girls who are taken out of school.

The exception in my case stems from the fact that, as early as sixth grade, I was able to receive a scholarship from PLAN Burkina through the PEASS project. This made it easier for me to continue my studies to a higher education. This is also what led me to join the Refugee Education Council, which brings together nationals from all over the world, each of whom proposes solutions based on their experiences to improve the condition of refugees in terms of education.

To help the education of refugee children, I would like to see more; more scholarships that cover all courses, so that young people do not give up from lack of support; more efforts to break down stereotypes for a reconsideration of girls' education and greater inclusion; more global funding for programs that educate girls; and more commitments to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to go to school, regardless of their gender, ability, or refugee status. We need more.

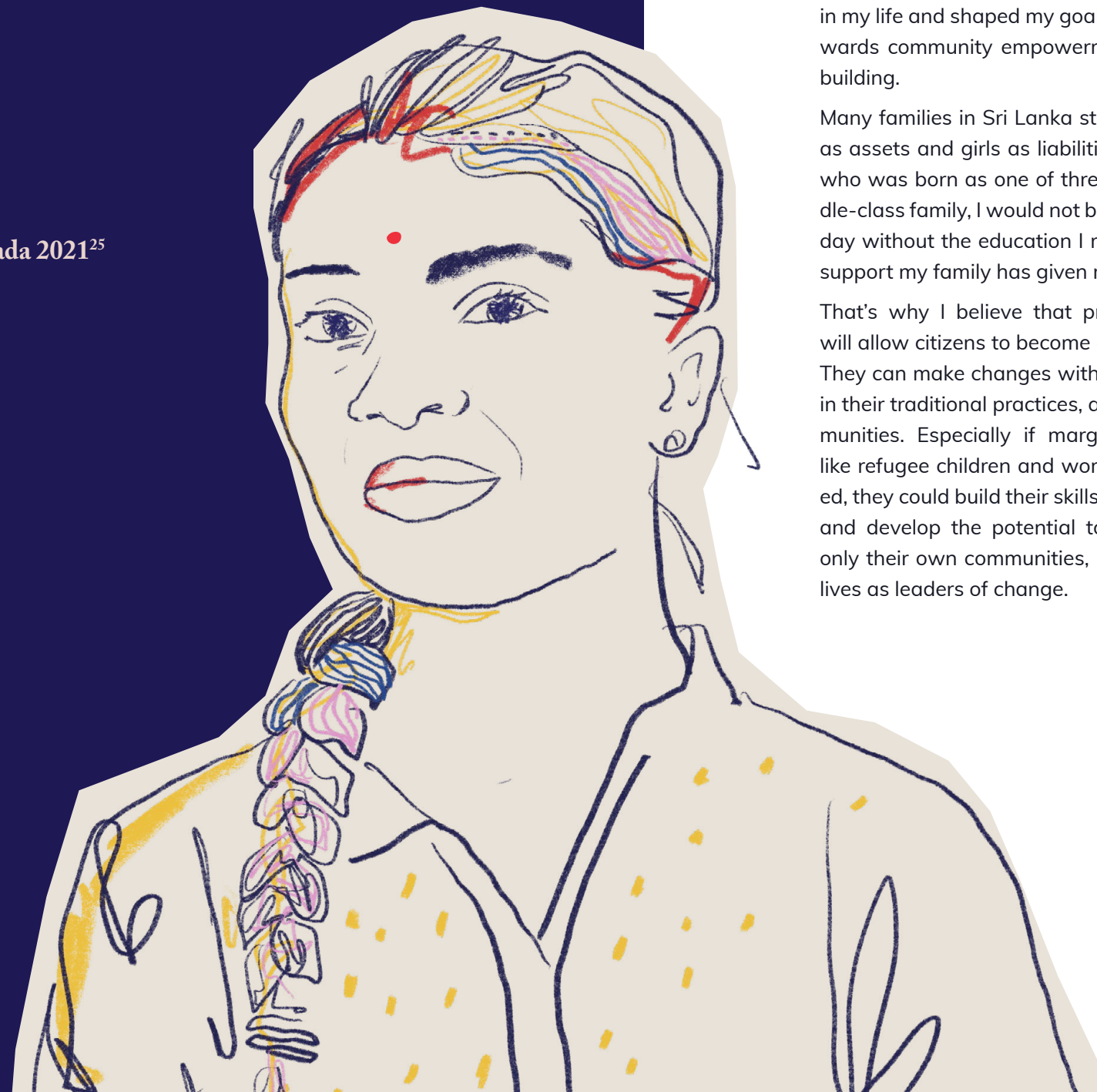
So, let us raise our signs high so that a new dawn can rise, bringing with it a gentle breeze for the education of refugees!

Assets and Liabilities: A Young Advocate's Plea for Education

Anojitha Sivaskaran

Originally published by UNICEF Canada 2021²⁵

My name is Anojitha Sivaskaran, I am a young girl living in Sri Lanka who has worked with grassroots and different civil society organizations in the field of peace and community empowerment for more than three years. Recently, I have been honored with The Diana Award 2021, the most prestigious prize for young people's social action or humanitarian work and I have joined as a member of the Refugee Education Council.



As someone who grew up in the northern part of Sri Lanka, I have directly experienced Sri Lanka's 30-yearlong civil war. I have been displaced to several places and faced numerous challenges accessing food, security, justice, and shelter. This created a turning point in my life and shaped my goals of working towards community empowerment and peace building.

Many families in Sri Lanka still consider boys as assets and girls as liabilities. As someone who was born as one of three girls in a middle-class family, I would not be where I am today without the education I received and the support my family has given me.

That's why I believe that proper education will allow citizens to become change-makers. They can make changes within their families, in their traditional practices, and in their communities. Especially if marginalized groups like refugee children and women are educated, they could build their skills and knowledge and develop the potential to transform not only their own communities, but hundreds of lives as leaders of change.

There have been many efforts taken to ensure the quality of education for all, including establishment of the Refugee Education Council (REC), as part of Canada's Together for Learning campaign. I joined REC, to advocate for equal and quality education for all by sharing my own lived experiences as an internally displaced person (IDP) as well as my networks and connections.

One thing I firmly believe in that has really stuck with me is that each and every action towards quality education should always be accompanied by sustainability. This is something we are trying to accomplish as a council. Despite the challenges created by the global spread of the COVID-19, we are continuing to work on our goals and objectives using alternative measures and mechanisms. Through the campaign and the council, Canada, as a country, is creating an example for other countries in the world. But this effort should be extended at a wider level, which can be initiated and led by Canada.

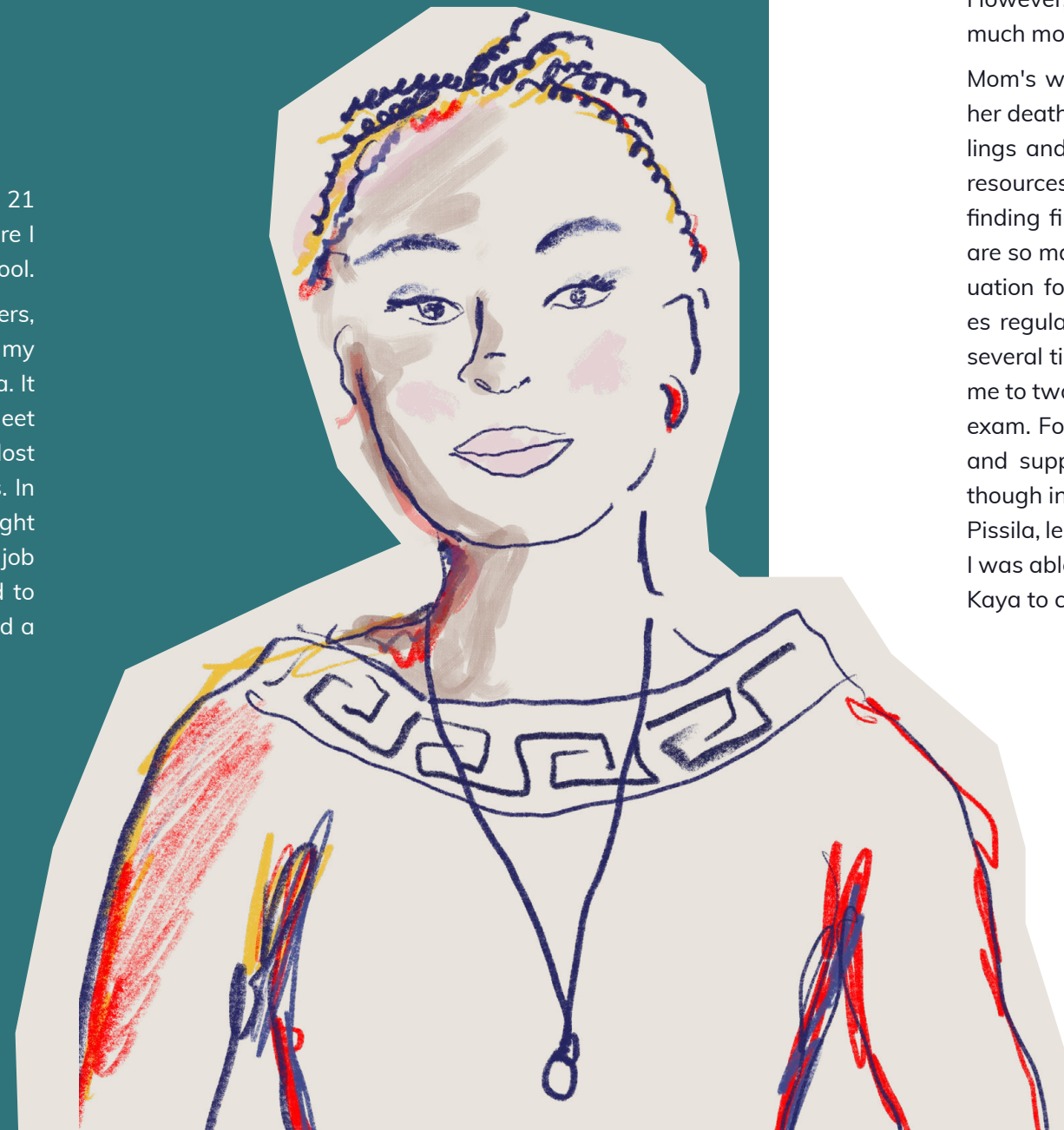
Let's get together! Let's shape our future together!

From Fish to Rod: Dignity through Education

Nabaloum Pascaline

My name is Nabaloum Pascaline. I am 21 years old and I currently live in Kaya, where I am in my third year at the private high school.

In 2019, I arrived with my mother, five sisters, little brother, and grandfather after losing my dad in 2017 in our village called Tchièbana. It was our grandfather who managed to meet our daily needs despite his age. We then lost our mom in 2020 following a short illness. In Pissila, life was not at all rosy, you had to fight to be able to survive. Our grandfather's job didn't allow us to eat every day, so I had to drop out of school from time to time to find a little job here and there to eat.



We lived with host families where we encountered difficulties since we came from another village. For example, I have looked many times for a job as a housekeeper in restaurants and many other places. I wanted to work to help my family pay the school fees of my younger sisters and younger brother who are frequently expelled due to non-payments. However, there is no work and the hosts are much more privileged than I am.

Mom's work allowed us to survive, but since her death, we lack financial means so my siblings and I not longer live together. Natural resources are no longer enough to live by, and finding firewood is a problem because there are so many vulnerable people like us. My situation forced me to no longer attend classes regularly, and I was expelled from school several times for not paying my fees. This led me to two successive failures in my important exam. Fortunately, I was able to obtain work and support from Fondation Hirondelle. Although insecurity has taken over education in Pissila, leading to the closure of many schools, I was able to save money to travel this year to Kaya to complete my studies.

It is difficult for us to have people to talk to, or people to listen to us and comfort us. There are locals who exclude us and call us "displaced," making us relive the bad memories of the security crisis we went through. Life is not easy, and the support we receive is never enough. I am deeply grateful for the non-governmental organizations and the good will of people who assist us, but I ask them to give us the necessary funding so that we can develop our own activities. Food donations always deplete in the end, and they are never enough. However, education and employment will enable us to work and provide for our perpetual needs. Once again, I insist on the importance of education, and the relevance of focusing on children from vulnerable families like mine.

My siblings are currently out of school. However, they can count on my determination. I went to school and got my diploma, and now I am going to use it to help my siblings complete their education too.

CALL TO ACTION

The Time To Act *Is Now.*

We call upon donor governments, education ministers, multilateral and non-governmental organizations, private sector partners, and everyday citizens to do their part to prioritize the education of refugee and displaced girls and boys.

We believe that everybody has a responsibility to help reduce disparities to address the devastating global education crisis, which grows more severe each year.

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"From inspiration and ideation to implementation and evaluation, we are proof that refugee and displaced people can and should be included at every single step of the process to create change."

Nhial Deng

"When refugees are included in the discussions affecting their lives, there's a chance for change, a chance to turn things around and improve, but most importantly, inclusion gives equal power to each one of us to take charge and contribute to matters that not only influence our individual lives, but also contribute to the greater good of humanity."

Istarlin Abdi

