

INTRODUCTION

I am Zacharia Mohamed Odowa a refugee, legally registered under the UN Refugee Agency living in kakuma refugee camp, 24years old, Somali by nationality. I had finished both my primary and secondary education in kakuma refugee camp, a certificate holder in community development and social work from Turkana University College Sponsored by Danish Refugee Council, Certificate in psychosocial case management course offered by JRS kakuma and currently pursuing a diploma in liberal studies at Regis University offered by Jesuit Worldwide learning.

I had worked with LWF (Lutheran World Federation) peacebuilding and conflict resolution unit as a caseworker, United States Refugee Admission program as an interpreter, a teacher at LWF and the speaker for Kakuma Youth Parliament, which advocates for the refugees and host community in kakuma.

I would like to express my view as a young refugee youth representative on how digital identity can help refugees all over the world especially in kakuma refugee camp where my opinion and experiences are based on. To begin with, the refugees worldwide needs recognition and acceptance, many people are dehumanized with their refugee status due to their status, lack of valid or recognized documents which proves identity and belongings

Digital identity will definitely empower refugees because not only do refugees need to reformulate their personal identity to secure a sense of belonging, but also it is imperative from a legal, social, and political perspective. It will indicate a sense to own belonging and identity, in this 21st century, people are identified with their documents and unfortunately, these documents refugees are not in title to access thus, digital identity will help refugees to be identified and recognized as real people deserving the right to own documents.

In kakuma refugee camp, UNHCR uses digital way of registering refugees known as Population Registration and identity Management Ecosystem (PRIMES). The digital registration system for refugees is only helpful to refugees like me when it comes to the following areas.

- UNHCR registration
- The government of Kenya Registration.

In the UN Refugee Agency, registration is a way of registering refugees and asylum seekers by providing refugees as persons of concern with the UNHCR in kakuma.

Government registration, refugees are fingerprinted by the government officials and issued with an ALIEN IDENTIFICATION. The challenge is refugees possess these documents but it does

not help them as a full proof of who they are. In other words, the possession of such valid documents will not help refugees to have access to what people like the host communities could be accessed. Both of the above registrations refugees do not own personal legal proofs to access the following services:

□ Refugees cannot register their names with sim cards and register with their names as indicated by their issued documents. For instance, SAFARICOM is a communication company in Kenya, in most cases; refugees are not allowed to present their documents to register a sim card with. Also, refugees cannot register for M-PESA which is an effective mobile money transfer. This is because of the refugee identity which this person presenting but if the refugees are issued with global identity recognized worldwide, these problems will not hinder refugees to have access with sim card registration. whereby the M-PSA could help in cash assistance transfer.

□ Education: both camp and urban refugees have the right to education, in all education levels such as primary, secondary and tertiary education, refugees cannot be registered with their refugee identifications if they want to sponsor themselves, this means, institutions offering education in the country register their students with KENYAN birth certificates and other national identifications.

□ This is a challenge to the refugees who are willing to pursue their education outside the refugee camp. If there could be digital identity system for refugees where they could prove the identity of the refugees and consider it as valid would have helped the refugees because of this, refugees should be provided with the globally recognized digital identity.

□ Travelling and movement: due to lack of strong and accepted documents that can be presented by the refugees, we cannot travel/move out of the refugee camps we are living. This means refugees are definitely restricted and do not have the right to move within their hosting countries unless issued with TRAVEL DOCUMENT by the government offices which even could not exceed a duration of one or two months.

It is because of the kind of documents refugees have and as well as the lack of a digital system that empowers refugee identity, we are restricted in the refugee camps.

□ Work permits: from my 12 years refugees experience in kakuma refugee camp, refugees do not get the work permit from the government of Kenya, we are not in the title of better-paying jobs due to kind of identity we have. We are educated, willing and able to work to but we are not supported by the documents we have.

Refugees work as an incentive staff in the refugee camp with the humanitarian organizations only to be paid less than 70US\$ per month.

SELF-RELIANCE

Refugees are people with abilities and capabilities. If fully supported, they can be self-reliant. They can improve their living standard instead of depending on the monthly ration food provided by WFP. This will also help to ease the pressure on host countries and enhance refugee self – reliance as agreed by the global leaders in the 2018 global compact on refugees

The digital identity can pave the way for refugees to support their life and give them the opportunity to start and run a business as well as the opportunity to own property. It can also help refugees to have documents, which can help them to get loans from financial intuitions and banks so that they can the idea of joining the global business community. Many refugees started a small business within the refugee camp, if they could have international support, they would have improved their living standard as well as the economy of the host communities and countries.

The biggest challenge with refugees when it comes to self-reliance are the documents we possess which can support in such situations. If the refugees have valid and recognized papers for identifications, refugees would have had other alternatives for improving their living standard.

INCLUSION OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS.

It is really a dream that many refugees are waiting to realize, inclusion matters a lot for the refugees and asylum seekers, they are willing to participate in decision-making forums in order to be informed and included the kind of decisions to be made for them. When the inclusion process is being practiced, it leads to social justice and equity among the refugees.

The digital identity will help the humanitarian and international organizations to identify their targeted groups and include them in their services by using the refugee digital identification system.

HOW WILL IT HELP IN RESETTLEMENT

Many refugees believed that resettlement provided for refugees is not equally distributed, this refugee perspective discouraged embassies that could help the refugees.

If the digital identity system is being established, providing embassies in collaboration with UNHCR will identify the selection process and its criteria.

DATA AND PRIVACY PROTECTION

UNHCR should take the full responsibility of improving its privacy protection policy since; the digital identity system will now be kept all confidential information and data for refugees.

If this information will not be protected, it can be misused and fall in the hands of people who can eventually put the refugees in trouble.

ACCESS TO PRIVATE SECTOR SERVICE

The legal digital identity will open doors for private sectors and business companies to employ refugees as potential staffs with the ability to perform the duties effectively and efficiently. This will help private sectors employees to accept the documents presented by the refugees on digital identities.

It can also attract the private sectors to invest the refugees at their refugee camps and residential areas which create employment opportunities to a larger number of unemployed youth.

INCREASED LIVELIHOOD

As a refugee youth representing nearly 200, 000 refugees from 20 different nationalities, I believe the digital identity will help refugees to increase their livelihoods as they will be provided with job opportunities, access to work permits and self-reliant for starting and running their own business will definitely the refugee livelihoods into an unexpected level.

UNHCR's PRIMES CONTRIBUTION

The UN refugee agency did great and recommendable support for protecting both refugees and their information with utmost confidentiality, but the digital identity system will help UNHCR to get accurate and reliable refugee data worldwide wide. This will help quick verification and system update of refugees for better planning and service provision.

It will also help UNHCR to fight against fraud and corruption of which its wage war is on ongoing. Many cases of corruption and fraud will be minimized since every refugee data will be digitalized and as well protected. This digital identity system will also help the UN refugee agency to discover double registration of refugees, for instance, a refugee might be registered in kakuma-Kenya and at the same time in Uganda.