

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
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BACKGROUND PAPER

Act your age: exploring the challenges for youth in adult roles
Thursday 16 June 2016, 14.30 - 16.15, Room 3

Background

Displaced children and young people often take on additional social and economic roles and responsibilities to support themselves and their families. Moreover, displaced adolescent children – those between the ages of 10 and 18 – are at risk of becoming separated from their families and being exposed to violence, marginalization, exploitation and abuse. Whereas displacement may pressure male youth to migrate or travel far in order to find work, female adolescents are more likely to take up a greater share of unpaid domestic labor, including gathering food or caring for younger children. The pressure on adolescents to take up low-skilled work as a short-term strategy traps communities in a vicious cycle of poverty as children are unable to complete basic education or access opportunities for skilled employment. In spite of all these considerations, little attention has been paid to the impact and the specific measures needed to reach adolescent children.

Many adolescents and young people feel proud to be able to contribute to their households, and to be seen as valuable members of the community with a greater say in family and community decisions. New responsibilities can also afford young people the opportunity to acquire new skills, and can provide them with new meaning and focus in their lives. However, there is often also a darker side to young people taking on adult roles. The pressure on adolescents to provide for their families can have consequences for their physical and psychological development, with many boys and girls experiencing feelings of isolation and desperation as well as physical hardship. Adolescents and young people may also be driven to engage in risky behaviours such as survival sex and drug and alcohol abuse. Increased responsibilities can also mean increased exposure to violence and exploitation in the workplace, at home or in the community.

Aims

With a panel made up of speakers who have taken on adult responsibilities in their youth, or who work with youth, this session will focus on the adult roles that youth, including stateless youth, are sometimes forced to adopt, such as child – or youth-headed households and breadwinners. What are programmatic responses to these issues – how can we better support these young people? After screening a short video documentary directed by a former unaccompanied child from Uganda and now film director, Kate Ofwono, the panelists will then give their brief interventions. Specifically, the panelists will reflect on the experiences as their families' breadwinner or care-giver, on how to best support youth in adult roles, and on the challenges, benefits, and protection risks that arise.

Subsequently, all participants will be divided into 4-5 break-out groups led by one youth participant, and explore the different challenges and protection risks that were mentioned by the panelists. The goal will be to formulate concrete commitments to support refugee and stateless youth and give recommendations to direct humanitarian action supporting young people in adult roles. The importance of supporting youth capacities and skills as partners, leaders and decision-makers in all of these action areas and in seeking youth-led solutions will be an over-arching theme for the whole session. Groups will be asked to develop their ideas into a tweet or campaign message that they would like to see adopted by agencies and governments.

Youth Profiles

Moderator

Laura Elizabeth Valencia Restrepo – Youth Representative, Ecuador

Laura is a young woman from Colombia of 19 years. She is currently living in Ecuador, where she came to seek protection with her family some years ago. She is particularly involved in the social mobilization of young people in Ecuador and in the sensitization of challenges shared by Ecuadorian and Colombian young people.

Speakers

Kate Ofwono – Filmmaker and former refugee from Uganda

Kate Ofwono (29 years) fled from Uganda when she was still a teenager. In Kakuma, the young woman became involved with the Nairobi office of FilmAid International. This engagement for displaced youth together with her artistic talent enabled her to study at the Geneva University of Art and Design (HEAD) and support UNHCR in various projects. She is now about to graduate in cinema and is still engaged in supporting youth refugees.

Maher Qubbaj – CARE Jordan

Combining an academic background in agricultural engineering with twelve years of work experience in the field of non-profit organizations, Maher has become an expert in managing projects that address issues related to gender, youth, women empowerment and protection in urban contexts. He has facilitated joint networking activities with civil society organizations, governmental bodies and NGOs in order to enhance community participation. Maher is currently a Program Manager with the Urban Protection Program at CARE International in Jordan, where he is in charge of the implementation of emergency response projects, and works closely with refugee committees and representatives.

Zhirair Chichian – Stateless youth from Georgia

Zhirair (20 years) wanted to be a professional athlete in Georgia. But when his team had to travel to compete, he stayed behind to train by himself. Why? Because he is stateless. The stateless status led him to take serious risks in the past, including for his health. After years of combat, Zhirair obtained ID documents and is now able to travel. Zhirair wants to share the challenges related to stateless young people and how it could push them to take responsibilities normally destined to adults.

Outline of the Session

14:30 – 15:10	Panel Discussion
15:10 – 15:45	Youth moderated break-out sessions
15:45 – 16:15	Plenary – Feedback from the break-out session, discussion and tweet message contest

Logistics required

- Audio-visual equipment for playing videos.
- Microphones for speakers.
- Simultaneous translation Russian – English – French – Spanish.
- Flip charts, markers for 4 groups.

Coordinators

Barbara Jackson, Kevin Dunbar and Brooke Gibbons, Care International
Steinunn Bjorgvinsdottir and Janis Ridsdel, UNHCR