

## Reference Paper for the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention

### Strengthening Refugee Human Capital in Displacement.

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#### Abstract:

This paper contains information that reflects my 9 years of experience in the camp where I encountered refugees arriving empty handed and later on adapted with the camp situation. They engaged with the circumstances by using their knowledge, skills and abilities to financially be self-reliant. I had a chance to talk to different fellow refugees, those doing businesses, farming, working for Agencies and refugee leaders with Community Based Organizations. Over the years in exile, refugees have used their potential to develop their communities and the little support they get from humanitarian organizations when they arrive and during their stay, have also impacted their convictions in what they can do to develop themselves and better their future.

## REGISTRATION

Over decades States within the horn of Africa have known an influx of refugees from countries torn apart with war, conflict, political unrest, famine, tribalism and climate change. The movement of refugees and displaced people caught host countries unprepared to address their needs. Kenya is one of the largest host countries of refugees. Some of the host countries look at refugees as a burden while agencies, UNHCR and many other humanitarian organizations pull up their strength to raise funds and respond to the basic needs of refugees and displaced people.

However, both the government of Kenya and UNHCR work closely to provide assistance to refugees in search of protection. Before recognition, refugees go through a process of registration. This has changed over the years. Previously the registration was done by UNHCR. The government was not in the picture of registration. The government took responsibility for carrying out the registration process late in 2000's. This process is very important in the life of an asylum seeker and a refugee because many refugees lose their identification documents in the process of fleeing their country. When present in the host country, registration is the first thing they need to identify themselves with and navigate around the available opportunities in the camp and outside of the camp. Registration is very important, not only for the government and agencies to know how many asylum seekers and refugees are living in Kenya. Asylum seekers and refugees use the documents they received during registration to access basic services. They can get temporary shelter, access to education, access to healthcare and they can also apply for incentive jobs. It is a step toward life changing. They feel welcomed and protected to move with life. A lot of progress has been made in the process of registering refugees, technology has been applied and it has made the process efficient. Previously, there was no biometric use in the registration. People's information were kept on their machines but as per now biometric is used in the system of

registration. The fingerprint is currently used in the registration process. However there is still a gap in correcting the name. It takes a long time for the beneficiary to get his name corrected or the misspelled name to get corrected. It leads to greater effect. A lady from South Sudan missed a scholarship because her school name was written differently from the UNHCR. It also creates complications when the person starts the resettlement process. For instance, there is a refugee from South Sudan whose name on the UNHCR document is different from the IOM. Changing the name at that stage affects or delays the resettlement process.

## EDUCATION

Education being a human right, the government of Kenya and the implementing education agencies have made education accessible to refugees in the camps. Refugees in the camp take the same curriculum and examination as any Kenyan student in Primary and secondary school. Human capital influences asylum and refugees' decision to adopt in the host country.

Over the years, the education sector in Kakuma refugee camp has brought hope to the dreams of many refugees. As per today, beyond national universities in Kenya, some refugees have joined in campus studies abroad and virtual studies worldwide. It has been possible for refugees to join universities abroad through an open door by UNHCR to organizations and people of good will who step in to support refugee education. It is the case of the WUSC (World University Service of Canada) program that sponsors refugees to pursue their studies in Canada. These kinds of programs run through the support of UNHCR Education depart and other INGO such as Windle Trust Kenya (WTK). The University of Geneva has been offering online certificate courses to refugees in Kakuma and Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) have been offering online Diploma in Liberal Art to refugees in Kakuma for the last past 10 years now. Through JWL, Southern New Hampshire University has been offering an online bachelor degree for the past 3 years. DAFI

programs have also been offering scholarships to refugees in Kenya to attend national universities such as Kenyatta University, Nairobi University, Moi University and Masinde Muliro University. These are top universities in Kenya. Refugee students who have completed their secondary school in Kenya and whose grades allow them to join the university, do as Kenyans. As much as education is concerned in the SDGS, refugees understand that they are not left behind in the concept of the SDGS. The government has been working in collaboration with agencies to ensure that refugees are involved as long as they have papers that allow them to join school.

Many refugees from South Sudan have crossed the board of South Sudan to Kenya in search not only for protection but also for education. And refugees from non- speaking English countries join formal and informal education to adopt in the hosting country. The kind of informal education available is for instance English training centers and vocational training such as welding, masonry, tailoring, hairdressing etc. Something to know here is that not all are unable to attend the formal education. Children and teenager's able to join formal education.

Education has enabled many refugees to be self-reliant. Few who accessed tertiary education have established initiatives that give back to the community through employment and availability of opportunities. Resilient Action International (RAI) ([www.resilienceaction.net](http://www.resilienceaction.net)) is a refugee initiative that started some years back as a community based adult education initiative and today it has become an international NGO serving refugees in Kakuma refugee camp and beyond Kenya borders. Other refugees have attended various training which has enabled them to establish successful enterprises and businesses. We have so many refugee initiatives that are doing great work to support refugees. We also have a Solidarity Initiative for Refugees ([www.sirafrika.org](http://www.sirafrika.org)) which is a community based organization that is offering educational opportunities to many refugees in the camp. We have GLAP business enterprise

[\(https://m.facebook.com/Glapenterprises/\)](https://m.facebook.com/Glapenterprises/), it does make soaps and it has been doing an amazing job to help refugees combat Covid-19 in Kakuma refugee camp.

The United World College (UWC) has been operational in Kenya for 30 years now and many Kenyans have benefited from its valuable scholarship program. In those 30 years of operation, no single refugee has been given the chance to compete for the UWC scholarship until this year when we have gotten three teenager students from Kakuma refugee camp to attend the UWC high schools worldwide. This change was achieved through a refugee initiative, URISE Initiative for Africa in partnership with Amala organization ([amalaeducation.org](http://amalaeducation.org)) which sponsored 1 student and this brought two more opportunity support by the UWC. UWC Committee in Kenya by the support of UNHCR Kenya were able to get the three students. Selected students were from secondary schools within Kakuma refugee camp. UNHCR Kakuma facilitated the UWC committee in Kenya to conduct the interview in the camp. UNHCR as well coordinates the process of getting the refugees passport (Convention Travelling Document) in order to travel out of Kenya and join their high schools abroad.

Education substantiates the importance of human capital for refugees to be able to contribute to the social economic aspect of their hosting country. The World Bank and the International Finance Corporation carried out a study in Kakuma refugee camp and it resulted that people in Kakuma are not just recipients of aid. The study shows that Kakuma is a marketplace where more than 2000 businesses are taking place.

Knowledge and skills have hugely impacted the cultural and social environment of the camp and the hosting country. Kakuma refugee camp does host people from more than 20 countries with various cultures. Education plays an important role for these residents to accept one another. Refugees themselves have used their skills to socially integrate and coexist peacefully. They

initiate businesses that bring them together and activities that make them coexist. Kakuma United FC is a football team composed of refugees from different nationalities. It has players from Congo, South Sudan and other nationalities. They play in the Kenyan football Competition. There are groups of women dealing with income generating activities. These women are sometimes from different nationalities and do business together as they provide food service to organization events in Kakuma. The camp has currently experienced a huge growth, therefore there is Okapi Green project ([www.okapigreen.com](http://www.okapigreen.com)) which produces electricity through the use of solar panels.

### HEALTH SERVICES

Health service is one of the urgent basic needs that asylum seekers and refugees need when they arrive in the camp and during their stay. The humanitarian sector has considered this pressing need and have been providing basic health to both asylum and refugees. The International Rescue Committee provides health services to refugees in all parts of the camp and because of the increase of asylum seekers, AIC and Kenya Red Cross have joined the health service sector. Things have improved in the past years. Almost all different areas of the camp have a health facility. Kakuma refugee camp has 6 health facilities of which three of them operate 24hrs. Kalobeyei Settlement counts 2 health facilities, one operates 24hrs. The staffing involves both, the host community and the refugee community. The clinic human force has more refugee staff even though they are less paid than their colleagues from the host community. It is the policy within UNHCR Kenya and this affects agencies that get support from them to run their programs. The assumption behind is that refugees have access to free water, food from WFP and shelter.

Many of these staff are trained in the camp to empower them and provide assistance in the hospitals. Refugee nurses established the Community Healthcare and Physiotherapy training to enable their fellow refugees acquire knowledge, get employed and prevent community diseases. I had a chance to talk to one of the Community Healthcare and Physiotherapy alumni, who is a refugee from Burundi. After attending the Community Healthcare and Physiotherapy, he has been employed by AIC last year as a Pharmacist. Nishimirimana (Not his real name) said acquiring the job was a means to acquire more experience in pharmaceutical area but also he is able to serve his community through AIC. He added that, he is now able to put sugar on table because the employer has a duty to pay him as mean of accepting his contribution in the running of the clinic. Nishimirimana, said that he hopes to finance his Community Healthcare and Physiotherapy level 2 training so that he can strengthen his knowledge. He mentioned that the beginning was challenging because he need time to familiarize with the way things are done in the pharmacy.

On top of what the humanitarian organization provides, refugees have demonstrated that they can contribute to this pressing need. They have established pharmacies where most of the refugees buy drugs that they can't find in the clinics owned by humanitarian organizations. Some drugs are not available in the clinics and sometimes they run short of drugs. Patients go to buy the prescribed drug in the pharmacy within the camp or out of the camp. I tried to talk to a Congolese who owns a pharmacy and he said that legally allowed to run pharmacy in the camp UNHCR Kenya, they don't have licenses. It is good to note that any refugee who dies at home is not allowed to be buried in the camp until the circumstances of his death are investigated. I met with Daniel (Not his real name) from DRC and who owns a small pharmacy business. He also works for AIC as Medical Assistant. He said that he started his business in 2018 after realizing that the clinic was sometimes facing shortage of drugs. The Business has impacted his life because it has helped him establish a

good relationship with other refugees from different nationalities. He added that he is now currently able to financially support himself and help some of his old mother in back home in DRC. The Main challenges Daniel has encountered in his business is getting license. He said that he is operating illegally. He does not understand why pharmacist are not given license. It affects the business because they have to locally find a way for the business to survive. However, he hopes that one day the officials will grant their business a green card for their businesses to continue existing.

### SHELTER

Shelter is one of the core reliefs that asylum seekers and refugees are provided with upon their arrival and during their stay in the camp. A reception center was established in Kakuma refugee camp where asylum seekers are provided with rooms and food before being relocated in the camp.

When they get relocated in the camp, a portion of land and inadequate temporary shelter made of UNHCR tents are given to refugees. They stay in for a period of time before they are given iron sheets by a humanitarian agency here in the camp. In that period of the time, the asylum seeker or refugee should have to build his or her temporary house, made of mud bricks to be considered for the iron sheet assistance.

Acquiring this shelter means so much in the adaptation of the asylum seeker. They feel having a roof where to rest and organize themselves.

### SELF-RELIANCE

With primary relief services and livelihood assistance, refugees use their potential talent to socially and economically support themselves. Humanitarian agencies provide livelihood assistance to many refugees. It is also important to note that refugees have talents and potential. Investing in

their human capacity has created a considerable access to the economy. After a study carried by the World Bank, refugees contribute to the economy of Turkana County which host them (<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/308011482417763778/Yes-inmy-backyard-The-economics-of-refugees-and-their-social-dynamics-in-Kakuma-Kenya>) Agencies like WFP, FAO, NRC and AAH have transformed many lives through agriculture. In the past three years, they have increasingly been providing training in agriculture, seeds and tools to trainees in Kakuma camp and Kalobeyei settlement.

They have built a greenhouse in Kalobeyei village 1. It serves both, the host and the refugee communities. The project has socially and economically empowered both communities. They have access to the market and both communities benefit from each other. Due to agriculture, some of these farmers own motorcycles. They have established different businesses out of agriculture. It is also important to know that refugee community based organizations (CBO) provide support to their fellow refugees. Faulu Production, (<https://missionkrc.wixsite.com/fauluproductions>) a community based organization supports farmers by giving them loans.

So much has changed over the past years, many agencies have come in to support refugees to achieve self-reliance. AIC (African Entrepreneurship Collective) offers refugees with business training, consultation and give them loans to boost their businesses. The loan given to refugees have impacted the business sector in the camp. There are a variety of businesses as we speak now. Despite the camp being in an arid county, there is availability of fresh food. There is so much happening, we have women groups who do catering. They are supported by agencies. They are now part of family matters. They are able to provide for their own families. Danish Church Aid are supporting women with chicken farming. As much as they try to improve the nutrition of their own families, they also build a capital out of it.

Lutheran World Federation (LWF) trains teenage mothers in Hairdressing and tailoring. At the end of the project, trainees receive equipment to start business with. It has helped teenage mothers to socially and economically settle in the camp.

It is important to note that some refugees have got education in the camp and they are currently back to their countries and impacting their communities as they also live a self-reliant life. It is the case of Majok Quol who completed his secondary school in Kakuma and attended Peace Building training. He is back in South Sudan and he is involved in a community association that used to normalize the situation of IDPs. Samuel Buhendwa, is a Congolese who have been in Kakuma in 2012 and he attended Don Bosco Vocational Training center where he studied English course and this got him a job in one of the standard Primary schools in Bakuvu, South Kivu.

Refugees have demonstrated their human capacities in the last past years. The impact of their human capacities have changed the face of Kakuma refugee camp and challenged many minds of people who believe that refugees completely depend on aid. The government of Kenya and many agencies being headed by UNHCR have been at the forefront to help and protect asylum seekers and refugees. However much is still needed to be done in providing and delivering assistance to refugees. On the side of the government, they should without discrimination establish policies that supports refugees and which do not limit the movement of refugees. It will increase and boost refugee businesses. It will also increase chances of refugees to get employment. The government should speed up with the process of delivering Refugee Alien Cards because this alien card allows refugees to apply for green opportunities that are available to them. It also helps them access financial services such as opening a mobile bank account. It is also required at many occasions in the life of a refugee for instance, when applying for a scholarship and traveling. As much as the government is concerned in the issue of hosting refugees, their security is very critical and it should

ensure them security. As much as the government is concerned, refugees need work permits to acquire jobs and compete like any other qualified person.

For agencies working with refugees and protecting them, it is time to start involving refugees in decision making as much as it concerns them. It will have more impact in the lives of refugees but also shape the agency's approach toward refugee's support, they are not there to depend on aids when they are given opportunities to become self-reliant. Agencies should also support refugee initiatives and this will bring exposure to their substantial work. As much as localization is being discussed, agencies should support it so that many refugee initiatives may be acknowledged. I will recommend that much of what has been discussed in the refugee global compact be implemented.