

Mini-feature

Refugee-led social protection

The six articles in this FMR mini-feature explore how those who have been displaced find their own ways of assisting each other, filling gaps in official assistance or providing better-suited means of support. Evidence from Uganda, Kenya, Germany and Indonesia demonstrates the diverse ways – both formal and informal – in which refugees provide protection and assistance to their communities. Articles also analyse how external humanitarian actors can form effective partnerships with community-based organisations led by and for refugees.

This **16-page mini-feature** is available online in English, Arabic and French at www.fmreview.org/economies. It is available in print in English only.

Refugee-led social protection: reconceiving refugee assistance

Evan Easton-Calabria and Kate Pincock
(University of Oxford)

Refugee paralegals

Musenga Tshimankinda Christian
(Refugee paralegal)

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This mini-feature has been published as part of FMR issue 58 which is available in English, Arabic, French and Spanish free of charge. (Note that the Spanish edition does not include the mini-feature.) If you would like print copies of the full issue in any language, please email the Editors at fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk.

Production of this mini-feature has been supported by the ESRC-AHRC Global Challenges Research Fund.

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Refugee-led social protection: reconceiving refugee assistance

Evan Easton-Calabria and Kate Pincock

The help and assistance that refugees offer each other is central to the lives of many displaced people. Recognising this allows support for displaced people to be reconceived in more sustaining and empowering ways.

‘Social protection’ commonly refers to programmes and policies that aim to reduce the poverty, vulnerability and risks that populations can face. These were traditionally state-led initiatives. The term, however, has also recently become common in international development where international actors strive to alleviate poverty both in collaboration with and in the absence of States.

Social protection for refugees also includes refugee communities’ own efforts to support themselves. Our research in Uganda and Kenya¹ reveals the ways in which refugees are working to support, protect, advocate for and transform the prospects of their communities. This assistance, which we term ‘refugee-led social protection’, includes activities to address vulnerability, such as providing food, shelter, education and health care, but also involves advocacy and the resulting transformation of local and international structures, such as laws and humanitarian systems, which may hinder rather than enable refugees’ access to such provisions.

Refugee-led social protection

Humanitarian actors usually assume social protection in both Kenya and Uganda to fall entirely under the remit of government initiatives, social enterprises and civil society actors. This assumption is deeply problematic and driven by a now debunked perception of refugees as passive recipients of assistance. Despite the increasing emphasis in refugee research and policy making on recognition and affirmation of refugee agency, refugee-led social protection remains inadequately explored by academics, policymakers and practitioners.

Refugees in urban areas are not provided with basic necessities such as food and shelter

and instead must find ways to become self-reliant. However, competition within local economies, discrimination, a lack of access to work permits and limited or non-existent recognition of foreign qualifications can make the pursuit of an individualised form of ‘self-reliance’ extremely challenging. Formal and informal groups and organisations, led by refugees, offer ways for fellow refugees to draw upon and contribute to networks of assistance beyond the limited means of UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and its partners. Our research in Kenya and Uganda has found that these support systems may be organised along tribal, ethnic or national lines of solidarity, as shown by organisations such as the Community of Banyamulenge in Nairobi and the Somali Community Association in Kampala, or can be religious in origin, with mosques and churches across both cities holding collections for refugee families.

In addition to less structured religious and cultural support are formal and informal community-based organisations established by refugees. These organisations take a variety of forms, and some are interlinked with the informal religious and cultural support networks described above. In Nairobi, refugee-led social businesses such as L’Afrikana train both refugees and locals in arts and tailoring, and reinvest profits from sales of their products into projects to support vulnerable children from both local and refugee communities with school fees. URISE in Kampala similarly provides training for young people, including in graphic design, t-shirt printing, music, videography and computer literacy, with the aim of equipping them with the skills to support themselves and build a better

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future. Other groups such as RefugeeCare in Nairobi focus on distributing food and clothing to refugees in need. Others still, like Kobciye in Nairobi and Hope for Refugees in Action in Kampala, operate savings and loan cooperatives and business training programmes to enable members to start their own income-generating schemes.

Groups such as Tawakal and Save World Trust in Nairobi provide counselling and trauma services to refugees, for whom overcoming trauma and coping with mental health issues is a huge challenge. Other work focuses on political activism; displaced South Sudanese activists work across Kampala and Nairobi to coordinate peace-building activities back in their home country, and the Federation of Congolese Abroad seeks to change the image of the country and advocate for an end to war. These activities constitute social protection beyond the individual scale, as improving the security of countries of origin enables refugees to repatriate, and peacebuilding and advocacy efforts often focus on the building or rebuilding of national social services.

Even within camps and settlements (where formal assistance is more readily available and more easily accessible), refugees also find their own ways of supporting themselves and their communities. One community organisation in Nakivale settlement draws on the professional skills of a doctor and a lawyer, both refugees, and treats lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals in their own homes at night to help them avoid stigmatisation at the camp

clinic. As homosexuality is illegal in Uganda and the camp clinic is staffed by Ugandans, LGBTI people risk discrimination and even persecution if they are identified; this community organisation therefore fills an important gap in assistance to a marginalised refugee group. Wakati Foundation trains otherwise inactive young men in construction to assist with building homes for vulnerable families who would otherwise have to sleep under plastic sheets. And informal Somali women's groups welcome new arrivals and offer food, shelter and kindness to those who arrive when UNHCR's offices are closed.

Many refugees told us that official providers of assistance are usually their last port of call when they need help. Both in Kenya and Uganda, agencies' huge caseloads deter refugees from seeking officially provided services; refugees also have concerns about corruption. The impersonality and lack of real investment in refugee futures that respondents associated with these services were also described as major factors influencing their preference for smaller, local groups. There refugees receive help from people they know, which often fosters a relationship that goes beyond that of benefactor and recipient.

Improving support for refugee-led social protection

Some refugee-led social protection efforts are backed by funding from international actors; since 2009, for example, UNHCR has used its Social Protection Fund to offer small grants to projects that refugees conceive and



UNHCR/Frédéric Noy

These young Burundian refugees in Kashojwa village, Uganda, belong to the Talented Orphan Refugees' Association. "We learn English, we make baskets and hats, we sing together, we play sports together, we're a family now. We sell what we make and share the money with everyone. In Kirundi, there is a proverb that says 'If we work together, we can improve all our lives.'"

implement themselves – so-called refugee self-help projects. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with refugee communities have often been criticised for having a simplistic understanding of these communities that is divorced from wider historical, regional and national contexts. By better understanding the contexts within which refugee-led social protection takes place, the conditions under which external actors can most effectively support or partner with refugees themselves become clearer.

A major challenge reported by many of the groups described here is their lack of access to partnerships with more powerful actors, whose funding and training can offer the groups opportunities to grow, increase impact and become more sustainable. Forming partnerships rather than inviting refugees to participate as implementers or mobilisers for pre-defined programmes means refugee-led social protection actors can retain those characteristics that make them better positioned to reach poor communities.

As well as understanding when and where partnership is likely to be empowering, it is important to note that establishing a transformative social protection agenda – that is, one that not only goes beyond protecting people against the risks associated with being poor but also addresses the structural causes of poverty – requires cohesive action. This need for solidarity can be seen through the building of consortia of refugee-led organisations. Together they can work for common causes and, in principle, networks can be a way to share expertise and knowledge and ‘raise up’ less established organisations. Strengthening networks can make refugee-led organisations more visible and formalised, and can create avenues for advocacy. However, while such efforts to promote solidarity in Kampala and Nairobi are underway, strategic cohesion is difficult in part because of distrust. UNHCR’s implementing and operational partners are suspected by refugees of co-opting the ideas of refugee-led organisations, which can do little to stop it. This makes refugee-led organisations less inclined to reach out to national and international

organisations from which they in theory might receive funding or other assistance. In addition to contributing to the silos in which refugee-led organisations often work, this distrust precludes opportunities for awareness-raising about the existence of this important type of social protection.

There is also a risk that international organisations see refugee-led social protection activities as a means of economising by shifting work onto other organisations (even those that are under-resourced), with the resulting risk that the quality of assistance declines. International organisations and local partners must remain aware of the inequalities between different forms of organisational assistance and take steps to ensure that refugees’ vital work is properly supported and valued.

Our research challenges the idea that refugee-led organisations are fringe actors; rather, they are central to the lives of many displaced people. The role of refugees in providing not only community-based safety nets but also genuine opportunities for change in the positioning of refugee communities as assistance actors cannot be understated. However, the effectiveness of refugee-led social protection is only assured if it continues to be driven by refugees themselves, given that they are best placed to understand these needs. Those looking to partner with refugee-led organisations must preserve and value refugees’ proximity to those they seek to help, or else risk losing what makes them such important actors within the international humanitarian system in the first place.

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<http://bit.ly/RSC-TheGlobalGoverned>

1. ‘The Global Governed? Refugees as Providers of Social Protection and Assistance’ is a two-year ESRC-AHRC funded project which aims to document and understand the activities of over 60 refugee-led initiatives across urban areas (Nairobi and Kampala), settlements (Nakivale) and camps (Kakuma).

Refugee paralegals

Musenga Tshimankinda Christian

Refugees in Kenya face multiple barriers to accessing their rights. The work of paralegals who are themselves refugees and who support and facilitate refugees' access to justice offers a vital service that many NGOs, whose scope and budgets are limited, insufficiently provide.

Refugees in Kenya face multiple challenges. In addition to the long process of recognition or rejection of refugee status, these challenges include lack of access to documentation and services – including refugee registration processes, business and work permits, student pass, bank accounts, social security numbers, travel documentation and mobile communication. Refugees also experience difficulties relating to police harassment, a general lack of knowledge of refugee issues, negative and discriminatory attitudes from local populations and barriers to foreign qualifications recognition.

In order to address this, some refugees in Nairobi have been trained by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Kituo Cha Sheria, supported by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the UN Migration Agency (IOM), as paralegals to support fellow refugees. A paralegal is someone who has either a basic legal training or more extensive practical legal experience, who provides legal assistance to facilitate access to rights and justice. Their work is generally supervised by a lawyer, law office or any legal institution.

Refugee paralegals sensitise refugee groups and public authorities on refugee rights through forums, workshops, training and conferences and also contribute to the capacity building programme of authorities to appropriately handle refugee cases, including how they conduct, stop, arrest and detain forced migrants and on how refugee documents should be issued and verified. They also contribute to awareness-raising activities for government representatives to improve their knowledge of refugee issues.

Refugee paralegals also work to empower the refugee community by providing guidance on their rights and obligations, including how to react when stopped, arrested or detained and how to approach

authorities on matters of documentation. They provide refugees and asylum seekers with information regarding their asylum application and their refugee status, offering advice on their cases, making referrals and following up on cases. They advocate for the release of arrested refugees, asylum seekers and other forced migrants at police stations, prisons and places of detention, and accompany refugees on visits to organisations and institutions to seek assistance on various social issues (for example, to police stations in order to report crimes).

As a lawyer, I have a legal background and therefore have an obligation to help my community, so I became a refugee paralegal. Refugee paralegals are able to undertake work that large international NGOs have difficulty with or do not undertake due to their budget limitations and the scope of their work. For example, I am able to intervene in refugee cases (especially arrest and harassment cases) at any time of the day or night, including on weekends and holidays; large organisations only intervene during their hours and days of work. We also advise, refer and follow up on cases, giving feedback to refugees, which means they do not have to pay the costs of transportation to these NGOs, whose offices are all far from where refugees live. Importantly, refugee paralegals are based where refugees live. We deal with refugees on a daily basis as the majority of us are also refugees and live as part of the refugee community. In the community where I live and work we have established a forum where refugees can share their own ideas on legal and livelihoods issues.

In the course of my work as a refugee paralegal I have assisted many refugees. One Congolese refugee, who was conducting business without a business permit, was arrested for being in Nairobi unlawfully.

He had previously been refused a business permit by the local authorities because they felt he lacked adequate identification. I advocated for his release by proving that his registration papers (from both the government and UNHCR) were issued to him in Nairobi, thereby giving him the right to live there. Following his release I also assisted him to obtain a business permit so that he could continue to do business lawfully in Nairobi.

I also helped a Somali refugee who was living in Dadaab refugee camp by advocating on her behalf with the Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS) in Nairobi when she was dealing with logistically complex demands for paperwork during the process of preparing to join her mother, who had been resettled in the United States. My intervention on her behalf, which included accompanying her to the RAS office, helped to avoid a delay in the process.

There are still important steps that need to be taken to make life legally secure for

refugees in Nairobi. Refugee paralegals are currently lobbying the Government of Kenya to apply all the provisions of the Refugee Act 2006 to ensure refugees receive full protection in Kenya. We must also advocate for the government to facilitate local integration, opening doors to make refugees feel welcomed and safe, since many cannot return to their countries and their chances of resettlement are low. One way of doing this would be by establishing a permanent awareness-raising programme for police and other public administration officers in order to build their capacity to handle refugee cases. Both refugees and government authorities must know refugees' rights and have the power and knowledge to advocate for them. Refugee paralegals in Nairobi are working to make sure this happens.

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Kobciye: empowering Somali refugees in Nairobi

Afrah Hassan

Established by a resettled Somali refugee and now under the leadership of his children, Kobciye resource centre works to empower Somali refugees in Eastleigh, Nairobi.

In the early 1990s my father was one of millions of refugees fleeing the civil conflict engulfing Somalia. Relative to many others he was lucky – he was educated and able to secure scholarship opportunities in the United States, where he was resettled. From there he worked to bring over his still young family and to eventually settle in Toronto, Canada. Escaping a violent conflict and settling into a new community sparked my father's passion to help his native community. It began in 1993, when he helped the new wave of Somali refugees who were arriving in Toronto having escaped war, and it continues today with Kobciye, a community resource centre in the Eastleigh neighbourhood of Nairobi, Kenya, which he established. In the intervening years, and in spite of the challenges of keeping the organisation going, Kobciye has continued to grow. Its success is built on its

engagement with the community and ability to gain legitimacy and trust within Eastleigh.

Kobciye, which means 'empowerment' in Somali, is a resource centre that assists vulnerable individuals (including undocumented refugees) within the Eastleigh community, and provides skills trainings such as basic computer literacy, sewing and tailoring and other programmes. Kobciye aims to equip individuals with relevant skills that will build their capacities and lead to further opportunities. The organisation identifies the needs of the community through broad consultations with community stakeholders; this includes organising sustained engagement events and working with established community partners.

After my father's death in 2012, my sister and I returned to Nairobi to try to carry on his legacy. Having settled in Canada as

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refugees when very young, we had grown up in a completely different country, culture and community and we were initially taken aback by the sheer demand and impact that Kobciye was generating in Eastleigh. Although we were always aware of the challenges facing Somali refugees, particularly those in Kenya, truly understanding the circumstances of urban refugees was a profound learning process. Learning how to effectively create programming that accounts for and responds to the needs of the diverse local refugee population was a large part of this learning process. Eastleigh is a dynamic community of individuals of varying backgrounds, all tightly packed within a dense urban area. Adapting to the needs of the community and personally building trust and legitimacy while building on the legacy of our father was all part of learning on the job.

Integrating ourselves into the community and acquainting ourselves with the issues that individuals care about has helped Kobciye to continue to develop. Our own experiences as part of a family of first-generation immigrants gave us a unique insight into how we can cultivate new programming and community engagement. Some of the transitional challenges that refugees face in Canada are comparable to those faced by refugees in Eastleigh, whether that be accessing resources or navigating the legal frameworks that govern their existence. Drawing these parallels between our experiences and those of refugees in Eastleigh has helped us focus both our programmes and how we position ourselves within the overall community.

Appropriate programming

Alongside being a renowned regional business hub, Eastleigh is also the destination of thousands of refugees who are looking for a long-term home or to relocate to other (particularly Western) countries. Many individuals have set up

thriving businesses and integrated fairly well within the local community; others struggle, particularly outside the infrastructure of a formal refugee camp. Understanding these factors has helped us create a framework where we understand vulnerabilities and respond by targeting individuals who will benefit most from our programmes.

With formal education rates lower in Eastleigh than in neighbouring communities, we focus on equipping our members with tangible and applicable skills, including in computer literacy, sewing and tailoring and basic financial literacy. For example, our computer literacy programme aims to give students a basic knowledge of computer functions, on which they can build with further training. We also provide a sewing and tailoring programme that complements Eastleigh's thriving textiles business, and which can be a transition point for potential employment opportunities within the local community. Over the course of the last eight years of reliable and consistent programming, Kobciye has provided vocational skills training to hundreds of Somalis.

There has long been a negative perception of the Somali refugee population in Eastleigh,¹ and in 2014 tension peaked with the police crackdown known as Usalama Watch. This presented a significant challenge to our organisation. We responded by moving from empowerment and skills training to advocacy and awareness raising in order



Weekly seminar, run by Kobciye.

Afrat Hassan

to create a dialogue to combat some of the negative perceptions and stereotypes created by the police and security offensive. We held forums where discussions were held with local authorities and political offices, arranged rallies condemning police brutality and promoting cohesion, and organised cultural exhibitions that highlighted the contributions of each community within our immediate region. We also produced literature that aimed to counter some of the negative narratives that have surrounded the urban refugee population, particularly Somalis. Although today the tension has largely receded, there remains social stigma around the urban refugee population that

is still being contested and negotiated within the Eastleigh community.

Kobciye's impact in the community has continued to grow, with my father's vision serving as a roadmap for our progress and evolution. I am immensely proud and fortunate to be able to lead this organisation, helping the community from which I came and enjoying the continued support of the community which Kobciye serves.

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1. See Carrier N (2017) 'What Can We Learn From the "Little Mogadishu" Migrant Hub?' *Refugees Deeply* <http://bit.ly/Carrier-RefDeeply-Eastleigh>

Syrian refugee-led organisations in Berlin

Jennifer Wood, Evan Easton-Calabria and Yahya Alaous

Many of the approximately 50,000 Syrian refugees living in Berlin continue to depend largely on State assistance; some refugees have also created and found additional support in active, vibrant community initiatives.

Refugees in Germany receive considerable State support. Those whose asylum applications are accepted are assigned to a local city or town, gain temporary residency and begin the integration process. Although new arrivals in 2015 were initially housed in school gyms and other emergency shelters, there are now longer-term refugee hostels and continuing efforts to help refugees find apartments of their own.

Once residency has been established or looks likely, refugees attend an integration course to learn the language and culture, and have their first meeting at a job centre to learn about employment prospects. Unemployed refugees receive a monthly sum to cover living costs. Refugees receive support from the municipality with local orientation, logistics such as transportation and medical resources, and access to organisations and clubs. However, finding a job without recognised qualifications or German language skills is difficult; so too is finding decent housing – already an acute problem in Berlin for low-income earners, even before taking into consideration the needs of refugee families.

Despite the wide-ranging support provided by State agencies, gaps in services exist and, in many cases, unmet needs are addressed by grassroots initiatives found across the country. Hundreds of projects, networks and organisations exist, almost all of which have formed since 2015.

Initially, grassroots support by Syrians in Berlin mainly took the form of helping refugees to access emergency assistance and navigate Germany's asylum and registration bureaucracy. In the early days of high numbers of refugee arrivals, for instance, groups of Syrian refugees – often recent arrivals themselves – positioned themselves at main train stations in Germany, equipping newcomers with maps, directions and advice about registering and finding shelter.

However, in the last three years there has been a shift from providing logistical and day-to-day assistance to offering cultural, community and creative support that meets refugees' psychological, emotional and personal needs. In many cases, these refugee-led efforts are now registered German organisations. Over 75 Syrian assistance

organisations exist in Germany,¹ and our research² identified 10 in Berlin alone.

The Salaam Culture and Sport Club (Salaamkulturklub) is one such example. The club was founded by four Syrians – an academic, judge, journalist and interpreter – who recognised that Syrian refugees desperately needed translation and other logistical support in order to register as refugees, apply for jobs and learn about Germany's complex administrative and educational systems. The club also offered free overnight accommodation at the height of refugee arrivals in 2015 so that people could join the long queue at the nearby registration office the following morning.

Over the last few years, Salaam's assistance activities have both formalised and broadened. Advice is provided in the form of weekly presentations on different themes, such as how to search for and apply for a job, or how to register children in school. There is also a monthly presentation highlighting 'success stories' by refugees who have accomplished something in Berlin, be it securing employment or achieving a higher German language level. The club also now offers a café to promote intercultural exchange and a range of other support, including language practice, sport and leisure activities (including for refugees with disabilities) and intercultural and creative projects.

Differing aims

One of the most established Syrian cultural organisations in Berlin is Mada,³ housed in the cultural community centre Ulme 35 in a quiet part of former West Berlin. The cultural centre provides office and event space and the opportunity for collaborations with German artists and activists. Mada was founded by Safi, a Syrian refugee, and focuses on dialogue, art, culture and community by offering a cultural programme of lectures, theatre, films, readings and art exhibitions. There are events almost every day, including German language training and events for children and families, and many activities are intended for both Syrian and non-Syrian participants.

The idea behind establishing Mada arose in reaction to other Syrian cultural groups

in Berlin which were more conservative, as Safi felt that Syrian culture as he understood it was not being adequately represented or experienced through them. This reveals a division that is more widely evident among Syrian refugee-led organisations in Berlin: some aim to reinforce conservative forms of Syrian culture, religion and law while others aim to use Syrian culture to promote Syrian integration and the social cohesion of Syrians and Germans.

Another significant refugee-led cultural initiative is Berlin's first Arabic library: Baynetna, meaning 'between us'.⁴ Staffed by a team of committed volunteers, the library offers Arabic books to local readers, and promotes learning for Germans and 'Westerners' about Arabic culture and literature. Maher, a publisher and refugee from Syria, and Baynetna's co-founder, first had the idea to create a library in 2016, prompted by the lack of Arabic books in Berlin. He started the project in rooms at a German refugee housing facility which was used for learning and community gathering, and slowly gathered donated books. The project also hosts regular literary events – often featuring both Syrian and German performers – and strives to use these as opportunities for intercultural exchange and learning. In this way, it is "not just a library but a literary salon", according to Dana, another co-founder.

In February 2018, Berlin's public library offered Baynetna shared space to house the library, which is now open to the public four days per week. However, books, shelves and furniture need to be packed and unpacked weekly because the main library still uses the space on the other days – a regular reminder that this home, too, may be temporary. Maher, like many refugees seeking to create meaning in their new lives, comes to the library every day because it reminds him of his former publishing work in Syria. For him, books are a powerful tool for facilitating the integration of Syrians into Germany.

The success of refugee-led organisations and initiatives in Berlin in addressing the different needs of refugees stems in part from their flexible and adaptable structure. Many organisations have over time adjusted their

activities based on the skills of volunteers and the changing needs and interests of participants. While Berlin was once thought of as a place of temporary refuge, it has now become the beginning of a new life and identity for many. Yet the majority of Syrian refugee-led organisations in Berlin do not yet consider themselves sustainable, as they are run largely by volunteers and are dependent on donations and other ad hoc sources of funding. While this reveals a need for reliable funding that will allow them to continue their work in the long term, in many ways such constraints are inevitable. These refugee-led organisations are still new, and the story of Syrians in Berlin is still only at the beginning.

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1. www.citizensforsyria.org

2. This research was generously funded by a two-year grant from the Toyota Foundation.

3. <http://bit.ly/Ulme35>

4. www.baynetna.de

Refugee-led education in Indonesia

Thomas Brown

Refugee-led education initiatives in West Java, Indonesia, show how refugee communities can work with supporters to overcome service gaps faced in host countries, demonstrating a community-led approach to refugee assistance that is empowering and sustainable.

Indonesia allows asylum seekers and refugees to live in the country until they can be resettled through the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, but does not offer any legal pathways for them to naturalise, and also prohibits them from working during their stay. Consequently some 14,000 asylum seekers and refugees live for years in a state of limbo in Indonesia while awaiting resettlement, with a lack of formal rights and limited access to services like education. Faced with the prospect of children missing years of schooling at a critical stage of their development, groups of Afghan Hazara refugees living in the Indonesian province of West Java have independently initiated a number of education centres to serve their community.

There are more initiatives like this in refugee communities across the globe than we realise. Providing capacity building and guidance to refugee-led initiatives to address challenges themselves, rather than simply doing it for them, is an approach which serves to empower refugees by making

use of their skills and experiences, while also delivering badly needed services in a responsive and cost-effective way. After all, it is refugees who know best the needs of their community and in most cases have the skills and experience required to serve them.

Cisarua, a small mountain town in West Java, just a few hours drive from Jakarta, has in recent years become the home of some 2,500 asylum seekers and refugees, mostly ethnic Hazaras from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Unlike other refugees in Indonesia, who are often supported by international or local assistance groups, refugees in this area live independently in the community, largely relying on savings or remittances.

The movement of refugee-led education initiatives in Indonesia started in this small township with the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre (CRLC), established in August 2014 by four Hazara men with media and business backgrounds. The project quickly attracted the attention of outside supporters from Australia, who founded Cisarua Learning Limited (CLL), a non-profit group that

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supports the centre. Following the success of the CRLC, two further refugee-led education hubs were opened in 2015 by different groups of Hazara refugees – the Refugee Learning Nest (RLN) and the Refugee Learning Centre (RLC). There are now five such education centres operating in the area, which are independent but all follow the same basic model established by CRLC.

Between them, the five learning centres serve approximately 300 children aged 5–16, as well as providing English education for adult refugees. Each centre is run by refugee volunteers, who fulfil administration, management and teaching roles. Modest fees charged to parents are supplemented by donations from benefactor groups or private individuals, usually from abroad or from expatriate communities living in Indonesia. Some of the centres have also formed strong relationships with international schools and civil society groups in Indonesia. Members of the community are often called upon to support the schools by lending their skills, whether in cleaning, maintenance or construction, and community members are heavily involved in decision making within the schools through regular meetings.

The curriculum has a distinct focus on English since refugees are hopeful they will be eventually resettled in an English-speaking country or one where it is a common lingua franca. Having a strong command of English will not only enable faster integration with a new host community but is also perceived to strengthen their chances of being accepted for resettlement. The use of English is also important for inclusivity; while most of the children, like their teachers, are ethnic Hazaras, there are also a number of students from Iraq, Myanmar and Sudan.

In addition to providing vital education for children, these centres also support a range of additional activities that benefit the wider refugee community. Depending on

the skills that refugee volunteers can offer, the centres support English classes for adults, sports programmes, community-based health workshops, vocational skills-sharing programmes, and arts and handicraft classes for women refugees.

One of the most popular activities in the learning centres is football, which is hugely popular with both students and teachers. Each centre has a coach who runs training sessions and matches, which are open to women and girls as well as men and boys. These activities act as community gatherings for both participants and spectators, and the benefit of such activities on the mental well-being of those involved should not be underestimated.

Besides the learning centres, there are a number of other notable refugee-led initiatives operating in the Cisarua area. The Refugee Women Support Group Indonesia is run by a young Hazara woman, and focuses on textiles and jewellery making. The group also conducts workshops on health (including reproductive health) and hygiene, sexual and gender-based violence, and family planning. The group sells their textile products in stalls in Jakarta and Australia through a Melbourne-based non-profit organisation.

Through such refugee-led initiatives volunteers are able to put their skills to use and make an impact on their community,



A young refugee volunteer teaches her students in the Refugee Learning Centre in Cisarua, Indonesia.

while gaining experience that may prove useful in securing employment once resettled. The learning centres also serve as community hubs, acting as much-needed places for socialisation and community activities. They give structure and hope to refugees' lives, offering social and mental health benefits to those living in uncertain and difficult circumstances.

Following these examples in Cisarua, in late 2017 a number of similar education centres emerged in Jakarta, a major urban hub for refugees living in the community in Indonesia.

Supporting grassroots initiatives

The extent of external support provided to each of the refugee education centres varies, with some receiving ad hoc financial support from private donors, and others having more structured support that extends to mentoring, guidance and capacity development.

As well as providing financing through fundraising efforts, the CLL benefactor group supports CRLC by connecting the centre's teachers with trainers and mentors via video link and field visits, and has provided them with cameras and media training, allowing them to document their activities and maintain an active social media presence. Leaders in the CRLC have also been highly effective at engaging local and international (in particular, Australian) media, and have a high profile in expatriate circles in Indonesia, Australia and elsewhere.

Same Skies, the Swiss-Australian non-governmental organisation (NGO) that supports RLN and RLC, provided start-up financing for the centres but now concentrates its efforts on building the capacity of refugee volunteers to develop the projects so they become largely self-sufficient. Same Skies volunteers conduct capacity-building workshops for school staff, on topics including teacher training, child protection, financial management, conflict resolution and first aid. This has helped the two schools improve their overall educational and managerial capacity, leading to the provision of better services, while also building the skills and confidence of the volunteers.

Same Skies also provides remote 'coaching' through regular video-link meetings to identify needs in the centres and provide appropriate guidance and support to the volunteer team. Providing guidance remotely is both cost-effective and a strategic choice – it avoids creating a permanent physical presence in the community and the dependency that can follow. Like CRLC, refugee volunteers at RLN and RLC make effective use of digital communications to engage with other refugees as well as foreign audiences. Same Skies has supported this by providing capacity development and guidance on digital marketing and fundraising strategies in order to enhance the centres' independent sustainability. As a result, RLC and RLN have been able to build an extensive international following and leverage it to attract donations through online crowd-funding campaigns.

Multilateral institutions such as UNHCR are also getting behind refugee-led models of assistance. UNHCR Malaysia's Social Protection Fund initiative supports a range of small-scale self-help projects which are developed and implemented by refugee groups. The fund has supported 320 projects, including income-generation projects, skills-training programmes and community service initiatives like community centres, sports and recreation halls, and day-care and shelters services.

Refugees who are involved in community initiatives like these demonstrate significant agency in their ability to come together to overcome obstacles they face, challenging the perception that they are helpless or in need of outside assistance. The refugee-led education initiatives of West Java, and the manner in which non-profit benefactor groups support them, show just how effective a model of refugee assistance this can be – one that empowers and builds resilience by utilising and developing the human capital that exists within the refugee community.

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Lessons from LGBTIQ refugee-led community-based organisations

Hester K V Moore

The work of community-based organisations led by and in support of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) refugees in Nairobi, Kenya, provides important insights into how humanitarian agencies can form effective partnerships that help to ensure access to services for all.

Refugee-led community-based organisations (CBOs) have emerged across countries of asylum to address various issues affecting refugee populations. In Nairobi, organisations led by and working on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) refugees are proving to be resourceful and promising providers of community-based protection. Their contributions complement the broader work of humanitarian agencies and, at a time of financial uncertainty for UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), they are also avenues of alternative, private sector-funded assistance for refugee communities. By emphasising overall community development, these CBOs combine economic activities with pertinent legal, psychosocial and medical issues, thereby promoting the overall well-being of refugee communities and ensuring a holistic response to the question of self-reliance.

Humanitarian agencies can encourage and support CBOs' development through external advocacy, building their capacity by developing and guiding their organisational strategies and the strengthening of financial accountability mechanisms, and cultivating networks and connections with potential partner organisations (including other refugee-led CBOs). At the same time, agencies should remain conscious of the need to encourage a broad network of CBOs that takes account of the diversity of refugee communities. Failure to pay attention to divisions that already exist between different communities could result in agencies reinforcing negative power structures, and pushing already marginalised voices further away. The nature and extent of any agency's partnership with a refugee-led

CBO must also be clearly defined. Will it, for example, involve the CBO becoming an implementing partner, or will it mean working together to achieve mutual strategic goals? Precedence, transparency and sustainability – all key to establishing and maintaining healthy relationships – must all be taken into sufficient consideration.

LGBTIQ refugee-led CBOs in Nairobi run multiple diverse programmes to address the specific needs of LGBTIQ people. These programmes include:

Community health: One CBO has harnessed the pre-existing medical skills and training of community members to provide refugee-led health training to groups of LGBTIQ clients, whose access to health services can be limited because of discrimination. Refugee community health workers subsequently lead targeted outreach to sections of the wider refugee community on various issues such as sexual health awareness (for persons at risk of or engaging in survival sex work); information about communicable diseases (for those living in communal housing); and prenatal and maternal health care (for lesbian, bisexual and queer – LBQ – women). Leaders of these programmes also identify appropriate health-care partners and establish and strengthen referral systems.

Psychosocial support: One CBO in Nairobi runs a monthly group counselling session for refugees who are living with HIV. The CBO has created partnerships with national counsellors who have experience of working with LGBTIQ individuals. These counsellors both facilitate sessions and train members of the CBO in order to promote

programme sustainability. Another CBO seeks to mitigate the negative effects of social isolation among LGBTIQ refugees and encourage community development through a coaching programme that cultivates their sporting and artistic skills.

Legal protection: Given that physical security is an important issue for all LGBTIQ refugees, one CBO has partnered with a local community-based paralegal organisation that offers legal assistance to refugees in the form of accompaniment to police stations, paralegal training and emergency shelter and relocation.

Livelihoods initiatives: Empowering LGBTIQ refugees with livelihoods skills is a crucial part of a holistic protection strategy. Several CBOs are running livelihoods courses for LGBTIQ refugees, including in barbering, electronics and phone repairs, tailoring, bead and craft making and poultry farming.

Crucially, these initiatives draw upon LGBTIQ refugees' pre-existing skills and talents, sending a potent message to refugees that they are able to engage with agencies on their own terms, and take ownership of their issues. One refugee spoke of the effect:

"If you build the capacity of the community to engage in these projects, they won't worry [as much] because they are receiving services from places other than humanitarian agencies."

Humanitarian agencies: supporting LGBTIQ refugee-led CBOs

One leader of a refugee-led LGBTIQ organisation suggested how agencies can better support these organisations:

"The first step is acknowledging we are here. Why doesn't UNHCR act as a bridge between all CBOs – not only sexual orientation and gender identity [SOGI] groups but non-SOGI groups also? We expect more from agencies, in terms of support for our projects. Right now, what we want from UNHCR is not money but guidance. What we need is networks."

The leader went on to suggest that UNHCR needs to formulate a long-term support strategy which should facilitate avenues between refugee communities and third parties – such as donor organisations – who support LGBTIQ initiatives. UNHCR's eventual role would be one of capacity building and overall mentorship of emerging CBOs.

In response to a survey about outstanding needs, three refugee-led LGBTIQ CBOs in Nairobi noted the need to develop longer-term strategies, including succession plans to ensure continuity of leadership. They also stated a need to develop overarching financial frameworks to guide programmes, business initiatives and projects, as well as to develop financial management procedures. Other needs were identified, including for: the development of monitoring and evaluation procedures for projects (procedures that are consistent with standards applied by other professional organisations); connecting and sharing best practices with other CBOs and humanitarian agencies; and guidance on reporting and grant writing.

Including refugee-led CBOs in professional networks is key for the development of these internal capacities. By drawing on and learning from the experiences of other established organisations, refugee-led CBOs can grow, be supported and potentially emerge as partners in the provision of services to refugee communities. UNHCR should balance the positive outcomes of this development with the need to preserve refugees' autonomy over their own initiatives. It should also consider carefully the question of financial support – particularly the potentially divisive effects of supporting some CBOs over others. The selection process for such financial support must be accessible and transparent, and take into account refugee communities' particular vulnerabilities. CBO leaders also require non-financial support, such as training and mentorship, to develop their potential.

Some LGBTIQ refugees believe that CBOs could also act as a bridge between their own marginalised communities and the wider refugee community: "Why don't we interact

with other groups? I don't want to stay [working with my own CBO], all about sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). We need to be refugees as a whole community." In developing professional networks, the CBO leaders liaise with a broad group of non-LGBTIQ refugees, including other CBO leaders. As well as potentially providing avenues for employment of LGBTIQ refugees, there is scope for such professional networks to become forums for social dialogue, and potent tools for advancing LGBTIQ rights.

Networks and diversity

In Nairobi, many LGBTIQ CBO leadership structures are dominated by men who have sex with men (MSM). LBQ women refugees have expressed concern at not being represented in these organisations or in forums where decision making that affects their communities takes place: "If you're not masculine, you can't talk. Even in meetings, the boys dominate. We need to empower the lesbians."

As CBO structures grow in influence, space for members of marginalised communities to assert themselves in decision making can decrease. Further, as CBOs increasingly become interlocutors between UNHCR and other refugees, risks arise that include the monopolisation of leadership structures, missed identification of vulnerable cases, mistrust between community members, and questions surrounding the presence and extent of agencies' support. Refugee communities can become polarised – and politicised – by power dynamics inherent in the relations between humanitarian agencies, private sector partners and CBOs, particularly where financial support is involved. To counter this, agencies (including private sector actors) must remain aware of the potentially divisive effects of their engagement with CBOs, and seek to promote diverse refugee leadership structures, as well as remain sensitive of the intricate social dynamics of refugee communities. It must be acknowledged that MSM are proportionately greater in number than other communities (including LBQ, trans* and intersex), are empowered by a

strong network of organisations working with MSM, and are generally more vocal than members from other communities.

These issues also raise more probing questions surrounding how far humanitarian agencies are willing to extend partnerships with refugee-led CBOs. The social effects of the funding of community-based initiatives by humanitarian agencies have not yet been comprehensively researched. These effects could be felt in relationships, power dynamics and risks of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation linked to the unequal distribution of financial capital among refugee communities. Agencies should consider carefully the effects of providing financial and other support to CBOs and in particular the potential effects upon already marginalised individuals and groups. How will that support affect relationships between refugees, and between refugees and service providers? And is that support likely to increase the overall self-reliance of a community, or will it instead promote unrepresentative leadership structures, hindering the empowerment of marginalised groups?

The growth of CBOs and the increasing roles they are playing in refugee protection make greater interaction between key actors – which include the CBOs themselves – necessary. Agencies must assess how best to harness the positive efforts of CBOs, while avoiding potentially negative effects of partnership. Private sector partners and donors must remain aware of their influence, strive to understand issues and facilitate access to funding for marginalised groups. The opportunity to work more closely with refugees carries a duty of care to ensure that support does not polarise vulnerable communities, nor promote some issues over others that are equally as important.

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1. 'Trans*/trans asterisk' is a term used to denote all transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming identities.

2. This article is based on 'Disaggregating LGBTIQ protection concerns: experiences of displaced communities in Nairobi', written for RefugePoint by the same author.



'Butterflies With New Wings' is a network of women helping and protecting women, many of whom have been displaced, who have suffered violence due to armed conflict in Colombia. In 2014, the network was the recipient of UNHCR's Nansen Refugee Award. UNHCR/Elisabet Diaz Sanmartin

