



## **Young and Restless:**

Harnessing the Economic Resilience  
of Displaced Youth in Nairobi



**WOMEN'S  
REFUGEE  
COMMISSION**

## Research. Rethink. Resolve.

The Women's Refugee Commission identifies needs, researches solutions and advocates for global change to improve the lives of crisis-affected women and children. The Women's Refugee Commission is legally part of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, but does not receive direct financial support from the IRC.

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Photographs © Josh Chaffin

Cover photo: Young women selling KenChic brand chicken sausages on the street in Eastleigh told the Women's Refugee Commission they were proud to finally be making their own money. (See p. 14.)

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## Contents

Acronyms & Abbreviations.....	i
Executive Summary .....	1
Key Findings .....	1
Key Recommendations .....	2
Purpose of the Mission .....	2
Methodology .....	3
Limitations .....	3
Profile of the Youth .....	4
Refugee Youths' Priorities .....	6
Context .....	6
Kenyan Policies toward Refugees .....	7
Livelihood Programs for Refugee Youth .....	10
Programming Gaps .....	11
Recommendations .....	12
To Donors .....	12
To UNHCR .....	13
To Service Providers .....	13
To Kenyan Police .....	15
Organizations Interviewed .....	15
Appendix I: Interview Questionnaire .....	17
Notes .....	19



## Acronyms & Abbreviations

BDS	Business development services
BPRM	(U.S.) Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
MFI	Microfinance institution
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
RCK	Refugee Consortium of Kenya
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission
YIKE	Youth Initiatives Kenya

## Executive Summary

Young men and women displaced in Nairobi, Kenya, face many barriers to earning an income. Urban violence, police harassment, restricted access to formal markets, disrupted education and a lack of safe spaces in the community are among the main barriers to attending school and training programs. Refugee youth report that education and training, as well as personal security, are their highest priorities. Young people appear to have little knowledge of their rights, of refugee laws and policies or of the few programs that exist to assist them. Very few refugee and asylee youth—perhaps fewer than 500 individuals citywide—access any kind of economic strengthening program.

As many as 200,000 refugees and asylum seekers from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi may now reside in Nairobi.<sup>1</sup> As access to services such as secondary and tertiary education and training is increasingly strained in the country's refugee camps, youth continue to arrive in Nairobi's urban and peri-urban areas, where they struggle to make ends meet.

### What Is a Livelihood?

A “livelihood” refers to the capabilities, assets and strategies that people use to make a living. Access to basic services and control of assets shape the economic strategies that refugees employ to achieve self-reliance, that is, food and income security. Displacement destroys livelihoods and forces people to adopt new strategies to support themselves. Refugees often arrive with no safety net, they usually flee with few resources and little preparation and, at times, become separated from or lose family members. Without access to basic services and assets, men and women, girls and boys often rely on risky activities to survive. These may include working as commercial sex workers, illegally hawking goods on unsafe streets or trading sex for food or shelter.

## Key Findings

Although Nairobi is home to many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), few NGO programs and services target refugee youth. In addition, although the urban refugee numbers are huge, existing programs reach only a few hundred refugee youth. As a result, refugee youth are unable to further develop their skills, languish in the informal market with few opportunities to advance and face a myriad of daily protection risks.

Most refugees reside in poor, high-crime neighborhoods and live in fear of police harassment and gang violence. Women and young girls are routinely sexually harassed.

To survive, youth work in the informal sector, for family-run businesses, in petty trade or in short-term, low-wage jobs. Some young women have multiple household and child care responsibilities, which limits their access to income-generating activities and restricts their social interactions. Yet they are still expected to seek work outside the home. They are often found in low-paid and isolating domestic work, where, they report, their rights are routinely violated.

While education is legally open to refugee and asylee youth in Kenya, and tuition in government primary schools is theoretically free, many young people say they cannot afford the costs associated with attending school. At the secondary level, public schools increased their annual fees in 2011, making them out of reach for many families, even with government subsidies.

Youth from better-off families, despite their level of education, have few economic opportunities as formal employment is legally off limits to foreigners under 35 years old. Government and nongovernmental programs in Nairobi to support refugees and asylum seekers are few.

On the positive side, a few NGOs are implementing innovative new programs, coordination between service providers is perceived by service providers to be strong



and opportunities to strengthen youths' economic resilience do exist. In general, though, a more comprehensive and longer-term approach to livelihoods support is needed for young women and men in Nairobi. The new UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) frameworks for urban livelihoods and education<sup>2</sup> has the potential to help realize that goal.

## Key Recommendations

The Nairobi urban refugee context calls for a comprehensive, long-term approach to livelihoods support for young women and men that focuses on access to education, training and startup capital, as well as protection from violence and police abuse. Even with a new UNHCR urban strategy and education strategies, the problem of the small scale of interventions vs. the large scale of need will likely persist.

### Donors should:

- build partner capacity in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating interventions; institutionalizing best practices and scaling up.

### UNHCR should:

- accelerate efforts at educating displaced urban youth about refugee policy, rights and services;
- scale-up efforts to educate the Kenya National Police on refugee law and policy;
- continue capacity support to the Department of Refugee Affairs.

### The Kenyan National Police should:

- take decisive action to control police harassment and extortion of foreigners.

### Service providers should:

- create targets for inclusion of young displaced women and men in urban programming, engaging their participation in program design;

- connect beneficiaries to services specific to their level of poverty. All wealth groups need access to savings and micro-insurance products. Youth at the bottom levels should receive material support in order to prevent loss of business startup capital. At higher levels of income and after training, young people should gain access to microcredit products. NGOs can partner with private firms to develop micro-franchising programs. Young women and men should be empowered to make their own local market assessments.
- provide youth with more access to safe spaces to socialize with peers, develop relationships with mentors, especially for girls and for groups whose social capital is less developed.

Programming for less-resilient youth should not rely on simple demand for services, but on active outreach. Many out-of-school youth will need “catch-up” and non-formal education programming, to include functional skills, such as computer use, numeracy and English.

For a full list of recommendations, see page 13.

## Purpose of the Mission

With support from the U.S. Department of State, Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) and in collaboration with UNHCR, the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) is conducting a one-year study on safe pathways to economic resilience for displaced, urban young women and men, ages 15 to 24.

Information gathered from desk research, field assessments and in consultation with displaced youth will build evidence to influence policy and practice targeting youths' learning and earning needs.

This report focuses on key findings from a May 2012 field assessment in Nairobi, conducted in partnership with the International Rescue Committee's (IRC's) Kenya country office. The aim of the field assessment was to:

1. identify those factors that increase the economic resilience of urban displaced youth;
2. determine which existing services increase the economic resilience of urban displaced youth.

## Methodology

This study was conducted in the Nairobi neighborhoods of Eastleigh, Kangemi, Kasarani, Kawangware and Waithaka, where the concentrations of refugees are known to be the highest. The team met with 42 individuals in one-on-one interviews, and also conducted eight focus group discussions of six to eight persons each, disaggregated by gender and age. Respondents were identified by community-based organizations and the IRC, one of the largest providers of economic strengthening services to urban refugee youth in Nairobi.

The sample group of youth was aged 15-24, roughly half female and half male. It captured a cross-section of the refugee community, including Somalis, Ethiopian Oromos, Eritreans, Rwandans and Burundians, as well as a few Kenyans. The interview team consisted of three Kenyan female youth, one female Somali-speaking Kenyan and one Somali-born male youth. To capture a spectrum of experiences by economic status, the team endeavored to include roughly equal numbers of in-school/out-of-school youth and entrepreneurs/wage earners/inactive. In order to understand the challenges and opportunities related to programming for this demographic, about half of the respondents were chosen because they had been exposed to NGO economic strengthening programs.

Using a semi-structured interview tool (see Appendix I, page 17), young women and men were asked a series of questions related to their daily activity patterns, the livelihood strategies employed by their households and the opportunities and challenges in their quest to earn a living. When necessary, individual interviews were conducted with a Somali or Oromo translator. All focus group discussions were simultaneously translated into English.



The Eastleigh neighborhood has one of the largest concentrations of refugees in Nairobi.

Interviews were also conducted with representatives of 18 organizations that provide livelihood services for displaced youth or that advocate on their behalf. (See full list, page 16.)

Finally, a methodical review of the recent literature (2005-2012) identified 19 reports relevant to urban displaced youth livelihoods in Kenya. The search started with 27 keywords associated with livelihoods, youth, gender and displacement issues, and focused on well-known databases of NGO or UN agency literature. Key informant interviews yielded several more relevant reports.

## Limitations

In spite of a concerted effort to overcome such bias, due to the transport and opportunity costs of attending the assessment interviews, the sample likely does not adequately include representative numbers of the poorest and most vulnerable refugee youth.

## Profile of the Youth

Most of the young women and men in the sample had been separated from their families for several years,

some had lost contact with their relatives and some had lost family members to conflict. Of the out-of-school youth of school age, many said they had stopped attending school upon leaving their homeland. Some had learned Swahili since arriving, and a few spoke some English, but most were hampered in their goals and access to services by the language barrier.

For the most part, the youth in the sample were not actively seeking services and were largely ignorant of any services that might be available to them. With the exception of one dance troupe of Rwandans in Kawangware, respondents were not aware of any youth groups or youth-led initiatives outside of informal football (soccer) games and normal socializing. They showed little knowledge of their rights as refugees or of the law in Kenya as it pertained to them.

### Registration Status

Of the female refugees individually interviewed, about 75 percent were registered with UNHCR, about 20 percent were unregistered and 4 percent were seeking asylum. The males in the sample were more likely than the females to be asylum seekers (20 percent). Registration of refugees was higher among the Rwandan and Congolese than among the Somalis, Ethiopians and Eritreans.

### Their Journeys

Young people from Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea told stories of having to flee suddenly and of encountering various security forces and bandits en route to Kenya. Most spent time in Kenya's refugee camps before making their way to Nairobi. Youth from DRC came following the conflict in their country in the wake of the 2008 elections. Most Rwandans interviewed fled the hostilities related to Hutu-Tutsi rivalries, whether in Rwanda during the genocide or, more recently, in DRC. They told stories of being separated from families due to attacks by militia and police, facing torture, rape and the killing of relatives.

*In Congo my [Rwandan] mother was married to a Congolese, but she is Tutsi. So we were discriminated against and attacked, and my aunt and older brother were killed. We ran away to another village. I was raped by three soldiers and forced to live with them. I was tortured and they broke my leg when I resisted. My brother and I ran to a church. I was pregnant and I had a miscarriage when we fled to Rwanda. I was helped by a relative to travel to Nairobi.*

Rwandan-Congolese female, age 21,  
Eastleigh neighborhood<sup>3</sup>

*I had two children in Mogadishu. My husband fled because the militia attacked him. My mother-in-law blamed me for his departure and snatched my children from me. The same militia captured me and threatened to do the same as they had done to my husband. So I had to flee to Nairobi and we were robbed on the way here. The men we were traveling with were beaten.*

Female Somali refugee, age 19,  
Eastleigh neighborhood<sup>4</sup>

The degree of trauma among many of these refugees was high, and was likely exacerbated by the insecurity and poverty they experience in Nairobi.

### Education

According to Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK), one of the major obstacles faced by the youth is access to education, especially beyond secondary level. The sample was chosen to include approximately equal numbers of in-school and out-of-school youth. Among those of school-going age, most who were not attending school cited the lack of money for school fees as their main challenge. At the secondary level, public schools increased their annual fees by up to 20 percent in 2011, increasing the burden borne by parents to 60,000 Kenyan shillings (\$710) on average, which many respondents said they could not afford, even with



government subsidies.<sup>5</sup> Many females identified pregnancy and childcare responsibilities as additional barriers to attending school. Among Somalis and Ethiopians, especially, girls confront cultural barriers to going to school. Without tertiary education, the young people said they were unlikely to find sustainable decent work.

On the positive side, the in-school respondents generally said they liked the school environment and felt safe, and few complained of discrimination in school, perhaps in part because many of their schoolmates are of the same ethnic group.

### Livelihood Activities

Nearly half of the sample group reported no specific source of livelihoods. Many of these young people likely survive partly on remittances from abroad. A few respondents admitted receiving cash from relatives in Canada, Europe and the United States. Others may have been reluctant to do so.

Of those that do earn a living, the main occupations fe-



A research team member interviews a young woman refugee from Somalia.

male interviewees reported were casual and temporary work, including domestic work, helping out in shops and in hair salons. Male interviewees earn their living largely from casual, temporary labor, delivering milk, water or packages, and helping in street stalls and shops. The school-going youth were mostly supported by relatives involved in trade or casual jobs. Only a few reported that they or their relatives were engaged in regular work.

Several respondents reported having received one-off food assistance and money from local relatives, friends and well-wishers. Three respondents said they had received emergency support from NGOs such as the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and Mapendo.<sup>6</sup> One interviewee said she survived by begging on the street.

### Livelihood Constraints

Many of the youth in the sample clearly lack such basic information as what mechanisms they could employ to earn a livelihood and what skills they would need to match labor market demand.

Youth complained that the pay they earn is lower than that earned by Kenyans. They say employers take advantage of their weak position in the labor market, and their (perceived, at least) lack of legal recourse. According to multiple respondents, “They don’t have to pay you if they don’t want to” and “[T]here’s nothing you can do about it.”

The recent UNHCR/DRC survey found that Eastleigh refugees and asylum seekers experience a monthly cash shortfall of 3,000-4,000 shillings (\$35 - \$48), and that the poorest households likely turn to negative coping strategies to survive.<sup>7</sup>

Women’s economic opportunities are often limited to low-earning income sources because of gender bias in the market. They are more likely to be exploited at work or sexually harassed in the streets, which restricts their mobility and ability to build social relationships and earn a living.

*“Kenyan men threaten to rape us. My sisters and I don’t go out past six o’clock.”*

Rwandan woman, age 25,  
Waithaka neighborhood<sup>8</sup>

Displaced youths’ livelihoods are also constrained by policies around work and business permits, as discussed in “Work and Business Permits,” below. None of the youth in the sample held work permits, street vendor permits or business licenses.

## Refugee Youths’ Priorities

Asked about needed services for youth, by far the highest priority of most interviewees was education/training. This is seen as the key to securing a decent job, through which they could “feed my children,” “get a nice house,” “marry with many wives” or help their families.

Somali female and male youth in particular expressed their desire to start businesses. The lack of capital is seen by both the youth and the key informants interviewed as the major obstacle to starting a business.

After education/training, youth said they need help obtaining their official refugee status. Many unregistered youth in group discussions were either exasperated with the process, unmotivated to pursue registration or unaware of how to register.

Asked in focus groups about long-term solutions for their predicament in Nairobi, young people expressed a near universal desire to be resettled to a third country.

*“I can’t stay in Kenya and I can’t go home. I need to be somewhere else, where I can be free.”*

Young Ethiopian woman in group discussion, Eastleigh neighborhood<sup>9</sup>

*“I would go home if my country was safe, but I don’t think this will happen. I would like to go to Europe, or really, anywhere.”*

Young Somali man in group discussion,  
Eastleigh neighborhood<sup>10</sup>

Despite these stated desires, none of the respondents in group discussions said they were actively seeking resettlement.

## Context

Between a third and a half of Kenya’s urban population lives in poverty, and with growing urbanization, the urban poor will represent half of the country’s total poverty by 2020.<sup>11</sup> The country’s GDP growth rate fell from 7 percent in 2007 to 3.5 percent in 2011, which constrains formal sector job growth. At least 44 percent of Nairobi’s population lives below the poverty line, with 68 percent working in the informal sector. The economy has been further impacted by rising inflation, which rose to 15.6 percent in March 2012, weakening consumers’ purchasing power.

In 2010, according to UNHCR, Kenya was home to a diverse population of 513,060 refugees and asylum seekers, 87 percent from Somalia, 7 percent from Ethiopia and the remaining 6 percent predominantly from the Great Lakes countries and South Sudan.<sup>12</sup> That number was probably an underestimate and is surely higher today, given the recent influx. UNHCR estimated in 2012 that the Daadab complex held 465,000 refugees and Kakuma camp an additional 85,000.<sup>13</sup> Data is scarce on the number of refugees and asylum seekers living in urban areas; the official number as of December 2011 was 52,473,<sup>14</sup> but others have estimated it is as high as 200,000.<sup>15</sup>

The majority face precarious living conditions in overcrowded slums, most notably in Eastleigh, a suburb of Nairobi where the majority of Somali refugees reside. Urban refugees report paying higher rents than Kenyans and are reportedly sometimes charged illegal



Refugees in Nairobi typically live in slum areas such as the peri-urban neighborhood of Kawangware, whose population of refugees and asylum-seekers comes mostly from the Great Lakes countries of Rwanda, Burundi and DRC..

fees for health services. Additionally, some schools charge admission fees even though primary education is free and secondary education is subsidized in Kenya. As of 2012, foreigners under 35 years of age are barred from formal employment in Kenya, but are able to participate in the informal economy if they can obtain documentation and cash for license fees and/or bribes. (See “Work and Business Documents,” below.)

## Kenyan Policies toward Refugees

Kenya has a long history of hosting refugees from neighboring countries. Until the 1980s, there were no camps and refugees were able to settle wherever they chose. But by the early 1990s, temporary camps were set up by the border in order to accommodate the significant influx of refugee arrivals from Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. At the time it was thought these camps would be temporary, but returning home has not been possible for

many refugees due to ongoing conflict.<sup>16</sup>

Kenya is signatory to several human rights instruments relevant to refugee protection, including the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention. Since the 1990s, Kenya has enacted several policies for refugee encampment that require refugees to reside in either Dadaab or Kakuma camps, which are located in remote, underdeveloped and insecure areas of the country, where refugees have limited livelihood opportunities.<sup>17</sup> Although these policies do not allow refugees to leave the camps without written permission, there are exceptions allowing some refugees to live in urban areas if they are seeking higher education or medical care or face serious protection risks in the camps. In more recent years refugees have been able to avoid the camps altogether by taking advantage of the bus services and paying bribes at police checkpoints.<sup>18</sup> Refugees come to the city for various reasons, but most report they want greater livelihood opportunities and a sense of security they did not feel in the large camps.<sup>19</sup>

### Education

To exit the informal economy and secure decent work, youth need access to education and training. Completing secondary school in Kenya has been found to decrease the probability of low-skilled, casual self-employment by roughly 50 percent, and to result in a sharp drop in the probability of teen pregnancy.<sup>20</sup> The lack of quality post-primary educational opportunities in the camps has caused many refugees and asylum seekers to move to cities.

Free primary education and subsidized secondary education are extended to displaced persons in Kenya regardless of refugee status, provided they bring the appropriate paperwork and can cover the associated costs. But many cannot; in the small sample inter-

viewed by the Women's Refugee Commission, by far the most frequently cited reason for being out of school was a lack of funds.

In the latest available UNHCR data (2009), some 14,500 refugee children were enrolled in primary school in Nairobi.<sup>21</sup> Only 80 refugee secondary school students were benefiting from UNHCR assistance,<sup>22</sup> though the total number of enrolled refugee secondary students remains unknown. The retention and completion rates of refugee children are not recorded.<sup>23</sup> Some 300 students were participating in non-formal education activities with UNHCR assistance in 2009, and 125 students were enrolled in a scholarship program for tertiary education, though mostly in camps and not in Nairobi.<sup>24</sup> These numbers have probably not changed much since 2009; one UNHCR representative estimated that, aggregating the client lists of all active NGOs in Nairobi, only approximately 350 individuals are getting support for education or training.<sup>25</sup> An unknown number of refugee youth attend informal private schools that are not regulated by the government.

University education is accessible for refugees as long as they can pay the fees and have proper school documentation. University is not accessible to asylum seekers unless they have a Kenyan sponsor. The UNHCR/Windle Trust DAFI program provides a small number of refugees in Nairobi with support to attend universities and other tertiary institutions.

## Security

In the literature on Nairobi and in the delegation's interviews, refugees of all nationalities consistently report being exposed to violent crime, including robbery and gender-based violence.

*"I don't feel safe in market places and in matatus [public transport] because of theft, and I don't like the shopping centers because the shopkeepers try to cheat us."*

Somali female, Kangemi neighborhood, age 20<sup>26</sup>

*"I only feel safe in my house. I am scared for my life due to constant harassment from men in the community."*

Congolese female, age 20,  
Kasarani neighborhood<sup>27</sup>

*"You just stay at home most of the time, and you play soccer, but it is important for your safety that you return before dark."*

Somali adolescent males in group  
discussion, Eastleigh neighborhood<sup>28</sup>

These conditions put major constraints on refugees' ability to earn money in the informal economy, the main avenue available to them.

Numerous published reports and our own interviews also confirm that refugees, especially young men, are regularly subjected to harassment and extortion by the Kenyan police.<sup>29</sup> In spite of UNHCR and the Refugee Consortium of Kenya's efforts to educate the police, lower-ranking officers may be unfamiliar with refugee documents and suspicious of their validity and authenticity.<sup>30</sup> Somali and Ethiopian refugees living in Eastleigh reported being stopped by police on a daily basis and threatened with detention or forced to pay a bribe, regardless of whether they had appropriate documentation.<sup>31</sup>

*"The Kenyan police are the main problem we have here. They always call us Somali guys 'Al-Shabaab' or 'Super Power' [a Somali street gang active in Eastleigh]. But we are not! We came to Kenya to get away from Al-Shabaab."*

Focus group of out-of-school unemployed  
Somali males, age 16-18 years,  
Eastleigh neighborhood<sup>32</sup>

The opportunity for extortion may even be luring officers to refugee neighborhoods.<sup>33</sup> Some refugees make informal arrangements with their neighbors to pool funds in the event of an arrest.<sup>34</sup> Others have taken to paying police a monthly protection payment to avoid



harassment.<sup>35</sup> Bribe payments represent a large portion of refugees' income, impacting their livelihoods.<sup>36</sup>

Many Somali and Ethiopian respondent females complained of threats to their safety related to harmful cultural practices, clan and family stresses.

*"My parents were forcing me to marry a rich old man but I didn't want to marry him. So I escaped Ethiopia by bus and joined other refugees who were coming to Kenya for assistance from the UN. In the refugee camp in Kakuma my parents found me and forced me back to Ethiopia, but I managed to escape again. I still get threats from my mother's family who live in Nairobi. But I now live with my baby and my husband, whom I love."*

Female Ethiopian refugee, age 22,  
Kangemi neighborhood<sup>37</sup>

*"I sometimes see my [deceased] husband's family because they live nearby, and I fear that they will kidnap my children."*

Young woman in a group discussion,  
Eastleigh neighborhood<sup>38</sup>

The various security threats (and cultural restrictions, in the case of Somalis and Ethiopians) combine to severely limit the movement of girls in their communities, which has direct negative implications for their livelihoods.

## Social Networks

Somalis are said to be particularly adept at using social networks to find work or build a client base for their businesses. Due to their appearance and language, immigrants from Great Lakes countries are often more able than Somalis or Ethiopians to blend into Kenyan society, but they are thought to have weaker in-group networks.

Outside of the mosque, only limited informal associa-

### Family Health Options Kenya (FHOK) Eastleigh Youth Center



FHOK, affiliated with the International Planned Parenthood Foundation, runs a bustling youth center in Eastleigh, Nairobi, with pool tables, a gym and a health clinic. The center is run by young people and provides a safe environment to relax, learn life skills, access reproductive health services, vocational training, small business development services and educational theater. Dozens of young women and men can be found socializing here on any given day.

tions or self-help groups exist in the Somali community, and ostensibly even fewer exist among the other nationalities. The youth in the focus groups were not aware of any such groups, though a few better-off young Rwandans in the individual interviews sample were members of a Rwandan cultural organization.

For the most part, youth indicated that they had no one to talk to about their problems, ask for help or borrow money from. Most said they had no safe spaces where they could socialize with peers, develop relationships with mentors, expand social networks or build self-esteem.



## Registration Documents

In 2006, the government of Kenya passed a Refugee Act<sup>39</sup> that sets out the legal and institutional framework for managing refugee affairs. The act was largely welcomed by civil society; however, its implementation has been undermined by lack of institutional capacity and guidelines for implementation.<sup>40</sup> For refugees this means many have different types of documentation and are unclear on which papers they need or how to apply for them. This confusion leads to fear of deportation or being sent to the camps when they come in contact with authorities. Although some parts of Kenyan government believe refugees should be confined to the camps due to security concerns, in practice refugees living in Nairobi are not in danger of forced relocation to the border camps.<sup>41</sup>

Most refugees expressed exasperation with the process of obtaining refugee status.<sup>42</sup> UNHCR supports registration of refugees but has a significant backlog, and cases can take up to three years to be processed. This is a great challenge to staff, who can see as many as 800 refugees in a day. It also has a great impact on refugees who require documentation to secure their economic livelihoods. The lack of documentation among refugees is a major hindrance to accessing credit products, bank accounts and other livelihood-related services. However, the government of Kenya is currently in transition to take over the registration process from UNHCR and has started providing alien IDs to refugees.

## Work and Business Documents

The Immigration Act of 2006 granted Class M work permits to refugees recognized by the Kenyan government before 1990, which would by definition exclude the youth in this study. The Ministry of Immigration stopped issuing the permits in 2004, and issued only small numbers since 2008.<sup>43</sup> In 2012, Kenya shut the door to foreigners seeking permits for jobs that pay less than Sh168,000 (\$2,000) per month or Sh2 mil-

lion (\$24,000) per year, and barred foreigners aged 35 years or younger from obtaining work permits.

Business permits are legally available to registered refugees, but “the system is not even working for Kenyans, and oftentimes bribes have to be paid”<sup>44</sup> to government officials.

## Livelihood Programs for Refugee Youth

A well-coordinated<sup>45</sup> group of NGOs divides the caseload of most-vulnerable refugee cases that present themselves in Nairobi, offering various packages of temporary cash and in-kind assistance, education and training, micro-business startup services and referral to healthcare and psychosocial services. Though not specifically targeted, some youth are included in these programs. The livelihood elements of these programs generally center on support to home-based income-generating activities, usually with a startup grant or low-/no-interest loan. Some NGOs offer support for education and job skills training for displaced youth, though as noted above, this extends to perhaps only 350 individuals citywide.

A smaller number of NGOs (including the International Rescue Committee [IRC], Youth Initiatives Kenya

### Promising practice: Enterprise development with vulnerable youth

#### Youth Initiatives Kenya (YIKE)

Among youth-focused service providers in Nairobi, Youth Initiatives Kenya may have the largest client group, numbering in the thousands, including some displaced youth. YIKE’s innovative approaches to economic empowerment include engaging youth who work as trash pickers to manage and operate proper recycling plants, and establishing public bath houses in informal settlements that also collect and sell waste methane as fuel.

**Promising practice: Private sector partnership****Girls Empowered by Micro-franchising (GEM)**

An innovative new project will eventually engage 2,400 female youth ages 17-19, at least one third of whom will be displaced persons. Micro-franchising refers to the creation of scaled-down versions of existing successful businesses using proven marketing and sales techniques. With supplies and training from major Kenyan firms, and with support from NGOs like YIKE, Family Health Options Kenya (FHOK) and the IRC, young Kenyan and refugee women work in teams to sell food, hair products, solar lighting and other goods.

Funded by the Nike Foundation, GEM includes a robust monitoring and evaluation component to facilitate future scale-up and replication elsewhere.

While the project had only recently started, participants selling KenChic brand chicken sausages on the street in Eastleigh told the Women's Refugee Commission they were proud to finally be making their own money. (See cover photo.)

[YIKE] and the Italian NGO CISP) implement different livelihood programs for better-off poor people in Nairobi, which include small numbers of displaced persons, including some in the youth category. Displaced youth beneficiaries of these programs probably number only in the low hundreds of individuals, though IRC in particular has plans to scale up its micro-franchising program in the near term.

## Programming Gaps

In general, few NGOs in Nairobi have coherent livelihood programs for displaced people. While most of the NGO service providers the WRC spoke to are working with some individuals in the 15-24 age range, most young people are only able to get livelihoods support if they belong to a particular vulnerable category.

Among existing programs, the problem is chiefly one of scale. Most NGOs have a client list numbering only in the hundreds, and some only reach a few dozen clients per year.

Several of the service providers working with the most vulnerable complained of a high failure rate of the business, where basic needs (rent, food, healthcare) emergencies prevent investment in the business.

*We sometimes tend to assist [vulnerable refugees] with self-reliance approaches [entrepreneurship training, trade skills] even when their basic needs are not yet met. Consequently we have too many people failing in their new businesses because they couldn't even pay the rent or buy food.*

NGO program manager, Nairobi <sup>46</sup>

Two of the service provider organizations interviewed complained that they see "not enough demand for skills training from women," which is likely due to a combination of lack of awareness of the programs, social isolation and competing demands on their time from childcare and other household obligations. Few service providers (YIKE, GIZ) use sports to provide a platform for arousing youth interest in programs, in spite of sports being the main leisure activity, at least among male youth.

**Promising practice: Serving clients with children****Jesuit Refugee Service**

In working to build the self-reliance of vulnerable displaced people in Nairobi, NGOs confront the fact that most clients have young children. This constrains their ability to attend skills training or to work outside the home. In response, JRS helps clients find qualified skills training institutes in the areas in which they live, to cut down on the time and cost of transport. Many of the business JRS supports are home-based, which allows parents to care for their children while they work.

GIZ, Refugee Consortium of Kenya and other NGOs conduct periodic sensitizations about available services, but of the 100-plus young women and men the WRC spoke to, only a small handful had ever heard of any livelihood services for refugees, citing only the programs of IRC and Mapendo (now known as Refugee-Point). Sensitizations have not typically been targeted at youth, and are mostly attended by older people.

## Access to Financial Services

Those with UNHCR and Department of Refugee Affairs documentation are legally permitted to open bank accounts and access credit, though in practice banks often ask that foreigners have a Kenyan co-signer for fear of default.<sup>47</sup> UNHCR and a few NGOs have been working with banks to negotiate refugees' access to savings, credit and remittances services. Having access to an alien ID card through the new government-owned registration process should help displaced

### Promising practice: Training and network fostering

#### Il Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP)

Where other NGOs offer micro-business training of a few days or weeks, the NGO CISP specializes in business development services that engage beneficiaries over a year or more, monitoring grantees in groups and focusing on “mindset change” to get people thinking more entrepreneurially. CISP has established drop-in business information centers to address the lack of knowledge among micro-entrepreneurs. Engaging mixed groups of Kenyans and refugees, CISP also facilitates the creation of clusters of businesses for the purpose of networking, each of which holds a conference at the end of the year with banks and public officials. CISP hopes these events and linkages will improve governance and foster local economic development.

people access financial services, but this remains to be seen.

In the meantime, displaced persons' access to capital comes through business grants and low- or no-interest loans administered by NGOs, usually to members of a vulnerable category, such as gender-based violence survivors or sex workers. The numbers of people receiving these grants and loans is small, perhaps in the low hundreds citywide. The selection criteria for awarding business grants are based on need and not grantee capacity to successfully manage a business. As a result, according to the service providers themselves, grantees may end up using funds towards emergency costs such as food or medicine, leading to a high rate of failure.

## Recommendations

The Nairobi urban refugee context calls for a more comprehensive and longer-term approach to livelihoods support for young women and men that focuses on access to education, training and startup capital, as well as protection from violence and police abuse. A new UNHCR urban strategy for Kenya, and the UNHCR Education Strategy 2012-2016 may go some distance to achieving these goals, though at the time of this writing these frameworks were new and had not been funded or implemented. In any case, the problem of the small scale of interventions vs. the large scale of need will likely persist.

### Donors

1. Provide clear guidance and funding support for refugee/vulnerable host community urban programming, including that targeting female and male youth, to demonstrate commitment to the host government for refugees' freedom of movement and rights to work and residence in urban areas.<sup>48</sup>
2. Build partner capacity in designing, implementing,

## Promising practice: Domestic workers

### Center for Domestic Training and Development (CDTD)



Among displaced girls who work outside their homes, perhaps the most common form of employment in Nairobi is domestic work in the homes of others. These young women complain their labor rights are often violated, and many are subject to abuse. Under contract with UNHCR, CDTD is currently training about 250 young people in cooking, computer classes and life skills and educates them on their rights. Recognizing that their target group is often “invisible” in the homes of their employers, CDTD conducts its outreach door-to-door, negotiating with employers to allow young women out of the house. Like most agencies providing services to refugees in Nairobi, CDTD has outgrown its modest facility and cannot meet the vigorous demand for its services.

monitoring and evaluating interventions; institutionalizing the use of best practices and models that are proven to work; and scaling up to reach more beneficiaries.<sup>49</sup>

3. Insist that the contracting process for training and business development services providers be open to the widest possible pool of firms, taking advantage of the high capacity of the Kenyan private sec-

tor. The firms should be rewarded based on their ability to:

- identify viable fields for training
- connect clients to sustainable employment or self-employment.

This is to avoid the tendency for NGOs and agencies to contract with a single, often non-profit training provider and to measure results in terms of numbers of persons trained rather than employment/self-employment outcomes for trainees.

## UNHCR

1. Accelerate efforts to educate displaced urban youth about refugee policy, their rights and available services, with evaluation indicators based on surveys of beneficiary knowledge.
2. Continue to support efforts to educate the Kenya National Police ranks on refugee law and policy.
3. Continue to support the Department of Refugee Affairs to improve quality of services, and train other government agencies on refugee and asylum-seekers' rights.

## Service Providers

### *Livelihoods*

1. Focus on diversifying household income sources so that youth can prepare for setbacks and risks. This requires facilitating access to more than one income-generating activity per household, and ideally to microinsurance products.
2. Create targets for inclusion of young displaced women and men in urban programming. In addition to targeting based on vulnerability, ensure access to programs for youth as youth, and that engage youth participation in program design.



*“With all the challenges they face in getting a proper job, if young refugees are going to be successful they will have to work in the informal market. The way to entering the informal market is through capital, so the more we can do to help them access capital, the better.”*

Christine Mwaniki, Country Director, Jesuit Refugee Service Kenya

- Consider the use of sports programming as an entrée into programs targeting young women and men.
3. In the effort to meet the unique needs of refugee young women, do not leave out young men.
  4. Program around the widely applied CGAP Graduation Model,<sup>50</sup> where beneficiaries are connected to services specific to their level of poverty.
    - Youth at the bottom levels should receive material support, including food parcels, cash vouchers and/or rent assistance, in order to prevent loss of business startup capital. They will also need longer-term investments in financial literacy in preparation for subsequent interventions when they have more stable levels and sources of income. When youth cannot meet their basic needs, they should not be provided with loans.
    - All wealth groups need access to savings and micro-insurance products, which help to manage risk and reduce reliance on harmful coping strategies. Youth savings products should allow for the timing and size of deposits and withdrawals to be flexible, as their income is irregular and they may have emergency consumption needs. Note that a savings product that requires regular payments may push youth, particularly girls, into harmful relationships or activities.<sup>51</sup>
    - At higher levels of income and after training,
- young people should gain access to micro-credit products. Ensure that any microfinance programming is conducted by qualified institutions and that microfinance and humanitarian assistance be separated. Liaise with banks to ensure youth have access to accounts and credit.
5. In the provision of micro-grants or loans, link with experienced microfinance institutions (MFIs).
    - Loans should be coupled with business management training.
    - Young women and men should be empowered to make their own local market assessments. One available tool is the Women’s Refugee Commission’s Market Assessment Toolkit for Training Providers and Youth.<sup>52</sup>
    - Note that an increase in loans to young women may saturate traditional female services and products. Women should therefore be encouraged into safe niche or emerging markets.
  6. Provide youth with more access to safe spaces to socialize with peers, develop relationships with mentors and role models in their community, learn life skills and build self-esteem.
  7. Build components into all programs to strengthen social networks, especially for girls and for groups whose social capital is less developed.
  8. Always link displaced youth with Kenyan youth as a means to encourage social cohesion and avoid resentment due to targeting of displaced people.
  9. In programming for less resilient youth, do not rely on simple demand for services, but instead conduct active outreach to identify vulnerable youth. Engaging community members to go door-to-door may identify more “invisible” peers, including unregistered refugee female and male youth and especially domestic workers.



### NairoBits

NairoBits is a partnership of Kenyan web design firms and NGOs that offers practical training in multimedia, entrepreneurship, reproductive health and life skills to disadvantaged youth, including some displaced youth. The information and communications technology (ICT) curriculum is updated by active ICT firms to reflect trends in the employment market. The NairoBits model has been replicated in several other African cities.

10. Design programs around the reality that many, if not most, refugee youth have their own children to take care of, which limits their availability during certain hours of the day. Solutions can include subsidized daycare options for working women, organizing neighborhood crèches or home-based work.

### Education and Training

1. Provide or link out-of-school youth with “catch-up” and non-formal education programming. In particular, work with girls to design incentive projects to help encourage them to enroll and stay in school or nonformal education programs.
2. Scale up access to scholarship programs to attend school, not only to cover the direct costs of school enrollment, but to subsidize loss of income resulting from stopping work.
3. Develop flexible student loan products for youth wishing to continue post-secondary education.
4. After vetting for quality of instruction, support refugee young women and men to attend skills training institutes in their local areas, as JRS does. These firms may need sensitization on refugee rights and Kenyan refugee law.
5. Training should include functional skills, such as computer use, numeracy, English and other skills applicable in various settings in the event of return

or resettlement.

6. Link with private sector firms to provide business development services (BDS) and/or engaging university graduates in business or economics to provide advisory services.
7. Partner with large private firms to develop micro-franchising programs for youth, building on the lessons from the GEM program. (See box, Promising practice: Private sector partnership p.11.)

### Kenyan Police

1. Educate the officer ranks on refugee law and policy.
2. Take decisive action to control the widespread phenomenon of police harassment and extortion of foreigners.

## Organizations Interviewed

Centre for Domestic Training and Development (CDTD)

Il Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP)

Danish Refugee Council (DRC)

Family Health Options Kenya (FHOK)

Faraja Foundation

Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

Heshima Kenya

Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI)

International Rescue Committee (IRC) Kenya

International Rescue Committee (IRC) Somalia

Jesuit Relief Services (JRS)

Mama Fatuma Children's Home

Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK)

RefugePoint (formerly Mapendo)

Technoserve Kenya

Tushirikiane Kenya (Tusa)

UNHCR

Youth Initiatives Kenya (YIKE)

## Appendix I: Interview Questionnaire

### Youth Urban Livelihoods Assessment Nairobi, Kenya, May 2012

#### Individual Interview

Location/Neighbourhood: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex (circle as appropriate): female / male

Status (circle as appropriate): registered refugee / asylum seeker / unregistered

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Context/Observations:

---

#### Background

1. Age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you lived in Nairobi? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Please tell the story of how you/your family came to Nairobi  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Married? Yes / no
3. Do you live with your family (parents or a relative)? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. How many people live in your home? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What kind of assistance do you receive from others (remittances, food aid, etc.)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How many meals do you usually eat in a day? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Education

6. Do you attend school? Yes / no
  - a. (If yes: )What do you like about school? What don't you like about school?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - Do you feel safe in school? Why/why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - What is your level of education? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. What are the challenges with attending school (costs, discrimination, etc.)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - Do you work or are you currently seeking work? Circle: Working / seeking work
  - a. What kind of work do you do (are you looking for)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. How did you find this work (or how are you searching for work)?  
\_\_\_\_\_

c. What are the risks with this type of work? How do you protect yourself?

\_\_\_\_\_

How much do you earn? \_\_\_\_\_

d. Do you keep the money, or give it to someone else? Do you have a safe place to keep your money? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Have you ever participated in any form of education other than formal school? (vocational training, business skills, financial education, other)? \_\_\_\_\_

a. If no, why not? (costs to participation, barriers to participation, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

b. If yes, did this result in paid work (self-employment or wage employment)?  
Circle: yes / no

c. What classes or services could help making money easier? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What kind of community or program activities do you participate in?

\_\_\_\_\_

a. Do these activities that include Kenyans? Yes / no

b. If you don't participate in any community programs, why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Safety

9. Are there places in the community where you don't feel safe? Where and why?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Where are the places where you **do** feel safe?

\_\_\_\_\_

11. Do you have:

a. A safe place to meet friends at least once a week? Yes / no

b. Someone who you feel safe to turn to if you have a problem? Yes / no

c. Someone you can safely borrow money from? Yes / no

d. A safe place to stay at night? Yes / no

12. What are your goals for the future?

\_\_\_\_\_

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, *Refugee Education in Urban Settings: Case Studies from Nairobi – Kampala – Amman – Damascus* (Geneva, 2009), p.14. <http://www.unhcr.org/4b278e4f9.html>.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council, *Promoting Livelihoods to Build the Self-Reliance of Urban Refugees in Nairobi* (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Interview by Leila Ahmed in Kangemi, Nairobi, May 21, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Interview by Christabel Nafuna in Eastleigh, Nairobi, May 18, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Mugambi Mutegi, "Kenya: Secondary Schools Raise Fees Ahead of First Term," *Business Daily* (Nairobi) (December 30, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Recently renamed Refuge Point.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council.

<sup>8</sup> Interviewed by Maureen Mutua, May 15, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Interviewed by Josh Chaffin in Eastleigh, Nairobi, May 18, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Paragraph draws from UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council, *Promoting Livelihoods to Build the Self-Reliance of Urban Refugees in Nairobi* (2012), p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR, *Refugee Education in Urban Settings: Case Studies from Nairobi – Kampala – Amman – Damascus* (Geneva, 2009), p.14. <http://www.unhcr.org/4b278e4f9.html>.

<sup>16</sup> 2012 UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Kenya, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e483a16>.

<sup>17</sup> UNCHR, *Navigating Nairobi: A review of the implementation of UNCHR's urban refugee policy in Kenya's capital city* (2011). <http://wrc.ms/SnsnnS>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Owen Ozier, *The Impact of Secondary Schooling in Kenya: A Regression Discontinuity Analysis* (Department of Economics, University of California at Berkeley, 2011), p. 4. [http://economics.ozier.com/owen/papers/ozier\\_JMP\\_20101117.pdf](http://economics.ozier.com/owen/papers/ozier_JMP_20101117.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> UNHCR (2009), p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Interview by Josh Chaffin May 22, 2012

<sup>26</sup> Interviewed by Mohamed Abdullahi, Kangemi, Nairobi, May 21, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Interviewed by Christabel Nafuna in Kasarani, Nairobi, May 22, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Interviewed by Josh Chaffin in Eastleigh, Nairobi, May 18, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Sara Pavanello et al., *Hidden and Exposed: Urban Refugees in Nairobi, Kenya* (HPG, IRC, RCK, ODI, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Interviewed by Josh Chaffin in Eastleigh, Nairobi, May 18, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Interviewed by Mohamed Abdullahi, Kangemi, Nairobi, May 21, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Interviewed by Josh Chaffin in Eastleigh, Nairobi, May 18, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> The Refugee Act 2006, <http://wrc.ms/RDhKQs>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> UNCHR, *Navigating Nairobi*.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Anderson, "The cost of living: an analysis of the time and money spent by refugees accessing services in Nairobi," *New Issues In Refugee Research, Research Paper No. 230* (2012), p. 11. <http://www.unhcr.org/4f070ace9.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Sara Pavanello et al.

<sup>44</sup> Conversation with Dennis Likule and Omolo Joseph Agutu of the Refugee Council of Kenya, May 25, 2012.

<sup>45</sup> When asked, several NGO representatives said separately that NGO coordination of most vulnerable refugee cases in Nairobi is working well.

<sup>46</sup> Interviewed by Josh Chaffin, May 15, 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Technoserve Kenya. *Girls Assessment Final Report: Eastleigh & Huruma* (2011).

<sup>48</sup> Sara Pavanello et al.

<sup>49</sup> UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council.

<sup>50</sup> CGAP Graduation Model, [http://www.cgap.org/gm/document-1.9.38771/Graduation Model Chart Native file-revised%5B1%5D.pdf](http://www.cgap.org/gm/document-1.9.38771/Graduation%20Model%20Chart%20Native%20file-revised%5B1%5D.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> USAID, *Youth Savings Accounts: A Financial Service Perspective: a literature and program review*, microReport #163 (May 2009), p. 5. <http://wrc.ms/O5kkaV>.

<sup>52</sup> Women's Refugee Commission, *Market Assessment Toolkit for Training Providers and Youth*, 2009, <http://wrc.ms/Rlit8O>.





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