



Economic Empowerment of Urban Refugee Youth

Guiding Principles



**WOMEN'S
REFUGEE
COMMISSION**

Research. Rethink. Resolve.

Since 1989, the Women's Refugee Commission has advocated for policies and programs to improve the lives of refugee and displaced women, children and young people, including those seeking asylum—bringing about lasting, measurable change.

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Cover photo © Josh Chaffin

Under contract with UNHCR, Center for Domestic Training and Development (CDTD) in Nairobi 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.

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

CBO	Community-based organization
GBV	Gender-based violence
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LCPS	Low-cost private schools
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission
YIKE	Youth Initiatives Kenya

Executive Summary

In many countries in the Global South, against a backdrop of chronic unaddressed urban poverty, rapid urbanization is giving rise to normalized daily violence and low-level armed conflict in densely populated slums. A sizeable minority of the people coping with these conditions are refugees aged 15-25. The urban context presents unique barriers to the economic success of displaced young women and men, but also some significant advantages. Enormous untapped potential exists for the empowerment of refugee youth in urban areas.

The 2009 urban refugee policy¹ of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) advocates for the right of refugees to live in cities, but governments still restrict refugees' right to work and require them to live in camps. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) often implement programs more appropriate to camps.²

Key Findings

In Cairo, Panama City and Nairobi, where the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) conducted field research, refugee and displaced young women and men suffer from limited freedom of movement due to the threats of petty crime and violence, armed gangs and police harassment. For female youth, especially, the threat of gender-based violence (GBV) looms large in public spaces. Thousands of female refugee youth are employed as domestic workers, where they say their rights are trampled.

These forces limit young people's ability to socialize, earn a living and access services. Most refugee youth are at a major educational disadvantage in their host country and many never manage to return to school, as they face various barriers. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is largely out of reach. Beyond technical skills, refugee youth are said to lack important work readiness skills.

Social networks are seen by young women and men as the key to accessing economic opportunities, but refugee networks are often weak. Since self-employment in

What Is a Livelihood?

A "livelihood" refers to the capabilities, assets and strategies that people use to make a living.

the informal sector is the main available livelihood option, lack of capital is seen by would-be microentrepreneurs as the major constraint. Young women and men interviewed seemed to have little contact with banks or informal savings or lending. Managers of education and training programs for refugee youth say they cannot hope to meet the scale of the need for their services. Only a tiny subset of the youth interviewed in Cairo, Panama City and Nairobi were accessing any programs besides government education. Organized youth-led or youth-serving organizations are scarce.

Key Recommendations

See page 10 for expanded recommendations.

1. Governments and agencies should work to create an enabling environment for refugee youth and their host country peers by:

- working with national actors to build their capacity to deliver integrated urban youth livelihood services;
- mainstreaming marginalized youth participation in program design, monitoring and evaluation;
- building bridges between displaced youth and their host country peers and adults;
- maximizing female youth program uptake;
- offering multi-sectoral interventions (health, education, livelihood); and
- blurring the line between educational programs and economic strengthening.

2. For out-of-school youth, nonformal basic education offerings should be scheduled around their busy schedules and other constraints including the need for childcare. For in-school youth,

agencies should promote access to secondary and tertiary school on an equal basis with host country nationals.

3. **Vocational training must lead to improved income and should be based on an assessment of local demand for goods and services.** Training should focus on transferrable skills such as customer service, computer literacy and UN languages, which will be in demand regardless of where refugees ultimately settle.
4. **In building financial capital, programs should facilitate access to flexible savings and loan products that are youth friendly.**
5. **Programs should help develop peer-to-peer networks and group activities, which are natural platforms upon which to deliver services.**
6. **Agencies should work to build or promote the expansion of youth-led and youth-serving community groups.**

Background

In 2010, 3.5 billion people lived in urban areas.³ In addition to the periodic natural and man-made disasters



Refugees in Nairobi typically live in slum areas such as the peri-urban neighborhood of Kawangware.

that cities are vulnerable to, according to the findings of a global experts meeting in 2012,⁴ the urban environment is giving rise to new and specifically urban types of emergency:

- low-level armed conflict between state and non-state armed groups in densely populated slums; and
- a chronic urban emergency, where certain socio-economic groups continually display levels of ill health or malnutrition, but “which is rendered invisible by a lack of data or a lack of disaggregated data.”⁵

A sizeable minority of the people coping with these conditions are refugees* aged 15-25. To take three examples, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR’s) 2009 annual statistics (the latest available), 107,913 persons of concern resided in Cairo, 49 percent of whom were under 18 years of age and 17 percent between the ages of 12 and 17; Nairobi was host to 46,316 persons of concern, of whom 32 percent were under 18; and Panama City counted 16,851 refugees, with 40 percent under the age of 18.⁶ All three of these cities have rapidly growing urban refugee populations, and these numbers may actually be substantially higher.

Young women and men** come to cities seeking refuge, passage to other destinations or new opportunities. Like internal migrants, they seek out urban areas for access to better education and economic opportunities. Some seek the anonymity of large urban centers to escape the insecurity of refugee camps, while others look for other forms of humanitarian assistance, such as third-country resettlement.

Funding for emergency programs explicitly targeting

* In this report, the term “refugee” is used to refer to all individuals who have crossed an international border and come from a country that has produced or is producing a significant number of refugees and asylum-seekers, irrespective of their legal status.

** This paper defines the youth category as 15-24 years, though definitions of youth vary by culture.

young women and men—especially those who are not in school—remains scarce. An overview of World Bank lending to conflict-affected countries in 2005 found that less than 8 percent of lending was directed specifically to secondary education projects, compared to 43 percent for primary and 12 percent for tertiary education.⁷

The problem is compounded in crisis and post-crisis contexts, and further compounded in refugee settings, where only 36 percent of refugees participate in secondary school (2009) as compared to the 67 percent global participation rate (2008).⁸ However, UNHCR resources allocated to secondary education in particular have increased from 7 percent of the budget to 14 percent, from US\$8.8 million in 2010 to US\$21.1 million in 2012. This recent change may indicate a global policy change, but data over more years will be necessary to observe a trend.⁹

When they can access education programs, youth are typically grouped either with younger children or with older adults, where they may not belong. Where effort is made to provide age-appropriate programs, they may not be gender sensitive, missing opportunities to maximize inclusion of both female and male youth.¹⁰

Some 47 percent of the global unemployed are youth, and in many countries, young women are more likely to be unemployed than young men.¹¹ Refugee youth often have a harder time integrating into the labor market for social and psychosocial reasons. The relationship between the marginalization of disadvantaged youth from relevant education, training and livelihood opportunities, and the potential for cycles of instability and conflict has long been acknowledged.¹²

The demographic “youth bulge” is often interpreted solely as a threat to stability and security, without recognizing the enormous positive potential.¹³ Large numbers of unemployed and disenfranchised youth can be a security risk, but when education, healthcare and employment are available, young people can be a tremendous asset for all societies—able to renew and revitalize a country’s economy and institutions. In fact, in many cases the youth may be the greatest asset a

country has. Recent decades saw South Korea and other Pacific Rim economies grow rapidly by harnessing the power of a physically strong and more easily trained youth-bulge workforce.

Purpose

In the course of conducting a multi-country study of urban refugee livelihoods from October 2011 to September 2012, the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) identified a major gap in knowledge of and programming for refugee youth living in cities. The literature on urban refugee youth livelihoods was weak and fragmented, and while some programs were known to exist for some categories of this varied population, few rigorous impact evaluations were found.

In embarking on the study, the WRC sought to assess the situation of refugee youth livelihoods in multiple urban areas, and to learn how humanitarian actors and governments could more effectively help young women and young men to:

- create pathways to secure employment
- find opportunities for learning and earning
- build social capital
- stay in or return to school

The study was particularly interested in finding ways to address the unique needs of young women, marginalized groups and out-of-school youth.

Methodology

This report details findings and guidance from a qualitative, applied research initiative undertaken by the WRC that builds the knowledge base on urban youth refugees and identifies potential economic strategies and approaches to assist them in achieving self-reliance. Findings are drawn from three main sources:



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

1. Three field assessments of urban refugee populations in Nairobi, Kenya; Cairo, Egypt; and Panama City, Panama, conducted in 2012. Assessments included in-depth household interviews; focus group discussions disaggregated by age, gender and ethnicity; semi-structured interviews with local businesses, service providers and government officials; and project site visits. Two hundred and thirty seven refugee youth were consulted; 125 females and 112 males.

2. Secondary research on urban displacement that focused on the realities faced by urban refugees in the pursuit of livelihoods, as well as lessons from urban poverty alleviation programs. Sources included UNHCR and humanitarian agencies' reports and existing guidelines, academic journals, country case studies, project evaluations and independent reviews of urban poverty alleviation programs in developing country contexts. A global focus was adopted in order to extrapolate recommendations applicable across diverse settings.

3. Semi-structured interviews with humanitarian and development practitioners on lessons learned from livelihoods work with urban communities.

Limitations

In the interviews and group discussions with refugee young women and young men, despite our efforts, the competing demands on their time and constraints on their movement undoubtedly led us to under-sample some of the most marginalized sub-categories of youth, such as female domestic workers, those who live/work on the street and those with disabilities.

With little specific research on urban displaced youth livelihoods to draw from, the secondary source literature was taken from related issue areas (youth livelihoods in development contexts, rural displaced livelihoods, education in emergencies, child protection, etc.). Given the lack of rigorous evaluations of humanitarian programs for these populations, the document set consists of mostly “gray literature,” such as situation analyses, policy briefs, discussion papers, conference reports and program guidance documents. The literature review included only documents written in English.

Findings

The urban context presents unique barriers to the economic success of displaced young women and men, but also some significant advantages. Enormous untapped potential exists for the empowerment of refugee youth in urban areas.

Living in often precarious economic conditions, many refugee youth are trying to find ways to contribute to the household economy. This is especially true in an urban setting, where the poor usually depend on multiple simultaneous livelihood activities. Many are working, but the available opportunities do not provide sufficient income or safety. The urban environment finds a preponderance of “invisible” refugee girls in domestic work, where, they say, they are subject to exploitation and abuse. These girls are particularly hard to identify, reach and protect.



Refugee young women and men say that they cannot afford the time to attend formal school or attend nongovernmental organizations' (NGO) programs. The lucky ones manage to balance their earning and learning, but for most, their need to earn a living impedes access to formal and nonformal education.

What follows are generalized findings from across contexts. For specific findings and recommendations from the three cities visited, see the individual trip reports:

- *Young and Restless: Harnessing the Economic Resilience of Displaced Youth in Nairobi*¹⁴
- *Arrested Development: Colombian Youth in Panama City*¹⁵
- *Shifting Sands: Risk and Resilience among Refugee Youth in Cairo*¹⁶

Policy Environment

In 2009, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued a revised urban refugee policy¹⁷ that advocates for the right of refugees to live wherever they want, including in cities. Change in programming, however, has not kept pace with the change in policy. Governments still restrict refugees' right to work, some still enforce an encampment policy and service providers working with refugees in urban areas often implement programs more appropriate to camps.¹⁸

Many of the urban refugees interviewed for this project do not enjoy the right to work legally in the host country, and even where the law allows, the laws are often overzealously enforced by police and government officials. Young women and men were mostly uninformed as to their rights as refugees/asylum seekers and the policies that pertain to them. Police and local security personnel are often suspicious of foreigners and ignorant or dismissive of refugee rights and regulations.

Given the restrictive policies at the national level, municipal bylaws and power dynamics at the neighbor-

hood level become more important from the refugees' perspective. These local rules and conventions constrain foreigners' efforts to earn a living in the informal economy, where most are forced to work.

Security

In many cities, refugee young women and men suffer socially and economically due to limits on their freedom of movement. They usually reside in the least safe neighborhoods, leaving them vulnerable to petty crime and violence. Young males are susceptible to recruitment into armed gangs, whose presence further threatens refugees' ability to safely earn a living on the street, where most are forced to work. For female youth, especially, the threat of gender-based violence (GBV) looms large in public spaces, limiting their ability to socialize, earn a living and access services. The most often mentioned threat by the study population was the police, who may routinely harass and detain foreigners, often in systematic efforts to obtain bribes. Many young people complained they cannot assemble in public, even in small groups, without attracting negative police attention.

Due to these threats, refugee youth said that when they are not working, they stay home and feel isolated from their peers, leading to depression and anxiety. The problem is particularly acute for young women, who are more likely than males to care for household children and live under cultural constraints on their behavior and movement.

Assets

Refugees' ability to safely earn an income is largely determined by the assets they possess. Displacement usually results in the loss of financial capital, natural resources and important social connections. They often flee with few resources and their family and friend networks are disrupted. Young women, especially, and young men may arrive in their new host city with even fewer assets than adult refugees.

Human Capital

Education

Some refugee youth are better educated than their host-country peers, but most are at a major educational disadvantage by the time they enter the labor market in their host country, might only be semi-literate in the new language of the host country and may even be illiterate. In contravention of educational rights for youth, even in non-emergency contexts, youth, and especially female youth, often have more difficulty than children in accessing education.¹⁹

Most refugee youth have experienced a gap in schooling resulting from their flight; facing various constraints in the host country, many never manage to return to school. In interviews, the most commonly cited barriers to attendance included the need to earn money for the family; the cost of tuition and/or uniforms and supplies; discrimination; distance to campus and cost of transport; and for female youth from traditional societies especially, cultural constraints on girls being educated.

However, many of the male Somali and Ethiopian youth interviewed in Nairobi expressed satisfaction with the Kenyan school system, which they see as a safe environment to see their friends and interact with Kenyan peers. But even when they do manage to access education, young women and men complain about the quality of instruction and relevance of the curriculum. Education systems are seen by young people as inadequately preparing them for the available jobs.

While many would benefit from access to “second-chance” or nonformal educational options, governments, learners and their families often see these approaches as somehow less legitimate than formal school, and tend not to favor them.²⁰

Refugees are rarely sure of how long they may find themselves in the host country, and while many of the youth interviewed by WRC hoped for resettlement in the near term, in fact, globally the average displacement time for today’s refugees living in camps is 17

years.²¹ Given this reality, young women and men must have access to educational options that help them achieve self-reliance in whatever context they eventually find themselves.

Training

Systems for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) are largely out of reach for the displaced young men and especially the young women interviewed. Many said they were unaware of training opportunities, while others complained that TVET offerings are out of date and/or too costly. UNHCR partners do offer training services, mostly to refugees who belong to specific vulnerable categories, but the numbers of trainees are very small in comparison to the demand.

The few available skills training programs typically have short time scales, they lack follow-up services to help young people make the transition to work and they tend to measure the number of persons trained rather than the number gaining sustainable jobs or self-employment.²² With a few notable exceptions, training programs are not geared to the particular needs of heterogeneous groups of female and male youth, and they are rarely linked to any assessment of market demand for goods and services.

Apart from technical education, refugee youth may also lack more fundamental skills in work readiness, such as punctuality, patience, politeness and willingness to learn. A recent study of youth programs in 26 developing countries found that young people, their families and employers believe work-readiness training to be the most valuable program component in livelihood and employment programs.²³

Social Capital

Social capital, such as social networks, increases people’s trust and ability to work together. Social networks serve as informal safety nets that draw support from kinship, neighbors and friends, based on reciprocity and solidarity, and include material and emotional sup-

port. These are particularly important given refugees' exclusion from formal safety nets, such as public services and government social assistance programs.

More than any other group, perhaps, young people crave affiliation, as well as useful connections that give them access to human and financial capital.²⁴ In interviews and discussion groups, social networks and "who you know" were seen by young women and men as the key to accessing economic opportunities. Social networks among refugees may not be as strong as those in their countries of origin, or they may be insular and apart from host-country networks, making employment opportunities and social support harder to find. Lacking adequate social networks, protection and support, young men, especially, can be vulnerable to gang recruitment in cities, while female youth may be at risk of sexual exploitation and recruitment into prostitution.

To varying degrees by ethnicity and location, refugee communities do create their own self-help groups, which can often be a lifeline for their more vulnerable members. However, many young women and men say they are distrustful of such groups in their community, or they feel left out by their older, mostly male leaders. In spite of the enormous potential for refugee youth groups, few groups were found in Cairo, Nairobi and Panama City that might allow young people to socialize safely, provide basic assistance and advocate for their own needs.

Financial Capital

In these settings, where self-employment in the informal sector is the main livelihood option, lack of capital is seen by young would-be entrepreneurs as the major constraint to success in life. But for the most part the young women and men interviewed seemed to have little if any contact with banks or even informal savings or lending schemes. Few banks reach out to refugee community members of any age, let alone the youth. In some contexts, the law disallows minors or non-nationals from opening bank accounts. Even where youth-friendly financial services exist, refugee youth are unlikely to be aware of these services.

Existing Programs for Urban Refugee Youth

Managers of NGO education and training programs for refugee youth say they cannot hope to meet the scale of the need for their services. Only a tiny subset of the youth interviewed in Cairo, Panama City and Nairobi was accessing any programs besides government education. Typically the only refugee youth benefiting from livelihood assistance are those who fit into particular vulnerable categories.

Even if the resources for expanded programming were made available, statistical data are rarely disaggregated by subcategories of age that would help policymakers and programmers respond to youth needs.

Though humanitarian agencies may recognize the importance of youth participation in program design, management, monitoring and evaluation, few manage to implement such an approach. Participatory programs are labor intensive for service providers, and adult decision-makers rarely consult or engage youth in a systematic



A refugee youth learns welding, a popular training option for work in the informal economy, at Don Bosco's Vocational Training Center. Photo courtesy of Don Bosco.

and meaningful way.²⁵ While the literature around youth empowerment discusses the potential of participatory programming in the areas of volunteerism, disaster risk reduction, sports and self-help groups,^{26, 27} with the exception of the work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, few examples of these types of programs were found among service providers working in Nairobi, Panama City and Cairo. In the vacuum, young refugees say they are frustrated and socially isolated, and marginalized male youth, especially, are vulnerable to recruitment by street gangs.

Young people interviewed for this study were mostly unaware of their rights and available services. In some cases UNHCR implementing partners have conducted community outreach through meetings, radio and web messaging, and the development of information materials, but these efforts have not typically made an effort to target young women and men, and programmers complain that youth tend not to participate in proportionate numbers.

Opportunities

Even with all the challenges of the urban context, cities can offer displaced youth many advantages over camps or rural contexts. If they can overcome the financial, cultural and political barriers, the urban environment affords young people more access to private sector firms and productive technologies than they would have in a camp or rural setting. Hypothetically, the city also offers more opportunities for continuing education, mentorship, internships and apprenticeships.

While many urban displaced youth are comparatively vulnerable, others are not, and may fare better even than their host country peers. Some refugee youth come from the most privileged classes in their countries of origin, as they would have needed some capital to be able to flee their homelands.²⁸ Through a self-selection process, a sizeable percentage of refugee youth that arrive in the city may be individuals with more initiative and drive than the general populace in their home country or the host country.

Guiding Principles for Building an Enabling Environment for Urban Refugee Youth Livelihoods

- **Creating an enabling environment:** Mainstream refugees as part of a wider pro-poor urban effort focused on understanding the incentives and power dynamics in neighborhoods, where agencies act as the catalyst for local economic development that is inclusive of refugee youth and other groups.²⁹
- **Mainstreaming participation:** Engage young people as resourceful contributors to program design, monitoring and evaluation.³⁰ Participation is not only a basic tenet of a human rights-based approach, but is seen in the literature as essential to ensuring program relevance and sustainability.³¹
- **Building bridges:** Engage mixed groups of host country and displaced youth in activities,³² targeting communities rather than solely refugees.³³ Establishing services for refugees alone has often proven ineffective and tends to lead to inter-group hostilities.³⁴
- **Inter-generational engagement:** Create opportunities for young refugees to build constructive relationships with adults in their communities, as many have been separated from their families.³⁵
- **Gender mainstreaming and gender targeting:** Set ambitious targets for female participation in co-ed programs, but also create programs for female youth specifically.
- **Starting at the margin:** Make special efforts to find and recruit out-of-school youth, youth with disabilities, members of ethnic and religious minorities and adolescent girls for programming. These groups may be less visible in a community due to discrimination and other constraints, but programs have more impact if they make an effort to ensure their inclusion.^{36, 37} Young



people themselves can be engaged to identify and bring in their more marginalized peers for participation in programs.

- **Combining interventions:** Apply multiple simultaneous interventions for youth, offering job skills training in combination with life-skills, health education, numeracy and literacy, platforms for peer interaction, mentorship, entrepreneurship training, savings accounts and/or microloans and start-up kits to facilitate the transition into the labor market.³⁸ Such models have been shown to increase rates of savings and employment for older girls, improve health and psychosocial outcomes³⁹ and reduce exposure to unwanted sex.⁴⁰
- **Increasing beneficiary knowledge of services:** Ensure that marginalized young women and men are aware of services on offer, and do not assume that refugee youth get information through the same channels as other youth. Young people interviewed for this study were mostly ignorant of any programs that might help them. Since most urban refugees have access to a mobile phone, NGOs have found success in using SMS to keep people informed.
- **Blurring the line between education and economic strengthening:** In formal and nonformal education, set targets for employment or self-employment. Reorient education offerings toward facilitating the transition to work, which aligns with the priorities of many young people.⁴¹
- **Building cross-sectoral partnerships:** Provision of services such as post-training internships or apprenticeships; nationally and internationally recognized accreditation; access to land or facilities for businesses; capital and credit; business start-up kits, etc., will necessarily come through partnerships between agencies and with government, ideally with private sector involvement.⁴²
- **Mitigating risk:** Work with women, men, girls and boys to include protection strategies in their livelihoods work. Female youth domestic workers, in particular, are in need of specific protection strategies.

Systems Approach

Work with national actors to build their capacity to deliver integrated urban youth livelihood services, rather than creating parallel systems.

- Before establishing new asset-building programs, agencies should conduct a mapping of existing programs and advocate with them for refugee inclusion.
- As old models that provide cash support and special programs for refugees are neither realistic nor sustainable for the ever-growing urban refugee populations, more emphasis should be placed on working with and through refugee self-help organizations, such as refugee churches and mosques, informal rotating savings and loan groups and mutual assistance associations.

Agencies should build the capacity of one or more refugee community-based organizations (CBOs) to establish “one-stop shops” for referrals to services. The presence of numerous refugee CBOs is unique to cities, and they should be tapped as a source of information, services and informal social protection for their respective communities.

Consider the specific types of GBV that might occur as women and girls earn income or access services, and identify possible protection strategies. WRC has several relevant tools:

- o *Peril or Protection: The Link Between Livelihoods and Gender-based Violence in Displacement Settings*⁴³
- o *Preventing Gender-based Violence, Building Livelihoods*⁴⁴
- o *Integrating Protection/GBV Mitigation Into Livelihood Programs Checklist*⁴⁵

- **Monitoring, evaluating and sharing lessons learned:** To the extent possible, engage young peo-

Graduated Approach

Build livelihood interventions around the CGAP Graduation Model, 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 microinsurance 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.
- At higher levels of income and after training, young people should gain access to microcredit products. Ensure that any microfinance programming is conducted by qualified institutions and that microfinance and humanitarian assistance are separated. Liaise with banks to ensure youth access to accounts and credit.

ple in all stages of M&E processes and feed lessons back to communities. Share results with other actors serving urban refugee youth.

- **Disaggregating data collection:** Policy and programming decisions depend on good quantitative and qualitative data on youth, disaggregated by age and sex and by other variables such as ethnicity and residency status.

Recommendations

Advocacy

Diplomatic efforts should focus on the right to work, the right to education and equal treatment for refugees of all nationalities. Longer-term solutions that involve advocacy with the government must be coupled with short-term solutions on supporting youth and education support and livelihood-specific programming. Advocacy efforts also require new strategies, such as going very local—targeting the ward leader, the police chief, the mayor and the high school principal rather than the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education.

In particular, **agencies should advocate for better regulation of the informal market of domestic workers in the hopes of improving their treatment and standard of living.** In Nairobi, UNHCR partner NGOs have found success in helping strengthen training and certification for domestic workers, standardizing job descriptions and raising employer and employee awareness around rights and responsibilities.

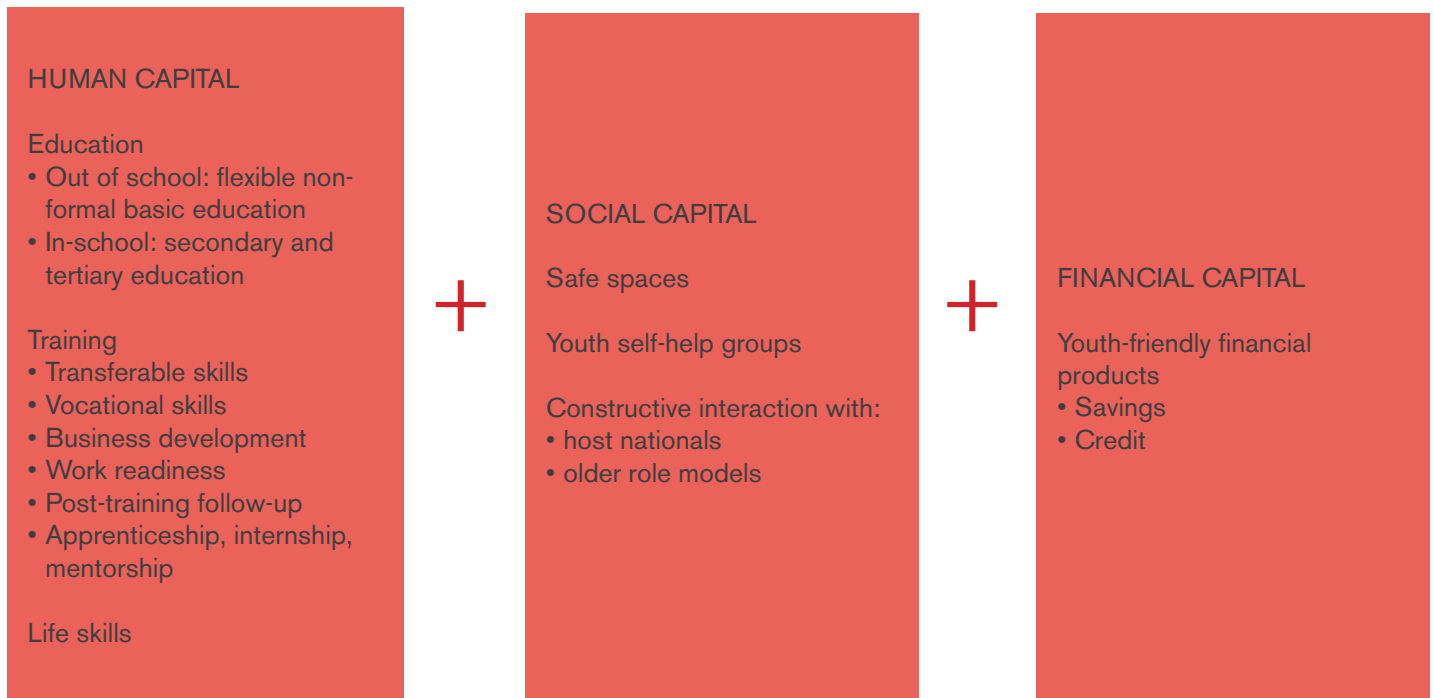
Asset-building: Human Capital

Education

For out-of-school youth, nonformal basic education offerings should be designed in consultation with a diverse group of young women and young men, who can help ensure maximum relevance and inclusion. Programs will need to be flexible and to include some combination of accelerated learning, online and distance learning, and catch-up courses, all scheduled around their busy schedules. To maximize attendance, programs may need to offer onsite after-work classes, evening and weekend programs. Evening classes for young mothers have proven successful, especially where female graduates act as role models to younger peers.⁴⁶

Asset-building

The following model shows the combination of essential assets that governments and agencies should concentrate on building to improve the lot of urban refugee young women and young men.



For in-school youth, agencies should promote access to secondary and tertiary school on an equal basis with host country nationals. In addition to working with government schools, agencies should explore partnerships with low-cost private schools (LCPS), where great numbers of poor young people are opting to study in Nairobi and other large cities. Agencies can assist educational institutions in reorienting toward helping learners make the transition to work, adding work readiness and business components to curricula, and career guidance services.⁴⁷

Skills Training and Business Development

For vocational training to be effective, it must lead to improved income in the short term. Programs

should measure results by their ability to help trainees secure and maintain employment or self-employment, rather than the number of persons trained. In the case of business development, quality for fewer beneficiaries with higher capacity to succeed may be preferable to lower-quality programming for more beneficiaries with less capacity to succeed.

Fields for training should be linked to the national strategy for youth employment, where one exists. They should also be based on an assessment of local demand for goods and services, where the research is conducted with or by young women and men themselves, if possible. WRC and Columbia University have developed a market assessment toolkit for this purpose:

- *Market Assessment Toolkit for Training Providers and Youth*⁴⁸
- *Toolkit User Guide*⁴⁹

Selection of fields for vocational skills training may require counseling of the trainees, as young people tend to choose trades that their friends are pursuing, causing an over-saturation of trainees in a particular trade. Those who have grown up in a refugee camp may tend to choose from the limited number of trades they have been exposed to and may need help in broadening their horizons. Wherever feasible, young women should be empowered to pursue trades that are not traditional for women, as these tend to pay more than traditionally female trades.

The most successful approaches to skills training are those that include post-training follow-up services. To help young people transition to employment, service providers must be able to provide the necessary networks and linkages,^{50, 51} especially to experiential learning opportunities such as business mentorship, internships and apprenticeships. Agencies may need to incentivize employers by paying part of the apprentice's salary until they gain the skills and experience to do a job.

Beyond the vocational component, **skills training should focus on providing transferrable skills**, such as customer service, computer literacy and education in UN languages, which will be in demand regardless of where refugees ultimately settle. Urban and peri-urban agriculture is a livelihood skill transferable to many contexts, and can also be a means of food security.

Nonprofit social service agencies are not necessarily the best choice to teach business and trade skills. **Where feasible, agencies should partner with private firms to conduct training.**⁵² Promoting competition among training providers is a recognized best practice.⁵³ Partnership agreements should be extended to training firms that best demonstrate they can connect young people to sustainable employment or self-employment. Their staff should be trained on the UNHCR urban livelihood guidelines.⁵⁴

Promising Practice: Enterprise Development with Vulnerable Youth

Among youth-focused service providers in Nairobi, Youth Initiatives Kenya (YIKE) 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 even collect methane gas for use as fuel.

As with nonformal education, **training should be tailored to the unique needs of youth with children**, which may mean providing childcare, connecting them with home-based income generating activities or helping them identify training institutes near to where they live.

Micro-franchising has shown great potential to offer employment and non-formal learning opportunities for out-of-school youth. This involves the creation of scaled-down versions of existing successful businesses using their proven marketing and sales techniques. With supplies and training from major firms, and with support from NGOs, young people work in teams to sell food, household products and other goods. Agencies have also empowered mixed groups of host-country and refugee youth by helping them to set up their own cooperative firms, some of which have been highly successful.^{55, 56}

Agencies can also help refugee young women and men to identify niche markets for their unique talents as foreigners, such as translation, traditional handicraft production and production of country-of-origin crops and foods.

Asset Building: Financial Capital

Programs should facilitate access to flexible sav-

ings and loan products that are youth friendly. This may entail supporting the development of informal savings and credit associations, approaching banks and/or partnering with microfinance institutions, engaging youth in the design of financial products. Depending on the context, agencies may also have to engage in policy advocacy to ensure that youth are legally allowed to hold bank accounts and take out loans. Savings accounts may be more appropriate than credit products for many youth, especially at younger ages.⁵⁷

Asset Building: Social Capital

Evaluation research both with children and with adults has shown that adding a social capital component, such as group deliberation, to a livelihoods program can help to build the beneficiaries' agency and make the program more successful.⁵⁸ Peer-to-peer networks and group activities are also a natural platform upon which to deliver a host of other services.

Agencies should help youth access places to safely interact with their peers and adult role models from

Informal Small-business Incubation

Some migrant-run businesses, especially in Somali communities, use an informal small-business incubation system to expand into new markets and increase self-employment. Established small businesses train and employ fellow migrants, usually young newcomers, to start their own businesses. The business owner withholds a portion of an employee's salary and trains the employee in how to run the business. Once enough money is saved and the employee's capacity is built, the employee is supported to start a satellite business in a new location. Typically the original owner maintains shares in the new business.

There may be potential for service providers to encourage or incentivize business owners to follow this model.

their own and other displaced populations as well as host country nationals, allowing them to receive and exchange information and learn new skills.⁵⁹ Female youth domestic workers will require special attention to ensure they can access these safe spaces. Such spaces do not always need to be "created" but are often well established through local churches, schools and youth-led and youth-serving organizations.⁶⁰

Given the lack of youth-led and youth-serving organizations identified in the WRC's interviews, agencies should work to build or promote the expansion of such groups to help young people exchange information, identify common needs and opportunities, and build social capital internally and with youth of other nationalities. The potential for engagement through sports remains largely untapped by NGOs in the survey cities, though it appears to be the main leisure activity, especially for young refugee males.

Volunteer work also has great untapped potential to create bridges between host-country and displaced youth and can be a platform for engagement around life-skills education, post-disaster reconstruction, disaster risk reduction and peace-building projects.



Dale Buscher of the Women's Refugee Commission (standing, fourth from left) with refugee psychosocial workers for Psycho Social Training Institute-Cairo (PSTIC) who worked as research assistants and translators for the assessment in Cairo. Most of the young men are Iraqi refugees.

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Annex I: Resources

Women's Refugee Commission

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Other resources

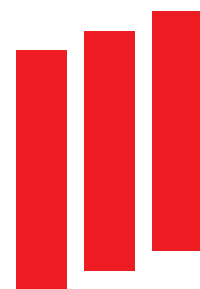
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