

70 Years Protecting People Forced to Flee East and Horn of Africa Regional Session

Hosting/organizing institution: The Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium (CLCC) and Arizona State University

Session Title: The Role of Connected Learning in Advancing Protection Efforts

Context/Background of the Panel:

Globally, few refugee children have access to the full cycle of formal education, from primary through secondary completion. In 2019, there were 7.1 million school-aged refugee children and more than half- 3.7 million children – lack the opportunity to attend school. This gap widens as children age, culminating in a drastic decline in tertiary opportunities for university-aged refugees. Compared to 37% globally, only 3% of refugee youth have access to higher education opportunities. In response to this reality, UNHCR along with other higher education institutions and nongovernmental organizations are partnering to illuminate the possibilities for greater inclusion in formal education systems that result in Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees or other accredited certifications. The campaign #15by30 strives to increase the percentage of qualified refugee youth accessing higher education to 15% by the year 2030. In the past few years, significant gains have been made in fostering collaboration between universities, NGOs, and other educational organizations to build out pathways and offer scholarships that make this goal possible.

This session explored how connected learning, which leverages contextualized and student-centered experiences supported by technology and innovation, can be prioritized to advance protection efforts across East and the Horn of Africa. The panel also discussed how evolving protection policies have created the conditions for connected learning environments to thrive. Though the CLCC focuses mainly on higher education efforts, perspectives from the primary and secondary education space were also shared.

Major points arising from speakers and discussions:

Professor Gasim Badri chronicled Ahfad University for Women's long history of serving refugee students, dating back to the 1980s. Of the 400-500 students AUW has served over the 40-year period, many have stayed in touch with the university after having gone on to work for UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations like the Regional Institute of Gender, Diversity, Peace & Rights (RIGDPR)- further illustrating that educated refugee learners are well positioned to carry on this important work due to their intimate knowledge of the refugee experience and eagerness to contribute to the solution. AUW has worked closely with UNHCR to respond to various conflict situations over time- starting with Ugandan and Somali refugees in the 1980s, and later partnering with the Hugh Pilkington Charity to serve students from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Today, the institution offers scholarships to students from 32 countries, 22 of which are in the African and Arab region.

AUW offers 13 bachelor's and 9 master's degree programs, and all academic courses are integrated with internship opportunities, leveraging experiential and case-based learning approaches that are enhanced by soft skills capacity-building. Professor Badri notes that the presence of refugee students at the university not only provides unmatched utility for the students themselves, but also to the institution as a whole.

Joyce Adoch Talamoi introduced Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and its mandate, which is to serve persons affected by displacement globally. In Uganda, the NRC serves refugees from Burundi, DRC, and South Sudan who are currently living in 12 districts across the country. NRC's work focuses on basic education, accelerated education, formal primary and skills training. Joyce also noted that NRC's partnership with Arizona State University is focused on expanding access to tertiary education. Uganda's Sector Education Strategy Plan (ESSP) stipulates that refugees can access education at all levels, at any learning institution in the country. As a result, it is not uncommon to find refugee learners and Ugandan nationals learning side by side in the same classrooms.

However, she also notes that while more refugee learners are accessing primary education, very few are able to transition to secondary and even less transition to tertiary education due to a number of obstacles: cost and the ability to prove qualifications for entry chief among them. Connected learning and blended education approaches do much to address both of these obstacles, and should be leveraged to promote durable solutions like i) building skills competencies toward self-reliance, thereby reducing dependency on aid; ii) reducing the likelihood of developing negative coping mechanisms by promoting opportunities for positive self-development; iii) helping refugees to rebuild hope and define new aspirations through their interaction with new people and facilitators, both in and out of the country.

Leonne Laura Uwizihiwe provided an overview of Kepler's partnership with the Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) in Rwanda. Since 2013, the NGO and the American university have provided students access to an accredited degree which is achieved through a competency-based online program. Kepler provides extensive support services including in-person coaching, health and financial support services and career preparation. These supplemental training opportunities ensure that graduates are able to meet the labor market needs in countries with developing economies. Kepler provides all students with full scholarships, learning equipment such as laptops and internet, tailored preparation and remediation, and connection to professional networks and employers/internships.

The Kepler model has three parts: online content, in-person learning, and workplace training. The SNHU concept hinges on students developing skills through project-based learning, as opposed to traditional classes and lectures, which increases their potential for success in the job market after graduation. The learning is self-paced, which means students define their own schedules with the support of Kepler learning coaches. Kepler consults employers to determine which skills and competencies are required for the workplace so that they can align the curriculum accordingly.

Laura notes the reciprocal relationship of the program's design: refugee students benefit as well as the labor market, since Kepler is providing competent employees to the job market. Students can study together in the Kigali campus or in Kiziba refugee camp. The program boasts impressive statistics: 50% of its students are female, 25% are refugee learners, and 90% of graduates are employed or pursuing further education within 6 months of graduating. To date, they have served over 1000 bachelor's degree students and over 270 refugee learners.

Kepler students have been trained to learn independently, so the COVID-19 pandemic did not derail student programming; though Kepler experienced a greater demand on psychosocial support resources over the past year, it did still manage to graduate students on time

Philemon Misoy introduced the mission of Windle International, an NGO established in 1977 to assist refugees with English language learning. Windle has since evolved and expanded into the UK, Uganda, Sudan, and in Kenya. In Kenya, Windle is responsible for running secondary education in Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps. This includes teacher management and reducing girls' barriers to primary and secondary school, both in refugee camps but also for girls in host communities, noting that the challenges each group faces are often the same. Windle also manages the DAFI scholarship program funded by UNHCR and places students from Dadaab, Kakuma, and Nairobi in local Kenyan universities. Windle also supports the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) scholarship program which prepares students for the TOEFL exam and facilitates student departure from Kenya to Canada. Many of these graduates are contacted to support nation-building back at home. Despite the incredible success of these programs for the students lucky enough to be chosen, these opportunities are only granted to 2% of eligible refugees.

Similarly, Kenya experiences major challenges in teacher training, as a high percentage of teachers in schools have never accessed accredited higher education but rather short-term workshops with certificates of completion awarded at the end. York University, University of British Columbia and Windle brainstormed and put together the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) program to serve as a model of university education delivered where refugees were located. In this model, refugees engage in an accredited teacher training certificate program in Dadaab for one year while continuing to teach, proceed to a diploma program which takes 2 years, and finally proceed to a degree program which also takes 2 years.

In order to make this a successful model, BHER created a consortium of universities including York University, University of British Columbia, Kenyatta University, and Moi University. They formed an agreement to accept university credits from each other, and each institution specialized in a unique part of the program, i.e. content or skills development.

The first batch of master's students graduated from this model in 2020, despite the pandemic. Another group is slated to graduate in April 2021. Over 400 students have been supported in the BHER program. A learning center in Dadaab has been established and equipped with computers and internet connectivity. All of the students have tablets and data bundles to help them access content from the comfort of their homes. During the pandemic, learning centers

were closed, but instructors met with students virtually and curated virtual meetings where students could discuss their work amongst peers.

Recommendations on the way forward:

For humanitarian organizations like UNHCR, expand education mandates to include higher education, as in recent times the focus has been largely on primary and secondary students. The need for women is especially great.

For all actors providing education programs for refugee learners, embrace a holistic approach to scholarship provision by merging spaces and creating alliances amongst all the actors in protection, private, public, and community-led spaces.

For all actors in the humanitarian space, examine who is at risk of being left out and who is at risk of dropping out due to protection issues. Consider the resources that we can mobilize to confront these reasons for dropout or lack of access, especially with regard to students who are women.

Top two quotations from the session:

“When I talk of opportunity costs of time regarding livelihoods, online learning which is self-paced gives the youth the leverage or the opportunity to pace themselves, to choose to study at a time when they are not engaging in livelihood activities or their other social responsibilities for their families. This flexibility becomes very critical with the online learning and blended approach.” -Joyce Adoch Talamoi, Norwegian Refugee Council

“The idea is that when you take students out of a refugee camp, if he was working as a teacher, then you have reduced the teaching capacity of a school. If he was working as a nurse aid, then you have reduced the workforce in that hospital... We are seeing that it is possible to provide training to students within their area of residence without moving them out of the camp. We ensured that we do not extract this workforce from where they are working.” -Philemon Misoy, Borderless Higher Education for Refugees

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