



Refugee Law Project

School of Law, Makerere University
A Centre for Justice and Forced Migrants



PROFILE OF SUPPORT GROUPS AT REFUGEE LAW PROJECT

(As of 3rd March 2015)

I. Introduction

Support groups have become an integral part of RLP's intervention strategy alongside individual and household support. The groups provide space in which to build new support systems within refugee communities to replace the lost traditional ones, and are thus a source of empowerment, self-esteem and self-reliance. They ensure continued healing when organizational services, which are often donor funded, cannot meet the demand, and they frequently become a source of new referrals to our services. Over the years, RLP has helped establish 15 support groups that are directly and indirectly affiliated to different thematic programmes.

II. RLP's relationship with the support groups

RLP has been the force behind the establishment of the support groups and plays the following roles:

- i. Provides meeting space for the Kampala-based groups
- ii. Helps in preparing the associations' constitutions and registration processes
- iii. Provides mentoring to group leadership structures
- iv. Offers training for the groups on issues relevant to their needs
- v. Oversees election of leaders and does general monitoring of their activities
- vi. Sources funding for group activities and, where necessary, offers fiscal sponsorship to groups that are yet to be registered to open their own bank accounts.
- vii. Provides accompaniment, upon request from the group leadership, to key group activities (e.g. outreach activities to community leaders and other service providers)
- viii. Offers technical support (e.g. proposal writing, constitution development, editing reports, editing video)

III. Profile of the support groups

1. Association of Persons with Disabilities in Kampala

The Association of PWDs currently has a membership of 200 individuals including refugee PWDs and their families. The support group was established in 2010 with only 8 members. The objectives of the group include: provision of psychosocial support to refugee PWDs and their families; fighting stigma and discrimination against PWDs; providing a collective voice to advocate for PWDs' rights; advocacy for mainstreaming of PWD issues in



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organizational plans; promotion of self-reliance through income generating activities.

Their activities have therefore included training of stakeholders on challenges faced by PWDs; awareness creation in their communities; development of Information Education and Communication messages on disability; identification of cases within their communities; home visits for those who cannot move; and fundraising.

- i. The group is currently aiming at registering as a Community Based Organisation (CBO), and as such have managed to raise 250,000 UGX for this cause.
- ii. The group's first proposal for an IGA in poultry farming was granted funding by a private foundation

2. Somali PWDs Group

The PWDs in Somali community formed their own group as a result of having challenges of communicating with other refugees because of the language barrier, as well as other ethnic reasons. The group has 31 registered members and has an elected leadership. They meet regularly to discuss issues affecting them as PWDs.

3. The Association of PWDs in Nakivale

This association was formed in 2012 with the aim of bringing together PWDs in Nakivale refugee settlement to support each other and currently has a membership of 50. They have since been given training in business skills and tailoring. The association members meet regularly and provide social support to other group members. They also help identify the most vulnerable in their communities and through the established referral pathways, refer these individuals for further assistance.

4. Association of Elderly Refugees in Kampala

The group has continued to mobilize and attract members and currently has a total of 70 members. The group was formed to address the peculiar needs of the elderly refugees; to create awareness on the usefulness and contribution of elderly refugees to society; and to get a better understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of older refugees in their role as caregivers and useful members of society so that ways can be identified to support them in their endeavors. This group is also currently acting as a collective voice in advocating for the human and psychosocial rights of elderly refugees.

The association's activities to date include; meetings as group members and with stakeholders such as UNHCR and its implementing partners; psychosocial support for the sick through home visits; provision of basic needs that are mobilized from members.



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The association members have drafted a constitution and the final copy will be out soon. The group has collected 230,000UGX through fundraising to be used for its registration as an association.

5. Peer Counselors Associations

There are four peer counselors groups and these are: the Nakivale, Kyaka II, Kyangwali and Kampala associations. These groups were formed after training was provided for them in basic counseling skills. The purpose of creating these teams was to create structures within the communities that could deal with the day-to-day psychosocial challenges facing refugees. The peer counselors are therefore mainly comprised of refugees and a few staff of implementing partners and teachers in refugee settlements.

Their activities currently include provision of psychosocial support to refugee children in schools; awareness creation on dangers of sexual and gender based violence, torture and its effects; identification of the most vulnerable.

6. Refugee Youth Associations

There are three youth associations which RLP works with. These are the French Club in Nakivale, COBRUWAS in Kyangwali settlement, and the Pacesetters Association in Kampala. These support groups are mainly for young adults between the ages of 19-29 years. This is a critical high-risk group with unique challenges. Currently it has a membership of 65 individuals.

The association provides a free platform for the youth to share experiences and challenges. They are also involved in Music Dance and Drama and this provides them opportunity to engage in productive leisure activities. They are currently raising funds through their annual subscription fees and an additional registration fee every time they attend their monthly meetings to create a basket fund from which they can borrow for income generating businesses.

In the settlements especially, the youth association members are engaged in home care and mentoring for orphaned children; taking care of the sick; building houses for the elderly; promoting proper sanitation and good hygiene among communities; building of child-friendly spaces for child headed families.

7. Child Right Groups

There are currently two children's support groups, which include Manchester Children's Club (MCC) for children aged 8-12 years and Freedom Children's Club (FCC) for those aged 13-18. These clubs have meetings every first Saturday of a month because many of the children are of school going age. Their activities include debates on relevant issues affecting their lives such as



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discrimination in the schools and the communities, social and life skills, relationships, they are also equipped with negotiation skills, risks of child trafficking, child abuse. The clubs are a platform for the children to know their rights and learn to interact with others.

8. Association of Torture Survivors – Kampala and Nakivale settlement

The Association of Torture survivors (ATV) Kampala has been in place since March 2011, and the Nakivale chapter since 2012. The Association started with very few members majority of whom were Congolese. But to date, the Association has over 350 members including those from other countries like Rwanda, Burundi.

The ATV has been a healing ground for many of the survivors and it has united them as one since they all went through similar experiences. The majority of members are involved in various businesses like making of bags, carpentry, mechanics etc and are able to take care of their families.

The association also advocates for a torture free society through celebrating the UN Day in support of torture victims, and through sensitization activities such as drama, music and dance, poems. They have also prepared memos that have been circulated in offices such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights officer in Kampala, UNHCR, Office of the Prime Minister, RLP.

9. Association of Refugee Professionals

The Refugee Professionals Association was started in 2011 to cater for the needs of the professionals. It was also formed as recognition of the untapped human resource present in the refugee communities, which when well utilized, would lead to development and improved livelihoods. The Association currently has a membership of 80 registered members, 50 in Kampala and 35 in refugee settlements.

Objectives of the Association

- i. Identification and registration of all professionals among refugee communities in and around Kampala and the settlements
- ii. Building a website with a database of refugee professionals with different expertise and sets of skills as a way of increasing their visibility and exposing them to the job market.
- iii. Helping to establish different associations of refugee professionals along different competencies to create a platform for information and experience sharing, confidence building and peer support, and a platform for collective advocacy.
- iv. Establishing a network of community outreach.



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Their current activities include teaching French for different clients; operating clinics, running personal businesses. They also have monthly meetings at the RLP.

10. Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda (MOHRAU)

This is an association that brings together the male survivors of sexual violence; the group emerged out of RLP's work with individual survivors since 15th September 2011. The group was formed due to increasing numbers of male individuals presenting with challenges resulting from sexual violence and the need to overcome the challenges. Since then the initial group of six men has grown to over 80. The group meets on a regular basis (once a week) to provide peer support, and has provided significant input into international advocacy initiatives of the Refugee Law Project, as well as working within the refugee community to change perceptions of survivors of rape. The group is currently developing a multi-disciplinary publication.

11. Women Refugees Association in Africa (ASSOFRA)

Assofra is a women only association. When it began in 2009 it was called ASSOREF (Association for Francophone Refugees) and it brought together French speaking refugees and asylum seekers, both male and female. Following internal conflicts and misunderstanding between the men and the women, the women decided to form their own section because they believed that the men hindered them from utilizing their potential. This female section later became ASSOFRA (Association of Female Refugees in Africa). The name change was also because the members felt that the old name excluded non French-speaking refugees and asylum seekers. ASSOFRA expanded rapidly to include female refugees from Rwanda, Burundi, Southern Sudan, DR. Congo, and Somalia and currently has 65 registered members.

ASSOFRA's vision is to have a mobilized and unified social and economic forum providing suitable environment and promising a future for the refugee women in Uganda and Africa at large. Their mission is to promote and enhance a suitable environment for the refugee women to exercise their rights without any restraints. It has a well established leadership structure with a constitution and is being registered as a community based association.

Activities include provision of psychosocial support to members through home visits, social and emotional support during sickness, loss and other relational challenges. Members also often identify foster families for placing unaccompanied girls and provide mentorship for these girls. They have a savings scheme from which they borrow money to enhance their businesses at a minimal interest rate and a welfare fund which members can borrow from interest free in case of sickness.



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ASSOFRA holds two weekly meetings; the Wednesday meeting is an income generating activity where members contribute some money that is put into a revolving fund; the Friday meeting is a general meeting aimed at encouraging the sharing of lessons from the field, sharing of resources, exchanging ideas, strengthening the refugees' engagement.

12. Living with Hope (LWH)

This support group comprises persons living with HIV/AIDS. Formed in June 2012 the group brings together both male and females refugees and asylum seekers living with HIV/AIDS. The group has a strong leadership structure and RLP provides technical and mentoring support. LWH meets every first Wednesday of the month. The group also makes referrals to RLP especially those that join the group for VCT and ART.

During their meetings, the group discusses challenges and jointly proposes solutions to them. Positive living is never an easy life especially in a group in which some members are still in denial. According to the group, most of the members strongly believe that they acquired HIV/AIDs through sexual violence and torture that they went through either in their countries of origin, during flight or at their homes in their host communities.

13. Families with children born out of rape

This is support group formed by women with children born out of rape and was established in 2011. The group has now grown to include some men especially in the settlements. The group is in its transition to being called "*Families with Children Born out of Rape*" after realizing that the burden of raising children born out of rape burdens both women and men. The major challenge is how to bring up these children; how to cope with the shame associated with the rape experience; and how to defend the children against external victimization, particularly if the child is male. Such challenges follow the women even when they get re-married because new husbands will often require the women to leave the children behind. Current membership is 45.

14. Men of Peace

This an association of male survivors of sexual violence formed in January 2013 during a research project by RLP and Johns Hopkins University of Public Health in a screening exercise to identify male survivors of sexual violence. This support group is located in Nakivale which is one of Uganda's largest refugee settlement hosting over 75,000 refugees. The current membership of the group is 140 encompassing refugees of various nationalities.

Men of Peace is one of our fastest growing refugee support group in terms of numbers. The group, through music, dance and drama, is also involved in



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carrying out advocacy on the plight of male survivors of sexual violence, highlighting the severe lack of appropriate support services.

15. Men of Courage

This is a group of male survivors of sexual violence in northern Uganda who suffered at the hands of government soldier (NRA) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the sexual violence happened 2 decades ago, they still continue to struggle for survival and others still have untreated wounds. This group is mentored through the Conflict, Transitional Justice and Governance of the RLP. Currently membership is 35 and the group still continues to grow as a result of community sensitization and awareness.

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