



# In Search of Safety and Solutions:

## Somali Refugee Adolescent Girls at Sheder and Aw Barre Camps, Ethiopia

A Study Conducted by the Women's Refugee Commission

April 2012

### *REPORT FOR COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTORS*

#### **WHO ARE WE?**

The Women's Refugee Commission is an advocacy organization based in New York, United States. It advocates for changes in laws, policies and programs to improve the lives and protect the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and young people.

#### **WHY DID WE COME TO ETHIOPIA?**

The Women's Refugee Commission traveled to the Somali region of Ethiopia to meet with Somali refugee girls, ages 10–16. We met with girls in the Sheder and Aw Barre refugee camps near the city of Jijiga in eastern Ethiopia.

We talked with girls about the risks they face and what could be done to improve their lives. The goal was to make sure that agencies working with refugees understand the unique situation of adolescent girls. We will encourage agencies to develop programs that help keep adolescent girls safe.

#### **WHAT DID WE DO DURING OUR VISIT?**

Two staff from the Women's Refugee Commission spoke with 86 Somali refugee adolescent girls; 24 refugee adolescent boys; and 25 refugee women and men community leaders. We identified services for adolescent girls that can be improved to empower and protect them.



Somali refugee girls do a mapping exercise, showing the Women's Refugee Commission interviewers where they feel unsafe as they go about their daily tasks.

## THE CONTEXT IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia has signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. But life for a Somali refugee, *especially a refugee girl*, is still very difficult. Why?

1. Refugees generally do not have the right to work. There is little formal work that the refugees can engage in. This means they have to get jobs that are low paid and sometimes risky. When there is not enough money in a household, girls have to work either in or outside the home to help support the family. This means they cannot go to school. The jobs girls find outside the home can be risky; many work as domestic servants and may be abused by their employers.
2. The government of Ethiopia is in charge of refugee children's education. However, there are not enough schooling options for the girls (or boys). Only 50 percent of the girls in Sheder camp and 33 percent in Aw Barre camp go to school. This has a negative impact on their future and the life they will lead as an adult.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN SHEDER AND AW BARRE CAMPS?

1. Insecure shelters and lack of lighting at night leave girls feeling like **“easy prey to anyone who wishes to do us harm.”**
2. Girls may not go to school because of early pregnancy, early marriage, inadequate physical and legal protection and underpaid, exploitative and abusive work.
3. Communities do not recognize, value or support girls' contributions to community life and leadership activities.
4. Girls have been out of school since fleeing Somalia in 2008-2009. They lack the social support and resources needed to go back to school.
5. Girls lack decent work opportunities. The girls the Women's Refugee Commission interviewed could only identify domestic work and the sex trade as ways to earn money.
6. Girls said that they do not use sexual and reproductive health services because they are afraid of discrimination from adult providers and social stigma.
7. Girls of all ages have experienced and are at risk of sexual harassment, verbal and psychological abuse, female genital mutilation, rape, abduction, early and forced marriage, early pregnancy, exploitative domestic work, labor trafficking and sex trafficking.
8. Girls said they do not register their newborn children because they fear social stigma. As a result, they do not receive supplementary food rations for mothers and babies.



Most girls do not have the opportunity to go to school. Girls should receive incentives to encourage them to go to school. Girls who go to school will have a better life.

### WHAT DO WE RECOMMEND?

Donors, the Administration for Refugees and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), UN agencies and international, national and community-based organizations must work together to address refugee girls' unique needs by doing the following things:

1. Increase girls' physical security

- ✓ Provide strong housing materials with sturdy doors and secure locks for households headed by unaccompanied, single girls.
- ✓ Put water points closer to girls' housing and away from male-dominated areas such as mosques and sports fields.

2. Support girls' participation and leadership

- ✓ Develop mentorship opportunities for adolescent girls to meet other girls and adult women.
- ✓ Encourage the refugee central committees to include adolescent girls in community decision-making, particularly those related to camp management, design and security.

3. Give priority to girls' education and study

- ✓ Provide incentives to encourage girls to enroll in and complete primary and secondary education. Provide child care for young mothers.

4. Prepare girls for safe and dignified work

- ✓ Improve the safety of available jobs. For example, create terms and conditions for girls working as domestic help in and outside the refugee camps.
- ✓ Train adolescent girls in entrepreneurship and financial literacy skills in order to expand the options available to them.

5. Improve sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention and response

- ✓ Train all security personnel and traditional justice bodies in gender-based violence prevention and response, human rights and child protection. Teach them to respect survivors' confidentiality.

## **WHAT WILL WE DO NOW?**

The Women's Refugee Commission will share these findings and recommendations to improve the situation for Somali refugee girls in Ethiopia.

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR WORK?**

To learn more about the Women's Refugee Commission's advocacy on behalf of displaced women, children and youth, visit [www.womensrefugeecommission.org](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org) or contact us at [info@wrcommission.org](mailto:info@wrcommission.org).

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