



The Path to Hope:

Congolese Refugee Adolescent Girls in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp, Tanzania

A Study Conducted by the Women's Refugee Commission

January 2013

REPORT FOR COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTORS

WHO ARE WE?

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) is a research and advocacy organization based in New York, United States. Our goal is to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children and young people displaced by war, persecution or natural disaster. We advocate for changes in laws, policies and programs that affect people affected by conflict or crisis.

WHY DID WE COME TO TANZANIA?

The WRC traveled to the Kigoma Region of Tanzania to speak to refugee adolescent girls ages 10-16 at Nyarugusu Refugee Camp. We talked with girls about their problems 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 use the findings from our study to encourage agencies working with refugees to develop programs that help keep adolescent girls safe.

WHAT DID WE DO DURING OUR VISIT?

Two staff from the WRC met with 36 Congolese refugee adolescent girls, 10 adolescent boys, 16 women and men community leaders, nine mothers and two fathers of adolescent girls, and 15 staff of agencies working at Nyarugusu Refugee Camp. We talked with everyone to find out what girls need in order to grow up into healthy young women, free from violence and able to provide for themselves.



Congolese refugee girls participate in a safety mapping exercise, explaining where they feel safe and unsafe as they go about their daily tasks.

THE CONTEXT IN TANZANIA

Tanzania has signed the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Convention and Protocol define who is a refugee and the rights of people who are granted asylum. It has also signed the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention. But life for a Congolese refugee, *especially a refugee girl*, is still very difficult. Why?

1. Refugees do not have the right to work in Tanzania. This means they have to survive on informal jobs that are low paid and sometimes risky. When a household does not have enough income, girls have to work either in or outside the home to help support the family. This means they often must drop out of school. The jobs outside the home can be dangerous; girls feel unsafe as they travel outside illegally to earn money.
2. Although refugee children have the same rights to education as Tanzanian children, refugee girls' school enrollment is lower and dropout rates are high. Sometimes girls get pregnant or get married off too early, and thus drop out of schools. This has a negative impact on their future and the life they will lead as an adult.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

1. There is insecurity inside and outside the camp and girls often feel unsafe as they move about in their daily tasks. Girls are traveling farther and farther outside the camp to collect firewood, which puts them at greater risk for physical harm.
2. Girls have few opportunities to develop life skills because they are often too busy carrying out household chores or engaging in income-generating activities in and outside the camp.
3. School dropout rates for girls are high because of poverty and lack of basic materials such as soap to wash clothes and money to buy school supplies. Girls are also at risk of dropping out of school because they experience sexual harassment and violence, become pregnant, or are forced to marry.
4. Girls have little time to play or socialize with each other. They lack peer support and have few role models to help them.
5. Girls lack safe work opportunities. All of the girls we spoke to were engaged in some kind of unsafe livelihood activities, often taking physical risks going outside the camp for petty trade, casual labor or to work on host community farms. Vocational skills training opportunities are few. Often they are only available for older youth or women, and few girls get to participate in them.
6. Local and international NGOs are doing their best to provide essential services to refugees. But whether they are actually reaching adolescent girls is not certain because program data is not collected specifically on girls.



Secondary school girls keep safe by walking home together from school.

WHAT DO WE RECOMMEND?

1. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should:
 - ✓ advocate with the Ministry of Home Affairs to allow resumption of refugee income generation and market activities inside and outside the camp;
 - ✓ prioritize development of alternative energy sources for cooking fuel and fuel-efficient cook stoves to keep women and girls safe and to protect the environment;
 - ✓ work closely with service providers, camp committee leadership and the national police to build up informal security watch (*sungusungu*).
2. Service providers and refugee community-based organizations should:
 - ✓ consult girls themselves and community members, including the girls' caregivers and boys, in the design, implementation and monitoring of programs;
 - ✓ strengthen non-formal education for girls so that they have increased opportunities to develop life skills, vocational skills and form social networks with their peers;
 - ✓ make sure that existing programs support increased participation of girls and are adolescent-friendly so that girls feel more comfortable going to seek assistance;
 - ✓ when collecting program data, ensure that girls are counted by taking gender- and age-disaggregated information.

WHAT WILL WE DO NOW?

The Women's Refugee Commission will share these findings and recommendations to improve the situation for Congolese refugee girls in Tanzania. We plan to pilot a small project through a local partner at Nyarugusu Camp to test out a program centering on enhancing girls' safety.

You can read our full report and our ratings in *The Path to Hope: Congolese Refugee Adolescent Girls in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp, Tanzania* at <http://wrc.ms/TviDMY>. Please let us know if this report was helpful to you at info@wrcommission.org.

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