

# The Refugee

MAGAZINE

DADAAB EDITION

Issue #4 | February 2015



## TALENT HIDDEN IN DADAAB

Having won many medals in competitions back in his home country, Ethiopia, Okugny Feels his talent is wasted in the camp and wishes he could get a chance to show it to the world

ALSO  
**inside**

- BUSH CLEARED IN IFO HELPS BOOST FIGHT AGAINST SGBV
- DRC Brings Virtual Degree classes to Refugee Students in Dadaab Refugee Camp
- Dadaab marks International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM



# CONTENTS

## 3 EDUCATING A GIRL IS EDUCATING A NATION

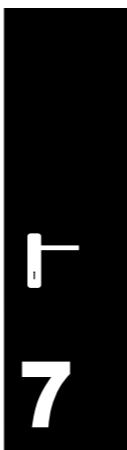
In a patriarchal community where women have very little say in issues affecting them or the community, 19-year old Nadhifo is helping change lives of girls by advocating for their right to education.

## 13 DOOR-TO-DOOR CAMPAIGNS BY HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL EMPOWER YOUTH LIVING WITH DISABILITY IN DADAAB REFUGEE CAMP

Having gone through stigma and discrimination, youth with physical disability is now stronger, following door-to-door campaigns by Handicap International. He feels stronger and helps empower other persons with similar conditions.

## 7 OF WORDS UNSPOKEN AND AN UNTOLD MYSTERY

A side-effect of forced child marriage that is never spoken about is revealed as children involved in prostitution in Dadaab Speak out.



**SUB-EDITORS**  
Mohamed Abdullahi Jimale  
Sahal Ali Hussein

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
Paul Odongo

**CONTRIBUTORS**  
Kin Abdi Awes  
Mohamed Osman  
Mohamed Mohamud Duthe  
Mohamed Hassan Afey  
Ahmed Issack Kheir  
Mohamed Bishar Bashir  
Simon Bol Dhiel  
Mohamed Abdullahi (LUNGU)  
Mohamed Bashir Bishar  
Abdiweli Omar Mohamed  
Asad Hussein

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**  
Anne Ndegwa  
Ninah Lianza

**DESIGN & LAYOUT**  
Paul Odongo

**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Paul Odongo  
Sahal Ali Hussein

**The Refugee Interactive**



Follow us @therefugeemag

# Editorial

“Telling untold stories” is our manifesto. Going beyond cultural and social barriers, our dedicated team works hard to air the plight of all, from all the corners of the camp, reporting facts truthfully, objectively and without bias.

Welcome to yet another edition of your favourite read. In this edition, we cut across all issues, but focus majorly on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, especially early marriage and FGM.

Through the years, agencies in Dadaab have been involved in major sensitization campaigns to help kick some of the cultural practices carried out by refugees – that are a threat to the safety of children, women and girls in the camps – to the curb. This, in a bid to let the girls live, to give them freedom. Freedom from guilt. Freedom from depression. Freedom from the trappings of the detrimental culture we’ve built our lives around and to put structures that will ensure that they flourish and play their role efficiently in the society.

In this edition, we tell even more exhilarating stories untold, of refugees and asylum seekers. Find out about some of the unforeseen effects of forced child marriage as children found in prostitution in the camp speak out. Who will come to their rescue? Just me and you, doing something about it.

Some stories that may be missing from the third edition have also been republished in this edition. This owes to the fact that one of the stories published enkindled inadvertent interest in the refugee community, on grounds of the perceptions some readers had.

On this note, we would like to assure you, dear reader, that all stories published in The Refugee Magazine are at the sole discretion of the writers, who are majorly refugees, and are in no way, meant to portray the stand of the magazine or its publisher – FilmAid – or partner agencies. With regard to this, as ‘The Refugee Magazine’, we would like to assure our readers that all content published is true and is counterchecked for professionalism in the publication.

As always, we hope you will enjoy reading through this edition, and do not forget to give your feedback through the contacts provided.

Cheers!

*Editor-in-Chief*

Stories in *The Refugee Magazine* are written by refugees for the refugee community. In no circumstance is any story depictive of the opinion of FilmAid or any other organization except where specified otherwise.





# BUSH CLEARED IN IFO HELPS BOOST FIGHT AGAINST SGBV

By Hassan Afey and Mohamed Duthe

**I**fo residents feel safer after a bush that was associated with many acts of violence against residents – especially women and girls – was cleared out.

The event, which took place on February 4, 2015, saw people come in large numbers from various agencies and the refugee community to clear out the massive thicket between Sections A, D and G, that, as the residents say, aided as a hideout for villains who carried out heinous acts even in broad daylight.

The initiative to clear out the bush, which was organized by FilmAid, in partnership with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), brought together other agencies including the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), National Council for the Churches of Kenya (NCCK), The Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA), Handicap International (HI), Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK), Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), CARE and Save the Children among others.

The refugees living in the blocks near the area expressed their joy of seeing the bush cleared. “Now women will be able pass this area peacefully, without fear and wor-

ry of getting sexually assaulted and their property taken away,” said the Chairman of Section C, Mr. Khalif, “and as leaders we are optimistic that we will no longer hear the bad news of women raped in this area.”

“Representatives from the partner agencies who spoke at the event gave encouraging speeches directed towards women, saying that women are an integral part of the society. “As FilmAid, we thought it wise to bring the agencies together so that we can make a step in making this area safe for our women and girls, who are the major victims of SGBV,” said the FilmAid Dadaab Outreach Officer, Charity Kola. Hawa Digale, the DRC representative at the event echoed words encouraging men to support women, for mutual benefits.

However, women and girls are not the only people who were majorly affected by the existence of the bush. Many other residents also resonated to the fact that the initiative would go beyond just protecting the women and girls from harm, to contribute to the general security in the area. “I was attacked by a group of about seven men while passing the bush on my way to an interview,

taking away my certificates, mobile phone and all the money I had,” says Ojow Agura, a refugee living in Ifo. Many people say the bush was a good hide-out for perpetrators or idlers who in turn attacked people, robbing them and injuring others. “On my way to the market, they stabbed me on the leg then took my bicycle and mobile phone,” says another refugee in Ifo, Oman.

The event was followed by a mass awareness campaign against SGBV to serve as a build up forum for the International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM, which was to be marked on February 6, 2015; and launching of “Sandbox” a new six-part film series produced by FilmAid in Dadaab. The film aims to address GBV, conflict management, early marriage and aid workers-community relations among other themes of concern.

Clearing of the bush has been lauded as a milestone in the protection of the refugees, ensuring that they can live and move safely.

“Now women will be able pass this area peacefully, without fear and worry of getting sexually assaulted or getting robbed..”  
Ifo Section C Chair



Clockwise from Page 1: A bulldozer helps fell trees during the exercise. Fatuma Roba of FilmAid, Lewis Murithi of Handicap International, Charity Kola of FilmAid, Nicholas Midiwo of UNHCR and Mohamed from the Department of Refugee affairs pose for a photo after the exercise. Two boys watch as the bush is cleared. A woman burns vegetation cleared out. Men from Handicap International pull chopped branches headed to the ‘incinerators’.



Photos: P. Odongo



# EDUCATING A Girl is Educating a Nation

## IN A PATRIARCHAL COMMUNITY WHERE WOMEN HAVE VERY LITTLE SAY IN ISSUES AFFECTING THEM OR THE COMMUNITY, 19-YEAR OLD NADHIFO IS HELPING CHANGE LIVES OF GIRLS BY ADVOCATING FOR THEIR RIGHT TO EDUCATION

By Mohamed Bishar Bashir

In a camp where the girl child faces numerous obstacles on her path of growth and development, more and more girls are getting empowered.

On a normal school day, girls would be seen fetching water, working in the homesteads or collecting firewood while boys are in school. But now the tables have turned, and more girls are getting enrolled into schools and very few drop out due to arising issues. Various agencies in Dadaab have been involved in empowering the girls to go to school, even providing them with non-food items including sugar and solar lamps to encourage them to go to school.

Despite the initiatives and campaigns, many girls still stay at home or drop out of school. That's where Nadhifo Ali Abdi comes in.

Born 19 years ago in Dadaab, Nadhifo has seen a lot in the camps. Having made it through education from kindergarten through secondary school within the confines of the camp, she has much to be proud of, having achieved her dream – getting a scholarship under the World University Service of Canada – and will be leaving the country in August this year to study a course of her choice. “It has always been my biggest dream to get the scholarship,” she says. She would like to study pediatric medicine or gynaecology. “I have the hope of going back to my country someday and helping people with my skills. There is need for female doctors in my community, especially in the field of gynaecology since women in my culture do not feel comfortable being handled by men at that level and this has put many women at risk,” she says.

In school, she was an outstanding student, always at the top of her class. In her academic profile, she was the best student in the district

mock exams, emerging the best overall student in Hagadera with a mean grade of A (minus), at the same time being the top performer in English, Kiswahili and Arabic.

She, however, was a little disappointed when the results for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) came out last year, missing the B plain grade by one point. “I expected to perform much better. I had confidence that I would, but that's just how it goes sometimes,” she says. That however did not break her heart. “Having achieved the minimum requirement for the scholarship, I was okay with it,” she adds.

Nadhifo stands out in her community for the role she has played, and is continuing to, in encouraging girls to go to school. She is a role model to many and she takes advantage of the way people perceive her, to advocate for girls' education. She holds sentiments that the weak link to girls' education is the parents, since the agencies in the camps have already made numerous efforts to encourage and support girl child education. “A lot has changed and even though we cannot go to school to study at night like boys, we are given solar lamps to use at home at night,” she says, “many girls fail to go to school because of the way their parents perceive them – that they would get married soon anyway – and seeing that I made it this far, the parents feel encouraged when I talk to them about supporting their girls' education, with the hopes that the girls will help them in future.”

Nadhifo's community is patriarchal and women have very little say in issues affecting them or the community. This had led to the vulnerability of women, who are subjected to abuse. She is the first born in their household. She says her mother has been supportive of her educa-

tion, even after the passing on of her father in the year 2005. “My mum really encouraged me and has been quite supportive,” she says.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage have been the biggest issues that girls in the camps have had to deal with, that greatly affect their education. But with the numerous sensitization campaigns that have been carried out in the camps over the years, the severity is dwindling. Many parents are recognizing the need to send girls to school and keep them in school until they finish high school, at least.

Nadhifo is currently a teacher at

“Many girls fail to go to school because of the way their parents perceive them – that they would get married soon anyway – and seeing that I made it this far, the parents feel encouraged when I talk to them about supporting their girls' education, with the hopes that the girls will help them in future.”

Waberi Secondary School. She teaches Business Studies and Islam Religious Education (IRE). She was previously a Chemistry teacher, whose department she also headed for a period of time. “I love Chemistry but I was shifted to Business Studies since there was need for teachers in the subject,” she says.

Her vision is to be a role model for women in the world and eliminate harmful cultures that are deeply rooted in her community. “To me I could have said that educating a girl is just like educating a whole nation,” she alludes.

## WHY EARLY MARRIAGE?



**Early marriage: one size too big!**

BY MOHAMED ABDULLAHI (LUNGU)

**F**orced early marriage is one of the biggest challenges faced by many girls all over the world especially in Africa.

Maryan Abdi, a refugee of Somali nationality is one of the many girls whose tale is no different from many peers in her community.

Her family fled from Somalia in 1992 and got resettled in Dagahaley, Dadaab refugee camps. Her mother fled with her four children leaving behind her husband. Maryan greatly missed her dad. At 10 years of age, she was the eldest of her three siblings when they fled from the war torn country.

She joined Waberi primary school at eleven years of age. She showed great interest in school and her performance was exemplary. She was already top of her class in her first year. This performance she carried from one class to the next, year after year she never disappointed.

Nonetheless, it was not all easy. There were issues back at home. Hunger plagued them. "The little food provided by WFP (the World Food Programme) was not enough to sustain us considering we had no other source of support," says Maryan, "life was hard, but I was determined to study hard and see my dreams come to pass."

It was during this time that an old man from the community decided to pay Maryan's mother a visit. "He was old enough to be my father, but that did not stop him from asking for my hand in marriage," says Maryan. Despite his refugee status, the old man had herds of cattle back in Somalia. Maryan's mother was quick to accept his proposal without even consulting her. He vowed to give Maryan's mother four cows and he would keep an eye on the family to ensure they were doing okay.

"One morning while I was preparing

### FACTS ABOUT EARLY MARRIAGE

1 in 3 girls in the developing world are married before the age of 18 and 1 in 9 are married before the age of 15.

#### POVERTY AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Girls living in poor households are almost twice as likely to marry before 18 than girls in higher income households.

#### HEALTH AND CHILD MARRIAGE

- Girls younger than 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s. Pregnancy is consistently among the leading causes of death for girls ages 15 to 19 worldwide.

- Child brides face a higher risk of contracting HIV because they often marry an older man with more sexual experience. Girls ages 15 – 19 are 2 to 6 times more likely to contract HIV than boys of the same age in sub-Saharan Africa.

#### VIOLENCE AND CHILD MARRIAGE

- Girls who marry before 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence than their peers who marry later. A study conducted by ICRW in two states in India found that girls who were married before 18 were twice as likely to report being beaten, slapped or threatened by their husbands than girls who married later.

- Child brides often show signs symptomatic of sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress such as feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and severe depression.

Source: International Centre for Research on Women

breakfast for the family, my mother called me and informed me that she had accepted the old man's proposal for my hand in marriage and it was not up for debate," says Maryan.

From that moment on she did not go back to school and completely lost her appetite. The man, who already had several wives and many children wasted no time in preparing the wedding. Two weeks after Maryan's mother accepted his proposal; the old man made all the plans and was ready to take Maryan.

To Maryan, she did not consider that day as her wedding day, but the day she saw her future fade into the darkness. She cursed her early days in her new role as a wife as well as her new husband.

Her eyes were filled with tears as she narrated the tale of her marriage. "I was with the man for two years. Right from the day I left home to be with him, up to the last day when I went back to my mother's house, not even once did I ever have a full night's sleep and I passed my days crying. He treated me like a slave. Beat me up and forced me to work all day long."

After two years marriage, in a twist of fate, her husband died. Her life would soon take a new direction. She was chased away from her matrimonial home to prevent her from inheriting any of her husband's wealth. Yet she felt she was the rightful heir as she had given her husband a son.

Back at home she did not receive a king's welcome. No one was happy to see her carrying a baby. Married at fourteen and widowed at sixteen.

"After staying in my mother's house for two months, I decided to fend for myself by any means possible. I got a job as a house girl at our neighbour's house in the camp for a small monthly wage.

After being a house girl for two years, she got married to a man who was a waiter then. Later he bought a donkey cart that he used to fend for a living. "Life is not too bad now, but I feel sorry for myself when I see my former classmates working with the agencies in the camp, a life I had always dreamt of," she muttered.

Forced early marriage has negative impact on many innocent girls and can be eradicated by educating the parents and the society in general.

Illustration source: plaintalkbm. Vector redesign by P. Odongo

## IMPLICATIONS OF EARLY MARRIAGE



BY MOHAMED OSMAN

**F**rom many walks of life, child marriage is regarded as an abomination to the thriving and progress of girls. In Dadaab camps, strong campaigns and mobilization to oppose child marriage have been conducted by humanitarian agencies to combat it, but it still remains firm and regenerates debate in the Somali community, which has been the most affected. People from the camps hold various judgments regarding early marriage.

"Back to my antecedents, early marriage is a tradition that has to be maintained and conducted," says an old man in Dadaab. He describes child marriage as a way of curbing disgrace and keeping the conduct of girls in check. "My daughters were married at an early age but still survive despite the hurdles and complications they faced as wives," he adds.

To some, marrying early means getting children at an early age, hence spending more time with their children. "I would have loved to get married at the age of nine, because then, my child and I would grow up together," says a 19-year-old mother of two, "in the world of today, the mother gets very old while the

children are still young."

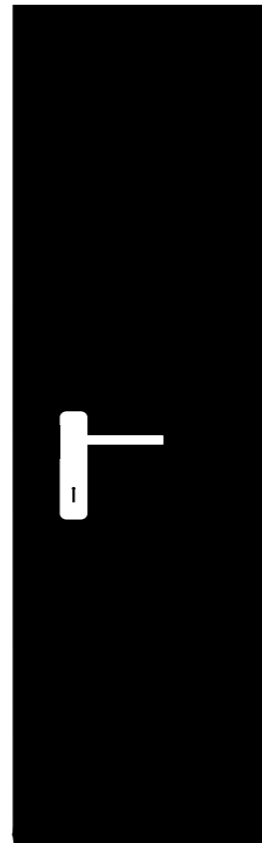
On the other hand, some people disapprove the existence of child marriage and work towards its erosion. They describe it as barbaric and a huge denial of rights. "My daughters will not be married until they mature fully and finish their studies," says Abdi to The Refugee Magazine.

Siman, now 20 years old, is a victim of early marriage. She was 15, in form one when she was married off. "I was given off to the man without my knowledge or consent, the shock silenced me for three days as I got stuck in contemplation," she says with a scowl in her face. She later dropped out of school when she had a feeling of a developing pregnancy. "I had complications during birth and was really scared," she says.

She pauses, and tears begin to fill her eyes as she struggles to speak. "The man left me after having the baby," she says. She now stays with her family, together with her young boy. "I am now a burden to my family," she claims

Many resonate with the fact that more still needs to be done to curb this menace

# OF WORDS UNSPOKEN AND AN UNTOLD MYSERY



BY MOHAMED JIMALE

**In a dominant culture where such words are taboo to even mention, children are found wallowed deep in prostitution, attributing their straits to forced marriage and sexual exploitation**

From a well-known adage, many would recognize it as the world's oldest profession. Practised in the ancient Rome and Greece and some other ancient cultures, it has been in existence longer than anyone alive can track his lineage, or so they say.

Trading sexual relations in exchange for payment, or prostitution, as it is commonly known, has long been in existence, despite many cultures shying from it, if not naming it a taboo. Closer home, in Kenya, there is no legal definition of prostitution in the Penal Code, but it is illegal to live off the earnings of prostitution, hawking sexual services and even calling one by that name would be termed as casting aspersions on that individual's chastity, which is punishable by law.

Even closer, in Dadaab, the majority of the populace is made up of persons of Somali origin. Prostitution is forbidden in the Islamic religion, it is hard and

rare to find commercial sex workers among the Somali community, but they do exist.

Aisha Farah\*, 17, has decided to break the silent cry of many girls in the business of trading sexual favours in the world's largest refugee camp, Dadaab. She started the act when she was just 14 years. She says most of the young girls who are engaged in prostitution have troubled backgrounds, ranging from sexual abuse in early childhood to domestic violence and abject poverty.

For Aisha, the choice of her path started after she was forced to marry her cousin by her parents. "I was forced to marry my cousin who was a drunkard, they said he would withdraw from the drugs and alcohol if he marries, but no other girl would accept him because of his habits," says Aisha, "I refused to marry him." Despite her protests, she was married forcefully. "This waged a war between me and my parents, and

after rebelling, I ran away from home," explains Aisha. She says she joined other girls who were living in a separate home away from where their families were. She was welcomed into the place by a former classmate, Fartun (not her real name). "At first I wondered why these girls left their homes, and who was providing for their basic needs, food, makeup and rent. I could see boys and other men coming to the place but I could not understand the reason behind their coming," she says.

"After staying for a week, I was called by Zeinab\* the leader of the group, she explained to me that everybody struggled for themselves, and that we had to work for our survival," she asserts, "Zeinab said I had to work with them if I had to stay with them. At first I did not understand what she meant. In the final conclusion of her talk she told me that they traded sex for money and favours in the blocks. Her friends working under the same pimp had also come to this place like me and joined them and she expects the same from me," adds Aisha. "I had no other alternative than to accept it."

"My first night was a nightmare. I was taken to the furthest block from where we were living by Zeinab. We entered a compound, which had two houses, we got into one of the houses. There was a man inside. Zeinab told me that the man would seduce and not hurt me," claims Aisha. "He told me that he would give me money, buy me clothes and later take me to Nairobi for an adventure. Then I noticed he was getting closer to me, trying to touch me. I warned him not to touch me or else I would scream," she explains, "he called for Zeinab and explained what went wrong with us. Zeinab shouted and threatened to expel me from the group, but I still refused. They tied up my hands and put tape over my mouth and Zeinab left after that. He started to rape me. It was so painful. When he finished, four other men came into the room and they all had a turn. It was scary. It really hurts every time I recall that day," she adds.

"The act of prostitution is not common in Daadab as most communities, majority being the Somalis do not condone the act, the cultural values do not entertain it and everything is done in the shadows. No one is willing to talk about it as the act is seen as a taboo and *haram* [forbidden]," says Yusuf Hassan, a Hagadera resident. Yet, there are over 200 prostitutes according to Aisha. Aisha estimates that she has had over 150 partners since it has been so long she has lost count.

"Often young girls are lured or forced into com-

mercial sex with promises of rewards for money, clothing and resettlement," says Fathi\* a friend to Aisha. "I was just 14 when I started this. I was promised that I would be resettled to a third country, since the man I was to sleep with was in a resettlement process and would claim me as his wife during the process. But all that was false," adds Fathi. "Prostitutes give unlimited sexual access to men based on the amount of money they have," claims Farah, a Hagadera resident

However, there are numerous risks associated with prostitution. First, the society considers it immoral, those who engage in it stand to face stigma and punitive actions by the communities they live in. "Here, girls who engage in the act are threatened to be stoned and their houses set on fire," says Aisha. "In Islam, a girl or a man who engages in sex before marriage will get a hundred lashes and the married who are unfaithful will be stoned to death," elucidates Sheikh Mursal.

Other than the discrimination and harassments that the girls face, prostitution may also lead to the spread of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. This happens especially if the players do not take protective measures when engaging in intercourse. Due to their psychological status, the women sometimes do not deny sexual services to those who do not want to use condoms. "Some men say they will not pay money if they use condoms," explains Aisha.

In a setup majorly dominated by one culture, the actions of persons are highly dictated by cultural perceptions. Child marriage is still practised under the shadows, often with psychological effects of rape and sexual abuse. These include rape trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, low self-esteem, guilt, and self-destructiveness. Minor girls are never taken for treatment, as sex with a minor girl is a crime and the people are scared of consequent criminal proceedings.

Aisha believes that there are worse stories of girls' experience in prostitution that remain untold, as many fear for their lives by even coming out to speak about it.

Many girls lie in anguish. Those who oppose the will of their parents to get married early are often cast off, and their families or communities disown them. When they become runaways, they feel like there is little that can be done to save them.

\* Real names hidden to protect the identity of the individuals and/or groups.

# SCHOOL CHILDREN COMPOSE POEMS TO MARK INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ZERO TOLERANCE TO FGM

To commemorate the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation, the Danish Refugee Council ran a writing competition in Ifo camp to get school children to write about the heinous act. The following are some of the poems that made the top ten. The Refugee Magazine selected the articles at random and does not in any way depict the order of performance in the writing competition.

## THE PAIN OF FGM

It was my fifth day in labor  
Or the fifth unsuccessful delivery  
Oh! Bring the butchers to book

I vividly remember the unfortunate day  
I was vigorous in youthful when mum whispered  
To the witch and fingers pointed at me  
Innocently playing about

Next I was stripped  
Tightly held and tied  
My legs were parted

A knife went through my body  
Hacking my important organs  
Taking my happiness with it

My cries fell on deaf ears  
I was however soothed  
By mom's crocodile tears

Stitching followed suit  
To crown the evil practice  
I fainted in a pool of blood

I vividly remember  
I was not alone in this  
That was long ago

I hear of today's women  
I hear of enjoying sex  
I hear of even monthly periods

Drained by healthy intact organs  
I hear of successful delivery  
To me all is but a story

I hear of FGM  
I hear of activists against it  
Then I wish and wish and wish!

Those culprits would be brought to book  
That their corpses were exhumed

That the dead could rise to life

To pay for the heinous act  
Of painful torture and misery  
To the victims of FGM

Let's all arise  
To ensure stricter laws  
And curb the evil act

The effects of FGM  
IS widely read and felt  
As major cause miseries  
And family separation  
Divorce and violence  
And neglect of children

Many died in the act  
When devil was on the act  
And the devil made away with it!

War was waged against it  
With commendable achievement  
Beware the war is far from over

For the act is deeply rooted  
In the form of traditions  
These roots must be uprooted

We must all arise  
Activists be referred to human race  
Term it a rejuvenated war

The targets under the threat  
Should know of their rights  
To connect the circuit on

A budget must be assigned  
From our natural cake

By Jama Mohamed Noor  
School: Hormuud Primary School

## THE TEARS OF A GIRL CHILD

I am a girl  
Born with good healthy body  
But forced to circumcised  
With the pain I can't imagine  
NO! I can't imagine myself

It is so ungodly and out of sense  
For you believe that  
A daughter who is not circumcised in unclean  
We suffer mentally, physically and spiritually  
As a result of this mutilation  
But yet they are the same women, who are the backbone of Africa,  
The fruits, the foundation and the veins of this nation  
Without the neck, the head isn't going anywhere  
But when will your unapproved beliefs end, that we remain unclean?

When the rest of the girls were set aside to learn how to read and write  
I was set aside for the agony ritual in Africa  
I am proud of Africa  
Not because am born in Africa  
But because Africa is born in me

We lost great people in Africa  
We lost good leaders in Africa  
We lost so many lives because of FGM  
But yet we still laugh  
When we see them cry over the pain  
You don't give them their rights

You watch those girls  
Guilty of sins unknown  
Agony masking their innocent faces  
Timidly calling out for help, for love, kindness or hope  
Big drops of tears rolled down from the eyes  
Is that all you could do?

You let us be handicapped in some ways  
You let us struggle just to be like you or him  
But like snail you abandoned your shell  
You can't even soften you heart  
And give us our rights?  
But believe me because this is not a lie

Girls is our calling we don't deny  
We are girls and we are proud!  
We say no to FGM in Africa!  
Stop FGM in Africa  
Because backward never  
But forward ever

By Bapwoch Omot Oman  
Theme: Discouraging FGM  
School: Ifo Secondary School



Hear the cry of our  
girls.. **STOP**  
**THE**  
**BLOODSHED**



# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ZERO TOLERANCE TO FGM MARKED IN DADAAB



Pupils recite a poem about FGM at Halane Primary School in Ifo to mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM.

Photo | Sahal Ali Hussein

BY SAHAL ALI HUSSEIN

Worldwide, people celebrated the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation on February 6, 2015 to advocate for the ending of the atrocious act. In Dadaab, residents joined in parallel celebration to mark the milestones achieved so far in the fight against FGM.

In Ifo, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the agency in charge of protection issues in the camp fronted the campaign, having an award ceremony for talented writers who topped in a writing competition run by the agency. The function, which was held at Halane Primary School on a normal school day, was intended to serve as an awareness campaign.

The finalists of the inter-students writing competition were called to attend the function. Halane, the school which hosted the program, Hormuud, Ifo secondary and Horyaal were the schools whose students made the final ten. Parents, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) steering committees, teachers, representatives from Save the Children and the drama clubs of some schools also attended to commemorate the day.

Hawa Digale, an officer from DRC's Protection Unit read the opening speech. She mentioned that it has now turned a century of effort to put FGM to an end. Hawa said that DRC is committed to putting the harmful practice to an end. "As GBV lead agency, we are working to ensure our program is aimed at changing social norms often by engaging community elders, other men and boys," she said.

She mentioned that FGM has both short and long term implications on the health of girls and women. Choir clubs of different schools sung songs and recited poems, discouraging the continued practice of the act. The audience followed swiftly, seemingly entertained by the presentations.

Mohamed Omar, the head teacher of Halane Primary School who gave a brief speech, talked of his perspective towards the practice. He mentioned the Somali community as the most affected. Mohamed also spoke of the problems that girls face when they undergo the cut. "It takes long time for the wound to heal and if that was a pupil in school she ends up missing classes for a long time, sometimes an entire term," Omar said, "if there is one thing that con-

tributes to a girl's underperformance it will be FGM that I will think of first."

The writers who made the top ten in the competition were then called for awards. They were each given school bags with the message 'Do not hate me because of my gender' and a set of mathematical instruments.

Students and pupils who received the awards were from Hormuud, Halane, Ifo secondary and Horyaal. Hormuud had the overall best writer and the best female writer was from Halane.

Hawa promised those who did well in the writing competition that they would have their stories published in The Refugee Magazine. FilmAid, which had a representative, reassured them.

Mama Dahabo a GBV steering committee member spoke of the barbaric act.

She urged all stakeholders to join hands to eliminate the act. She argued that the practice is not an original Somali tradition but a borrowed culture. She spoke of how the traditional leaders are now committed to discourage the irreligious act and said the organizations can use the opportunity.

The teachers who represented the different schools also took turns giving sentiments to discourage the practice.

Emily from Save the children who wound up the function for the day spoke of Save the Children's concern in such occasion. "It happens to young girls, often below the age of 18. It is therefore Save the Children's responsibility to protect children from all kinds of violence. FGM is an act of violence and Save the Children has been and will always be committed in the fight against the unlawful cultural practice."

Despite proven facts of the hazards of FGM over the hardly-traceable benefits, it still remains a problem in some cultures in the camp. Indulging in the practice is illegal and culprits practicing or even aiding the practice face a jail term of seven years to life.

## THE PAINFUL TRUTH

At some point in my life  
I asked myself why  
All the eyes are on me  
It makes me want to cry

They wanted me to be tough  
Pass this habit to my kids  
Teach them to be rough  
Let them feel what I felt

But what if it is wrong  
And it has to be wrong  
It doesn't make me feel strong

This is a story  
That no one wants to hear  
It's only my destiny  
To end this life with fear

I was 5 years old  
When I started to realize  
That girls are born to be cold  
Just like a useless device

It's not my right to complain  
As a matter of fact  
I should withstand all emotional  
and physical pain

I heard that one of my friends  
Became a hero  
Because she went under a  
procedure  
That makes her so

I knew my day would come  
anyway  
It was never an option, it was  
compulsory

I had to bite my lips  
Hold back the tears in my eyes  
Because if I cried, they will  
inform other kids  
That I was a coward  
and I will never go a step

forward.

The Pain and I grew up  
Together we never stopped  
Seeking for something to separate  
us  
We never ever gave up

But people still wanted to hurt  
me  
They taught me that my life  
doesn't belong to me  
Now I feel there is nothing hurtful  
I got used with everything even if  
it is horrible

I remember I had urine retention  
And I needed a medical attention  
But first, they wanted permission  
From those who never change  
their vision

To cut me up  
To leave me with no choice  
But to give up

I guess they never cared about  
my emotion  
Or they would empathize  
knowing  
The sensation inside me was a  
tremendous commotion  
I was lost in a visible painful  
ocean

Looking forward to the golden  
age  
When It will vanish  
Can't wait for your golden age  
To come and end this punishment

BY ABDIFATAH AHMED



## DOOR-TO-DOOR CAMPAIGNS BY HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL EMPOWER YOUTH LIVING WITH DISABILITY IN DADAAB

BY MWANGI MUNGAI

**A**bdi Shukar Mohamed is a Somali refugee with paraplegia, a form of physical disability that affects the lower limbs. He was registered as a refugee with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at Dagahaley Camp in October 2007. Abdi was located at Block A11 in Dagahaley, where he lives alongside his mother Fatuma, and two other siblings.

On a dialogue session with the Handicap International mainstreaming team, Abdi narrates how he suffered from polio while he was 7 years old, which eventually led to his condition while in Somalia. “My mother was not aware of my condition and hence did not take me to hospital for treatment early enough,” Abdi says painfully. In conjunction with this, Abdi recounts his life as a person with disability in Dagahaley refugee camp for the last 23 years “for me I had to struggle with stigma and discrimination from the community because of my disability”.

It is here that Abdi voices how the community members have labeled and branded him with several derogative words in Somali such as “*Jerri*” which means a person with missing limbs, “*Jiis*” which means a limping person and also “*Langaro*” which means a person confined on elbow crutches. According to Abdi, those derogative words drained his motivation to effectively participate in the community on an equal basis with others, since it affected his ego, self-image and confidence.

Abdi’s mother, Fatuma, adds another social challenge resulting from stigma and discrimination, that most of the ladies in the camps would not accept to be married by a man with physical disabilities such as Abdi. “I have proposed many times to several different parents for my son to get a spouse but without



Abdi Shukar prepares to go fetch water from a water tap situated about 200 metres from his house.

Photo | P. Odongo/FilmAid

success. As soon as I mention that my son has physical disability, no parent wants to listen to me,” says Fatuma embarrassingly.

It was until the Handicap International mainstreaming team caught up with Abdi’s predicaments that he was able to get some assistance. “It was during the door to door campaign that we were able to identify Abdi and according him the necessary help” says one of the mainstreaming team members. The Handicap International mainstream-

**“I HAVE PROPOSED MANY TIMES TO SEVERAL DIFFERENT PARENTS FOR MY SON TO GET A SPOUSE BUT WITHOUT SUCCESS. AS SOON AS I MENTION THAT MY SON HAS PHYSICAL DISABILITY, NO PARENT WANTS TO LISTEN TO ME”**

ing team were able to give Abdi and his family extensive psychosocial support with the aim of encouraging them to combat stigma and discrimination.

In addition to this, the Handicap International mainstream team were able to enroll Abdi to the Youth Education Pact center (YEP) which is run by Norwegian Refugee Counsel (NRC) as he had missed school since the time he was in the lower grade in Somalia. It is anticipated that the psychosocial support and the enrollment to YEP center would go a long way in empowering Abdi especially in making him participate in the community on an equal basis with others.

Today, Abdi’s confidence has been restored and he is able to face community challenges without fear or anxiety. “Handicap International should increase more awareness sessions in the community so as to reach those who might be facing stigma and discrimination in silence like I once did..” say Abdi in his closing remarks. Thanks to the Handicap International door to door campaign team of which Abdi is now a proactive member, who’s main objective is to change negative attitude in the community.

## SHAPING THE SOCIETY – Hussein Noor and the Badbaado Team

**A** small van rushes across a dusty Dadaab road, leaving a trail of thick clouds of dust behind. The van is packed with white sacks, which could be mistaken for the camp’s favourite stimulant, Miraa (Khat). Only that miraa comes in other kinds of vehicles; even the small boy at the market knows. This van has travelled hundreds of kilometers to the camp, to bring sacks of clothes donated by people in Nairobi’s Eastleigh estate, to the needy population in Ifo 2.

This is one of the many initiatives that Hussein Noor and his team organized, to give back to the people in Dadaab where he grew up.

Born in Mogadishu in 1990, Hussein Noor can be remembered as a successful refugee.

He fled Somalia in 1991 with his family, settling in Dadaab’s Ifo camp. The soft-spoken young man started

schooling in the camp, starting at Duksi (Qur’anic school) and joining primary school later and heading to Garissa under sponsorship by UNHCR for secondary education.

On completing his high school, Noor moved to Nairobi where he lives as an urban refugee. He studied diplomacy and public relations, both at Diploma levels in Nairobi.

Now a student at Mount Kenya University, he is pursuing a Bachelor of Economics and Development Studies.

Noor is committed to exploiting his talents to help save the youth as well as help the needy youth in the camps. In April last year, Hussein co-founded Badbaado (a Somali word meaning safety) team. “The idea was to sensitize Somali youth on issues like drugs, illegal immigration to enhance the keeping of good morale values,” he says.

“The youth should make use of their underlying power; they are educated, creative and enthusiastic not to mention that they are strong – living in such situation makes them really strong. So let’s think bigger and stand to rebuild our country..”

Hussein Noor

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17



Hussein Noor with Children at Mwangaza Primary School in Ifo 2 camp where he had gone to donate clothes.

Photo | Self

## REKINDLING HOPE FOR YOUTH THROUGH VOCATIONAL TRAINING



BY MOHAMED OSMAN

Life in the refugee camp has not been easy for many, and sometimes the only easiest way to thrive is to get education then get a job. But this has also had its challenges, owing to the overflowing classrooms and limited education resources.

Some of the youth drop out of school and many others fail their examinations due to various reasons. More than 80% of pupils who sat for the top primary examination, KCPE failed to attain the benchmark score that can help secure them a place among the limited spaces in high school. When children drop out of school, some may end up engaging in vices and other 'immoral' activities. To prevent this, vocational learning institutions have been put up in the refugee camps to engage the youth, keeping them from idleness while at the same

time imparting to them life skills.

Youth Education Pack, commonly referred to as YEP Centre, founded by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is one such centre in Dadaab. It offers skills development, which go a long way in building the careers of youths. The skills training they provide include; carpentry, tailoring, electricity, computer literacy, hair dressing and journalism.

The students each go through a one-year curriculum after which they graduate. Equipment are often donated to some of the youth depending on the careers they pursue, to help them establish business ventures.

Ali Abdullahi is a 24 year old renowned tailor in Ifo market. The agency provided him with the equipment he needed, that he used to set up his shop to earn

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

however, it was not an opportunity I could let go." He says. He got his first official coach. The practice for the competition started. 8 kilometers was not a competition to underestimate. Two days before the competition, Opiew landed in Addis Ababa, the country's capital. "That was my first time to ever see the capital. It was already a dream come true!" he says. It was however, not a normal visit. He felt a big responsibility lay on his shoulders. He had to think of the hundreds of thousands back home counting on his success. "I had no time to spare to continue enjoying the beauty of the country's capital, I quickly started to practice," he alludes.

The long awaited day finally came and all the competitors hit the road. As lady luck would have it, Opiew won the race. He was the 8-kilometre champion in his country. He made his region proud and registered his name as a promising athlete.

In 2001, he won a 15-kilometer race in Oramiya. He was now a National hero. In 2002 he become the dart champion. His continuous success lasted until he left Ethiopia in 2005 for reasons he is not ready to share.

He however thinks he was denied opportunities to represent his country at international levels due to his skin color. "Maybe since I am black, they did not want me to represent the country in international competitions.

In Dadaab, he carries on his practice. He runs everyday. "That not only ensures that I retain and improve my athletics skills, but I think it is also the reason why I have never fell sick in the camp," he says.

Despite the tough conditions in Dadaab, the dream of achieving an international trophy remains alive. He hopes that some day he will get to take part in the international Olympics.

Over the years, besides the durable solutions such as repatriation or resettlement, individual talent has also been a great way for refugees to gain recognition, which has helped many to go to far places beyond the camps.

## TALENT HIDDEN IN DADAAB

BY SAHAL ALI HUSSEIN

**30**-year-old Okugny (pronounced 'Okunyi') Opiew has lived in Dadaab since March 2005. Here, he lives like any other refugee. He shares the harsh environment, the daily life struggles and much more with the thousands of refugees in Dadaab camps. The fact that Opiew is an Olympic champion and a renowned hero in his homeland does not have any bearing to his life in the world's largest refugee camp, so do his fellow refugees understand about his past life - a national Olympic champion and a winner of several gold medals.

Opiew was born in Ethiopia's Gambella region in Ethiopia in 1985. His father was a small-scale farmer in the same region. Their family depended on the farm produce for their survival. Their life was generally just like any other low class Ethiopian citizen. He started schooling in 1991, joining high school in 1997. It is that same year that he started running. His intention was however to run for health. He kept running with his brother who was then an athlete in the Gambella region.

Inspired by his brother, he thought of being an athlete. "It still seemed like a distant dream until I took part in my first ever competition, the 800 Metre-race in the Gambella region one year later, only to emerge the winner," he says.

The dream of being an athlete filled him up. The first race was an eye opener. He grew in desire. He loved the practice. "It was not running for health any more, I thought of achieving something big," he says. He soon grew popular in his region. He was popularly known to be a young promising athlete by his people.

Two years after winning his first race, the 800-Metres in his region, Opiew was selected to represent his region in the National Olympic championships. "This came as a surprise to me,

Okugny Opiew donned in some of the medals he won in Ethiopia.

Photo: P. Odongo/FilmAid

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

a living from. Ali uses his earnings to provide for his family. "I sustain my family of 5 members using my tailoring skills." He says. He hopes to change his economic status by growing his business. Ali failed to achieve the requisite grades in his class eight exam and was not able to join secondary school. He needed to find a way to support his parents who were counting on him.

He decided to join the YEP Centre after much persuasion by his close friends. He is happy to be in a position to improve not only his standard of living but that also of his parents. He also encourages his friends to join the school and gain new skills that can serve as a source of livelihood.

However, there are some youths who have not been able to secure places in the YEP centres, but they still try to find ways to earn a living. Abdi Hassan is a 25-year-old father of two. He dropped out of school in class eight after his father died and he had to become the provider for his family. "I was faced with so many fears after my father passed away and there was nobody to support the family. Education is not a priority when you have to first attend to basic needs," laments Abdi. He began working in a milling shop, spending his days grinding maize meal and sorghum so that he could earn a living to feed his mother, brothers and sisters. He is now able to support his family as well as his siblings. He encourages other youth to find ways to earn a living as opposed to just sitting idle. He is a firm believer that the best earnings are those gained through hard work.

Vocational training centres have widely played the role of a 'fail safe' – to help cushion many who fall out of the education system and those who may have not got the chance to join the normal schooling programs for various reasons including age. This has helped better the lives of many, who may have otherwise been more distraught.



The Badbaado Team meeting with Iman Sheikh Saed Rage, who is also the Executive Director of Sakinah Community Center. From right: Abdalla Kaneec, Sheikh Saed Ragea, Hussein Noor, and Abdirahman Samadoon.

Photo | Self

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

The idea came when Hussein and his mates thought about the how situation back in their homeland, Somalia, was after decades of civil war. "The belief that life is only comfortable in the developed world has plagued many Somali youth. Nairobi's Eastleigh hub is where in particular most of this evil is planned. Somali youth see it as an important passage to Europe," he says.

He says many Somali youth have been using unscrupulous ways to gain entry into the first world countries and some have been majorly involved in drug and substance abuse. "I discussed the idea with a friend and we thought of the "Badbaado" team, an organization that we would use to conduct awareness campaigns and inform the youth through the use of film on the danger of Involving themselves in illegal migration," he says.

Badbaado team has so far produced 10 educational videos in form of talk shows, short films and Presentations. With the power of film, he believes they can reach many Somali youth in deferent parts of the world.

Noor plays various roles in the team including directing, cinematography and editing for the

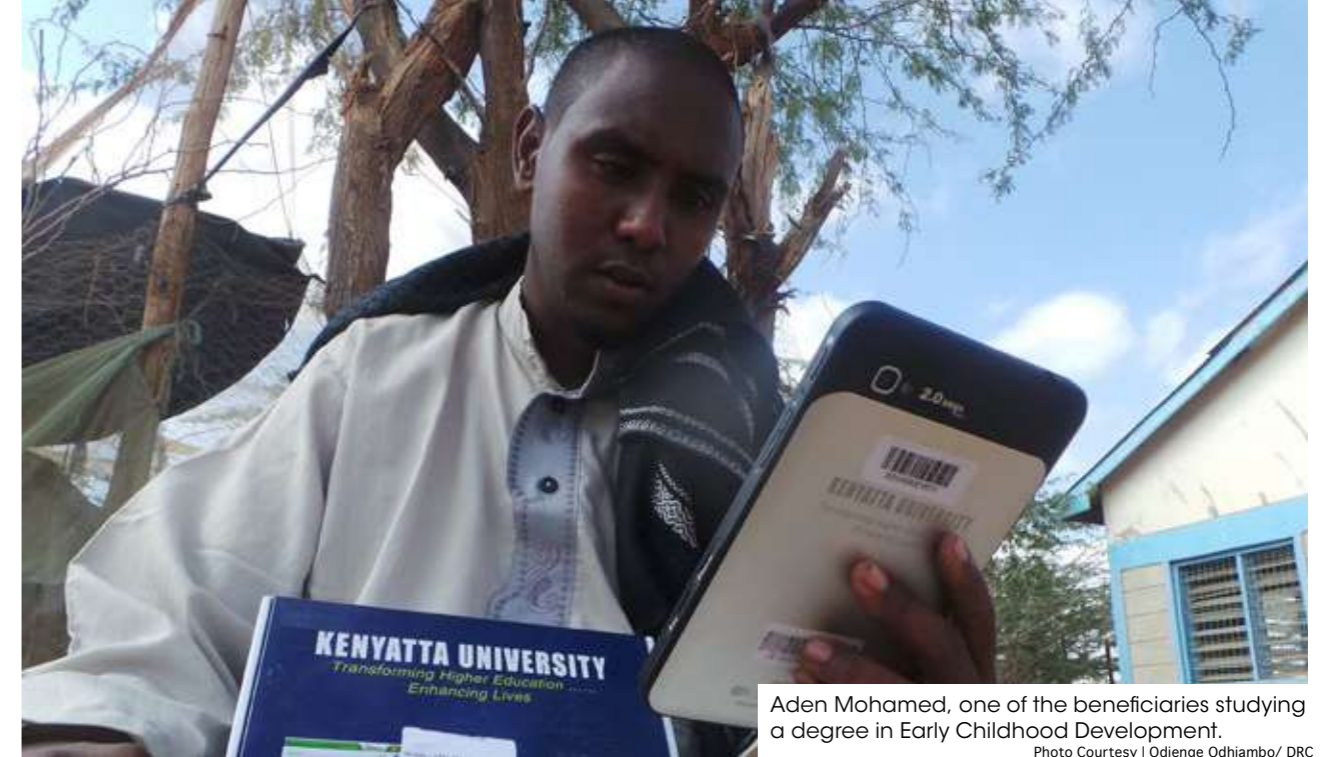
team. He and the rest of the team members already gained popularity in Nairobi's Eastleigh estate.

Late 2014 Noor led an initiative where they donated clothes to needy refugees in Ifo 2. Over 150 families benefited from the initiative.

He also spoke to the Somali youth in Dadaab on their ability to bring change to their nation and to the entire world. "The youth should make use of their underlying power; they are educated, creative and enthusiastic not to mention that they are strong – living in such situation makes them really strong. So let's think bigger and stand to rebuild our country," he said, "let's unite our invisible powers to make visible change in our country."

Noor is an example of a successful, ambitious and dedicated refugee youth who believes he can change his nation youth. Noor's Badbaado not only gained popularity in Nairobi but also caught the attention of local and international media.

**DO YOU HAVE A STORY, OR KNOW ANYONE WITH A STORY WORTH TELLING? GET IN TOUCH WITH US AND WE'LL TELL IT TO THE WORLD!**  
 Email us at [therefugee.news@yahoo.com](mailto:therefugee.news@yahoo.com)  
 Follow us on twitter @[therefugeemag](https://twitter.com/therefugeemag)



Aden Mohamed, one of the beneficiaries studying a degree in Early Childhood Development.

Photo Courtesy | Odienge Odhiambo/ DRC

## DRC Brings Virtual Degree classes to Refugee Students in Dadaab Refugee Camp

BY ODIENGE ODHIAMBO

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) begun enrolling refugee students from Dadaab refugee camp to Kenyatta University's Digital School of Virtual and Open Learning that is offering virtual degree classes to students who are unable to take up full-time on-campus programmes.

As part of its livelihood and Scholarship programming, DRC has partnered with BPRM, UNHCR and DANIDA to provide scholarships for bright and extremely needy refugees to help them acquire knowledge that will be essential for their personal and community development both in the camps and in their countries of origin should they choose to go back home.

The refugee beneficiaries under this scholarship programme are issued with new tablets fitted with tools and notes that they will use to cover their lessons from the refugee camps without attending physical classes at Kenyatta University – which has a campus in Dadaab town.

Isaac Hussein Hassan, Osman Abdi, and Aden Mohamed all from Dagahaley camp, their counterparts from Hagadera Abubakar Noor, Aden Ahmed and also Aden Mohamed from Ifo camp are five students who are part of 20 fresh applicants that qualified for the 2015 DRC degree scholarships and are taking various courses in a number of Kenyan universities based in different parts of Kenya.

"The programme allows me to work and also study at the same time, this gives me time to be near my family as I take care of them. I don't interrupt my normal life schedule like work." Says Aden Mohamed Ali who takes a degree in Early Childhood Education.

The launch of the security operation (Usalama Watch)

by the Kenya government in April 2014, brought about a number of challenges for refugees especially those enrolled in various educational institutions as their studies were interrupted and their movement curtailed. In this regard, DRC was prompted to find other suitable alternatives that will enable the refugee students to learn without interruptions.

"We have experienced painful cases of refugee student's arrests while in their semester periods. When this happens, our students lose valuable learning time and they are psychologically disturbed, through this virtual learning programme we intend to minimize issues of security arrest as a result of student refugee movement," says Sheikh Maro, DRC's Training and Scholarships Team Leader.

Apart from challenges of reduced student teacher contact and minimized cross cultural exposure, the Digital School Programme drastically cuts the cost of training an individual student by almost 50% hence giving a chance to an extra needy student. Besides, most of the degree students are former diploma holders who are already engaged in the camps in different economic activities and can now study while working.

"The limited funding and overwhelming demand of the scholarships is pushing DRC to seek new and innovative ways of assisting more refugees by lowering the costs of training an individual refugee" says Alex Lokimoi, DRC's Training and Scholarship Officer.

In December 2014, DRC awarded non-virtual scholarships to 294 students in Dadaab refugee camps enabling them to graduate with certificates and diplomas from different higher institutions of learning in Kenya. Over 500 refugees are expected to graduate this year and 112 of the expected graduates in 2015 are females.

# Somali Women Shine Despite Cultural Hurdles



BY ASAD HUSSEIN

One morning last week, Muna Sheikh and I sat at a restaurant in Nairobi's Eastleigh area waiting to place our order when a waiter suddenly came at us shouting, "Why don't you sit at the Women's Section?" I was baffled.

There was no point to the waiter's incivility: the Women's Section was mucky and men were not strictly forbidden from sitting in there, beating the purpose of keeping the sexes separate.

So why did the waiter want to shove the girl into a dark, grubby room in the restaurant? Did being a woman mean she needed to be cloistered?

This unsettled me for the rest of the day.

In the same week, on a stroll through Eastleigh, I met 20-year-old Halima who sells tea by the cup at Seventh Street. A long jilbab swathed her body, falling almost to her toes. Her smile caught my eye.

But behind Halima's smile was a great sadness. She had lost her mother a few

days before; she had given birth to a child whose father had divorced her only eight months earlier.

Halima also had to take care of her 11 siblings. Her father had long died and she was too poor to attend his burial in Mandera, in north eastern Kenya.

Halima's woes didn't end there.

She is a Kenyan citizen, from Mandera County, with no identity card. During the crackdown on Somali refugees in Eastleigh in April this year, she was confined in Kasarani Stadium for days until she paid 20,000 Kenyan shillings (220 dollars) for her release.

She is susceptible to the same treatment every time a new security swoop is carried out.

Halima was forced to leave school at class six after an uncle married her off to an elderly man from the U.S. After just four months of marriage, her husband, Hassan, divorced her on his return to the U.S. She tried to contact Hassan but in vain. Halima was left penniless and pregnant. To pay for her upkeep in Eastleigh, she was forced to sell her gold earrings to start a

business selling tea.

As I chatted with her, I could see she was about to cry.

I felt guilty. Then many other scenes from the past flooded my mind.

Halima's story resonated with me. My older sister once sold tea in Eastleigh. She too, like Halima, had gone through similar difficulties of having to raise younger siblings under dire circumstances. She was the one who bought me the first story books I had ever read and sparked the literary fire in me.

There are a few reasons I suppose that shaped my views on women.

We had a neighbour who regularly made disparaging remarks about women. He rained blows on his wife almost everyday. This often put him at loggerheads with my father who was, in his own right, an advocate for women. But the regular beating of the poor woman also had a profound effect on us children.

Dadaab was awash with strong women who ran their families alone. Most of them were widowed; others had left their husbands back in Somalia. Some

of them were caught in the jaws of incessant male cruelty.

I remember Safiyo, a neighbour who doted on me. She told me stories about her family, stories about her experiences and feelings which I did not understand, but I often went to her home. Today, I realize Safiyo needed a friend, a person in whom to confide her fears. Her husband, although he truly loved her, did not understand. She awarded me the name Asad, which means a lion. That is also what she called her son. Many years later, when I decided to become a writer, it became my pen name.

Dadaab was not a nurturing home for its girls. I remember there were only a handful that were in school with us. The Somali parents in the camp did not like sending their daughters to schools. Girls, it was said, would just go to cook for someone else. So taking them to school was considered a waste of scarce resources.

The strong winds of cultural malaise, the shadows of early marriages and the demands of house chores snuffed their talents. When I graduated from high school a few weeks ago, out of 11 girls who started school with us in 2002, just one made it to the end.

Yet the girls flourished in the face of all the challenges.

When we boys were busy going to the cinema, playing football or even chewing miraa/khat, the girls had their heads buried in books. Some of the few who had the chance to go to school obtained good grades that got them scholarships.

Muna Sheikh, the girl I mentioned at the beginning of the story, is a professional social worker who studied in Canada. There is also Fatuma who recently joined the University of Toronto to study chemical engineering. There is another Fatumo who went from the humble daughter of the school watchman to getting a scholarship to study in Canada. And many others, too.

Something extraordinary happened a few months ago.

Fadumo Dayib, a Finn Somali woman, announced that she will run for the presidency in Somalia in the 2016 elections. This, I believe, will be a big achievement for the Somali community. Though it is unlikely she will win in 2016, Fadumo will serve as a motivation for parents in Dadaab, as indeed in Somalia, to educate their daughters.

Then maybe we will change our viewpoint on women.

Perhaps we will cherish the labors they put in holding together a society that had long fallen apart, for enduring the anguish that Somali men had inflicted on them over the years, for bringing up strong children who made and will continue to make a difference in this world.

## DREADFUL RAINS

BY ALI SAHAL

Despite the signs of rain being a blessing to many, the dark clouds that gather ahead of rain reek of a disaster in wait to a teacher in his mid 70s in Ifo Refugee Camp in Dadaab.

Mulageta Aroba is seated next to his reading table, perusing through a book after last night's heavy downpour. A few wooden posts hosting a huge polyvinyl sheeting that was provided by UNHCR is what Mulageta calls home. His bed lies next to his reading table.

When it starts to rain, pools of water lay in many parts of Ifo refugee camp in a few minutes. UNHCR and its aid partners have already labeled some areas as flood zones. These include sections A, D, E, S and G and have called for people in those blocks to move to another section, N, which was established in the year 2006 after heavy floods in that camp. A call that many turned deaf ears to.

In a move, UNHCR and other organization resolved to depriving the residents of some services to show concern for them and make them relocate. For some time, the construction of shelters in the area was discontinued. That however was not fruitful. It is now eight years and people still live in these sections. Refugees in those sections, including Mulageta live in old houses.

In 2013, Peace Winds Japan started an equal distribution of shelter to all people in the camp.

The refugees' decision not to move from the dangerous halloos to the safer areas is a question that begs an answer. For some, it feels like moving may take a lot of effort, and settling down could even take longer. "We could not move after the call from UNHCR because it would be a struggle to fully settle again; we built these houses long ago," says the Minority Chairperson, David Aquein, "demolishing everything and settling in a new area will take time."

Alamayo Urdufa Asahari, an Oromo elder living in Block E2 is one of the people who hate the sign of rain. He lives with five cliques of his extended family in a single house. His house is a shack. "It leaks all over. We have to use almost all of our utensils when it rains to collect water that infiltrates through the leaks," he says, "Just the other day, I found my young granddaughter, who lives with us in this house drinking from a plate filled with leaking water. It worries me a lot."

Despite the people in these sections now receiving all the aid services equally with other refugees in Dadaab, they still suffer from the years that they missed some of the services such as shelter.



PROTECT THE GIRLS, THEY ARE THE FUTURE OF OUR GENERATION

HAVE  
YOUR ARTICLE  
PUBLISHED  
IN OUR NEXT  
PUBLICATION

Email us on: [therefugee.news@yahoo.com](mailto:therefugee.news@yahoo.com)



BPRM A gift of the  
US Government

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS MAGAZINE DO NOT REFLECT THOSE OF FilmAid, UNHCR, BPRM, OR ANY OTHER PARTNER AGENCIES EXCEPT WHERE SPECIFIED OTHERWISE.