

# THE Refugee

MAGAZINE

ISSUE #8 | DADAAB EDITION | MAY 2016



*Frances Namwebya Alesio*

PAPER JEWELLER WITH AN  
UNWAVERING RESILIENCE



*PLUS MUCH MORE!*

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The 6th May, 2016 announcement by the Kenyan Government of its plan to repatriate hundreds of thousands of refugees back to their countries has elicited mixed reactions from the beneficiaries some of who born and raised in the camps say there is no other home they know other than the camp. School going children risk losing all they have always yearned for-education.

The few weeks after the announcement, discussions surround the uncertainty of the final decision by the government whether it will be lenient to the refugees as the world and the respective nations seek lasting solutions to the volatile peace situations dogging them.

As the news and developments on the closure keep building up, we hope that when they meet at the cliché corners of the round table, the relevant authorities reach an amicable solution, humane and agreeable by majority and one that do not add to the misery perceived or real for the refugees.

From our end we bring you yet another edition of The Refugee Magazine illuminating heroes and heroines who have triumphed against all odds in their paths. These are real life stories of hard work, successes and hope for a greater tomorrow despite the numerous hurdles they have had to go through.

We feature Nadifo Abdullahi as she captures our attention boldly taking a huge step to talk and blog about the dangers of Female Genital Mutilation. Her motivation to start agitating for the girl child she says came about when her best friend got divorced barely three days after her wedding because she was uncircumcised. Infuriated, she could no longer sit back and watch how much regressive culture kept ruining young girl's lives.

Our top story covers a South Sudanese paper jeweller; a single mother of one whose struggles bore in her great resilience to turn around her life and create something out of scratch and throwaways in order to eke out a living for her young daughter. She thus ventured into paper jewellery moulding necklaces and bracelets.

The narrative of youth being lazy and idle is dispelled when we have a sit down with a young ambitious Somali Bantu Community leader, Ibrahim Lafey as he brings to perspective how his leadership has transformed a community historically uneducated farm tillers into one that appreciates book knowledge and hard work.

From the Refugee Magazine, we wish you a good read!

— EDITOR —

*Isaac Onyango*

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Dadaab Refugee Camp | PHOTO BY KEPHA KIRAGU

## BY PETER OKELLO

**O**n Friday 6th of May 2016, local and the international media is awash with news that the government of Kenya has announced its plan to close down Dadaab refugee camp; a camp it has hosted for the past two decade. The government cites the rise in cases of insecurity and economic strain exerted on it by the ever expanding population.

The directives from the Principal secretary State Department of Interior and Coordination of National Government Dr. (Eng) Karanja Kibicho states that “Due to the immense security challenge such as threat of al shabaab and other related terror groups, the government of Kenya has been forced by circumstances to reconsider the whole issue of

hosting refugees and the process of repatriation”

The story of the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps date back to 1991 and 1992 respectively when the United Nations and the Kenyan government agreed to host asylum seekers fleeing from the civil war that was razing Somalia and Southern Sudan nations. Since then the number has expanded massively hosting refugees mostly from Gambela region of Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. Within the past two and a half decades the number of refugees in Kenya has swollen to over 550,000.

In 2013, the United Nations High Commission for



Why does Kenyan government want to close the camp. It is not a good idea, to generalize as a threat. Refugees are not terrorists, we are innocent people. We don't kill other people. We left our country due to conflict. Why should we now kill someone?  
Ann Cham-Dadaab refugee.

# DO NOT CLOSE DADAAB CAMP, CRY REFUGEES

Refugees, the Government of Kenya and that of Somalia signed an agreement that would govern voluntary repatriation of refugees back to Somalia. This was to be coupled with ongoing efforts to consolidate peace, security and basic service delivery, and boost livelihood opportunities back in the affected countries.

So far, not much peace has been achieved in the affected countries and the Kenyan government's decision to close down the two refugee camps has been received with mixed feelings by the refugees some of who can only trace their homes back to these camps, they have been born and raised here, Fatuma Abdi, 17 thinks, "It is unfair that we be forcefully returned yet there is no peace yet restored back in Somalia."

Anne Cham an Ethiopia refugee living in

Dadaab said that when she heard the news, she was shocked and wondered what the future held for her and her children, "I am not happy with the news," she said. "This refugee camp has given us the hope, my child is in school now. We get free food and there is great peace because we do not live in fear of abuse and harassment." She added.

"Why does Kenyan government want to close the camp. It is not a good idea, to generalize as a threat. Refugees are not terrorists", she said adding that, "we are innocent people. We don't kill other people. We left our country due to conflict. Why should we now kill someone?"

The news about the camp's closure is gradually sinking in yet it has not resonated well with many wishing that the government of Kenya would reconsider its stance, have a

human face and give them just enough time to make something out of the lives they almost lost.

Citing insecurity and the volatile situations back in their countries as the reason as to why they would not want to go back now, most of the refugees in Dadaab only have their hopes of the government of Kenya reconsidering its position on the matter dangling by a thread.

As the anxiety and uncertainty of the final nail and hammer on the decision soaks the refugees in Dadaab camp, whether the government of Kenya will renege on the agreement it entered into to protect the refugees by being a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention by closing the camp or reconsider its position remains a matter that only time will tell.

# MODELLING AGAINST ALL ODDS FOR PEACE AND SOCIETY'S GOOD

Meet the multitalented young Sudanese woman who has defied all odds to keep on track her dream of strutting the fashion runways, sell platinum and grace silver screens and still pursue her studies for a cause at the heart of her war torn society.

BY PETER OKELLO

VISION IS WHEN YOU SEE IT IN YOUR MIND AND BEGIN TO IMAGINE IT WHILE DREAMS ARE WHEN YOU HAVE IT AND BEGIN TO ACHIEVE IT...

MYLES MONROE



LILIAN OCHAN

**I**f all dreams were to come true and wishes were horses then most would ride the best of the breed. Live in mansions. Wear designer clothes. Drive German cars, tee off to mowed golf courses to play with the high heeled in the society.

When the talented aspiring model, actress and singer Lilian Ochan Olay began her singing and acting back in her primary school level, she would get scorned at by those who felt it was such a waste of time. This however did not deter her from pursuing what she believed in despite

literally tripping a couple of time along the way. "I remember my first acting session, I fell on the ground face first in front of an unforgiving crowd. The loud laughter and the giggles weakened my limbs but I swore never to give up."

When she later moved to Nairobi she enrolled in school where she was yet again on the receiving end for being way older than her classmates. She was also derided due to refugee status. "They called me names and made fun of me whenever they could," she says.





**I believe that if you have hope for the future you have the true riches; no matter how little you have in your bank account. Hope they say is the rope that I swing on every day. I hope to one day open an arts theatre for youth to nurture and hone their talents and skills.” Lilian says.**

### Forged my path

“I had always wanted to become an actress, a singer and a model. This, I have always thought would have provided me with an opportunity to advocate for peace and equal rights. In my country, girls have been neglected and pushed aside to take up kitchen roles like cooking, fetching fire wood and water, washing utensils and laundering clothes but I wanted to forge a different path.”

The journey towards her dreams has faced numerous challenges that sometimes she feels she could just give up trying and but a still voice in her head tells her to hang in there just a little bit longer. She says she has once been denied an audition podium for runway models due to her being a refugee.

“I envision my future and I know where I would want myself to be despite challenges that I am facing. If I had a short and direct path to it, I would definitely take it. I look up to top models like Naomi Campbell, Gisele Bundchen and Tyra Banks who I get inspiration from through their hard work,” she says with a broad smile.

### Future Hopes

Looking back at her community in South Sudan and panning out to those still in refugee camps hoping day in day out that someday peace will be restored back and that they will be able to rebuild their lives, Lilian's motivation becomes sustained that her dream of being an actress depicting the plight of her people

and a singer narrating the need for peace is not one that should be left unattained.

“I believe that if you have hope for the future you have the true riches; no matter how little you have in your bank account. Hope they say is the rope that I swing on every day. I hope to one day open an arts theatre for youth to nurture and hone their talents and skills. I hope to open schools for orphans and disabilities so that they too can get education and help themselves,” Lilian says.

She is quick to add that her main cause is to try and educate her community on behaviour change citing the many cases of teenage pregnancies and a steadily growing number of girls dropping out of school to be married off as young as nine years olds in their teen's ages. “Cases like defilements, rape and sexual abuse and exploitation are on top of my agenda.”

As she tries to forge something out of her just sprouting career she urges young girls to go school, attend empowerment session in order to build their knowledge and becoming what they want to be.

Coming out as widely read lady she sums up with a Myles Munroe quote saying, “Purpose is when you know and understand what you were born to accomplish. Vision is when you see it in your mind and begin to imagine it while dreams are when you have it and begin to achieve it.”



“I envision my future and I know where I would want myself to be despite challenges that I am facing. If I had a short and direct path to it, I would definitely take it.”



PHOTO: GIRLS AND WOMEN FOLLOWING THE PROCEEDINGS

# WE #PLEDGEFORPARITY: DADAAB REFUGEES SAY

BY SIMON BOL

**F**ar away in the sunshine are my highest aspirations. I may not reach them, but I can look up and see their beauty, believe in them, and try to follow where they lead.

These are the words of Louisa May Alcott, an American novelist and poet on the emancipation of women.

In the spirit of holding the hands of women and helping their push for equality, and as the rest of the world marked International Women's Day, another world in the form and mould of Dadaab Refugee camp gathered to celebrate with its women, the achievements made in the clamour for women and girl child rights, growth and development.

International Women's Day celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievement of women the world over. It is a day women, both young and old, hold hands to track and celebrate the progress made.

It was pomp and colour at Hagadera's NCKK event as old women, young girls, boys and male members of the society with the support of various humanitarian agencies gathered in song and dance, educational skits and choral verses all themed around giving a voice to the woman.

Albeit remarkable strides in the fight for equality, progress has slowed in many places across the world due to amongst other causes retrogressive cultural practices, hence global





We, as the lead agency protection unit, discourage violence against women and advocate for the rights of girls and women in these communities so that they may have equal opportunities to actualize themselves,” he said.

action is needed to accelerate gender parity.

Abdi Sheikh, the Gender Based Violence Officer at IRC speaking at the event said that it is important that the issues of women be addressed with the gravity that it deserves stating that it is important that such days be marked to give a voice to the women.

“We, as the lead agency protection unit, discourage violence against women and advocate for the rights of girls and women in these communities so that they may have equal opportunities to actualize themselves,” he said.

As the appreciation for possibilities attainable from combined efforts from both men and women across the globe, leaders and individuals are continuing to pledge support within their sphere of influence by taking action as champions of gender parity.

The Special Advisor to Member of Parliament for Fafi Constituency where Dadaab Refugee Camp falls, Mr Noor Sheikh Farah, in his speech, acknowledged the efforts made by the key agencies concerned with gender

issues within the Dadaab refugee complex.

“I am touched by the agencies’ work in empowering women and the whole refugee fraternity in taking advantage of opportunities that build their capacities. They are the future of Somalia,” he said.

Participatory Education Theatre (PET) groups from around the Hagadera refugee camps entertained the crowd. Songs, Somali poetry and dances from the Somali Bantu community marked the peak of the celebrations. They awed the gathering to a resounding applause with their traditional trademark gyrations that pulled to the crowd from their seats and into to the dancing arena.

With smiling faces and dusty feet, the crowd dispersed having communed in the spirit of togetherness, joining hands with women in the fight towards equal opportunities for growth, development, eradication of gender based violence and with the echoing message of [#PledgeforParity](#).



PHOTO: Young girls and women keenly following the proceedings during the International Women's Day celebrations

“I am touched by the agencies’ work in empowering women and the whole refugee fraternity in taking advantage of opportunities that build their capacities. They are the future of Somalia,”

The Special Advisor to Member of Parliament for Fafi Constituency Mr Noor Sheikh .

# THE PAPER JEWELLER WITH AN UNWAVERING RESILIENCE

BY MOHAMUD AWIL



PHOTO: FRANCES ALESIO WITH HER DAUGHTER | PHOTO BY DENNIS MUNENE

What could have possibly gone wrong back home that a two year old girl would find herself living in a refugee camp thousands of desert miles away from home under the care of her old grandmother? The cloud of calm and peace that blanketed the Iba region of South Sudan had dissipated. Peace had departed.

I had rescheduled this interview a couple of times before this late morning. Frances meets me halfway to her houses adorned with a white woollen marvin cap covering her ears, a bluish short sleeved blouse and a midi bright yellow flowered skirt and with her two year old daughter on her side, she comes

across as a jolly woman. We exchange the typical African cliché pleasantries as she affirms, "I am well."

"I am Namwebya Frances Alesio," she says, as if she knew my first question. She is observant enough with my notes to know I am struggling to get the spelling right. She offers to write it for me. "I was sponsored through school by a missionary institute. They wanted me to be a nun but I wanted to be journalist so we disagreed and I left the school after form six."

Being an athletic woman, she played volleyball all through her high school. This would then stop upon finishing her schooling.



With no sponsorship she decided to venture into corporate volleyball where she plied her trade at East African Breweries between 2006 and 2009.

A promising career that would have made a rags-to-riches story suddenly tumbled over as she got addicted to alcohol. "We had bottles upon bottles of free beer for refreshments after every game. Soon, I could not control my drinking. I got hooked and could not train effectively."

After her career ended, she would later meet a man from her country of origin and got married. The marriage however did not last. Storm descended over paradise when she and her husband separated and he went on to live in Juba back in South Sudan. She was left behind and moved in with her mother in law.

"I suffered indescribable pain in her hands," she says with teary eyes. "I would make beaded jewellery and roast peanuts before going to school where I was undertaking my Association of Chartered Certified Accountants- ACCA course. I even lost my first child in that house!"

"After I lost my child, I ran away from home and worked for a couple weeks as a house help. It was a hellish modern day slavery. I kept looking at my sorry life with my face down. It was painstakingly despairing. A friend suggested I register as a refugee and I found myself in Dadaab's Ifo Refugee camp in August of 2014."

### The Waste Inspiration

Starting a life in Dadaab refugee camp brought with itself fair share of challenges that would have broken her will but her resilience never wore out. "One morning as I was cleaning up, I saw waste papers from posters lying around and I decided to make something out of them. I decided to start making paper jewellery out of these waste papers.

"As a single and jobless mother, these would enable me fend for my young daughter. I started collecting and designing them into shapes and forms of beads used in making handmade ornaments such as bracelets, earrings and necklace sets.

Soon, I was training other young single mothers on how to design paper jewellery. They are my sisters, we share so much in common and our challenges which have become the rock piles in our paths make us combine our efforts to be able to contemplate all that comes our way."

"We motivate each other that despite the challenges we go through, there will be a sunny day for each of one of us in our own ways."



PHOTO: Paper beads

Since then, the group of twelve young single mothers, under the guidance of two male advisors, have ventured into handcrafted paper jewellery and embroidered table and sofa clothes. There has been no looking back despite the myriad challenges they face. Financial constraints and no ready raw materials to start and finish the jewellery and the pendants is the main impediment to scaling up their production.

Having sold some of her wares before to visiting foreign agency workers for as much as five hundred Kenya shillings for a set of three; a pair of earrings, a necklace and a bracelet, she is confident the market to sell these wares is available.


"I believe this venture has great potential. Waste paper is readily available but we need other raw materials like the Kiriema (tiny shiny metal rings placed between beads for design and to hold the beads in place), vanish, glue, Maasai beads and fasteners which can only be sourced from Nairobi." Frances added that if they were to get a workshop to operate from seeing as the nature of their work involves the use of toxic chemicals such as glue and vanish which children can easily be exposed to, they would optimize their production in a safe environment.

"Let me show you where we practice," she says as she ushers me along to her practice ground. Despite the trouble Frances has gone through as a single mother, she's still manages a positive outlook to life given how agile and energetic positioning herself for the volleyball set.

### PAPER JEWEL IN SIX SIMPLE STEPS...

1. Cut the paper, and roll on a needle or thin stick to create a thin hole through the rolled paper.
2. Glue the paper to make it stick and stable
3. Colour before adding layers of vanish to make the paper stable and waterproof
4. Insert a thin thread through the holes created by the needle/ stick
5. Add the Maasai beads and the paper beads as per desired design
6. Tie the end with a fastener.





Composure.  
Confidence.  
Mastery of the  
English language.  
These are traits  
evident of a young  
Somali Bantu  
man who has  
challenged all  
probabilities to  
stand out away  
from the masses  
as a leader of a  
group historically  
looked down upon  
as farm tillers and  
no school goers to  
steer them toward  
a direction only  
the visionaries  
can tell.

**TO STAND OUT,  
FROM THE REST,  
LEAD FROM THE FRONT**

BY MOHAMED JIMALE

**HISTORICAL INJUSTICES AGAINST THIS COMMUNITY HAS BARRED THE GLOW OF CIVILIZATION FROM THE FACES OF SOMALI BANTUS. THEY WERE FARMERS BACK IN SOMALIA AND NEVER GOT THE OPPORTUNITY TO GO TO SCHOOL AND LEARN. IT IS A PITY THIS HAS NOT CHANGED MUCH.**

**M**ention Ibrahim Lafey and people will rise in honour of a great leader. An astute young man with an eye for development of his people, he was born Ibrahim Hassan Mohamed. Lafey was a nickname that people gave him. He now leads his people to a destination only a visionary mind like him can see.

Lafey's popularity and leadership attributes became evident when he was elected to the position of the Hagadera Youth Deputy Treasurer's position. An astute leader, he initiated and oversaw numerous projects for the youth especially those from his marginalized Somali Bantu community.

"Historical injustices against this community has barred the glow of civilization on the faces of Somali Bantus. They were farmers back in Somalia and never got the opportunity to go to school and learn. It is a pity this has not changed much," he says.

"Parents do not send their children to school despite schools being free and the Constitution of Kenya articulating that children have a right to free basic education. Cases of early marriage are rife and unemployment is accepted as a normality. Most are fully dependent on the food rations provided by the World Food Programme."

When he assumed office, the realization of his community's full dependence on aid, unemployment and retrogressive cultural practices propelled his desire to provide leadership to a people who seemed like they were drowning.

"I realised all the challenges and called for a meeting with the youth who had basic education and we formed groups that would train the community on behaviour changes. We did the trainings in our own language as it was all they could understand. We even encouraged parents to take children to school and we had a very positive response from many."

Hard work never goes unrewarded. The recognition of his efforts was acknowledged when he was promoted from Treasurer and nominated to be the Chairman of the Somali Bantu community in Hagadera camp in 2012.

He continued with his shrewd management style where he involved the participation of communities in every step of development projects. He extended his work to support other camps through information sharing and support and before the end of 2012, he was elected as the overall Chairman of the Somali Bantu community in the wider Dadaab Refugee Complex.

"I approached CARE International and we were provided with machines to run our waste recycling project," says Lafey before adding that, "other than the obvious importance of waste recycling which is environment conservation, the project has created job opportunities for over forty Somali Bantu men and women who were initially unengaged."

"As a Somali Bantu leader, I highly advocate for the education of the youth, sanitation and hygiene. You know most of the children loitering around the camps, some working as cobblers and some as shoe polishers are Somali Bantu. It is saddening to see these children stay away from free education and it makes me work hard in hand with their parents and the community leaders to ensure they are taken off the streets and into classrooms behind desks," he adds.

Despite some parents objecting the withdrawal of students from the menial jobs that keep them in the streets to fend for their families, there are testimonies of positives and Ismail Mohamed Hassan and Osman Baraki Leeb are just but a few amongst those who benefitted from the street to school campaign. They are currently working with United Nations Humanitarian Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) as interpreters.

Ibrahim has a strong working relationship with the agencies operating in Dadaab and gets opportunities to travel to Nairobi to attend empowerment and capacity building forums, the latest of which was at US Embassy to attend a meeting of minority and marginalized communities' advocacy.

He encourages the youth to seek education and to stand firm and promote peace and unity.



**As a Somali Bantu leader, I highly advocate for the education of the youth, sanitation and hygiene...It is saddening to see these children stay away from free education and it makes me work hard in hand with their parents and the community leaders to ensure they are taken off the streets and into classrooms behind desks,**

# NADIFO; BLOGGING BOLD AGAINST FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

BY ISAAC ONYANGO



PHOTO: NADIFO ABDULLAHI DURING OUR INTERVIEW

When her best friend and neighbour got divorced hardly three days after a glamorous wedding and only because she had not been 'cut', Nadifo Abdullahi would get her inspiration to fight for the rights

From the poor performance by girls in school to withdrawal from school altogether in order to be married off at a young age, many girls have faced so many challenges but just a handful have been able

to gather the courage to speak up about their plight and in condemnation of the vice that pull back girl child.

Nadifo, 23, has not allowed the hurdles placed on her feet and the weight set on her shoulders by the society to block her from a course she believes in. In early 2016 she came up with a blog to educate and inform her community on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) issues. The blog is in its formative



stage but has been doing pretty well. With growing readership and increased comments on stories posted, it is indeed worth believing that it is connecting with readers who are hopefully getting more informed on the issue.

In her blog Brownkey, she discusses issues of child labour, rape, battery and early marriage. She also touches on issues of girl child education with her main inspiration being the desire to change the perceptions of her society towards retrogressive cultural practices that have dragged women behind in her Somali community.

Her walk has not been easy as she has had to contend with financial constraints and the inability to mobilize groups of girls for workshops. "It has not been easy for the programme to take flight as I have to had to ride on the events organized by other agencies to be able to talk to girls," she says.

Cases of FGM are not new to her as she recalls her four-year stint as a pharmacist between 2009 and 2014. "I am familiar with the challenges these girls face. My community has not embraced change yet but we have made some few strides."

I asked if her background in pharmacy had anything to do with her resolve to blog about these issues. "Interacting with victims and issuing prescriptions made me understand the gravity of the pain these young women were going through. However, I am not a medical practitioner. I only educate on the dangers and need for shifts in perceptions toward the practice," she says.

"I saw young girls collapse right by the road unable to move due to the excruciating pain searing through their young bodies. It is not something the society should be proud of,"

She adds pensively.

She continues, "besides the pain, there are numerous negative effects of FGM to these girls later in life such as problems during childbirth due to painful labour pains and excessive bleeding which may lead to death in extreme cases."

She organises forums that bring together girls and women to educate them on the dangers of FGM. Using every avenue at her disposal to empower the marginalised segment of the society, she plans to harness the power of sports through football leagues to bring together the youth as a way of sensitizing them on various issues and for talent promotion.

"I do not have the funding to convene football tournaments but the clubs have agreed to support the idea by organising a tournament around girl child empowerment."

The last born in a family of twelve, she was born on her parents' way to the camp from their homeland of Somalia. She says her family has been her greatest pillar in this battle. "My family has supported me since I started this and they inspire me to keep trying harder in this pursuit."

"You cannot change a rigid society in a day, not even in a month or a year but the change process has to begin somewhere. This is the seed of change in this community," she concludes.



You cannot change a rigid society in a day, not even in a month or a year but the change process has to begin somewhere. This (blogging and having discussions about the dangers of FGM) is the seed of change in this community,

NADIFO ABDULLAHI

# PREGNANCY, BIRTH AND THE PAIN IN BETWEEN; TEENAGE MOTHERS OF DADAAB

BY CALEB ODHIAMBO

At the Girl-mothers support network the young mothers are supported to their final term to enable them raise their children in good health and with the right nutrition. They are also supported through income-generating start-ups while some are enrolled into accelerated learning programs or the catchup classes where they go through basic literacy and numeracy training sessions. Others are engaged in vocational skills training where they acquire skills mainly in dressmaking and tailoring and receive support in starting their own business ventures as groups.



PHOTO: Teenage girls during a support group meeting

Crawling on the floor clutching toys and occasionally trying to hold on to chairs in order to stand, baby Nasir and Fathi enjoy the environment in the office, perhaps fascinated by the tiled floor and the roof above them which is far a cry from the tent they woke up in. Sitting by the corner are three young girls. Two appear to be in wander while the other is lost in a state of calm.

My first instinct is - they too need toys. But no! I'm wrong. Naima and Amina are not your typical children, they

have been hardened by harsh realities and have been through so much for their age. They were robbed of their childhood.

The irony of Dadaab Refugee Camp is that it is the safe place where its inhabitants sought refuge. Dadaab's story is never complete without the mention of teenage mothers who have gone through some harrowing experiences in the same place they sought refuge. What was meant to be a temporary camp for 90,000 refugees

has slowly mutated into a permanent complex for approximately 347,000 given the protracted-refugee situation.

The camp is synonymous with cramped tents and people living in squalor. Constant cries of small food rations and water and violence against women and children is close to a norm and the volatile security situation heightens fear in the minds of refugees, the host community and humanitarian aid workers.

A typical day for a young girl in Dadaab would be to go to school, socialize with friends, write homework and undertake household chores. But for these three girls, Amina, Naima and Nimo\*(not their real names) all aged below 17 years, theirs is a different story.

Albeit arriving in Dadaab Refugee Camp at different times, they have something; they all fled from Somalia due constant threats from the dreaded militia groups. Amina was also escaping from a forced marriage imposed by her uncles.

The realities in the camp were hard to accept and far from their expectations. Food rations were hardly enough; shelter was in dilapidated tents which could not withstand the scorching heat from the sun and which offered little or no protection from the cold or the heat.

Naima and Nimo were lured into early marriage as a way out of poverty and they married men old enough to be their fathers. "I did not get married to get children. I got married to financially help my single mother take care of my six siblings. But I was wrong. I was cheated and I feel short-changed," says Naima, biting her lower lip while trying to hold back tears and stroking her baby's hair to distract her mind from the painful memory.

Nimo's husband got violent barely a few months into the marriage. "The beating was unbearable and sometimes he beat me till I passed out," says Nimo.

Seven months pregnant, Amina was in class four in Primary School when she was introduced to an old man. He started by giving her gifts and calling her regularly. "He

was old and had another wife. He would call me daily and give me some money. We started being close to each other, one thing led to another and I was shocked when I missed my period. The lab test confirmed my fears and I felt as though the world was coming down on me. I was nervous and terrified," said Amina.

Her pregnancy brought about a dispute between her and her father as he wanted her out of the family while her mother wanted her to stay. She dropped out of school when she could no longer endure the lewd comments and accusatory looks from her fellow students. Friends wore off one by one and family members grew aggressive towards her save for her mother.

The story of the three girls represents that of many other innocent girls who fall into to the deceitful scheme laid by men to trap and exploit them. In a patriarchal and male dominated society like Dadaab, it is extremely hard to break the news of premarital pregnancy, let alone get much needed support.

### Saved by Save The Children

"A very close friend referred me to a social support programme by Girl-mothers support network. At first, I was cynical and fearful about it but opened up to it after a couple of months. Through the support network, I was able to make friends, share my stories and laugh with other girls and above all accept myself. I learnt about pre-natal care and started to access the health facility through referral from our social support group," says Nimo.

Being inexperienced new mothers, the girls are trained on life skills, financial literacy, positive discipline and parenting in order to assist them gain parenting knowledge.

"I got my life back. I was suicidal and sentimental. I was blaming myself for everything but now I love who I am and I love my baby. I have renewed hope," brims Naima.

The young mothers are supported to their final term to enable them raise their children in good health and with the right nutrition. They are also supported through income generating start-ups while some are enrolled into accelerated learning programs or the catchup classes where they go through basic literacy and numeracy training sessions. Others are engaged in vocational skills training where they acquire skills mainly in dressmaking and tailoring and receive support in starting their own business ventures as groups.

"I contemplated abortion before I came here but now, I want to have my baby. I have already lost so much that losing my baby would be too much for me to bear. I will go back to school once I give birth. I am now convinced more than ever that education is my only way out," says Nimo

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Youth teams posing for a photo before match kick-off. PHOTO | Jimale

# HARNESSING YOUTH PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH ‘WEDDING TOURNAMENTS’

BY NADIR MOHAMED

**T**he Spartans were well known for their organized life and rigorous training that enabled them develop a deep power of resilient spirit over their minds. They trained extensively in warfare and sports. This is also the reason why they initiated the Olympic Games to demonstrate their fitness. Little wonder as to the Greek proverb, a sound mind is in a sound body.

A home to close to 350,000 people from different countries torn by war and conflicts, Dadaab has stood the test of time to withstand the challenges exerted on it by the ever expanding population. Despite their refugee status and their countries withering from war, this community of refugees has learnt to live in harmony harnessing unity through sports and education.



“Hagadera camp has one main football field which has been encroached upon by business owners in the as it is adjacent to the main market. The field is also used as matatu stage and dumping site for most traders at market,” says Aden Arab, Hagadera’s sports Chairman.

### Wedding tournaments

We have been financing ourselves from club registration funds but a large chunk of our funds come from our own contribution. For instance when one of our friends or team member has a wedding we contribute towards that and hold a tournament in his name. The winner and the runners up are awarded from the contributed funds.” say Ali Mohamed Noor, the Association Treasurer

Issack Hassan, the Secretary notes that the revamping of the Sports association has brought so many positives as there are over a hundred registered sports teams in Hagadera camp for both men and women and there is order which has aided in growth and appreciation of the benefits of sports.

The benefits of sports are numerous. Other than for physical coordination and strength, promotion of good health and character building, it is an effective tool that can be well incorporated into peace building campaigns.

Participation in challenging sports teaches children to adopt easier to the challenge of learning within a classroom setting. It also teaches children how to function in a competitive society

Realizing the benefits of sports in peace building and cohesion, Hagadera Sports Association has thus requested the agencies to support sports activities in FAFI camps. “We are knocking on doors to get support for our sports teams and talent and to assist in providing all necessary facilities to train them properly so as to enable the youth from these camps be engaged constructively and to compete at higher levels,” explained Ali Noor.

Parents should also set a good example for their children by encouraging them to be active in sports as it has lifelong benefits to the body and the mind.

“ The number of youth involved in sports increases with each passing day. Sports has kept the youth engaged and this has in turn kept them away from drugs and theft.

Up until 2011, CARE Kenya had sponsored numerous sports activities themed around various issues affecting the lives of Hagadera refugee residents. Upon their withdrawal, Hagadera Sports Association was born out of the need to continue the efforts initiated by CARE; peace building and talent development.

During the period preceding 2011, Hagadera had the highest number of registered sports teams under the Hagadera Sports Association. Since then, sports has faced many challenges and suffered setbacks like grabbing of sports fields, the collapse of some of the teams as well as lack of support from agencies as none of them supported sporting activities in camps.

“The number of youth involved in sports increases with each passing day. Sports has kept the youth engaged and this has in turn kept them away from drugs and theft. If they remain idle, it would become easy for them to be radicalized,” says Abdi Hassan, a 53 year old former footballer who commands a near legend status amongst those who attest to his footballing skills.



# FILMMAKER WITH AN EYE FOR ART ACTIVISM

BY MOHAMED JIMALE

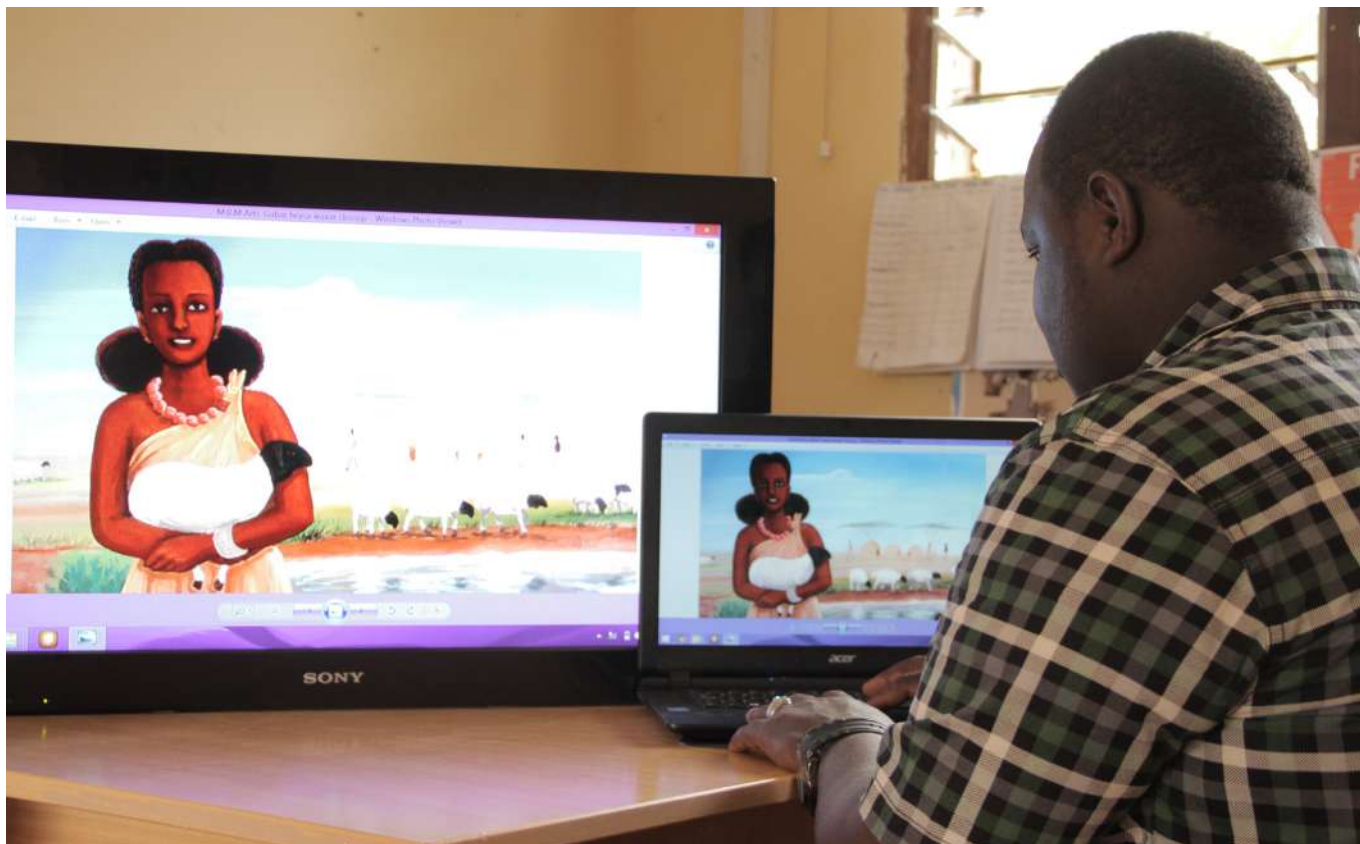


PHOTO: Jirde working on one of his illustrations

Once attacked by a group of young men as he practiced his painting because one of my artworks 'looked like' their sister, he says with a smile, "It is long time ago and it does not worry me anymore. It actually motivated me to even work on greater paintings."

A filmmaker by training, he exhibits the creativity of a genius and his mastery of art without attending any art school baffles his peers and the old alike. The fluidity with which he manipulates computer software remains a mystery to many who come to him from far and wide for his works. And he says, "To me, this is very easy, I learnt this myself and I keep working on being better at what I do."

Jirde Muktar was born in Somali's Banaadir region in Mogadishu 1987 but his family moved into Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp in 1996 to seek refuge from the

war back home. His father, Muktar Mudey was an artist and graphic designer. The family depended on what their father eked out from his art works.

Jirde started schooling 2001 as he was admitted in Amani primary school. Upon completion of his primary education, he joined Waberi high school to pursue his secondary education. It is while at Waberi did he realize his artistry.

It is a tale of like father like son as his talent did not come out of the blues, his father Muktar Bashir Mudey is well renowned artist who he used worked on paintings of prominent Somalia government officials during the late Siyad Barre Regime where he hand drew portraits of the leaders during key events and celebrations.



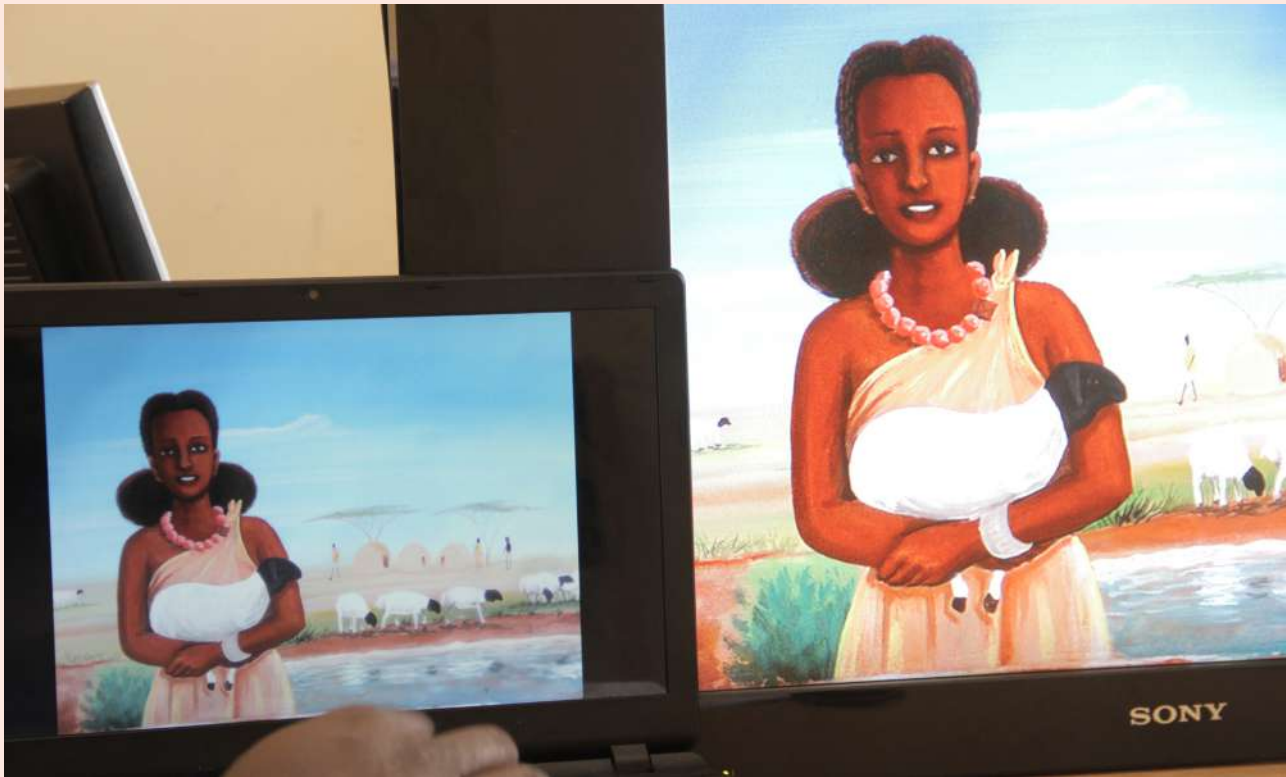


PHOTO: One of Jirde's depiction of a young Somali woman carrying a lamb. His paintings and illustrations are rich in culture and social action messages

When Jirde started drawing, it was something he did to pass time. It did not mean much to him. It was a talent most of his family members had so there was no wow factor in whatever he was doing or so he thought. His father, the old Muktar, however had a greater vision with his son's abilities. He encouraged him to take his gifting seriously.

With that slight push, Jirde decided to take part in school art competitions where he would emerge at the top of the pack. "Being a competitive artist had never crossed my mind before that until I won the art competition for my school. Then, I thought I could win much more for myself."

Already having added the art of painting

as a feather on his hat, he decided to widen his area of creativity to incorporate technology. He therefore started working with computer graphic design software and has over the time honed his skills by working on computer illustrations and logo designs for various institutions.

His star has shone far and wide. His popularity got a boost in November 2015 when he was selected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to represent Dadaab refugee camp at an Art exhibition in the Kenya's capital Nairobi. The exhibition pitted other refugee artists from Kakuma refugee camp and Dadaab.

"I cannot express how elated I was when I got the opportunity as the only graphic designer artist selected to represent

Dadaab. It is an inerasable honour. For the first time I stepped in Nairobi" He says.

Trained by FilmAid on filmmaking, he says that even though the power of film has not received the appreciation it he enjoys every bit of what he does it. He uses both film and his artwork to communicate social action to his community.

Jirde's is a story of a small window of opportunity given propelling an individual to greater success. For other artistic youth, it is a journey of uncertainty as they remain obscured not able to be heard or seen by the world due to lack of opportunities to showcase tier talents.



I cannot express how elated I was when I got the opportunity as the only graphic designer artist selected to represent Dadaab. It is an inerasable honour. For the first time I stepped in Nairobi"

JIRDE.

# I AM LIVING PROOF OF A NORMAL LIFE BEYOND HIV/AIDS.

BY MOHAMED JIMALE

**D**iscrimination. Stigma. But why me? Maybe I deserve it." Maryan\* (name withheld for purposes of confidentiality) thought to herself

Such is the circumstance within which Maryan\*(not her real) found herself in when her boyfriend left without the courtesy of informing her that he was leaving her. As if that was not enough she would learn what would devastate her pushing her to the edge of death. She had contracted Human Immunodeficiency Virus and it was eating her up so fast.

It has been nine years since he walked out leaving with nothing but a mix of anger despair; thoughts that bore contemplations of death.

The eldest in a family of five siblings and at only 17 years of age, Maryan was left to be



**“** I contemplated committing suicide several times when I felt so helpless but I had a change of mind and accepted my condition after I had a talk with IRC HIV programme staff who made me and my family understand that I can live like any other person if I took my medications properly.”

MARYAN\*

the breadwinner of the family upon the death her parents back in 2012.

“I lived with my family until I was in class seven when I met a boy and we became friends,” she says coyly. “He had joined our school the same year from Nairobi. Soon, we developed feelings for each other as I always saw him as a well-mannered boy,” she adds.

Maryan says they evidently rushed their young relationship that it grew to fruition way before its time.

“Our love brewed a little too quickly and barely a year into our courtship, we had shared so much. I gave him everything I should have kept. I gave myself to him and we did not use protection on any occasion.”

“One time he failed to come to school, I thought it was just a case of absenteeism and that he was going to resume the next day. He did not. When he stayed away for several days and stopped communicating with me, and even changed his phone numbers, I was taken aback at the sudden change in his behaviour,” Maryan laments.

After a couple of days of no communication and bottling her anxiety, she went to his home out of concern and the news she received almost gave her a heart attack. She was told he had gone back to Nairobi. “How would he go back to Nairobi without letting me know?” she asked.

So many questions begged for so many answers but no response came back. Two months after his disappearance, she was



# ART & POETRY

## GRASS WILL GROW

BY JOHN AKWAY CHAM

A Refugee's life is full of memories,  
Sometimes good, most of the times bad  
We are lost in a world of pessimism,  
Uncertain about tomorrow,  
For tomorrow is our question without an answer,  
But we keep up the hope that grass will grow

We walk deep into darkness and nothingness,  
Our right and left is dark,  
Like an uphill walk, we stroll forward  
The steps are not stacked for an easy climb  
Sometimes we roll back  
But we keep up the hope that grass will grow

Many have lost lives, others some contemplated suicide  
Nobody knows what the cure to this pain will be  
But thousands of our future plans  
Are telling us to remain strong  
Stepping forward is no mean fete,  
But we keep up the hope that grass will grow

Days turn into months,  
The years go by and home never comes  
We are caught in a cage  
And chained by uncountable thoughts  
Unable to get out,  
But we keep up the hope that grass will grow

Wishes are our daily meal,  
But none is ever accomplished,  
No belly ever gets full from wishes  
We keep holding onto that unshakable hope,  
Because there is no greater loss  
Than the loss of hope that grass will grow



taken ill for a bout of diarrhoea and vomiting. "I was taken to the hospital and was referred to the VCT centre at the hospital. I did not have any idea why," she recalls

Amid sobs, she says she could not believe it when the doctor confirmed her worst fears. She was in a sheer state of denial. How could she be possibly HIV positive? "Tears welled my eyes. I felt so lost and helpless. I still remember that day to this moment. I have never stopped thinking of the state of shock I was in. It was like a bad dream," she says with teary eyes.

With a soul full of despair, she prayed for death to take her. She sauntered back home and never went back for medication despite the doctor's instructions that she be put under antiretroviral (ARV) medication.

"About two weeks later, the information had spread that I was HIV positive. This, coupled with the fact that I was not feeding well due to loss of appetite, drastically dropped my weight to the point I remained a bag of my own bones."

This change in her health status brought a lot of humiliation and discrimination to her and her siblings that they could not even share the communal amenities they used to share before.

"We were considered to have been cursed by God and could not get water from tap stands. Continuing with my studies was even more daunting because of the harassment and abuse I encountered from the community and school mates," she pensively adds.

"I contemplated committing suicide several times when I felt so helpless but I had a change of mind and accepted my condition after I had a talk with IRC HIV programme staff who made me and my family understand that I can live like any other person if I took my medications properly."

"Many people with HIV are unable to access aid assistance provided by NGOs within the Dadaab Refugee camp due to fear of stigmatization and to an extent regressive cultural beliefs," explains a health worker at Hagadera's main hospital.

Despite campaigns to break the silence on stigmatization, accessing treatment still remains a challenge to people living with HIV/AIDS.

Maryan, who thought of tying a hangman's noose around her neck, now feels she can afford a smile knowing that the dark patch of utter hopelessness is long over and she is living proof that one can still live a normal life beyond being infected with HIV/AIDS.



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