



Growing up in Protracted Crises in Uganda: refugee youth experiences of transitions to adulthood

This research addresses a lack of knowledge of the impacts and outcomes for youth growing up in protracted crises to improve the efficacy of policy and the targeting of multisector programming for young people. Through an in-depth qualitative examination of lived realities and transitions to adulthood among refugees in Uganda and Jordan, this research will provide an overview of the diversity of experiences as well as in-depth case studies that map out the processes, impacts and outcomes for youth (disaggregated by age and gender). The research will innovatively employ the capabilities of young people to undertake their own research and knowledge exchange through a youth-led methodology and engage with communities of policy and practice regarding the impacts of protracted crises on youth's ability to access key transitions through education, employment and establishing family life at the right time.

Research Aim and Objectives

This research aims to explore how youth, experience and navigate pathways to adulthood when growing up in situations of protracted crises to inform policy and multisector humanitarian and development programming. The specific objectives of the research are:

- To explore how youth experience transitions to adulthood in the context of protracted displacement.
- To explore the social, cultural, spatial, relational and temporal dimensions to such transitions.
- To explore how youth transitions in protracted crises vary according to age, gender and other social markers.
- To develop potential policy recommendations and practical strategies for supporting refugee youth transitions.

Context

Young people constitute a significant proportion of global populations. There are currently 1.2 billion youth between the ages of 15 and 24 (UN, 2015). UN data shows that in Africa 60% of the population are aged below 25, (UN DESA, 2015); and in the Middle East 46% of people are under 25 (UN DESA, 2015; Faour & Muasher, 2012). These areas also host the largest number of displaced people, with the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) the largest generator of refugees globally (IOM, 2016). Within Uganda there are some 538,252 refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2016). Young people constitute a significant proportion of this population.

Over half of all displaced people are children under 18 years. They have poor prospects for adult life. As situations of crises become protracted, these children grow up through youth to adulthood, facing economic difficulties that are contextualized by situations of civil war, political tensions, and environmental crises which are exacerbated by protracted conditions of poverty. While humanitarian and development programming has invested significant sums into educational and vocational training initiatives, targeting youth affected by protracted displacements, this has not translated into the direct benefits anticipated. Significant barriers exist to understanding and planning to meet the aspirations of youth in contexts where crises have severely limited the potential for economic growth and employment opportunities (Gough et al 2013). Youth are therefore frustrated in their ability to attain social adulthood and some feel excluded within their local communities (Jeffery 2010; Langevang 2008). For those affected by protracted crises it is expected such exclusion will be amplified, limiting both individual potential and creating negative social implications. It is now critical that the impacts of displacement on youth transitions to adulthood are fully understood. Engaging youth as important social actors in addressing present needs and shaping the future trajectories of communities and societies, is vital to support effective transitions into adulthood and contribute to sustainable development outcomes.

This research will add new knowledge by understanding the experience of transitions to adulthood for young people growing up in protracted crises. While 'the nature and experience of these transitions are likely to vary according to various markers of social difference' such as age and gender (Hopkins 2006: 241), transitions to adulthood for such young people has been relatively ignored within academic and policy contexts. The motivation for this research, then, is to expand and deepen understanding of the factors that affect youth transitions and to utilize this new knowledge to refine operational planning and delivery of humanitarian and development policy and programming.

Research recognizes transitions to adulthood as a series of boundaries that youth cross at varying points, such as leaving home, starting employment, cohabitation and having a family, rather than a singular fixed stage where adulthood is attained at a special age or time (Hopkins 2006; McDowell 2002). However, this knowledge is based on research in the global north with little work focused on transitions in poverty contexts and especially where youth are growing up under duress and displacement (van Blerk, 2008). This identifies a gap in understanding that this research seeks to fill.

Methodology: Youth-led qualitative case study research

This research will employ an innovative qualitative youth-led methodology and will collaborate with youth and youth organizations to carry out the primary case study research in Uganda. The youth-led approach is based on the premise that all young people are experts on their lives and able to articulate their needs and requirements when opportunities are created for them to do so. This type of approach is essential when working with youth who have experienced social exclusion, duress and displacement (van Blerk et al, 2016). This will include:

Baseline survey: The survey will collect personal information, in order to disaggregate the participant group by age, gender, location, marital status, social-economic status, and household status. It will also to begin to inform the development of a typology of transition pathways and barriers.

In-depth narrative interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be used to generate a series of individual perspectives on diverse transition pathways. These will be used to explore the barriers experienced by individuals, their coping strategies and how far they have been successful, as well as identify specific implications across the target groups.

Focus groups: A series of focus groups will be undertaken with children aged 10-14 to ascertain their aspirations for successful future transitions including their perspectives on education, livelihoods and family life.

Story mapping: Story maps are youth journeys through transition as they navigate their experiences of refugee status. They identify key sites, people, (exploring space, time and relations in transitions) through video, text and photography.

Analysis, knowledge exchange and dissemination workshops: Following data collection, initial analysis will be completed using NVivo analysis software. Through a series of local workshops held in Uganda, an active feedback and dissemination process will be used to ensure youth, organizations, government, donors and other stakeholders are invited to participate in developing the final outcomes. Final documents including policy briefings, full reports and summaries will be made available to attendees as well as through the University of Dundee website.

Ethics: The University of Dundee Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has fully reviewed and approved the research. An ethical framework including the protection and rights of young people will be adhered to.

Further Information

Professor Lorraine van Blerk; Dr Wayne Shand (University of Dundee, UK)

Mr Rogers Kasirye; Mr Rogers Mutaawe (UYDEL, Uganda)

Dr Badru Bukenya (Makerere University, Uganda)

Email: guipc@dundee.ac.uk

Email: kasiryer@yahoo.com

Email: badrub@gmail.com