Youth Transitions in Protracted Crises
Methodology Report
October 2017

Key Points

- A participatory youth-led approach to researching youth transitions in protracted crises builds capacity and skills and positions young people as experts in their own lives.
- A range of methods were used to fulfil the breadth and depth of understanding of key issues. A funnel approach facilitated each new method to acquire a greater depth of experience.
- Multi-media tools and novel technologies enabled skills and capacity building for young researchers as well as engaging interest in the research.
- Training and engagement in participatory analysis, dissemination and knowledge exchange enabled young researchers to participate as experts in policy dialogue; both powerful for policy makers and confidence-building for young participants.

Introduction

This methodology report complements the Synthesis Report, Policy Briefing and the interactive online story map produced for the Youth Transitions in Protracted Crises research project. The aim here is to elaborate upon the innovative methodological processes used and outline good practice for working with young people in difficult circumstances. The Youth Transitions in Protracted Crises project was established with the aim to explore how youth experience and navigate pathways to adulthood when growing up in situations of protracted crises. The objectives of the research were developed to examine the multi-faceted dimensions of transitions from the perspective of young refugees in urban and camp settings. In Uganda, participants were both Somali and Congolese refugees while in Jordan they were Syrian, Iraqi and Palestinians from Gaza. Participants were selected to emphasise diversity of backgrounds and were aged between 10 and 24 years old, with equal numbers of boys and girls. The purpose was to inform humanitarian and development policy and to create practical strategies for supporting transition pathways of young refugees.

Research Approach

The research embraced a participatory youth-led approach, 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.¹ In practical terms this means young people work with the research team and, through collaboration, develop rapport and new ways of communicating researching with young refugees, rather than merely extracting data from them.² ³ This approach aims to increase young people’s understanding of their circumstances, to create change in their lives and transform current practice through reflection and action.⁴ ⁵ Participatory youth-led research is therefore a process requiring commitment to ongoing information-sharing, dialogue and trust, where active engagement with youth takes place on their terms and across the entire research process from inception through to analysis and dissemination. Such an approach requires researchers to listen to young people and to be reflexive and sensitive to changing conditions.

Ethics and risk assessments: A full ethical review was undertaken and granted by the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee and also locally in each country. An ethical framework for working with young people in the context of child protection and children’s rights was presented including: informed consent, access, ownership, confidentiality, anonymity and post-research debrief/dissemination. Full risk assessments were carried out at the University of Dundee for all team members engaging in fieldwork.
Partnership Delivery: The research was undertaken in collaboration with local NGO partners – Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) and the Information and Research Centre of the King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) in Jordan. Additionally, academic partners were involved from Makerere University in Kampala and the German Jordanian University in Amman. Local partners provided a unique perspective on the research and their involvement enabled a participatory youth-led methodology to be employed. They were essential to manage the operational delivery of the research, as a source of local information on the country context and in providing support to the young people involved in the project.

Youth Researchers (YR)
The research team engaged in training and selecting youth who chose to participate as researchers in the project. Training was specifically developed to optimise the research experience for YR and tailored to each method of data collection. The young people were identified through CBOs, had some secondary education and were equally split by gender. They came from both camp and urban locations and represented the mix of refugee groups in the research; as well as having lived as a refugee themselves for at least three years. Eight YR were selected in each country.

Methods
The research applied a model that facilitated a range of methods to be carried out, both to fulfil the breadth and depth requirements of the research and for triangulation purposes. A funnel approach was applied whereby as the research progressed with each new method, greater depth of experience was sought with a smaller group of young people. Four methods were used for this purpose (Figure 2).

Survey: The survey was carried out with 505 young refugees in order to collect personal information, to disaggregate the research group by age, gender, location; marital, social-economic, and household status (including child-headed households); and to inform understanding of potential transition pathways and barriers to transitions. The survey was designed with direct input from the YRs, with key changes in the final version clarifying some questions and resulting in significant changes to themes. The survey utilised ESRI’s Survey123 software and was collected via tablets, which were given to each YR. The software also enabled Arabic to be used as an administering language (Figure 3). This technology made the process more enjoyable for young people as well as ensuring safe and immediate transfer of data to the University for initial analysis and storage.

Narrative interviews: Semi-structured in-depth interviews were then used to explore the specific experiences of a range of young people across different contexts, locations and backgrounds. The interviews sought to understand the journeys they had made, and the impact of refugee status on various and interconnected aspects of transition as well as aspirations and well-being. Similar to the surveys, the YR discussed the questions and learned how to further explore areas of interest that emerged. This meant they had freedom to direct the course of the interview and probe emerging issues. The YR undertook the interviews in places and times convenient for the participants and, through the shared process of being a refugee of the same gender, age and nationality, quickly and easily established rapport. Use of local languages without the need for translation made for a more fluid and dynamic interview experience. The data quality was exceptional and all YR were supported by a nearby facilitator.

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Figure 2: Process, methods, and data sets. Surveys, interviews, and story maps show participant numbers; focus groups show number of groups (80 participants in total). 14 story maps are published online, but many more story boards were drafted by participants.
from the local partner organisation. As per the ethical protocol, before recording the interviews informed consent was sought. Interviews were transcribed and translated by the local partner and transcripts sent to the University of Dundee for coding and analysis using NVivo software.

Focus groups: In order to include the views of the younger participants, focus group discussions with 10-14 year olds were undertaken by the local academic partners. The purpose of the focus groups was to explore aspirations for the future, provide a current baseline for the later transition experiences of older participants, and think through how such aspirations change with protracted length of stay outside home nations.

Story mapping: This is an interactive web application that facilitates young people to devise their own research outcomes and offers a raw analysis of individual experience. Individuals worked with a YR to plan, create and write up their ‘story’, often about a single theme such as education, discrimination or marriage, but also about being a refugee. After planning a map of the spatial, temporal and relational journey they wished to illustrate, the participants could draw, write, record, photograph and video material to represent their story (see Figures 1 and 4).

The creative process of story mapping was undertaken with the support of a researcher from the core team and YR. Training for YR was exploratory and involved trialling and creating their own story maps before inviting other participants with a diverse range of stories to map aspects of their own journeys and transitions. The visual elements of individuals’ stories are combined using the ESRI story map software by the core team researcher, who received ESRI training. The map is available online to further promote and exchange knowledge created by youth regarding their experiences of transitions during protracted crises.

Analysis, Knowledge Exchange and Dissemination

A two-stage analysis process was undertaken. Initial quantitative analysis of the survey using SPSS and qualitative coding in NVivo took place at the University of Dundee. The second stage of analysis involved an interactive and iterative process between the core team, the YR, local partners and practitioners working in the field. This was essential not only to garner insight from young people and local partners regarding the findings and potential outcomes, but also facilitated additional information sharing and contextual knowledge that was not apparent to the core research team. Additionally, partners from both locations visited the other site to make connections between and across contexts.

Knowledge exchange and dissemination workshops: In each country the local partners and YR joined with the core team for active analysis workshops. Initial findings were presented, based on the SPSS and NVivo analysis, and then opened for discussion and debate. Generally, findings were agreed upon, with some additional context providing greater clarity. Following the analysis, bespoke YR training was provided to facilitate meaningful participation in workshops with policy-makers and practitioners. YR were encouraged to engage with themes and develop short speeches, based on their experiences and those of participants, to precede group discussions. Training covered the process of giving talks, including emotions, body language and voice, as well as responding to questions in group formats. The workshops were well attended in each country and contained a mix of NGO and government officials, all of whom were involved in the process of supporting refugees. Following a formal presentation of the findings and input from the local partners, the YR were exceptional in their ability to lead small group sessions including their delivery of introductory ‘personal’ experiences to frame questions and discussion. Workshop participants found the experience extremely powerful and the YR felt valued by being able to contribute their knowledge.

Figure 3: Tablet survey delivered in English and Arabic.

Figure 4: Participants in Uganda creating a story map.
Learning from Methodological Challenges

While successful in terms of partnership working, its co-produced format, the quality of the data and engagement processes, it may be helpful to share learnings from methodological challenges encountered during the research.

**Language:** The issue of language was significant due to the number of young people from different backgrounds participating in the research. In Jordan this was more manageable as most spoke Arabic and the local partner had access to a pool of transcribers. In Uganda, it proved difficult to locate a Somali transcriber; finally a young refugee who had participated in training was employed as a transcriber and trained accordingly. This had the benefit of including an additional young person in the project and enabled her to develop new skills.

**Emotions:** The process of discussing distressing issues was likely, given then topic of research. As the YR were all themselves young refugees living in the same circumstances as being narrated by their participants, careful consideration had to be given to emotional issues. During the training YR were asked to prepare and talk about one aspect of their transition experience. The detailed descriptions they gave uncovering highly emotive issues was surprising. Yet, they confirmed that talking in this way was helpful for them, viewing the research itself as a personal reflective and therapeutic process. Despite preparation through practicing listening skills, some YR did feel upset when interviewing participants. Local partners were available to provide support to overcome emotional hurt and all YRs felt the process was important. Participants were reassured by the empathetic manner in which YRs conducted interviews, and the YRs related personally to participants’ stories. This created an atmosphere of the research as meaningful for both.

**Research management:** A challenge for the core team was keeping the research process on track for fulfilling the aims and objectives. Partnership working and co-production of tools gave greater ownership to YR. In Uganda more visits were required than originally planned to ensure training was consistent and detailed. The collaborative process facilitated good relationships between all team members which helped in resolving difficulties as they arose.

**YR consistency:** In Jordan, it was more difficult to recruit YR for the full term of the research. Many different issues arose which resulted in YR not taking up the position or dropping out. These were related to issues such as employment (finding paid work) education (university and college terms and exams); and also related to family relations. For example, one YR suffered the death of a brother in Syria and some girls initially participated in the training but were then barred from doing interviews by family. In anticipation of such process issues, more YR were trained than positions available and so others could step into the vacant roles without additional training sessions.

**Story mapping ethics:** We developed a very clear ethical protocol that followed best practice guidelines for working with young people and vulnerable groups. Yet, challenges still arose in relation to the fast pace of online media. The creation of the story map had to be very carefully crafted to ensure that no individual young participants could be linked to their story through photography or video. This resulted in painstaking work both with young people in terms of the type of media they used and in terms of editing in the final production stage. However, the effort was well worth the results and the map is now testament to the vision and hard work of all the participants who wanted to share their stories with policy makers.

**Conclusion**

The methodology adopted was not without challenges, yet the specific approach fostered a knowledge exchange process that resulted in young people feeling they had been listened to and had been able to contribute significantly to debates that affect their own lives and to foster a desire to create change. Following the dissemination workshops, young researchers commented that the experience of being able to communicate with those working in policy and practice gave them a sense of accomplishment. Others have since tried to work within organisations in their camp/area or establish their own strategies to support others.

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**References**