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Taking the Lead: Refugees Creating Their Own Solutions



**An IRC – New School Study of U.S. Refugee
and Immigrant Organizations, International
Linkages and Exemplary Leadership**

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Project Purpose

- Create a community-based organization database of refugee focused service providers
- Identify organizations that collaborate with or contribute to organizations in their home country
- Identify outstanding refugee organizations and leaders for potential collaboration with IRC program departments

Focus Populations: Africa



**Sierra
Leone**

Liberia

Southern Sudan**

**Democratic Republic of
Congo**

**Southern Sudan was the only country study focused on region rather than nation, because of nature of conflict and composition of U.S. refugee population.

Focus Populations: Asia



Afghanistan

Burma/Myanmar**

**Myanmar is official country name, but international bodies who do not recognize ruling military junta (such as U.S.) use the name “Burma.”

Research: Methodology

- **CBOs identified through:**
 - Web-based research
 - Previous New School student study
 - CBO leadership/staff referrals
- **Findings based on:**
 - Data collected through surveys and phone interviews
 - **In-person organizational assessments**
 - CBO-produced print and electronic materials
 - News reports about CBOs



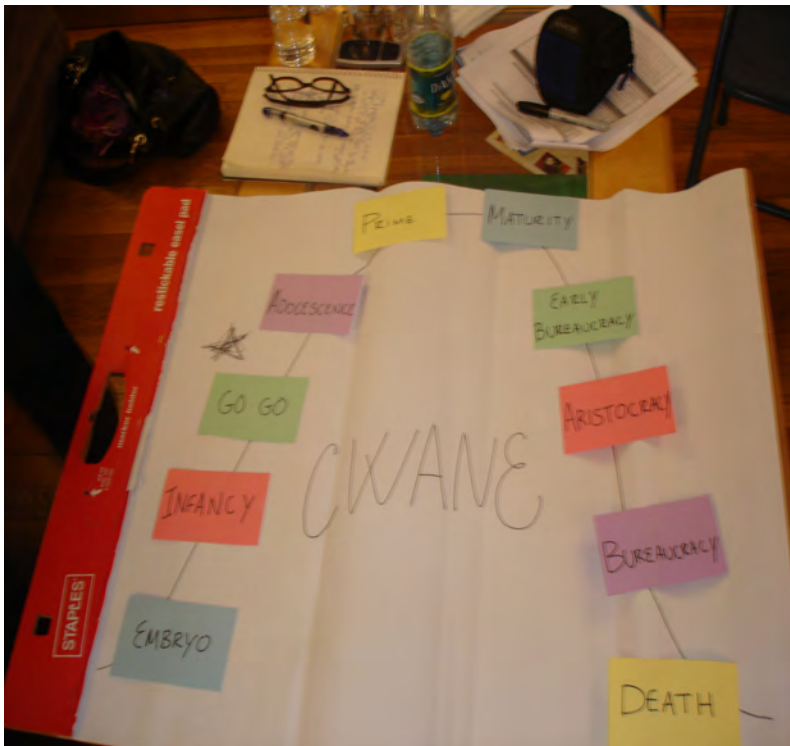
Survey Design

The Survey addressed:

- Why established, scope, programs and focus
- Leadership (board, staff and volunteers)
- Member and beneficiary characteristics
- Collaborations & linkages
 - U.S.-based
 - Home countries
 - Countries of first asylum

Organizational Assessment Tools

Sigmoid Curve

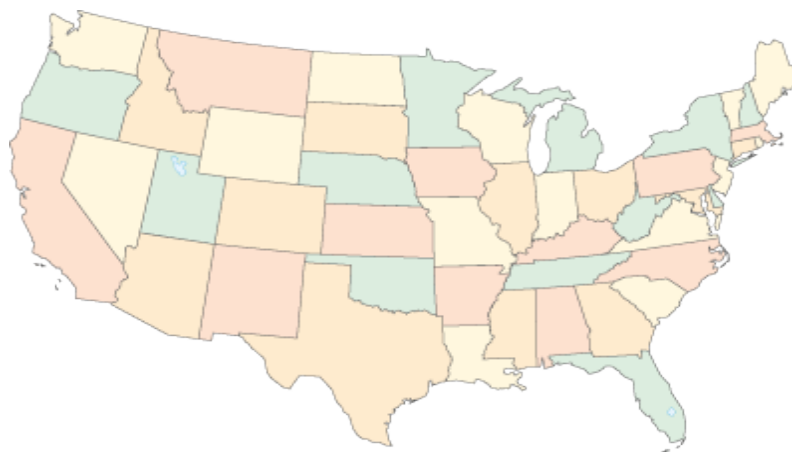


IRC Self-Assessment

- Management (program, organizational & financial)
- Leadership

Research: Scope

- 97 CBOs identified as Refugee/Immigrant-run in 20 states
- 43 CBOs interviewed
- 8 CBOs visited:
 - Maine
 - Massachusetts
 - New York
 - Pennsylvania
 - Virginia



CBO Main Functions

- Serve U.S.-based refugee/immigrant populations (locally, regionally and nationally)
- Assist with development, reconstruction and social services in home countries/countries first asylum
- Advocate on behalf of community and ensure information dissemination

Work in the U.S.



- Education (after school programs, literacy, ESL, seminars/conferences, college prep, vocational training)
- Health Service Provision (trauma counseling, health fairs, medical assistance)
- Legal Assistance and Referrals
- Community Outreach/Development
- Art and Culture
- Youth Leadership
- Peer Networking

Linkages to Home Countries & Countries of First Asylum

- Education (build/manage schools, provide volunteer teachers, scholarships and supplies)
- Development and Reconstruction
- Emergency Relief Aid
- Medical and Mental Health Services
- Exchange Programs (cultural, technical, development)
- Leadership Support



Advocacy

- Public Organizing (rallies, political demonstrations and festivals)
- Lobbying Government (in U.S. and abroad)
- Media Outreach (electronic and print)
- Conferences and Lectures



Particular
social, political,
economic conditions...



...directly shape each
population's CBO
efforts

Common CBO Experiences

- Funding Challenges
- ‘Mission Creep’
- Focus on Education



Unique Characteristics of CBOs

- **Afghan** – Financial and security issues, post 9-11 challenges in U.S; focus on immigrants, not refugees
- **Burmese** – Prioritizes independence for Burma and assisting refugees in countries of 1st asylum, offering only minimal social service for U.S.-based refugees
- **Congolese** – Non-English speaking struggles, strong organization of the Diaspora (across U.S. – globally), significant advocacy work

Unique Characteristics of CBOs

- **Liberian** – Colonial relationship with the U.S.; History of organizing U.S. population before the conflict, advocacy work
- **Sierra Leonean** – Few organizations focus only in U.S., because regional nature of conflict many CBOs are Pan African service providers
- **Southern Sudanese** –U.S. refugees primary focus (comprise majority of U.S. population), few and difficult linkages in Sudan

Organizational Assessments: CBOs Visited

Afghan:

*Afghan Communicator – Queens, NY

American Society of Afghan
Professionals – Alexandria, VA

Congolese:

*Congolese Women's Association of
New England – Jamaica Plain, MA

Fondation Shalupe – Braintree, MA

Liberian:

*African Cultural Alliance of North
America – Philadelphia, PA

Sierra Leonean:

*Nah We Yone – Harlem, NY

Southern Sudanese:

*Action for Self Reliance
Association – Portland, ME

*Southern Sudanese
Organization – Lynn, MA



Action for Self Reliance Association (ASRELA) – Portland, ME

- Built and manages a K-6 school in Kiryandongo refugee camp (Uganda) providing education and nutrition
- Designed and implemented a youth leadership program
- U.S.-based programs tackle issues such as tribalism, inter-family conflict and community building
- Success in producing large-scale fundraising events for Uganda school which joins diverse communities in the U.S.



Afghan Communicator – Queens, NY

- SLIDE INCOMPLETE
- Strong connections with U.S.-based Afghan CBOs and maintains a Kabul office to distribute Western aid
- Provides immigration assistance and referrals



African Cultural Alliance of North America (ACANA) – Philadelphia, PA

- Provides job and health referrals, legal assistance, educational programs, cultural orientation, support to artists, and a food bank for the community
- Partners with health care providers for trauma counseling, government agencies for cultural programs in the U.S.
- Implementing educational program in Liberia



- Working to become ‘one-stop’ social service provider for African immigrants and refugees

Congolese Women's Association of New England (CWANE) – Jamaica Plain, MA

- First group to conduct focus-groups of Congolese women throughout New England to identify their primary needs
- Advocates for Congolese Women's needs in the context of the wider Congolese refugee/asylee community
- Partners with mainstream social service providers and Congolese CBOs to produce public events in the U.S. and subsequent workshops throughout New England
- Raises funds for women's projects in DRC



Nah We Yone – Harlem, NY

- Provides support to refugees in detention centers and resources for resettlement including housing, job and legal referrals
- Fosters sustainable service network here beneficiaries give back as eventual providers
- Partners with high profile international human rights NGOs and local hospitals for advocacy and service provision
- Creates a community of support for African immigrants and refugees through counseling services, cultural programs, and youth camps



Southern Sudanese Organization – Lynn, MA

- Member of Massachusetts Mutual Assistance Coalition, an alliance of eleven immigrant/refugee groups that provides support programs, seeks funding and partners with mainstream social service agencies
- frequent partner to NGOs such as the IRC Boston resettlement office and other refugee support agencies.
- Creatively serves the community by utilizing skills and knowledge learned at home to overcome challenges such as unemployment

[picture to come]

Thank you!

