

**H i C N Households in Conflict Network**

The Institute of Development Studies – at the University of Sussex - Falmer - Brighton - BN1 9RE

[www.hicn.org](http://www.hicn.org)

**Livelihood networks and decision-making among  
Congolese young people in formal and informal  
refugee contexts in Uganda**

Christina Clark

[christina.clark@geh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:christina.clark@geh.ox.ac.uk)

**HiCN Working Paper 13**

February 2006

## **Introduction**

Refugee young people who are without their biological parents are often assumed to be among the most disempowered members of displaced populations. This paper interrogates this assumption by exploring Congolese young people's access to decision-making in a variety of household contexts in Kampala and Kyaka II refugee settlement, western Uganda. Using a network approach to household and family, research findings reveal shrinking networks, increasing delinkage between household and family, and a greater importance of households in the refugee context. These changes have resulted in the advent of households headed by young people and composed of young peers, as well as an increasing number of young people who are members of households outside of traditional family networks. Contrary to assumptions in much of the refugee literature, policy and programming, young people in these situations have greater access to decision-making at household, community and policy levels, thus showing that conflict-induced displacement has created opportunities as well as challenges for some refugee young people.

## **Methodology and terminology**

This paper draws on nine months' field research with Congolese young people living in Kampala and Kyaka II refugee settlement. Data was gathered using a variety of qualitative methods, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, oral history and individual writing exercises. Snowball and purposive sampling were used to identify over 350 research subjects. Due to ethical, methodological and logistical issues, in-depth research could only be conducted with research subjects who could speak some French or English, and thus had a certain level of formal education. Given these limitations, it is recognised that my sample is statistically unrepresentative, and hence non-generalisable. Moreover, it is important to stress that I am not endeavouring to undertake a strict comparison of young people in Kampala and Kyaka II, nor of those in different livelihood networks. Rather, similarities and differences are highlighted when they represented a significant trend within the limits of my study and are presented here as possible areas for future study in a larger, quantitative study. These trends are need to be analysed in relation to my informants' multiple subject positions (Mouffe 1993), with location and living arrangements only some variables, in addition to gender, social age, ethnicity, religion, etc.

In this paper, 'young people' refers to all individuals who have passed puberty, but who have not yet married. This is a social definition that emerged from the majority of my informants' experiences and views on childhood, youth, adulthood and old age in their changing social contexts. Such a perspective differs from many prevailing chronological definitions of children and young people that are codified in international law and are the basis of programmatic interventions by many, primarily minority world or minority-world-influenced<sup>1</sup>, organisations working on the ground.

---

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, 'minority world' refers to areas of the world that have the smallest populations, but control the majority of the world's resources. These are often referred to as 'the West', 'the North', 'industrialised' or 'developed'. I avoid these latter terms since they are geographically inaccurate and/or contain problematic evolutionary assumptions.

The term 'refugee' is used to describe the circumstances of people who have come to Uganda in the context of generalised conflict and insecurity in the DRC. It therefore applies not only to those who have been legally recognised as refugees by the Government of Uganda (GoU) and/or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but also to those who self-identify as refugees but have not registered as such for legal, practical or social reasons. In keeping with many of my informants' self-definition, I prefer to use the term 'Congolese' rather than 'refugee' to describe them.

### **Households, families and support networks**

The term 'household' merits particular attention, since it forms a locus of analysis in this paper. My research indicates that young people's roles and relationships within households and families can have an important impact on access to decision-making at various levels. However, the political aspects of both family and household are often overlooked in policy, programming and academic approaches to refugee young people. This neglect seems to stem from an overemphasis on the nuclear family as an 'ideal' social unit (Anshen 1959), and on the household as the 'ideal' economic unit, and a conceptual conflation between the two (Parsons 1959, p. 248; Laslett 1972, p. 24). However, many of these assumptions are ethnocentric, stemming from essentially minority world views, which do not hold true in many other contexts.

The majority of my informants came from Tutsi, Hutu, Chi, Alur, Nande, Hunde and Hema<sup>2</sup> groups in eastern DRC. These groups, while varying significantly in socio-cultural terms, are all patrilineal and patrilocal (Maquet 1961; Southall 1955; Lobho-Lwa-Djugudjugu 1980). Although residency is broadly determined by the male line, it does not mean that all members of the nuclear family necessarily reside in the same place. Rather, a much more extensive kinship structure could result in a variety of different living arrangements. For example, in polygamous Alur and Hema societies the wives and offspring of one man would live separately, especially in urban situations (de Boeck 2005), although sometimes would group around a common compound in rural areas (Southall 1955). Moreover, children and young people do not necessarily live with their biological parents due to widespread practices of child exchange and 'fostering' with kin or pseudo-kin (de Boeck 2005). Indeed, in some cases children are regarded as collectively 'belonging' to a wider group or village (Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Argenti 2002).

Recognising the common problematic conflation of 'family' and 'household', some household literature has promoted an analytic distinction between the latter, referring to residence, and the former, based on kinship (Wallman 1986; Bender 1967). This distinction conceptually separates out living arrangements, which are perceived to be territorially bound, and social relationships, which are not. However, this binary is problematic for a number of reasons. First, in some cases, kinship relationships *are* territorially-specific, since they are conceptualised in terms of a particular locality. In traditional Alur societies, for example, "[k]inship behaviour and linguistic usage convey [...] the primary distinctions of seniority and sex, with the underlying realisation of the principle of agnation which binds together them and nearly all the adult males, and children of both sexes, whom they come to know as *permanent members of their local group*." (Southall 1955, p. 34) my emphasis) In other words, kinship terminology and social relations are applied not only to family members to whom one is related through blood or marriage, but also to those of particular generations residing in one's local community. As de Boeck argues:

---

<sup>2</sup> To facilitate reading, Bantu language singular and plural prefixes have been omitted.

Those family members who come to ask a relative for food, shelter, money and other forms of support, have always been entitled to do so in the open gift logic of kin-based solidarity and reciprocity that is so characteristic of the social architecture throughout Central Africa. In these Central African worlds, also, the vocabulary of kinship has always been used in much more encompassing ways as a metaphor for opening up kin-based networks. By redefining strangers and outsiders as kin, for example, gift cycles were widened and new levels of trust summoned. In this way a political economy of gift exchange in the form of tributes between real, putative or fictive kin has always formed one of the most important organizational modes to create, enable, maintain and broaden the network of political relations. Tributary relations institutionalized the personal sphere and personalized the institutional sphere. (de Boeck 2005, pp. 206-207)

Moreover, some people to whom one is related through blood or marriage (on the maternal side for patrilineal groups) are *not* considered to be kin. Radcliffe-Brown (1987) explains that kinship results from the recognition of social relationships, which may or may not coincide with physical relations, and thus presents a complex set of norms, usages and patterns of behaviour.

Second, the territorialisation of household is problematic in societies where groups do not have fixed, stable abodes. This would apply, for example, to nomadic peoples, as well as refugees. Moreover, households are actually much more fluid than implied in statements about co-residency, as individuals may be attached to various households at the same time (Bender 1967). For example, young people in my study often exhibited a high degree of mobility, residing and sharing resources with friends, family and clan/ethnic members at different times for different reasons. In many cases, contact with multiple residences allowed young people to manage risks and access services, goods and decision-making. This suggests that co-residency alone is an insufficient criterion for determining household membership (Arnould and Netting 1982).

In trying to resolve some of the issues that arise in considering households and families as structures, some scholars have instead suggested a shift in focus to *functions* (Bender 1967). Functional definitions of 'household' usually centre around activities related to food production and consumption, and sexual reproduction and childrearing (Yanagisako 1979). These activities are often labelled 'domestic' and are usually conceptually linked to *economic* functions. This is reinforced by an economic approach to household which views them as a rational, homogenous economic unit that seeks to maximise utility (Engle 1990). However, in reality, households are *not* homogenous as different members may undertake different roles, have different priorities and may not necessarily disclose or pool all their resources (Lorge Rogers 1990). Such an approach thus neglects human agency – i.e. who is performing these functions and why. These decisions may also not be 'rational' in the pure economic sense, since they will also be influenced by cultures, norms, etc (Wilk 1991). A functional approach may thus simplify a complex reality by analysing functions and activities in isolation, rather than attempting to understand how they are related to others. This then often results in the conceptual reduction of the household to an economic unit and the family to a social unit, while social and economic issues are interrelated.

In order to overcome problematic binaries in structural and functional approaches, I draw on some of the literature which *politicises* households and families. As Yanagisako (1979, p. 189) argues, "The distinction between the domestic and politico-jural domains (or the private and public domains) calls for strict scrutiny not

just because of its analytical consequences, but because it is the encompassing framework for a cluster of notions which pervade anthropological studies on the family and household." Taking a feminist approach, my study questions the depoliticisation of households and families by interrogating power dynamics in access to decision-making. In contrast to traditional views of 'politics' as located solely in high-level institutions and processes, feminists have adopted a 'personal is political' approach to politicise spaces previously relegated to the margins of political analysis. As Mouffe (1993, p. 3) argues: "The political cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific sphere or level of society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent in every human society and that determines our very ontological condition." However, at all levels of society, political processes occur at the same time as other functions that may not be political. This means that what is required, as Barnes (1969) suggests, is an analytical distinction between simultaneous political and non-political action, rather than separating these out in terms of space, time or people that are inherently 'political' or 'non-political'.

I define 'politics' as decision-making over allocation of resources and power. Once we recognise the daily political activities in which people engage, we can look beyond assumed structural and functional distinctions between 'households' and 'families', as if they were homogenous, universal units, and think about these through the lens of power relationships. Arnould (1982, p. 573) emphasises the importance of the "dimension of household processes defined by the creation and negotiation of power and social inequality within and between households". In my informants' societies, it was age and sex which primarily defined these unequal socio-political hierarchies in terms of kinship (la Fontaine 1978), division of labour (Durkheim 1984) and differential access to political decision-making (Schildkrout 1978). Thus, social, economic and political roles and spaces are intertwined in families and households.

Bringing politics and power into the analysis then encourages us to think about human agency. In other words, it is important to consider who is performing different roles, why they are doing so and how they decide to associate with certain people in different networks. This helps to move away from problematic household approaches that overemphasise 'house' – either as a structure or function – and assume that it 'holds' people who passively become part of the structure and fulfil the daily functions. I suggest that a more useful alternative approach would be to focus on the people themselves. After all, both families and households are ultimately about *human* relationships.

I thus prefer to think about family and household as *networks*, since this moves us away from the sedentarist bias of many territorially based definitions, and also encourages us to think about relationships among people. In this paper, 'family' refers to a network of a people linked by a shared sense of kinship, as locally defined. This means that the notion of 'family' is context-specific, moving beyond the minority-world preoccupation with the nuclear family to recognise that 'family' may, for some people, include people to whom one is not linked by blood nor marriage (ex clans, ethnic groups) and vice versa. 'Household' refers to a network of people who share resources (financial, human, informational, political, etc) (Wallman 1986) related to "production, transmission (trusteeship and intergenerational transfer of property), distribution (including pooling, sharing, exchange, and consumption), biological and social reproduction, and coresidence (meaning shared activity in constructing, maintaining and using a dwelling)" (Wilk 1991, p. 36)

Both family and household networks include social, economic and political relationships, and hence can overlap to greater or lesser degrees, depending on

livelihood strategies. Livelihood is defined as the production and reproduction associated with 'life' (biological, physical) as well as a 'way of life' (social, cultural, political):

Livelihood is never just a matter of finding or making shelter, transacting money and preparing food to put on the table or exchange in the market place. It is equally a matter of the ownership and circulation of information, the management of relationships, the affirmation of personal significance and group identity and the inter-relation of each of those tasks to the other. All these productive tasks together constitute the work of livelihood. (Wallman 1986, pp. 54-55)

In developing livelihood strategies, individuals will draw on both family and household networks, which are, in turn, embedded within broader networks of neighbourhood, community and society. This network approach encourages us to contextualise dynamic family and household relations, rather than attempting to disaggregate them into isolated, self-contained units.

I use the term 'network' to refer to interlinkages and interrelationships among people. "The concept of a network emphasizes the fact that each individual has ties to other individuals, each of whom in turn is tied to a few, some, or many others, and so on. The phrase 'social network' refers to the set of actors and the ties among them." (Wasserman and Faust 1994, p. 9) This helps us to move away from the artificial borders implied by categorisation approaches to recognising dynamic, relational, contextualised and overlapping linkages that make people's experiences meaningful. Social network analysis has been used in psychology (Moreno 1951, p. 7), anthropology (Mitchell 1969; Gulliver 1971; Mitchell 1974) and sociology (Wellman 1983). Drawing on these three disciplines, some scholars have developed complex mathematical and statistical models (Burt 1980; Scott 2000) (Gilchrist 2004, p. 32). I do not use these quantitative network analysis models in my research, but they do provide opportunities for a marriage between the qualitative approach used in this paper and potential future larger, quantitative studies. The importance of network theory is its focus on *relationships* and hence the interdependence of actors and actions.

### **Effect of displacement on livelihood networks**

Once we shift the focus from households and families as units to overlapping networks of economic, social and political interdependence, we have a more appropriate conceptual tool with which to analyse the effects of conflict-induced displacement on individuals and groups. In this section, I highlight the principal changes that displacement had on young people's kin and survival networks; the next section will analyse how these changes affected young people's access to decision-making.

For the majority of young people in my study, family provided the primary basis for livelihood strategies in the DRC prior to flight. Families are linked to others in a clan network, which, in turn, are connected into a 'tribe'. While much of the literature on ethnicity stresses the importance of identity and belonging, this family-clan-tribe network is also very much about economic and political opportunities. For young people coming from rural areas, it was kin and clan which became the basis of the household, although not necessarily the nuclear family, as argued above. Such an approach challenges much of the focus of household literature, which emphasises economic factors, residency and territoriality. For those coming from urban areas, family and household networks had diverged slightly, since life in the city encouraged, and in some ways depended upon, relationships based on other groupings, such as work and professional associations, educational establishments, and social clubs.

With conflict and displacement, the first major change that occurred was a decrease in available networks – both family and household – as people dispersed. A common theme running through my informants' stories of flight and exile was a disintegration of traditional kinship networks, as all kin do not move at the same time to the same place, and communication and contact break down. A concrete manifestation of this shrinkage of livelihood networks was the advent of groups of young people living on their own without older generations present. This is a fairly recent phenomenon, resulting from social change against the backdrop of conflict and displacement in the DRC (de Boeck 2005).

Historically in many Congolese groups, marriage was the point at which physical, cultural, social, relational and economic factors attributed to adulthood converged. In my study, unmarried young people living by themselves or with peers did not usually self-identify as adults in spite of the fact that they had their own houses and were providing for themselves. This also applied to young heads of households with younger siblings or relatives, although some referred to the younger people in their households as their 'children' "even though they are really young people, because they are at my house and I feel like their mother".<sup>3</sup> They tended to see their circumstances as temporary and exceptional because of displacement and hoped for a return to 'normality' at some point.

The second major change due to conflict-induced displacement was the multiplicity of changes in family and household networks and an increasing delinkage between them. This is manifested in the greater number of young people living in fostering arrangements without knowing the whereabouts of their parents. As argued above, children and young people often lived apart from their parents within traditional contexts in the DRC. With displacement, what fundamentally changed was the fact that the whereabouts of their parents were unknown and their broader kin networks were reduced. In other words, it is the simultaneous decrease in the number and extent of support networks – being apart from families *and* extended familial and clan structures, as well as (for many) not knowing where one's parents are – that was significant for refugee young people. It is this 'aloneness' that many young people emphasised, rather than being parentless.

A final change, related to the first two, was the increasing importance placed on the household as a livelihood strategy. This was partially due to refugee policy and programming, which privileged the household as the basis for making claims and receiving assistance. It can also be attributed to the increasing divergence of kin and survival networks, as mentioned above, which increased the element of economic exchange involved in fostering arrangements. While it can be argued that traditional child exchange was also predicated on economic interests, as children were seen to be economic assets (Tolfree 2004; Nieuwenhuys 1996), certain refugee contexts increased young people's 'supply' of their labour, and populations' 'demand' for it.

### **Networks and access to decision-making**

While young people who experience decreasing and diverging family and household networks are often assumed to be particularly disempowered, my research showed that they may have more access to decision-making at household, community and policy levels than their counterparts who live in more traditional circumstances where family and household networks converged. How can we explain this seemingly contradictory phenomenon? I suggest that greater attention to how power relationships embodied in gender and social age play out on the micro scale of kin

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Marie, 2005.01.13, Kampala. [Author's translation from French]

and livelihood networks provides an analytical framework to interrogate young people's access to decision-making.

Young people in my study had a variety of different network configurations, many of which were fluid and changed over the course of my 15-month relationships with many of my informants<sup>4</sup>. First, there were a minority for whom family and household networks overlapped to a large degree. This was the case, for example, with young people who fled from DRC with their family networks more or less intact. These family networks then became the basis for household networks in Uganda, as they had been in the DRC. A greater number of young people in my study had household and family networks that only overlapped to a small extent. This was the case for young people whose family networks had shrunk significantly with displacement and hence built up household networks that were only tangentially related to family networks. Finally, there were young people who relied primarily on household networks for their livelihood strategies and had little, or no, contact with family networks. Within these differing network configurations, another distinction to be drawn is between those whose networks involved adults as key network members, and those for whom networks were centred around other young people. Snapshots from a few life histories will demonstrate some of the many different livelihood network configurations that I encountered.

*Snapshot 1: Inter-generational family networks to peer network*

Antoinette<sup>5</sup> is 16 years old, self-identifies as Hema and comes from Ituri. When she was seven years old, her parents sent her to primary school in Rwebisengo, western Uganda, where she lived with Congolese relatives. Her parents paid her relatives for school fees and living expenses, until they were killed during conflict in the DRC in 2004. In January 2005, the relatives she was staying with in Rwebisengo told her to go to Kyaka II refugee settlement. A male relative brought Antoinette and her 14-year-old sister to the settlement. Her two other siblings (20-year-old female, out of school since S3 because of lack of fees; and twelve-year-old boy, currently studying), along with a cousin whose parents also died in DRC, stayed in Rwebisengo.

Upon arrival in Kyaka II, Antoinette and her sister registered as unaccompanied minors with UNHCR. UNHCR simply gave them some food and a ration card, but no additional support. Their male relative from Rwebisengo recognised a translator working with UNHCR as Antoinette's aunt's husband. According to Antoinette, the former did not know that the latter was in Kyaka II before coming to the camp. The former approached the latter and asked him to look after the girls. The male relative then went back to Rwebisengo, but promised to return. Antoinette and her sister lived with 10 other people in a small, 2-bedroomed hut.

By the end of February, Antoinette had settled into life in Kyaka II: "Life here is OK. It's not good, and not bad." The school lacks teachers and books, and there is a lot of flu and cough. She wished that she had stayed in Rwebisengo, but feels that she cannot go back, so "will be patient here".

Antoinette's livelihood strategies were initially based primarily on an inter-generational family networks. She had little control over decisions taken within her

---

<sup>4</sup> Fieldwork was carried out in two phases (September 2004-March 2005; October and November 2005), together totalling 9 months. I kept in touch with some of my informants between the two phases and beyond my fieldwork.

<sup>5</sup> All names have been changed. In some cases, in order to preserve anonymity, details have been omitted or fictionalised. These alterations do not affect the significance of the life stories for the issues explored in this paper.

family and household: "My relatives are the ones who decide." However, Antoinette tried to take advantage of the few areas over which she does have control, such as studying hard at school.

A few months after she arrived in Kyaka, Antoinette's aunt and family decided to return to Congo. Their relatives in Rwebisengo, including Antoinette's siblings, also returned. Antoinette and her sister decided to stay in Kyaka, so that they could continue their studies. They built a hut with some other Hema young people in Bujabuli.

In comparing her life with relatives in Rwebisengo and Kyaka II, and then with peers in Kyaka II, Antoinette said that there were differences in food, studies and work. In Rwebisengo, she ate rice, posho, potatoes and milk. In Kyaka II, both with relatives and peers, she eats "maize flour and beans throughout each month". In terms of education, in Rwebisengo she was "studying hard" while in Kyaka she is "also studying a bit hard, but not so much". She feels that the quality of education in Kyaka is not as good as in Rwebisengo because Bujabuli secondary school is just getting started.

In comparing work loads, she had more tasks in her fostering arrangements than with other peers. Whilst living with older relatives, Antoinette was responsible for a variety of domestic tasks, including cleaning, sweeping, milling, fetching firewood and water, and preparing food. In Rwebisengo, she used to work 1-1.5 hours before going to school; in the afternoon, she would spend 1.5 hours fetching water and preparing supper. After supper, she would revise for school. Whilst living with her relatives in Buliti, Antoinette would work for one hour in the morning and two hours in the evening, after which she would go to bed, since it was dark and she could not study without kerosene.

With her peers in Bujabuli, "Here we have duties. Each one has to perform his or her duty." Antoinette is responsible for sweeping the compound and rooms, fetching water and preparing food on alternate days. These tasks take her an hour in the morning and about two hours at night when she is responsible for the chores. On alternate days, Antoinette is free to do as she likes. "Now that I am living with the group, I have more time to spend on my studies." Antoinette was elected to a leadership position in the secondary school during the 2005 academic year, after she had moved out with other young people.

#### *Snapshot 2: Family network of young people*

Marie is a 27-year-old woman from Bukavu, who is Bakongo on her mother's side and is  $\frac{1}{4}$  Rwandan and  $\frac{1}{4}$  Chi on her father's side. She self-identifies as Chi and does not disclose her Rwandan roots to other Congolese. Marie fled Bukavu by herself in 1996. Upon arrival in Uganda, Marie went to Kyangwali refugee settlement to try to find her family. She met another Congolese family, with whom she stayed until 1998. Marie initially supported herself by selling cloth until she won a scholarship to study social work at university. In 2000, she found out that her sister and nephew were living in an orphanage in Bukavu, run by a catholic priest. In July 2004, her sister (aged 16) and nephew (aged 13.5) came to live with her in Kampala after fleeing the 'Banyamulenge-Congolese' war, during which her sister was raped.

After completing her degree in late 2003, Marie looked for employment. Despite her university qualification and her knowledge of English, French, Swahili and Luganda, she was unable to find work. So, she volunteered at a refugee organisation as a translator. She also did some counselling there, and felt like she was able to practically use her social work degree. Marie received a small stipend of 5000 Ush

for each day she volunteered and thus earned enough to get by and to pay for the rent of her room at 30,000 Ush. However, in May 2004, the refugee organisation decided that they would no longer use refugees as translators. Since then, Marie has tried to make ends meet by giving English and French lessons for 10,000 Ush per month. She has also been looking for work at other refugee and development organisations, but has not been able to get a job. Marie feels like she is being discriminated against because of her nationality. People prefer to hire Ugandans, possibly because there are many unemployed people here. She also thinks that perhaps the Ugandan government puts pressure on international organisations to hire Ugandans.

Marie is unsure about her future plans, which constantly changed over the course of my interaction with her. In an informal interview when I first met her, Marie said that she would like to return to the Congo, because "that's where I feel the best". She did not feel secure in Uganda and would prefer to return to DRC than to continue to live in an uncertain situation where she had no work and "must look for something everyday". The economic pressure on Marie increased since she had "these children at home". In an informal group discussion with other young people a week later, Marie said that she would never go back to a refugee camp and argued that UNHCR should resettle her: "They [UNHCR] tell us that they only provide assistance in camps, but what is life in camps going to provide for our future? For a single woman, how are you going to grow enough to eat? The 'durable solution' is resettlement. We can do things here, but only while waiting." However, later in the same discussion, Marie disagreed with resettlement as the only option when some of her peers said that they would never go back to the DRC: "Who is going to rebuild our country? Also, there in Europe and America, there is discrimination."

By January 2005, Marie was finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet in Kampala through odd teaching jobs and selling cloth. She was considering going to a refugee camp with her sister and nephew if nothing more lucrative came along. UNHCR had also rejected her application for resettlement, saying that she had 'durable solutions' in Uganda because of her education and knowledge of languages. However, Marie felt that they did not understand her challenges in finding work and integrating into Ugandan society. Marie wanted to seek legal aid to see if UNHCR would reconsider her case for resettlement, she also continued to think about moving to a refugee camp, and began to talk about returning to the DRC, despite the situation there. For Marie, living in Uganda, as she had been doing for more than a third of her life, was only a temporary situation, and she was constantly seeking a more permanent and stable existence.

Marie has very small overlapping family and household peer networks, of which she is the centre. As the eldest, she maintains primary responsibility for livelihood strategies, but does share some decision-making with her younger family members. Marie is actively involved in refugee organisations in Kampala, and has taken on many leadership roles. She is often the only young female in refugee meetings.

*Snapshot 3: Overlapping inter-generational family and household networks*

Lucie is 15 years old and comes from Bukavu. She fled with her step-mother, three sisters (1 older; 2 younger) and five brothers (1 older; 4 younger) to Kampala. She does not know where her father is. Her elder sister remained in Kampala, while the rest of the family moved to Kyaka II refugee camp in November 2005. They shared a household with another widow and her daughter. Her stepmother also took in another 10-year-old male in an informal fostering arrangement.

In the DRC, her family was well off. Lucie attended a private school, where she reached S2. Family photos prior to their flight show Lucie and her siblings dressed in smart clothes, posing at a computer and in front of a flat screen television. Lucie's step-mother describes their drop in living standards: "There in Congo we were at the top. Here, we find ourselves on the ground. Maybe we'll have the chance to get up again."

In Kyaka II, as the eldest daughter, Lucie was responsible for many domestic tasks, including caring for her younger siblings, cooking, washing clothes and cleaning. She also found casual employment helping with domestic chores in homes and offices of the camp authorities, in return for a small salary, which she turned over to her mother. Lucie enjoyed braiding hair, which she did for free while she was learning, but could become a way for her to earn additional money. Lucie rarely moved around the settlement. She spent most of her time at home and in camp authorities' houses and offices nearby. Only occasionally did she walk to Bukere to buy supplies at the market, or collect the family's rations.

When the new school year began in February 2005, Lucie initially did not attend, although her siblings did and she expressed an eagerness to go to school. Lucie said that her mother did not have money for school fees, uniform and supplies. When asked when she planned to go to school, Lucie said, "I don't know. It's Mama who makes decisions." Lucie continued to work in her home and doing casual domestic chores for payment.

In mid-February 2005, Lucie began to attend school. She was disappointed with the poor quality of the schooling and said she was unable to make friends with non-French speakers. In early March, Lucie had the opportunity to write a scholarship examination for schooling outside the settlement. The Headmaster of Bujabuli Secondary School encouraged her to do so, believing that she had a good chance of getting a scholarship. He later reported that Lucie's step-mother had found her waiting to sit the examination and asked her to withdraw. The headmaster attributed this to the stepmother's jealousy: "These are the things that happen in Africa." However, Lucie's stepmother was worried that any ties to Uganda, including funded schooling, would jeopardise the family's chances of resettlement.

Lucie is part of a livelihood strategy based on both family and household intergenerational networks. As the eldest female offspring, she has many domestic responsibilities, and some access to decision-making, but is expected to privilege collective good over her individual pursuits (ex. going to school). She has little time for participation in activities for young people in the settlement.

*Snapshot 4: Overlapping family and household networks composed of young people*  
David is 17 years old and self-identifies as Hema. He was born and raised in Bunia, Ituri, where his parents were businesspeople. David was in secondary school and had reached S5 before he fled to Uganda in May 2003, with other Congolese. He does not know where his parents are.

Upon arrival in Uganda, David first stayed in Ntoroko village and slept with other refugees in a small Catholic church and surrounding grounds. While in Ntoroko, David made a living by doing odd jobs, such as accompanying others as they went fishing, loading and off-loading boats and fetching water. He did not attend school. David was told that there was a place for Congolese where they were given land and food. So, David used his own money to travel to Kyaka II refugee settlement and register as a refugee. In Kyaka II, David initially stayed in a reception centre for 5 days. David was given a chit for supplies at the depot. He also found a group of other

Hema young people, with whom he had distant family connections. Together, they built a house and farmed a plot of land. He and his friends had not farmed before coming to Uganda and were not given any instructions on how to cultivate. Some other Congolese helped them initially.

In addition to farming, David also attended free English classes in Kyaka II. David started at Bujabuli Secondary School when it opened in 2004. Although he had completed S5 in the DRC, he was put in S2, due to his poor command of English. During the first academic year, he successfully completed S2, and started S3 in February 2005. David finds it difficult to earn enough money for school fees, his uniform and supplies. "Where am I going to find the necessary money to continue with my studies? 13,000 Ush. The others look at it as if it was very little, but for me it's hard." To earn money, David works for other refugees 'in the forest', where he cultivates, clears plots of land and collects firewood. He is paid by task, not by time. Since he cannot work very fast, sometimes the pay is little. In October 2004, David was involved in the strike at the secondary school, after he was sent away from school for failing to pay his school fees. David was beaten and detained in Kyegegwa for his participation in the strike.

David's livelihood strategy involves a primarily household network composed of other young people, with whom he also has some ties through extended kinship. He also has links to a broader network of Hema in Kyaka II, but lacks stable intergenerational networks. David makes decisions related to individual livelihood by himself, although often seeks advice from other peers with whom he lives. At the household level, the young people pool resources (such as rations) and collectively decide how to distribute and use them. The young people collectively farm a plot of land they have been allocated. The plot is managed by the eldest male in the household, who does not attend school. The others, including David, contribute as much labour as they can, depending on their school schedule and other livelihood activities. They then divide the harvest amongst themselves according to the work put in, although females in the group receive a slightly higher ratio of returns, given their perceived relative physical weakness.

*Snapshot 5: Inter-generational household networks*

Rose is a 16-year-old 'Banyamulenge' woman who came to Kampala by herself after her family was massacred in Gatumba refugee camp in Burundi. Upon arrival in Kampala, Rose met a pastor at a protestant church, who allowed her to stay in his home, in exchange for domestic labour. While working in this home, another Congolese man, Jean-Pierre, saw Rose and recognised that she was a hard worker, so asked her to become an apprentice in his hairdressing salon. Rose was not paid for her labour in the salon, but was sometimes provided with lunch and hoped her apprenticeship would lead to employment once she was fully trained. Rose worked long days, completing her domestic tasks at home before opening the salon and assisting Jean-Pierre all day, returning in the evening to prepare food for the household.

In her home, Rose became more and more concerned about the behaviour of her foster father, who came home drunk and made sexual advances towards her. She was afraid that she was going to be raped and wanted another place to live. The UNHCR protection officer responsible for Rose's case was aware of her precarious living arrangements, but argued that UNHCR could not provide assistance to refugees who were not living in settlements. However, Rose could not move to a settlement until her refugee status was confirmed, a process that was delayed because Rose had been dependent on her father's refugee claim in Gatumba and UNHCR had difficulty locating her refugee records from Burundi. Moreover, Rose

feared life in a refugee settlement, due to her experiences in Gatumba, and felt that she may have more education and employment opportunities in Kampala.

After her foster family asked her to leave, Jean-Pierre took her in, but Rose was uncomfortable with this arrangement. She felt that Jean-Pierre could not afford to keep her and was concerned that she would be asked to leave again. She wanted to go back to the DRC to try to find her grandmother, whom she believed was still living in Mulenge. Rose was aware of the insecurity she would face as a Munyamulenge, particularly from Mai Mai on the road from Bukavu to Mulenge. But, she decided to leave anyway because her life was not moving ahead in Uganda. However, Jean-Pierre blocked her decision when he refused to give her transport money. Since Rose was not paid for the work she did, she was unable to raise the money herself.

Rose has drawn on intergenerational household networks for her livelihood strategies in Kampala. The fostering arrangements she has been involved in are based primarily on economic exchange, which have proved to be precarious. Rose's anxiety about her second fostering arrangement with Jean-Pierre's family is linked to a desire for a stable 'home', which she believes are based on kinship networks. The fact that Rose is 'Banyamulenge', a group with contested Congolese citizenship contributes to her sense of instability. Rose has no time for any activities, except for attending church, where she has found a sense of belonging.

#### *Snapshot 6: Household networks amongst young people*

Paul is 29 and was born in Bukavu. He has been in Kampala for four years, living in various types of accommodation, always with other young Congolese males. He had just finished secondary school when he fled DRC. He wants to go to university, but cannot afford it. After composing and singing several 'political' songs in the DRC, Paul was captured by Rwandan military. He narrowly escaped and fled from Bukavu to Goma by boat, from Goma to a border post by foot, and then to Kampala by truck. He registered as a refugee but "hid my problems because I was afraid and saw Uganda only as a transit country." He has been arrested by RCD-Goma and Rwandan agents, with the assistance of the Uganda police, in Kampala on several occasions, and consequently changes his residence frequently.

In the face of this uncertainty, Paul laments his lack of kin networks: "I don't even have a wife to comfort me." Paul would marry if he had the means. He only "looks like a child" (a reference to his small size); he says that if he were in the DRC he would be married and have children by now.

Paul's livelihood strategy is based primarily on household networks composed of young people. In addition to the young males with whom he pools resources in Kampala, Paul is also in contact with a group of young self-identified 'intellectuals' living in Kyaka II, who come to stay with him from time to time, and a friend who runs an NGO outside in a rural town outside of Kampala, with whom Paul works and lives from time to time. Paul bases his livelihood decisions on his own economic, social and security needs. He is active politically and is well-known as a refugee youth leader.

#### *Analysis*

These life history snapshots indicate that young people whose networks were primarily composed of young people had much more access to decision-making about individual and collective livelihood strategies than those in inter-generational networks. At community and policy levels, these same young people were much more likely to engage in visible, outspoken advocacy and be elected to leadership positions than their counterparts living in intergenerational kin households. For

example, all members of the Executive Committee of the Refugee Youth Association in Kampala and the former and current head boy and the former head girl at Bujabuli Secondary School in Kyaka II were, at the time of my study, involved primarily in peer, rather than inter-generational, networks.

My research suggests several reasons for the greater advocacy undertaken by these young people. First, they took decisions at the household level and thus had a greater sense, and proof, of their own capacities. As a result, they were more willing to negotiate access to political space at the community level, even in the face of norms that stressed their incapacity.

Secondly, the young people in my study who had household and family networks composed of peers generally had a greater amount of leisure time and control over independent economic resources than those living in intergenerational households, due to the significance of remunerated/unremunerated labour. In the latter cases, labour was much more likely to be unpaid, as all members of a household were expected to contribute to collective wellbeing. Any income that they earned outside the home was handed over to the head of household as part of a collective pot. For example, in a focus group discussion with P7 students, they said that once the crops they plant are harvested, it is heads of household who receive money from the crops and use it to "to buy the needs of the family".<sup>6</sup> Moreover, since these young people were usually listed as 'dependents' on the head of household's claim, any assistance, benefits, and, indeed, legal status (as will be discussed below), were accorded to the principal claimant. This solidified and entrenched the status of the 'head of household' and the assumed dependency relationship of younger and/or female 'others'. The household head was thus responsible for distributing collective resources within the family and, due to social hierarchies based on age and sex, young people (particularly female and those who were not the biological offspring of the head of household) were often given less than an equal share.

In contrast, young people living on their own or in groups were more likely to obtain individual, concrete benefits from any labour they undertook. While groups of such young people often worked together in their respective plots of land, the yields and any economic benefits were usually distributed amongst them depending on the amount of labour they had put in. Moreover, those who undertook work for other people (such as working in fields) were remunerated for their labour in cash or in kind, albeit often at a very low rate. Finally, young people registered by themselves received rations as individuals and hence had more control over their individual portions, which they often then chose to pool with others. This meant that young people living on their own had more time and independent economic resources to invest in political activities.

Related to this relative freedom to spend their time and resources how they wished, young people in peer households also tended to be more mobile and hence more visible in the absence of 'sheltering' strategies that confined their 'accompanied' counterparts to designated safe places. While young people living in intergenerational households often complained of having little to do, the fact that they were confined to the home for long periods of time reduced the chance that this free time would be used in engaging in political activities. In contrast, their counterparts living on their own not only had the time to participate in politics, but also greater independence to do so, in the absence of collective responsibilities to, and constraints within, their households. Indeed, this relatively greater 'independence'

---

<sup>6</sup> Focus group discussion, mixed sex, P7 students, Swe Swe primary school, 2005.03.04, Kyaka II.

was viewed as a problem by some adults and authorities. For example, the headmaster at Bujabuli Secondary School said that a new school policy was introduced that required students who did not have parents in the settlement to nominate a guardian who would be responsible for monitoring their activities. It was a demonstration, led and supported primarily by young people without their parents, which provoked implementation of this policy, since students without parents were seen to be unruly.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, some young people living on their own could capitalise on their 'unaccompanied minor' status, which increased their visibility and their access to resources and decision-makers. Indeed, even young people who were living on their own, but technically were not unaccompanied minors, used vulnerability discourse to demand greater assistance. This 'victimcy' (Utas 2004) was sometimes complemented or replaced by rights language, such as the right to education stressed by participants in the school strike.

This latter point relates to the way in which young people understood and used international discourses for their own ends. Indeed, they often found creative ways to negotiate greater political space by using labels to their own advantage. As Zetter (1991, p. 55) argues:

Refugees, more than many target groups suffer from the dilemma of policies which seek to integrate and create independence, yet which exclude, sustain dependency and differentiation. The labelled may not necessarily be unwilling victims of such discrimination and cooptation. A 'refugee consciousness' maintains an identity, and the enhanced solidarity may be turned to advantage as a lever on governments and agencies.

Bureaucratic labels thus become distinctive, politicised identities, through which 'target' populations can influence policy (Zetter 1991). For example, after rehearsed speeches by women at International Women's Day in Kyaka II, a young woman came forward to make an impromptu intervention that outlined some of the problems in the settlement. This focused on the 'vulnerability' of young women, and emphasised their roles as 'widows', 'orphans' and 'rape victims'. The use of victim language was a deliberate attempt to question and counter-act the positive picture painted by others in the planned interventions.

While young people in my study who were involved in peer networks had more access to decision-making than those in intergenerational networks, it would be erroneous to portray this simply as a struggle between older and younger generations. While some young people in my study did choose to move out of intergenerational networks which they viewed as exploitative, the majority were actively seeking their families and wanted to return to livelihood strategies based primarily on kinship networks. Indeed, some young people saw decision-making as a burden, which they had to bear because they were on their own, but would gladly renounce if given the chance to return to strong kin networks.

Given the sampling issues mentioned above, we also need to be careful in thinking about causal relationships between peer networks and access to decision-making.<sup>8</sup> The young people in my study who had greater access to decision-making at household, family, community and policy levels were not only involved in peer networks, but also predominantly educated and from urban areas. It is thus possible

<sup>7</sup> Interview, Headmaster, Bujabuli Secondary School, 2005.02.21, Kyaka II.

<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to Tilman Brück for bringing this to my attention at the Households in Conflict Network meeting, Berlin, January 2006.

that these young people are capitalising on other power dynamics that increase their access to decision-making. We thus need to contextualise their experiences both within overlapping relationships and multiple subject positions. It would be interesting to pursue this issue in a larger, more representative sample, including people from a broader range backgrounds. However, an important finding within the limits of my research is the fact that not all young people without their biological parents are inherently disempowered. This has important implications for policy, programming and research that tend to group refugee young people into essentialist categories, such as 'unaccompanied minors', without recognising differential power relations they encounter.

### **Conclusions**

While kinship networks have historically been the basis of livelihood strategies for many Congolese young people, displacement has resulted in shrinking networks of support generally and a greater emphasis placed on household networks. These household networks are much less stable and secure than traditional kinship networks. As a result, young people who are in household networks without corresponding family networks (for example, those in fostering arrangements or those living with other peers) often spend a great deal of time and anxiety looking for family. While conflict-induced displacement thus has the negative effect of reducing both family and household networks, it does give some young people greater access to decision-making and political opportunities. In my study, young people in peer networks had greater access to decision-making in households and families, and more opportunities to engage in political activities at community and policy levels. These findings question the assumed disempowerment of refugee young people living without older family members.

## Works cited

- Anshen, Ruth Nanda. 1959. The Family in Transition. In *The Family: Its Function and Destiny*, edited by R. N. Anshen. New York: Harper and Row.
- Argenti, Nicholas. 2002. Youth in Africa: A Major Resource for Change. In *Young Africa: Realising the Rights of Children and Youth*, edited by A. de Waal and N. Argenti. Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press.
- Arnould, Eric, and Robert Netting. 1982. Households: Changing Form and Function. *Current Anthropology* 23 (5):571-575.
- Barnes, J.A. 1969. Networks and Political Process. In *Social Networks in Urban Situations: Analyses of Personal Relationships in Central African Towns*, edited by J. C. Mitchell. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bender, Donald. 1967. A Refinement of the Concept of Household: Families, Co-Residence, and Domestic Functions. *American Anthropologist* 69 (5):493-504.
- Burt, Ronald. 1980. Models of Network Structure. *Annual Review of Sociology* 6:79-141.
- de Boeck, Filip. 2005. The Divine Seed: Children, Gift and Witchcraft in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, edited by A. Honwana and F. De Boeck. Oxford: James Currey.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1984. *The Division of Labour in Society*. Translated by W. D. Halls. Houndmills: MacMillan.
- Engle, Patrice. 1990. Intra-Household Allocation of Resources: Perspectives from Psychology. In *Intra-Household Resource Allocation: Issues and Methods for Development Policy and Planning*, edited by B. Lorge Rogers and N. Schlossman. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Gilchrist, Alison. 2004. *The Well-Connected Community: A Networking Approach to Community Development*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Gulliver, P.H. 1971. *Neighbours and Networks: The Idiom of Kinship in Social Action Among the Ndendeuli of Tanzania*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Honwana, Alcinda, and Filip De Boeck. 2005. Introduction: Children and Youth in Africa: Agency, Identity and Place. In *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, edited by A. Honwana and F. De Boeck. Oxford: James Currey.
- la Fontaine, Jean. 1978. Introduction. In *Sex and Age as Principles of Social Differentiation*, edited by J. La Fontaine. London: Academic Press.
- Laslett, Peter. 1972. Introduction: The History of the Family. In *Household and Family in Past Time*, edited by P. Laslett and R. Wall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lobho-Lwa-Djugudjugu. 1980. *Société et politique en Afrique traditionnelle: Bahema et Walendu du Zaïre*. Kinshasa: Presses universitaires du Zaïre.
- Lorge Rogers, Beatrice. 1990. The Internal Dynamics of Households: A Critical Factor in Development Policy. In *Intra-Household Resource Allocation: Issues and Methods for Development Policy and Planning*, edited by B. Lorge Rogers and N. Schlossman. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Maquet, Jacques. 1961. *The Premise of Inequality: A Study of Political Relations in a Central African Kingdom*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Mitchell, J. Clyde. 1974. Social Networks. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3:279-299.
- , ed. 1969. *Social Networks in Urban Situations: Analyses of Personal Relationships in Central African Towns*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Moreno, J.L. 1951. *Sociometry, Experimental Method and the Science of Society: An Approach to a New Political Orientation*. Beacon: Beacon House.
- Mouffe, Chantal. 1993. *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso.

- Nieuwenhuys, Olga. 1996. The Paradox of Child Labor and Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25:237-251.
- Parsons, Talcott. 1959. The Social Structure of the Family. In *The Family: Its Function and Destiny*, edited by R. N. Anshen. New York: Harper and Row.
- Schildkrout, Enid. 1978. Age and Gender in Hausa Society: Socio-economic Roles of Children in Urban Kano. In *Sex and Age as Principles of Social Differentiation*, edited by J. La Fontaine. London: Academic Press.
- Scott, John. 2000. *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.
- Southall, Aidan. 1955. *Alur Society: A Study in the Processes and Types of Domination*. Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons.
- Tolfree, David. 2004. *Whose Children? Separated Children's Protection and Participation in Emergencies*. Stockholm: Save the Children.
- Utas, Mats. 2004. Fluid Research Fields: Studying Excombatant Youth in the Aftermath of the Liberian Civil War. In *Children and Youth on the Front Line: Ethnography, Armed Conflict and Displacement*, edited by J. Boyden and J. de Berry. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Wallman, Sandra. 1986. The Boundaries of Household. In *Symbolising Boundaries: Identity and Diversity in British Cultures*, edited by A. Cohen. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Wasserman, Stanley, and Katherine Faust. 1994. *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wellman, Barry. 1983. Network Analysis: Some Basic Principles. *Sociological Theory* 1:155-200.
- Wilk, Richard. 1991. *Household Ecology: Economic Change and Domestic Life Among the Kekchi Maya in Belize*. Tucson and London: The University of Arizona Press.
- Yanagisako, Sylvia Junko. 1979. Family and Household: The Analysis of Domestic Groups. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 8:161-205.
- Zetter, Roger. 1991. Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4 (1):39-62.