

The Collective Voice  
of the region's  
Refugee community



REGIONAL REFUGEE FORUM NORTH EAST

Annual Review December 07 to November 08



## Report from the Chair Dr Mohamed Nasreldin

When I last reported to you in December 2007 we had just begun two major programmes of work which aimed to bring the Collective Voice of our membership to the attention of policy makers, and to support RCOs to achieve their unique potential to assist the settlement and integration of their communities in the region.

So I am really pleased that in this report we can reflect on real progress made. In the past year our Support for Community Action (SCAP) team worked directly with 37 RCOs (15 in Tees Valley and 22 Tyne & Wear), as well as with individual artists. And we now have 3 policy focused Subgroups in progress, addressing learning needs and employment routes, policing

and enforcement, and taking the lead in organising our region's response to the national campaign to restore the right to work for asylum seekers.

I want to thank our 8 staff for their hard work and welcome Herbert Dirahu, who left his post managing a Youth Work team for Darlington Council to take up the post of SCAP Project Manager. We wish Helen Attewell all the best in her new post as CEO of NEPACS and thank her for her great work in setting up the SCAP project.

I also want to acknowledge your achievements, made through the dedicated and inspirational work of RCOs, and the contribution of 95 people from 32 RCOs and 24 nations to the work of the Subgroups.

I myself have been involved in the Forum's development and management since it first began in 2001, and it has been my privilege to serve as its Chair since 2005. I feel proud when I attend meetings at both the regional and national level that our Forum is acknowledged as a model of collective pro-active work by those who came here seeking asylum, and is providing an inspiration for other RCOs across the UK. I now look forwards to a new generation of members taking on the challenges and rewards of managing the Forum in the future. I thank my fellow committee members for their work in developing a strategy to promote this and I encourage you to take up this exciting opportunity.

### National Campaign to restore the right to work for asylum seekers. Our Subgroup is leading the campaign in our region with Northern TUC

Our Right to Work Subgroup was set up in June to support this national campaign jointly organised by the British Refugee Council and national Trades Union Congress (TUC). To date 51 people from 16 nations have got involved in the Subgroup, which is lead with great dedication by Samouka Dore. Members plan our strategy and actions, have contributed their testimonies for our website, collected signatures for the petition, and made presentations at the very successful regional

launch event in October organised jointly with the Northern TUC.

Sam attended the TUC Organising Academy, TUC Congress in Brighton to witness the motion to support the campaign being passed, and the Conservative Party conference in Birmingham. The Subgroup also met with the Chairman of the Asylum Working Group of the Centre for Social Justice to contribute to its report on asylum policy due to be published in December.

We have now begun a busy schedule of making presentations to Union branch meetings and Trades Councils to raise awareness and support for a change in government policy.

Many thanks to Sam and all subgroup members for their work, to Elvis Katoto for producing a high impact film of members' testimonies, and to Agrin Mohamed and Gabriel Mulamba for appearing in the BBC Politics Show broadcast in October.

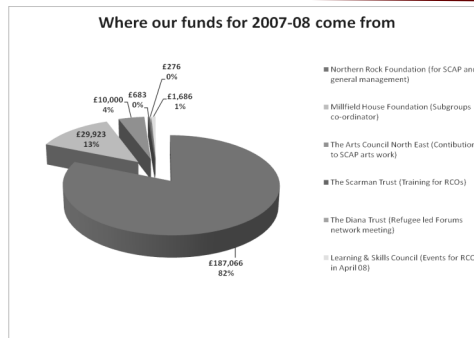


# Report from the Treasurer Eugenie Muhayimana



In our last accounting year (1st Aug 07 – 31st July 08) our total income was £240,881 while our total expenditure was £211,896. The figures for the previous year were income £110,000 and expenditure £81,000. The increases reflect the increase in staff from 3 to 8 (2 being part-time) with the SCAP project, and the new grant from the Millfield House Foundation for our Subgroups work. The difference between income and expenditure arises from grants spanning our accounting year, and also an under-spend on SCAP salaries in Year 1 as, while the project started in June 07, the recruitment of CDWs was completed in November 07. The under-spend will be used in Year 3 extension of the programme.

Staffing and running costs of our 2 offices represents 94% of our expenditure,



Governance costs 3% and 3% on direct costs of activities. Wherever appropriate and possible we recover direct costs of activities from partner organizations. We anticipate that activities costs will grow as the scale of Subgroup actions increases.

We finished 3 grants this year: Lloyds TSB foundation for the support of our Admin

Officer, and two small grants from Tyne & Wear Community Foundation and Newcastle CVS. We were successful in securing one new grant, beginning in July 08, from Capacity Builders' national Improving Reach programme for infrastructure support. This ICT project supports a Project Officer to develop the Forum's website and ICT strategy, and to provide development support and training to RCOs to develop web pages and self-managed websites.

The Forum is fully funded at current operational levels until July 2011. The next committee will need to address the Forum's continued actions and funding needs after July 2009.

Thanks to my colleague Gaby Kitoko for his support as Deputy Treasurer.



# Report from the Secretary Hastings Ndlovu

Firstly I want to give a welcome to those RCOs joining as new members this year. We would like to encourage you, and all members, to consider getting involved in managing the Forum and planning for its future.

Serving on the Forum's elected Executive Committee is a privilege as well as a responsibility. It can also be fun, and is a great learning experience which you can apply to your own RCO or work. However, we understand that many members may feel they do not have the time or skills to do this. And they may feel the committee is somehow remote and inaccessible.

So this year the committee has developed a strategy designed to give members an opportunity to experience committee work directly for themselves: for example, by observing at committee meetings, shadowing our officers, receiving mentoring from them, and accompanying them to other meetings and events. Or you could invite a committee member to visit your RCO and discuss your views with them or ask for information.

We also want to encourage you to send your views, feedback, concerns or complaints to us and you can find out how on our website. Our new

website was launched in July and our aim is for it to be real route for communicating with you; not only giving useful information, but also being accountable and transparent to our members.

There will also be 2 general members meeting held each year at which you can give your views and suggestions directly to committee.

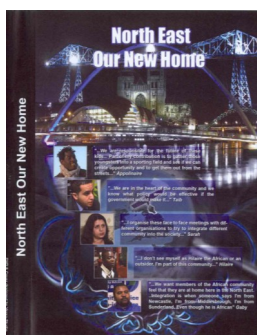
If you are interested or want any information about committee work and forum management please

*"We believe that real engagement of the Forum's membership refers to contact, inclusion, participation, equality, ownership, accountability, transparency, trust and confidence"*

contact the committee at: [executive.committee@refugeevoices.org.uk](mailto:executive.committee@refugeevoices.org.uk)

## NESMP Regional Conference and Independent Refugee led forums Forums Network

Our thanks to Forum member Ghalapoum Abdoulaye for producing an excellent 30 minute film capturing the unique contribution made by our region's RCOs over the past 7 years. It was screened at the NE Strategic Migration Partnership's Regional Conference in



May. Several key regional public sector agencies considered it the highlight of the event, and have been using it as a training tool for their organisations. It was submitted to the Government's national consultation on 'single group' funding as evidence of the key role RCOs play in community cohesion and integration.

**UK Forums Network:** We have continued to work with sister refugee led forums in Manchester, Leeds, Scotland and Wales to develop a national network and create a Big Voice of refugees nationally. 3 network meetings were held this year, in London, Glasgow and Manchester. Much useful learning was exchanged and plans developed for co-ordinated work and joint action.

## Development and capacity building support to RCOs



This year our Support for Community Action staff team, Sneita, Nasrin, Tresor, Andrew and Anoushka, provided case work support to 37 RCOs as well as refugee artists across the region. Several training events for RCOs were also organised, in partnership with agencies such as the Scarman Trust and Arts Council North East. 3 Peer Learning visits were undertaken by RCOs, visiting projects as far away as London and Glasgow.

The tailored packages of knowledge with short exercises for groups to practice and to develop their skills are now being rolled out to RCOs. They can be delivered at a level / pace appropriate to the group and at an appropriate time in their development to have most impact. Our team is also applying additional learning resources available from across the UK. Staff are building a network of contacts in the different localities which they can use

to provide additional support for groups. The project has already demonstrated the power of small scale partnerships where groups can make use of local facilities and resources.

In October Herbert Dirahu took on the post of Project Manager. Besides sustaining the Strategic Partnerships developed by Helen in the first year, Herbert is now focusing on ensuring the provision of consistent, high quality manage-

ment, support and professional development of Community Development Practitioners while ensuring that Community Development is at the centre of the local community empowerment agenda. Herbert says: "A large part of my work is to be the conduit between managing the project's governing strategy and staff delivery at a neighbourhood level".



As we enter into the second phase of the Project, a major area of our focus will be the Dissemination Strategy which will be embedded in the staff's Annual Plans. Key to this will be the sharpening of tools for staff to gather evidence and learning to be shared with other agencies and practitioners to help shape strategy and policy with Partnerships.

If you would like support for your RCO please contact 01642 232446 or [herbert.dirahu@refugeevoices.org.uk](mailto:herbert.dirahu@refugeevoices.org.uk)

Photo: Roma North East

## Subgroup on routes to learning and employment

We have been working with the Learning & Skills Council North East and other key agencies to develop the Regional Strategy to meet the Learning & Skills needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers, and promote routes to employment. 2 events were held in Newcastle and Middlesbrough in April which brought together 22 RCOs with officers from the LSC, Job Centre Plus, Union Learn team, ESOL providers and careers advice

agencies to exchange learning and information, identify the key issues, and identify actions to progress. A rolling action plan has been developed from these events.

*We are working with the Learning & Skills Council NE, Job Centre*

*Plus, Trade Union learn,*

*Cleveland Police Force, NESMP*

*Regional ESOL Group, NE*

*Migrant Health*

*Group*



Leading learning and skills



with the Northern TUC

## Subgroup on policing and enforcement

Members from 11 RCOs in Tees Valley have worked to identify their experiences of policing and enforcement, and to build a vision for the future. We are working with the Cleveland Police Force to develop opportunities for dialogue between RCOs and the police, for information exchange, and to contribute to the training of new police officers by providing community based placements and presentations on the political and human rights situation,

and society and culture in countries of origin. In June we organised a seminar for RCOs on UK law, police powers and individual rights, routes for complaint, and procedures and rights of those held in detention, delivered by an expert solicitor and Justice First.

One member made a 10 minute video which was submitted as evidence to the Equalities & Human Rights Commission's national consultation process

enquiring into the impact of new Counter Terrorism measures on Muslim communities.

If you would like to get involved in any of the Subgroups or know more about their work please contact our Co-ordinator Georgina Fletcher on 0191 423 6255 or [georgina.fletcher@refugeevoices.org.uk](mailto:georgina.fletcher@refugeevoices.org.uk)



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*The objects of the Association are the advancement of education and relief of poverty, distress and sickness amongst asylum seekers and refugees in the North East of England and to that end to provide a mechanism for hearing the Voice of asylum seekers and refugees by bringing together in council representatives of Refugee Communities working in the area of benefit.* RRF Constitution 4th March 2003

**Executive Committee serving December 07 — November 08**

Chair Dr Mohamed Nasreldin  
Treasurer Eugenie Muhayimana  
Secretary Hastings Ndlovu  
Committee Bini Tesfai Araia, John Baptiste Karaha, Gaby Kitoko, Sarah Ahmadi, Amir Nakash, Ben Chisanga

Committee members are elected by the membership from the membership. They are elected on the basis of their personal skills, experience and knowledge and their commitment to serve in the interests of the whole refugee community. The Committee met 7 times and a General Meeting was held in October. Committee members also attended meetings and events on behalf of the Forum.

We are grateful for the support of our funders



Supported by



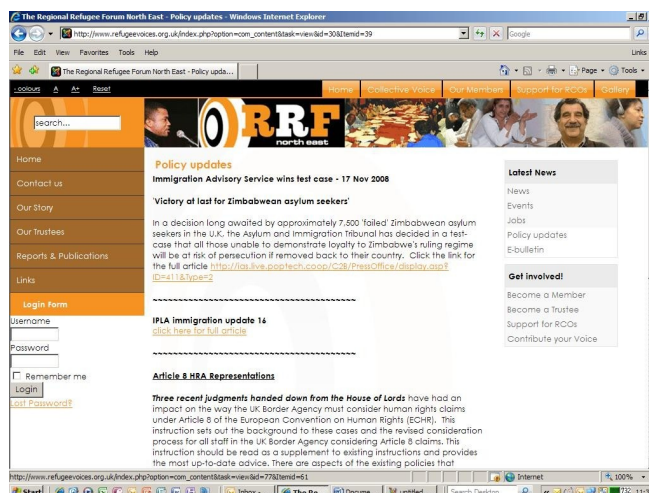
## Our new website, e-bulletin and web pages for RCOs

In July we launched our re-designed website at [www.refugeevoices.org.uk](http://www.refugeevoices.org.uk). It has a clearer design, is simpler to use, and contains regularly updated information on:

- the activities of our Subgroups
- voices of our members
- useful information on training, funding opportunities and development tools for RCOs
- updates on asylum policy
- news about RCO events
- information about the Forum's governance and aims
- copies of our monthly e-bulletin (which was also launched this year thanks to Andrew).

Joe is now our Project Officer for our ICT project, under new

funding received in July 08 from Capacity Builder's Improving Reach programme. With support and training from the Community IT Academy's Net Gain: Circuit Riders programme, he is developing an ICT strategy for the Forum and managing our website development.



From January he will be offering support and training to RCOs and artists to build their own webpage hosted on our website, so that you can communicate with your members and highlight your activities and achievements. RCOs will also be offered their own organisational email address. He will also build a photographic and video archive of Forum and RCO work which can be used to evidence all our work and celebrate the role of RCOs.

If you would like to take part in this project, get advice on your ICT needs, have an email address or build a webpage then please contact Joe Kamanga on 0191 423 6255 or [joem.kamanga@refugeevoices.org.uk](mailto:joem.kamanga@refugeevoices.org.uk)

If you would like to receive the monthly e-bulletin sent to your email address please contact Andrew on 01642 232446 or [andrew.jackson@refugeevoices.org.uk](mailto:andrew.jackson@refugeevoices.org.uk)