



The Collective Voice Of The Region's Refugee Community

Regional Refugee Forum North East

REPORT

October 2006



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Letter from the Chair, Dr Mohamed Nasreldin

My fellow RRF members

I feel proud to be able to present this report to you, as a record of the RRF's achievements since February 2005. Our successes have been made possible through the contribution of many people and I thank them all sincerely for their belief in our vision and their commitment to progressing our aims. From a vision born in 2000 within NERS (North of England Refugee Service), we have together built a unique model which has achieved national recognition, and demonstrated the power of collective action by the community of refugees and asylum seekers in this region, of all nationalities and ethnicities. Through the RRF, our members have worked in the interests of all refugees and asylum seekers who face the hard task of coping with exile, rebuilding their lives and seeking social and economic inclusion in this region. 6 years on from Dispersal, we are proud to see how our culturally diverse communities are making their contribution to regeneration here in the North East, and becoming a valued part of the whole regional community.



In this report you will find evidence of some of our achievements as well as the challenges that I am confident we will live up to in the coming year. We are of different nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, languages, histories and politics. Through the Forum we are united. We act collectively for the good of all refugees in this region. While each RCO can speak up about its own community, we have created the Forum as our Collective Voice. As isolated units we are weak and may not be heard. Through sharing our ideas and collating our evidences we can achieve greater influence over the development of policy and services, to ensure they are most effective in promoting settlement and integration.

In his report to the members in February 2005, our first Chair described it as the beginning of a new chapter, having made the transition to becoming a fully independent organisation only months before. In this report I hope you will see evidence of how far we have come since then. Internally there has been a lot of work going on. We have established our own office and recruited a new staff member to our team. We give a warm welcome to Joe Kamanga, who began work as our first Admin Officer in March this year. Joe has 4 year's experience in running an RCO, of involvement in BME networks, and has contributed to the development of the RRF itself. We have also worked hard on our organisational policies to ensure quality management of the RRF. We are now a registered charity, and our annual accounts are independently examined. My thanks to our Staff who have worked so hard to implement the Action Plan and serve the Committee and our members.

Externally, the RRF has established its profile and reputation. We are gaining access to more and more influential platforms for our voice to be heard by policy makers and service providers, both regionally and nationally. In the North East we have contributed the refugee voice to priority issues such as destitution, the NASS system, housing, economic inclusion, and the education of refugee children. Nationally we have made many presentations of our voice, and secured representation on the NRIF (National Refugee Integration Forum) and at several national conferences and seminars. We are getting our voice directly heard by policy makers at the highest level.

I want to see the RRF's members contribute a strong response to the consultation exercise soon to be offered by the Home Office. Next month they will issue draft consultation papers

Letter from the Chair, Dr Mohamed Nasreldin

on the *Future of Refugee Integration Services in England*. This proposes a new model for National Refugee Integration Services. The Home Office will allow three months for consideration and comments to be submitted. It is vital that our collective voice should be heard strongly in this process. As a member of the NRIF (National Refugee Integration Forum) I have seen the draft proposals and know that we must provide evidence to it before it becomes policy, about its contents and about how RCOs themselves want to be involved as deliverers of services.



The RRF made presentations at the Regional Refugee Integration Conference held in Gateshead February 9th & 10th this year, and many members participated in its workshops. We were firm in stating that the voice of refugees must be heard in the development of regional policy and practice in order for it to be truly effective. Now we have an important opportunity to input our recommendations to the draft *Regional Strategy for the Inclusion of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the North East*, soon to be circulated for consultation by the regional Consortium, NESPARS (NE Strategic Partnership for Asylum and Refugee Support, formerly NECARS). We also intend to ensure your inclusion in locality based Multi-Agency Groups within each Local Authority area, where you can discuss issues directly with those in charge of developing local policies and delivering services.

The RRF has also played an active role in promoting and supporting the development of emerging refugee-led forums in other parts of the UK. Our model of independent collective action has attracted much attention across the UK, both from the Home Office and other groups of RCOs seeking to take the same initiative and learn from our experience. We have found ourselves invited to make presentations and meet with several emerging initiatives. We have met representatives from Wales, Ireland, Yorkshire and the East of England. Our Constitution has been adopted by others, as a model for the way forwards.

The RRF will be directly involved in the exciting momentum that has grown in the last year towards creating a network that will link these emerging independent refugee led forums across the UK. This movement is creating the potential for an independent, national collective voice of refugees and asylum seekers. The Executive Committee has already discussed in detail the plan to host a National Network Meeting for representatives from these refugee forums early next year. We want to secure your involvement in the further planning and organisation of this major event, so that all members can ensure its success.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to my fellow members of the Executive Committee. They have served the RRF in a voluntary capacity, demonstrating their deep commitment to working in the interests of all asylum seekers and refugees in this region. They have given up much of their time to work tirelessly to oversee the running of the RRF and to ensure that it achieves the true potential of collective action. The RRF has benefited enormously through their contributions, and those of its appointed Advisers, Daoud Zaaroura and Simon Underwood. Last but not least, I want to offer an immense thank you to Simon Underwood. Simon has been a volunteer Adviser to the RRF since its very first meeting. His contribution over 6 years has been invaluable and his support for our aims total. It is with great sadness that he had to leave us in June, when he took up his new post as Head of Social Inclusion at Newcastle City Council. He will always remain our true friend.

And of course, thank you to you, all our members

Report from the Treasurer, Gaby Kitoko

Year 1 : end July 2004 – end July 2005

We are presenting to you our Annual Accounts for Year 1, that is from the end of July 2004 – end of July 2005. Our financial year runs from the end of July as the RRF received its first funding as an independent organisation on 25th July 2004. Our books have been checked and our accounts prepared by Read Milburn & Company, Accountants, who were appointed as the RRF's Independent Financial Examiners at our last AGM. In our first year as a fully independent charity, we received an income totalling £83, 815. Our core costs (staffing and running costs) came from a 3 year grant from the Big Lottery Fund. Our project costs (activities) came from small grants sources



Our income in Year 1 was composed of the following grant awards:

Big Lottery Fund	68,514	Running costs (2 staff salaries, office rent and overheads, rates, insurance, stationary, postage, telephones, travel, equipping new office)
Tees Valley Community Foundation	1,996	Learning Exchange Visits and Training
Tyne & Wear Community Foundation	5,000	Learning Exchange Visits and Training
Newcastle City Council Asylum Seekers Grant	3,860	Meetings
NCVS (Newcastle Council for Voluntary Services)	4,445	PCs, Internet, Website domain, IT software for Information Project
Total Income Year 1	83,815	

Our expenditure for Year 1 was as below

Activities (Meetings, Learning Exchange Visits and Training)	5,756
Running costs office rent and overheads, rates, insurance, stationary, postage, telephones, travel, professional fees	12,002
Staff salaries and recruitment costs	46,259
Capital costs - our own office (PCs, software, office furniture)	2,200
Total expenditure in Year 1	66,217
Unspent in this period	17,598

Year 1 Under spend is accounted for as below

Salries under spend: Grant start date 25th July 2004. Recruitment for 2nd staff member began in October 2004. New post began 10th January 2005. Therefore 5 months salary under spend in this period.

Capital costs: a later grant from NCVS allowed us to purchase PCs, website domain, and software so saving on the Big Lottery Grant capital costs provision.

Some grants extend into Year 2

The Big Lottery has agreed that under spend in Year 1 can be used to cover higher than anticipated running costs (rent, telephones) in Year 2..

Report from the Treasurer, Gaby Kitoko

Year 2: end July 2005 – end July 2006

Read Milburn & Company will produce our Annual Accounts for Year 2 early next year.

In Year 2 we were successful in securing the support of two of our region's major funders, the Northern Rock Foundation and the Lloyds TSB Foundation. We are very happy to have established this relationship with both these Foundations, who have taken a great interest in the aims and potential of the RRF.

Northern Rock Foundation has awarded us project funding to cover the costs of direct action. This includes providing training opportunities, funding learning exchange visits, meetings of the RRF, network meetings and the costs of publicising the Collective Voice.

At its meeting of 20th July 2005 the Executive Committee decided that the RRF would operate more effectively with an additional staff member. Due to the RRF becoming a fully independent organisation and continuing to grow, we needed to create a new staff post that would take over its increased administrative functions. In August 2005 an application was made to the Lloyds TSB Foundation for a two year grant to create a part-time Admin Officer post. In December 2005 Lloyds TSB Foundation awarded us a grant totalling £19, 964 over two years.

The RRF endeavours to make sure that funding raised for the organisation does not come from the same grant programmes that are applicable to community based organisations, so as not to compete with RCOs themselves for the same funding sources. The grant of £12,899 from Northern Rock Foundation comes from their Better Sector Programme, which awards grants to 2nd tier or umbrella organisations rather than community organisations. Lloyds TSB Foundation funds registered charities only. Both these funders were centrally involved in organising a seminar in May 2006 for the North East Funder's Forum to look specifically at barriers in access to funding experienced by this region's BME community groups and RCOs. The RRF was part of the advisory group for this meeting and made presentations at that event to promote recognition of the role and value of RCOs and also of their funding needs.

Big Lottery Fund	66,976	Running costs (staff salaries, office rent and overheads, rates, insurance, stationary, postage, telephones, travel, professional fees)
Northern Rock Foundation Application made Jan 2006 Grant started May 2006	12,899	Project costs Meetings, Learning Exchange Visits, Training, publicising the Collective Voice
Lloyds TSB Foundation Application made August 2005 Grant started December 2005	12,000	Salary for new post of part-time Admin Officer, plus PC and office furniture
Joseph Rowntree Foundation April 2006	1,000	Donation nominated by Co-ordinator for her work on JRF's National Immigration and Inclusion Committee
Total Income during Year 2	92,875	
Under spend brought forward from Year 1	17, 598	

Our core funding grant from the Big Lottery Fund ends in July next year. One of the first tasks of the new Executive Committee will be to examine our funding situation and begin talks with appropriate funders to secure our future for the next 3 years.

Report from the Co-ordinator, Georgina Fletcher

As Co-ordinator, working on the RRF every day, I have the advantage of constant contact with the Committee, our members, new RCOs, a wide range of agencies, policy makers, services, funders, and other refugee-led forums in the UK. From this position I can see some important trends:

- I can see how active and increasingly knowledgeable and ambitious the independent refugee-led sector is, both in this region and across the UK;
- I can see how the RRF profile is growing, and that more and more organisations are contacting the RRF to seek to work with us or through us, and how much interest there is in hearing the Voice of refugees and asylum seekers.
- But the RRF's strength and ability to produce the Collective Voice depends on the growth and stability of its member organisations, the region's RCOs. I can see how frustrated many RCOs are at being unable to secure the support they need to further develop their organisations and activities. People cannot sustain voluntary action indefinitely; Dispersal began 6 years ago, but still RCOs are relying on voluntary work to provide their unique and invaluable integration support to their communities. The contribution they are making to wider social policy agendas such as community cohesion, inclusion, equality, and regeneration is also so valuable. RCOs need to secure staff salaries and offices/ community centres.

I want to address each of these here.

First, I want to assure you that the Executive Committee and staff have been working very hard behind the scenes on your behalf to raise awareness about the issues facing RCO's organisational growth and sustainability. Much more than half our staff time is dedicated to providing one-to-one start-up and further development support to RCOs (both to members and those who are not yet members), including assistance in developing action plans and raising funding. We have also organised training events and access to capacity building opportunities. But we do not at this time have the staff capacity to meet the level of demand from RCOs, and we must also progress work on the Collective Voice itself. Therefore, in May this year, we worked with some of this region's major funders to design a seminar for funders to identify why RCOs find it difficult to access their funds. The problem is not with the funders, they are genuinely supportive of the refugee sector. The problem is that RCOs can only make successful applications if they first have access to development support.

As a result of this seminar, we were invited by the funders to develop fully detailed proposals for an effective and wholly practical solution to this situation. We have recommended a package of customised, intensive one-to-one sustained development support and training for your organisations, based on a focused case work system. We have good reason to be confident this will be in place in the region next year. We owe sincere thanks the region's Funders for taking such a genuine interest in this issue.



Supporting the actions and building the capacity of community organisations supporting culturally diverse communities in the North East region
Refugees' & Asylum Seekers' Communities, non-Refugee BME Communities, New Migrant Communities

Recommendations of the Executive Committee of the Regional Refugee Forum North East
September 2006

Report from the Co-ordinator, Georgina Fletcher

Secondly, whilst we have been successful in securing platforms for the refugee voice to be heard, we still have to know how to make most effective use of these opportunities. We know policy makers respect hard statistics more than anecdotes or generalities. We can achieve more influence through presenting detailed and comprehensive evidence



from our region that matches the standards of research and analysis demanded by the highest policy makers. Therefore we have designed the Expert Group structure for the RRF. These issue-based Expert Groups will be the real engine of the RRF, systematically gathering, analysing, publishing and presenting the evidence from all our region's RCOs to influence policy and practice locally, regionally and nationally. So I would like to encourage you, if you have a particular issue, interest or commitment, to get involved in one or more of these groups. Through them you can share the valuable evidence and experience of your community with other members, and together we can produce the data to back up what we all know to be true.

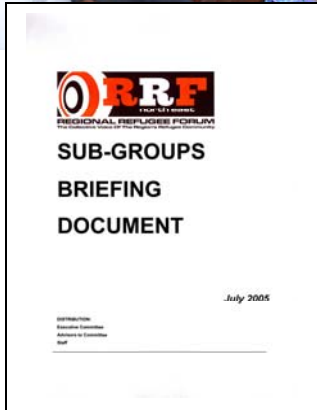
Refugees from this region can speak out for themselves and each other, confident that their voice reflects collective experience and ideas. When one of our members attends a conference, all members can be confident that issues affecting the whole community are being expressed through their presence. And you can bring back valuable information to share with all members. There are many opportunities to get involved in the RRF's programme of activities: you can join one of our issue-based Expert Groups; you could also represent the RRF on a Steering Committee, contribute to research projects, attend conferences, seminars and workshops, and make presentations. You will read more details about these opportunities in this report.

The third main focus of attention is on the emergence of a national movement of independent refugee-led forums across the UK. They are emerging spontaneously in a variety of shapes and forms, but all led by a belief that collective action will add value to the work of individual RCOs, and overcome the isolation, marginalisation and lack of power to change things that they too often experience. The RRF has been a pioneer in this and we give every support we can to other forums that seek to learn from our experience. We can also now start to learn from other models and bring those ideas back to the RRF and gain from them. It is a really positive time.

Other projects for the immediate future include producing a monthly newsletter for members to update you on news, policy changes, services, and opportunities to attend conferences, seminars and training. We will also start work immediately on creating a Regional Directory of RCOs for publication. Staff will be in contact with you soon about this. This directory will promote wider recognition of the initiatives been taken by refugees themselves, and should help to secure more link working and partnerships between yourselves and other agencies and services across the region. We will also be further developing the members' resource room at our office, equipped with IT and internet access and a range of information for your use.

I give my thanks also to my fellow team members, Kelly Paterson and Joe Kamanga for their hard work and valuable contribution to progressing towards our targets and aims.

RRF Expert Groups



The Executive Committee held special planning meetings to discuss the best system for collecting the evidence of the RRF's membership on the most important issues facing new arrivals, those waiting in the NASS system, those granted refugee status, and those whose cases have not been successful. Through systematically gathering evidence from the region's RCOs, both of what is not working, what works best, and the impact of policies, the RRF can take these findings and present them to people or agencies who are in charge of developing policy. The evidence (the collective voice) can be used to monitor the impact of policies, and the effectiveness of services. It can also be used to contribute our region's evidence to national campaigns which seek to change policies. This is the real potential of the RRF.

The Executive Committee has designed an Expert Group structure (Sub-groups of people with special knowledge). Each Expert Group will focus on specific issues, and will ask RCOs to nominate members of their community who have the most in-depth knowledge of that issue, or the most commitment to progressing that issue.

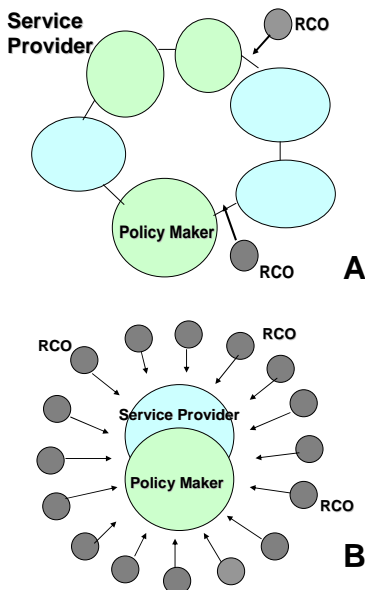
The Expert Groups are summarised as:

- Economic Independence (covers job, business start up, training, education and ESOL)
- Asylum and Refugee Policy and Law
- Housing, Health, Community, Safety, Destitution
- RCO development and activity, and the Media

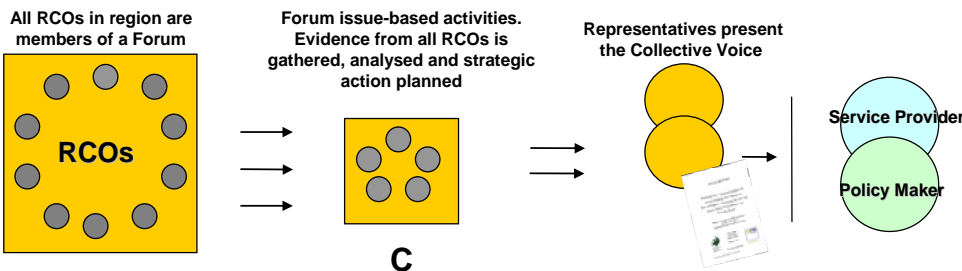
(Please ask staff for a copy of the full report for more details)

Please contact staff if you would like to get involved in one or more of the Expert Groups, or for more details.

Each Expert Group will be able to plan activities to help them gather the evidence required and produce the most effective analysis and presentation of that evidence. This can include organising visits to projects across the UK for ideas on good practice solutions, research, additional training (such as statistics, or presentation techniques), and attending conferences, seminars and workshops. Expert Group members can then make presentations of the findings to target policy makers and service providers.



This Committee feels this structure will ensure that our members' voices are heard, without each member having to attend every meeting or consultation event where the views of asylum seekers and refugees are being sought. We know that RCOs are so busy it is hard to find the time to attend all these meetings. The Expert Group structure will also avoid the tokenism that RCOs often feel, and the feeling of having little impact (see diagram A). It will also avoid the frustration many feel when they are only given time at meetings to make very general comments, or there isn't enough time to listen to everyone (see diagram B). The Expert Groups will allow an additional level of in-depth analysis to be carried out on all the gathered evidences. Policy makers respond most to statistics and analysis, they give this more attention and respect. This structure (diagram C) of producing an authoritative Collective Voice has the potential to achieve more influence and promote change.



RRF Examples of Activities

The following pages give some examples of how the RRF has worked to secure the participation of this region's RCOs in a range of activities which ensure that the issues facing the communities in this region, and their self-identified solutions, are heard at both the national and regional levels. This has been through members:



- Delivering a presentation or making a speech at conferences and seminars
- Networking and making new contacts
- Learning new information and gaining knowledge to share with other members
- Contributing to discussion, debate and research
- Raising the profile of the RRF
- Observing other processes or structural models
- Becoming a member of steering group or advisory committee
- Taking part in training

Reports of many of these events can be found on our website.

The Collective Voice at National level

NRIF – The National Refugee Integration Forum

After an open recruitment call by the Home Office to secure the involvement of refugees directly in policy making, and interviews held at the Home Office, the RRF's Chair, Dr Mohamed Nasreldin was one of only 30 people in the UK to be selected for membership of the NRIF on 9th Dec 2005. Gaby Kitoko, RRF Treasurer was recruited to the NRIF Sub-Group on Health.



The purpose of the NRIF is to advise the Government on the development of the National Refugee Integration Strategy, "*Integration Matters*" (March 2005), to monitor its implementation, and to oversee planning for an annual national conference on refugee integration. Its primary role is to identify and propose solutions to the issues that refugees face. Chaired by a Government Minister, the NRIF includes representation from the voluntary sector, local authorities, Government departments and the private sector.

Dr Mohamed and Gaby Kitoko can take the collective evidence and voice of this region's refugee community to advise policy makers and service providers at the national level.



Home Office National Conference on Refugee Integration 2006: '*Belonging*'

The North East region had strong representation at this important national 2 day conference held in Leeds 29th – 30th

RRF Examples of Activities

June 2006. The RRF secured 4 free places for RCOs in this region. Those attending were:

- Albin Horvat, Roma North East
- Afi Dometi, African Women's Group
- Remy Luhnzo, NEACAG
- Jean Baptiste Karaha, CACG

As a member of the NRIF the RRF Chairperson was also invited to attend.

Chartered Institute of Housing Conference: 'Refugee Housing...Integration not Isolation' London 20th Sept 2005

Dr Sarkhell Radha of KCK (Kurdistan Community for Kurds Tees Valley) and Sarah Ahmadi of the Sunderland Afghan British Community Association attended this first national conference to focus solely on refugee housing issues. Government representatives set out the policy on housing and integration of refugees. The conference gave delegates the opportunity to hear from organisations already successfully working in this field. The event considered the role of RCOs in developing and delivering services. It also looked at policy to improve the transition from asylum seeker to refugee in terms of housing and cohesion issues.

RCOs National Action Learning Exchange

3rd – 7th April 2006, Cardiff, Wales

This year's week-long annual conference that brings together representatives of RCOs from across the UK was held in Cardiff by Praxis and co-hosts Refugee Voice Wales. There were 4 free places offered to first time delegates from the North East. Those attending were Gaby Kitoko (ACANE), Sarah Ahmadi (Sunderland Afghan British Community Association), Dr Mohamed Nasreldin (Sudanese Society) and Dr Sarkhell Radha (Kurdistan Community for Kurds Tees Valley)



'A Black Perspective in Community and Youth Work'

Manchester 3rd December 2005

Herbert Dirahu, of SACA (Stockton African-Caribbean Association) attended this conference which aimed to enable black and white community and youth workers to focus on practice with a black perspective. Workshops gave opportunities to discuss issues and practice related to:

- Cultural creativity
- Rights and responsibilities
- Drugs and gangs
- Peer mediation
- Refugee awareness
- Child and adolescent mental health
- Relationships between white workers and black communities



RRF Examples of Activities

'100 Years of Immigration Law'

7th Dec 2005, ILPA (Immigration Law Practitioners Association)

Taeb Kaznazany of KIP (Kurdish Integration Programme) attended at this meeting which examined the legal history and the context of UK Immigration Law. It was chaired by The Hon. Mr Justice Collins.

Transnational Conference Exchanges for an Equal Europe: Asylum Seekers and Volunteering

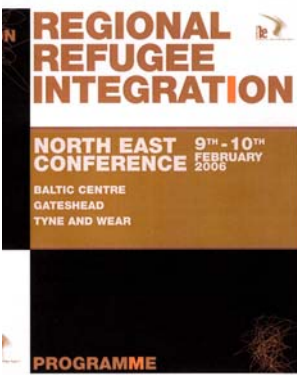
24th Nov 2005 London. Using the model of the RRF, Dr Mohamed Nasreldin delivered a presentation and a workshop advocating the effectiveness of collective voluntary action and how this can influence policy and practice. It highlighted the potential for a transnational network of refugee-led forums across Europe that can contribute to policy at a European level.

Parliamentary Briefing on Immigration, Asylum & Nationality Bill 2005

October 5th 2005 House of Commons, London

Verron Munda (Sunderland Great Lakes Community) attended the Houses of Parliament to add voice to debate on this Bill as it was passing through the process of becoming law.

The Collective Voice at Regional level



Regional Refugee Integration Conference

Organised by NECARS (NE Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugee Support – 'The Consortitum')

Feb 9th & 10th 2006 The Baltic, Gateshead

The RRF secured a free place for all the region's RCOs at this conference. In the opening session our Chair delivered a speech on the necessity of hearing the Voice of refugees in the development of any truly effective strategy for integration. Representatives of RCOs contributed their expert knowledge to a range of issue-based workshops. Clarence Mnkandla of NESAS (NE Southern African Society) and Gaby Kitoko (ACANE) made platform presentations which identified housing issues and gave valuable suggestions on how service providers can work in partnership with RCOs to deliver more effective solutions. Findings of the conference are to be used in developing NECARS' 3 year Regional Refugee Integration Strategy. Attending the conference were officers from the region's Local Authorities as well as Johnathon Duke-Evans, Head of the Refugee Integration Section of the Home Office, and officers from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

RRF Examples of Activities

NE Housing Board Voluntary Sector Advisory Group

RRF has membership of this and has made presentations to the group on housing issues for refugees and on the role of RCOs.

VONNE AGM

November 2005. Gaby Kitoko gave a presentation on the RRF's model of collective action and how this adds value to the work of this region's RCOs.

SPARC Project (Supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees Children within the education system in England).

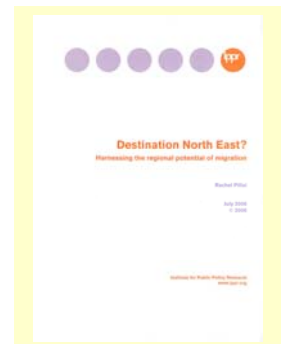
18th January 2006 Northumbria University. Presentation delivered by Herbert Dirahu, Chair of the Stockton African-Caribbean Association, highlighting the parent's perspective on the difficulties and issues faced by young refugees and asylum seekers in education in the North East.

"Can the Global become Local?"

IPPR North (Institute of Public Policy Research) Sept 7th 2005 Newcastle University. Gaby Kitoko was a panellist in a debate about how the people of this region can be participants in global issues, in particular Aid, Trade and Development. The RRF produced a booklet for the conference which showcased actual examples of how refugees and asylum seekers in the NE are making a contribution to the economic and social development of communities both in this region and also back in their countries of origin. The booklet can be found on our website.

'Destination North East: harnessing the regional potential of migration'

IPPR March – June 2006. The RRF worked with researchers from IPPR to hold a research focus group with representatives of RCOs in this region to hear their views and experiences on the barriers that refugees and asylum seekers face in delivering their true potential in the regional economy. IPPR also heard examples of success in refugee business start up, employment, and academic achievements, which demonstrate the value of the international connections and experience brought to the region by our communities.



RRF Examples of Activities



NE Funders' Forum (a collective of the region's major funders)

May 10th 2006: Gaby Kitoko and RRF Co-ordinator, Georgina Fletcher, made presentations and ran workshops on the unique role of RCOs and the range of support actions they deliver. We also identified the main barriers faced by RCOs in accessing appropriate funding to support both their organisational development and their programme of activities.



Supporting the actions and building the capacity of community organisations supporting culturally diverse communities in the North East region
Refugees' & Asylum Seekers' Communities, non-Refugee BME Communities, New Migrant Communities

Recommendations of the Executive Committee of the Regional Refugee Forum North East
September 2006

As a result of this seminar, the RRF was directly asked to produce its detailed recommendations for a real practical solution to the barriers faced by RCOs in developing their organisations towards being properly funded and recognised service deliverers. These recommendations were delivered to the funders in September 06. We anticipate that the region will soon have a programme of intensive one-to-one capacity building and training support for RCOs across the region.

Training for RCOs



hact Refugee Housing Training: Nov 2005 – Jan 2006

As a member of the Advisory Group, the RRF worked with the national organisation *hact* (Housing Associations Charitable Trust) to design a customised training course on housing for representatives from the regions' RCOs. The aim of the training was to:

- help them deliver effective information and guidance to their communities
- provide basic up-to-date knowledge on the housing and welfare entitlements of refugees
- raise awareness about the role of local and regional voluntary and statutory agencies therefore enabling advisers to signpost and network more effectively



19 people from our regions' RCOs benefited from the series of free training days. They also planned for the presentations that were made by Clarence Mnkandla of NESAS and Gaby Kitoko of ACANE at the NECARS Regional Refugee Integration Conference held in Gateshead on Feb 9th-10th 2006. Clarence spoke about the pressures created by the 28 day 'Move On' period, and the real problem of long term overcrowding created through the bureaucracy that surrounds Family Reunion. Certificates were awarded to all trainees by Johnathon Duke-Evans, Head of Home Office Refugee Integration Section.



RRF Examples of Activities

Website Development Training

August – November 2005

25 representatives from 14 RCOs across the region participated in a customised 4-part training course organised by the RRF and designed and delivered by Robert Tshisekedi of ITLC. The training course was delivered at venues in Middlesbrough, Sunderland, and twice in Newcastle. It was designed to enable RCOs to set up their own websites to communicate with and provide information to their own members. The RRF is hosting free mini web-sites for members on our website.



Refugee Business Start up Training

July 1st Newcastle (to be repeated in Middlesbrough)

The RRF knows that there are many entrepreneurs amongst the refugee community in the region, both those with business backgrounds and those who identify new market ideas here. This training course was organised in partnership with RiB (Refugees into Business) and delivered to 16 representatives from RCOs in Tyne & Wear by a trainer from the DTI (Department of Trade & Industry). It was designed to provide those working in RCOs to understand the basics of business culture UK style, and to provide the most effective guidance to their community on where to go for business start up advice and funding. All received certificates.



Networking with refugee-led forums across the UK

Network meeting with South Yorkshire Refugee Forum and Irish Refugee Council

Feb 17th 2005, Newcastle

Following their attendance at our last AGM, representatives and the co-ordinator, Mohamed Gaas, of the emerging refugee-led forum in Sheffield, and RCO representatives from Dublin, Ireland, met with the RRF to discuss ideas and learning about developing a forum and its range of actions.



RRF Examples of Activities



**Project Proposal: Regional Refugee Forums
National Development and Co-ordination
programme**

A programme to:

- 1) Promote the development of regional structures to produce the Collective Voice of the UK's regional communities of refugees and
- 2) Create a national interface for their Collective Voice to inform the development of National evidence-based policy and practice

Promoting the development of independent regional refugee-led forums across the UK and creating networking opportunities

20th June 2006. The RRF has created a proposal for promoting the development of independent refugee-led forums nationally, and ensuring that they have the opportunity to network with each other so as to share their evidence, share solutions and produce an independent national collective voice of refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugee Voice Wales

3rd October 2005. Newcastle

The RRF was visited by 2 representatives from the emerging refugee-led forum for Wales, Refugee Voice Wales, and the head of the Welsh Refugee Council. The Welsh Refugee Council is acting in the same developmental capacity as NERS did with the RRF. Since then we have maintained close contact with Refugee Voice Wales through their Co-ordinator Pierrot Ngadi, and share ideas and learning with them. They examined several models and constitutions and decided that the RRF Constitution was the most appropriate example to adopt. Further exchange visits will be arranged.



The aims of the project

Eastern Region Multi-Agency Conference on Asylum Seekers and Refugees


21st March 2006, Ely, Cambridgeshire

Through an invitation from the conference organisers, Menter (a regional network of BME organisations and communities in the east of england) Bini Tesfai delivered a presentation and workshop on the RRF's model of collective action. The audience included officers from Government Office for the East, NASS, representatives, the Refugee Council, Voluntary Sector Refugee Network East of England, and the East of England Regional Assembly Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

RRF Examples of Activities

NASRF Norwich Asylum Seekers and Refugees Forum

6th January 2006, Norwich. NASRF invited a representative of the RRF to attend a community event organised by this emerging forum. Kamara Ousmane attended and spoke to them about the model developed by the RRF and the range of activities we organise.



**The Regional Refugee Forum North East:
The Collective Voice of the Region's Refugee Community**

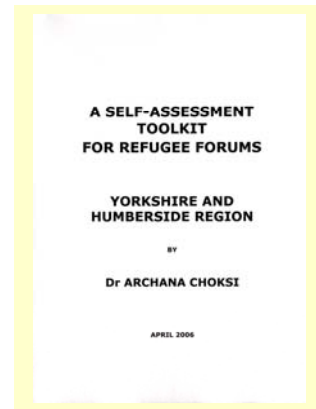
**How can RCO's achieve influence
on Policy and Practice?**

Models for creating the interface with policy makers -
from the perspective of RCOs themselves

How a Regional Refugee-led Forum can, through Collective
Action, add value to the role of individual RCOs

LASSN (Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network)

March 2006. RRF Co-ordinator Georgina Fletcher discussed the RRF's development and model with co-ordinator of LASSN, Dr Archana Choksi and to help inform the production of a Self-Assessment Toolkit for Refugee Forums in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, which could help guide their emergence and development.



Refugee Forums / Networks: Bridging the Gaps

18th September 2006, London. RRF Co-ordinator, Georgina Fletcher and RRF Admin Officer Joe Kamanga attend this network meeting of representatives and workers of refugee-led forums from across the UK to discuss:

- Role models of a refugee-led forum / network. The road to success
- Challenges and barriers for refugee forums in the dispersal regions
- How to co-ordinate our voices
- The way forward
- Proposal for an on-line national refugee forums network in the UK



Summary of Achievements against Objectives of 3 Year Action Plan

The Action Plan was agreed by the Forum's General Membership at its meeting of 14th January 2004. For more details see Summary of Actions pages.

1. Consolidate the RRF NE

- In April 2005 the RRF set up its own office in central Newcastle, with a members' room equipped with IT and internet access
- Identity created: RRF logo designed, and business stationary created, information leaflet and poster
- In June 2005 the RRF became a registered charity with the Charity Commission
- In December 2005 we raised funding from new sources for an additional staff member, and in May 2006 for our activities costs
- Recruited a 3rd staff member, a part-time Admin Officer to take over the increased administrative functions associated with becoming fully independent organisation
- May 05 launch of website, with an exclusive members area. Weekly E-bulletin to members. Free members' mini-websites hosted and email address available to all members.
- Developed a range of Health & Safety Policies and an Employment Handbook for the RRF (contract with First Business Support commenced May 2006)

2. Membership

- Membership numbered 42 RCOs at September 2006
- A further 8 RCOs included since Feb 2005
- Any RCO is welcome to participate in RRF activities and benefit from information circulated. This does not depend on membership.

3. Influence Policy and Practice (including raising awareness and understanding)

- Secured membership of range of committees, steering groups and bodies, regionally and nationally
- Secured free places for region's RCOs at national and regional conferences
- Participated in research programmes to influence policy
- Contact made with journalists on regional television, radio and newspapers leading to stories on serious issues and positive images in print and as broadcasts.

4. Encourage partnership working

- Actively promoting a national network of refugee led forums
- Actively promoting recognition of the role of RCOs as service deliverers to their own communities
- Creating links between RCOs and a range of services and agencies

Summary of Achievements against Objectives of 3 Year Action Plan

5. Promote the development and capacity of RCOs

- Training courses organised on Housing, Business Start Up, and Website Development
- One to One development work delivered by staff to established and emerging RCOs in the region, leading to successful fund-raising
- Information leaflets produced for members
- Signposting and referral of RCOs to a range agencies, and vice versa
- Presentations delivered to the North East Funders Forum on increasing access of RCOs to funding
- Proposal to Funders for practical solution to development and capacity building needs of region's RCOs
- Circulation of wide range of information to and from members and other agencies, such as policy changes, new services, events, training opportunities etc

6. Strengthen the position of the RRF NE

- Presentations by RRF representatives on the aims and role of a refugee-led forum to a range of audiences regionally and nationally
- A member of the Executive Committee recruited to the National Refugee Integration Forum, and one to the Sub-group on Health
- Secured inclusion in NASS Regional meetings
- Secured membership of NECARS Executive (now NESPARS)

Next immediate targets

- Expert Group action: collate data/evidence on priority issues from members, analyse and present the Collective Voice
- Make detailed response to consultation papers on draft policies and strategies circulated by Home Office (national refugee integration strategy) and NESPARS (regional refugee integration strategy)
- Produce a Regional Directory of RCOs
- Develop the members' resource room
- Monthly newsletter for all membership
- More mini-websites for members
- Secure effective development and capacity building support for RCOs
- Secure inclusion of RCOs in locality based Multi-agency groups on refugees and asylum seekers
- Extend networking with other emerging refugee-led forums across the UK
- Host a national network meeting of representatives from other refugee-led forums, work towards independent collective national voice of refugees



RRF Executive Committee

Elected February 16th 2005

Dr Mohamed Nasreldin
CHAIRPERSON

Gaby Kitoko
TREASURER

Herbert Dirhau
SECRETARY



Dr Sarkhell Radha (to May 06)
VICE-CHAIR

Sarah Ahmadi

Verron Munda

Caridad Galbraith (to Dec 05)

Co-opted March 2005

Bini Tesfai

Kamara Ousmane

Advisers

Simon Underwood
(to June 06)

Daoud Zaaroura



RRF Executive Committee

The Executive Committee has met 17 times since elected in February 2005. Seven people were elected to serve on the Committee at the AGM of 16th February 2005. The Committee appointed its officers at its first meeting, co-opted a further two members and also appointed two Advisers. Committee members act in a voluntary capacity. They are elected by the General Membership on the basis of their own personal skills, knowledge, expertise and commitment to serving the interests of the whole community of refugees and asylum seekers in the region and to the aims and principles of the RRF. They do not serve on the committee as representatives of their own RCO.

As Trustees of the Charity and employers, on behalf of the membership the Committee members have overseen the running of the organisation, the implementation of its Action Plan, ensured it has the funding to operate effectively, recruited and supervised staff, and directed the development of a range of organisational policies for employment and health & safety. They have also made presentations on the RRF to many audiences and attended many meetings with other agencies and emerging refugee led forums across the UK. Training can be organised for new Committee members where appropriate, and Away-Days will also be organised for the Committee to have quality time to discuss their roles and actions.

Dr Mohammed Nasreldin Chair Member of National Refugee Integration Forum. Sudanese Society Committee member. Employment Project Manager at the North of England Refugee Service with a team of 12 staff. Trustee of 3 charities. Country of Origin: Sudan. University Academic

Gaby Kitoko Treasurer Member of National Refugee Integration Forum Sub-Group on Health. Co-founder and Development Worker for ACANE (African Community Advice North East). Member of Young People & Children Safeguarding Board, with Children's Society and Newcastle Social Services. Country of origin: DR Congo. Red Cross and Human Rights worker, medicine, human rights, business

Herbert Dirahu Secretary Co-founder and Chair of SACA (Stockton African-Caribbean Community Association). Youth Officer at Darlington Youth Service managing 8 youth workers. Previously worked for NERS, CAB and Connexions. Management Committee member Teesside One World. Country of Origin: Zimbabwe. Teacher (Head of Humanities Department, secondary level)

Dr Sarkhell Radha Vice-Chair (to May 2006) Co-founder and Chair of KCK (Kurdistan Community for Kurds Tees Valley). Co-founder member of KIP (Kurdish Integration Programme). Member of Refugee Doctors Programme. Country of Origin: Iraq

Sarah Ahmadi Co-founder of Sunderland Afghan British Community Association. Entrepreneur Country of Origin: Afghanistan. Broadcast media and Business

Bini Tesfai Chair of NE Eritrean Association. NERS Youth Integration Project worker (Tees Valley). Committee member of BME Network Middlesbrough, Board member of Victim Support Teesside. Member of National Council for Victim Support.. Country of Origin: Eritrea. Geologist

Verron Munda Co-founder of Sunderland Great Lakes Community. Founder and Editor of '*Planet Afrique*' Magazine. Country of Origin: DR Congo. Political Journalist

Kamara Ousmane Co-founder of Sunderland African Association. Projects with Kick Racism out of Football. Now with South London Refugee Partnership. Country of Origin: Ivory Coast.

Cardidad Galbraith Founder of LACSA (Latin American Community Support Association). Professional interpreter (DPI). Country of origin: Cuba

RRF Executive Committee

Advisers

Daoud Zaaroura

Chief Executive Officer, North of England Refugee Service. Member of National Refugee Integration Forum. Director of fact. Director of Migrant Helpline. Member of NE Government Task Group. Member of Regional Advisory Board Ippr North.

Simon Underwood

Managing Director of Banks of the Wear Community Projects. Chair of National Refugee Forum. Member of JRF Refugee Housing Network.

Simon has been an invaluable friend and adviser to the RRF since its very beginnings 6 years ago. Sadly, he had to relinquish this role in June 2006 when he took up a new post at Newcastle City Council as Head of Social Inclusion. The council has 'potential conflict of interest' rules that do not allow senior staff to serve on other committees.

Simon writes

*“ It has been a real honour to be involved with the RRF since its very beginnings. I have learned so much and made so many good friends. You can be assured that I will still be really involved with the cause of improving the situation for refugees in the North East and no doubt our paths will cross many times. Already I am involved in updating Newcastle’s policies in relation to refugees and asylum seekers!
With very best wishes to you all,
Simon Underwood.”*

RRF Staff

Co-ordinator Georgina Fletcher

Before joining the RRF Georgina worked for 12 years as a researcher and producer on television news and documentaries (Channel 4 News, BBC and ITV), including location work in South East Asia, USA and Africa. She has worked with refugees over 20 years, both in the UK and in UNHCR camps overseas. She joined NERS in 1999 as a volunteer, and then became Project Co-ordinator for its *Transnational Project on Hearing the Voices of Refugees in Policy and Practice* for the European Commission. She was co-ordinator of the RRF when it started as a project within NERS in 2000 and then became employed directly by the RRF when it became an independent organisation in 2004. She is a member of JRF National Committee on Immigration and Inclusion.

Admin Officer Joe Kamanga

Before coming to the UK, Joe gained a degree in Industrial Chemistry from University of Lumumbashi, and was employed as Cultural Officer at the French Embassy in Malawi. Here in the North East Joe has gained 4 year's experience of running and developing an RCO, serving on its committee first as Secretary and later as Treasurer. As such he is one of the founder members of the RRF and has been involved in the development of its Constitution and Action Plan. As a representative of the RRF he has given presentations in the region and nationally, visiting other emerging refugee-led forums, and participated in conferences and seminars. He has also been part of the Sunderland BME Network. He is in the 4th year of a degree in Computer Studies.

Information and Communications Officer Kelly Paterson

Kelly worked on developing the RRF's communications functions from January 2005 to June 2006. We thank her for her contribution to the development of the RRF and wish her every success in the future.

RRF Membership

Organisations admitted to full membership of the Regional Refugee Forum North East at 4th March 2003 (when the Constitution was signed)

- ACANE (African Community Advice North East)
- African Women's Group
- Albanian Community NE
- BAOBAB
- Bosnia & Hercegovina Society 'Ljiljan'
- CACG (Central African Community Group)
- EACOM (East African Community)
- Ethiopian Community Association
- GAFRICOM (Gateshead African Community)
- ICANE (Iraqi Community North East)
- IFIR (International Federation of Iranian Refugees)
- Iranian Centre North East
- Kurdish Community North East
- LACSANE (Latin American Community Association NE)
- Le Camer
- NARA (Newcastle African Refugee Association)
- NEACA (NE Angolan Community Association)
- NE Afghan Community Association
- NECAFISI (NE Cultural Association for Integration and Social Inclusion)
- NE Eritrean Community Association
- NEST (Angolan and Portuguese Speaking Women's Project)
- Palestinian Community Association
- REACT (Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside)
- Roma North East
- Sri Lankan Society
- Sudanese Society
- Sunderland Farsi Speakers Network
- Sunderland Great Lakes Community
- ZICONE (Zimbabwe Community in the NE)

Organisations admitted to full membership of the Forum at AGM 16th Feb 2005

- Sunderland Afghan British Community Association
- Abogida
- ASINEE (African Solidarity for Integration in the NE England)
- Association for the Promotion of African Women
- CHAPS (Comminidad Hispano-Americana de Pennywell en Sunderland)
- The Farsi Group
- Kurdistan Community For Kurds Tees Valley (*to May 06*)
- NAFRA (Newcastle African Association)
- NCSP (Newcastle Congolese Support Project)
- NE Chadian Community Association
- Notre Voix
- Stockton African-Caribbean Association
- Sunderland African Association



Regional Refugee Forum North East
 3rd Floor
 50 Image House
 Carloli Square
 Newcastle upon Tyne
 NE1 6UQ

Tel: 0191 261 5910
 Fax: 0191 233 1261

Charity Registration Number
 1109815

Staff

Co-ordinator

Georgina Fletcher
 Direct line: 0191 261 6225
georgina.fletcher@refugeevoices.org.uk

Admin Officer

Joe Kamanga
 Direct line: 0191 261 5910
joem.kamanga@refugeevoices.org.uk

Website

www.refugeevoices.org.uk



Independent Financial Examiners

Read Milburn & Co Ltd
 71 Howard Street
 North Shields
 Tyne & Wear
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