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Valentina Baú & Michael Omondi Owiso

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## Community Building Through the Airwaves : *RefFM Radio Station and Young People in Kakuma*

Valentina Baú  and Michael Omondi Owiso 

### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role that community radio can play in a refugee camp, with particular focus on community building and social cohesion among young people. The article introduces the experience of RefFM in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya. Findings from four focus groups with young refugees in Kakuma shed light on both the uses and perceptions of the radio station among Kakuma youth. They also present insights into the design of radio-based interventions for humanitarian agencies working in refugee camps. In particular, reflections are offered on how “refugee community radio” programming can be developed to strengthen the ties between different communities living in the camp, and particularly among young people, while addressing the critical needs of a displaced population.

This paper examines the role that community radio can play in a refugee camp, with particular focus on community building and social cohesion among young people. The article introduces the experience of RefFM radio station in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya. RefFM is supported by the work of FilmAid Kenya, a development and humanitarian organization working in the camp, whose mandate is to provide the refugee population with up to date and accurate information on camp-related matters, and to facilitate people’s access to media channels, including through the provision of media training for young people.

While an extensive literature exists on the role of community radio, including the use of radio in international and community development, not enough is known on how community involvement in radio can be useful in the everyday reality of a refugee camp, where a large number of cultures, languages and ethnicities coexist. In these contexts, the centrality of both

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development and humanitarian work, which at times take place simultaneously, deserves attention.

The article begins by introducing two sets of literatures: one on radio in emergencies and one on community radio in development contexts. How these two bodies of work can come together to fill present gaps, both in the literature and in practice, is then discussed. This is followed by a presentation of the methodology adopted in this study and by the analysis of the data collected. This has been carried out by identifying specific remits attributable to the radio station, and by differentiating these between development and humanitarian work. Through the findings, which shed light on both the uses and perceptions of the radio station among Kakuma youth, reflections are offered on how “refugee community radio” programming can be purposefully developed to strengthen the ties between the different African communities living in the camp, and particularly among young people, while addressing the critical needs of a displaced population. These assist in formulating recommendations for humanitarian agencies working in refugee camps, with specific reference to the design of radio-based interventions.

### **Radio in Contexts of Emergency and Displacement**

In the literature on emergency media context, a strong emphasis is placed on the need to access reliable information and news. The aim is that of containing rumors and for the affected communities to have confidence in media accounts of emerging situations (Jack, 2017; Mahmud, 2020; Widnyani et al., 2018). This resonates with research on media precarity of refugees (see Dekker et al., 2018, with respect to social media). Overall, this literature points to the importance of identifying existing communications channels, technologies and information sources, but also institutional barriers to access these (Jack, 2017; Mahmud, 2020). It also underscores the importance of developing communications synergies with cultural norms and informal knowledge (see for example Widnyani et al., 2018, on an Indonesian disaster warning context).

Other studies in the literature on radio and media in displacement and emergency situations acknowledge and analyze the specific structures of the refugee camp: spatial, organizational, disciplinary and administrative structures that must be negotiated for effective communication to take place. Organizational structures of the camp and its communities are often parallel and conflicting, as in the case of Somalis in the Kenyan camp of Dadaab and its UNHCR administration. Nevertheless, awareness of the social hierarchies and institutions such as leadership (often linked to military structures), illicit businesses, and mosques can help identify “listening posts” and safe places that assist in mediating tensions (de la Chaux et al., 2018). The specific constraints of

camps, for instance on the Thai-Burma border, inhibit communication and exacerbate the exclusion of perspectives of groups such as Karenis from media and news. This restricts people's capacities to voice common experiences and hence to articulate claims (Jack, 2017). Seuferling's (2019) historical study of media politics in camps in Germany points to the importance of the camp's spatial organization on political demands for communications; the camp as a heterotopian space "enables new practices, politics, and agencies within the power dynamics of its control regimes" (2019, p. 209).

Radio as a source of sound, as well as the character of music broadcast on radio, contributes to the larger sonic/social environment, as in the case of long-established Palestinian camps such as Shatila in Lebanon (Puig, 2020). In general, a strength of the refugee/emergency literature related to media is its awareness of camp structures and environments as a key understanding for the viable development of media outlets including community radio. Perhaps most important is the provision of a starting point for a detailed strategy of listening, rather than the application of a "right" model of communication (Kivikuru, 2013).

While the refugee and emergency literature on radio and media can be focused on short-term situations, there is also the sense (common to the development literature) that community radio and other media forms involving community participation have potential for engendering social value for refugee communities beyond conveying information. These include reducing isolation, supporting the delivery of social services in camps, creating connections between camps through link-up programming, giving voice to common experiences in a public space (Jack, 2017, p. 138) and reducing conflict and tension (Jack, 2017; Mahmud, 2020; Widnyani et al., 2018). While there are clearly benefits to developing community media including community radio in camps, this is not a simple exercise; as Jack (2017) notes, "[t]here remains a lack of research into models of community media that might effectively be deployed in a camp environment in order to resolve the unmet need for information (p. 140).

## **Community Radio in Development**

Compared to the literature on media in emergency and displacement, the one on community radio/media in development presents itself as more established in theory (e.g. communication for behaviors and social change), approaches (e.g. edutainment), evaluation methodologies and volume of case studies. Within the media and development literature, there are also sub-fields concerned with education (Andrade Soriano, 2012; Patrício, 2012), gender initiatives (Baú, 2009), health (Wang & Singhal, 2018; White, 2012), and more.

In recent decades, participatory approaches to development have become the dominant paradigm in this field (in theory if not always in practice) and this has been mirrored in the predominance of participatory approaches to media such as community radio in development contexts. This is evident from the articles reviewing the field – sometimes known as communication for development – and attempting to summarize and/or add greater coherence to the literature (Kincaid & Figueroa, 2009; Kogen, 2022; Servaes & Malikhao, 2020). These overview studies are useful for unpacking the elements of participatory media and community radio that are not always sufficiently clear about differences in strategies and aims and impacts of different approaches. For instance, while a number of approaches may emphasize information and persuasion (Kogen, 2022), others may prioritize different modalities of community engagement – e.g. access, participation or self-management (Servaes & Malikhao, 2020). The latter is highly relevant to the social and organizational processes that develop around radio stations. There are debates around levels of participation, from a position supporting differing levels of engagement in various aspects of community radio production (Mhagama, 2016), to a “maximalist” position that argues for inclusion in all aspects of programming, production and management (Carpentier et al., 2015). This translates into a bottom-up involvement in content development and in defining community problems and solutions (Bamigboye & Osune, 2021).

Critiques of participatory media approaches are important in highlighting contradictions. One is the contradiction of “NGOification,” where radio and media funded by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can create a reliance on external donors and a minimization of local autonomy in spite of participatory rhetorics (Manyozo, 2012/2013). Community radio licensed and regulated by states contribute to a tendency of “development radio” being utilized in state-driven development agendas and policies in India and Africa, which can also undermine local participation and initiative (Mhagama, 2016; Pavarala et al., 2022).

The literature on community radio brings with it a set of assumptions and principles that are fused with development communication. Community radio has been understood as a “third sector” or “third pillar” of media after commercial and government radio, which offers greater possibilities for community participation and even control (see Pavarala et al., 2022; Shahzalal & Hassan, 2019). Some positive attributes of community radio (and other media) include community/local ownership, participatory structures and practices enabling greater depth of engagement and dialogue (Kincaid & Figueroa, 2009), capacity building and training for community members (Al-Hassan et al., 2011) and support for “communicative sustainability” (Shahzalal & Hassan, 2019). Kincaid and Figueroa (2009) argue for the right to “local media, such as community radio, [...] to produce content

for their development objectives rather than rely on content originating from external sources” (p. 508).

## Convergence in the Literature

There are similarities between emergency situations and the “ordinary” environments of uneven development in many parts of the world. Research within the communication and development literature reveals situations and social environments that bear a strong relation to those of emergency and displacement, notably studies of development contexts in favelas and “slums” (Hagen, 2021; Medrado, 2013). For instance, Hagen’s study on Kibera News Network (Nairobi, Kenya) demonstrates the value of on-the-ground reporting by young residents of the Kibera “slum” to enable self-recognition in media coverage with the aim of reducing conflict.

Other cases of overlapping relevance to the displacement/emergency context include those of indigenous peoples or other persecuted groups within national territories, resulting in (amongst other disadvantaging processes) the marginalization of groups (and associated cultural knowledge/languages) from national media and communication forms. Indigenous and marginalized groups have a significant presence in refugee and asylum seeker populations, and development communications projects have attempted to work in an inclusive and participatory way with groups that are not included in mainstream outlets. Pringle et al. (2012) have presented a number of case studies where media have operated to this end. Some of these cases may furnish principles and approaches of relevance to displacement and emergency contexts; they can also go along with an emphasis on planning conceptions such as “development with identity” (Servaes & Malikhao, 2020) and may be pertinent to refugee situations of a protracted nature.

The concern with trusted and reliable information in emergency situations (Dekker et al., 2018; Jack, 2017; Mahmud, 2020; Widnyani et al., 2018) is also echoed in the development media literature concerned with improving the quality of information in the public sphere through participatory media and journalism (Abadi et al., 2018; Kogen, 2022). Moreover, the rich supply of case studies found within the literature on radio/communication in development, showing a range of innovative participatory approaches, technologies and applications in different kinds of service delivery (see chapters in Pringle et al., 2012), can provide ideas relevant to displacement and emergency situations.

The concern with accessible and affordable technologies in contexts of displacement (Leung, 2010; Seufferling, 2019) is amplified in the radio/media and development literature that is focused on participatory possibilities in evolving media technologies, often in tandem with other media such as mobile phones, as part of multimedia strategies. For instance, Couldry

(2015) outlines components of a community media project in Columbia involving “a radiobicycle that could bring radio to people rather than the other way around, media schools for children, and distribution systems such as broadcasting children’s narrative in the street” (p. 9). Mobile phone technologies can be integrated into community radio practices to increase participation (Sullivan, 2012), and other freely available technologies can be used with radio (Wang & Singhal, 2018). Koradia (2012) brings in the example of Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems, used by corporations to automate phone calls. The author discusses how Freedom Fone, an open-source IVR platform, can be used to deliver educational content as well as a means for feedback. At the same time, GRINS radio automation system, designed for community radio, can facilitate participation with mobile phones and working off-air or on-air with participant groups.

As highlighted previously, there is a lack of models of community media for contexts of displacement and emergency. The communication for development literature supplies various participatory media approaches, along with detailed analysis of challenges: example include Kincaid and Figueroa (2009) on models of communication in participatory development; Kogen (2022) on development communication and social change; Diago (2019) on communication as a context of interaction in uneven development; and Al-Hassan et al. (2011) on participatory decision-making and capacity-building. Innovation lies in assessing such development communication models as possibilities within a detailed understanding of refugee camp structures and humanitarian environments, which is a strength of the literature on media in displacement and emergency contexts.

## Methodology

Kakuma camp is situated in Kenya’s Turkana West District, within Turkana County, approximately 150 kilometers from the South Sudanese border. Along with the Kalobeyi Integrated Settlement, it currently accommodates nearly 295,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR Kakuma, November 2024 data). Established in 1992 to provide refuge for young Sudanese fleeing war, the camp now hosts a diverse mix of communities, including South Sudanese, Ethiopians, Somalis, and Congolese. Significant numbers of refugees from Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi are also present. The camp is also home to a largely young population, with 61% of residents aged under 18 (UNHCR & World Bank, 2021).

RefFM is a radio station run by refugees that wants to inform and give voice to both refugee and host community in Kakuma. The radio receives financial and technical support from FilmAid Kenya, a development and humanitarian communication organization that uses media to engage with communities in the provision of critical information. Four focus groups were carried out with young refugees between the age of 18 and 28. Overall, 30

**Table 1** Categorized Activities Related to ReFFM in the Camp Arising from Focus Group Discussions

DEVELOPMENT WORK	HUMANITARIAN WORK
Promoting diversity & facilitating coexistence	Assistance to the public
Enabling arts and sports	Health-related information
Knowledge sharing & problem-solving	Information on food supply
Skills development	Conflict prevention

participants contributed to the discussions. Recruitment was carried out by FilmAid Kenya through known community leaders and community mobilizers, who have direct knowledge of young people and are familiar with community structures and processes in the camps.

Each focus group was conducted in a different section of the camp reached by the station's frequency: these included Kakuma 3, Kakuma 4 and Kalobeyei settlement. Discussions were facilitated by one of the authors in English with the help of a research assistant, who was familiar with the refugee camp population and its social context, and provided occasional translation in/from Kiswahili when this was necessary. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes; participants were asked questions related to their views about ReFFM radio station (the role played by the radio in the community and the content it broadcasts) and their experience with it (both as listeners and as contributing audience).

## Analysis and Findings

All focus group discussions were transcribed, and a thematic analysis was conducted in NVivo. A number of themes related to the role of and experience with the radio station emerged from the analysis, which were subsequently layered down to identify eight remits that can be connected to either development or humanitarian work. These were then grouped separately, based on the nature of the work that typically contributes to their nurturing. While some of these remits may at times belong to both types of work, the most plausible in the context of a refugee camp was assigned. The result of this process is visualized in [Table 1](#). What follows is a presentation of the findings based on the remits that were identified, in consideration of their distinctive area of work.

### Development Work

#### *Promoting Diversity and Facilitating Coexistence*

Radio serves as a medium where social identities are strongly expressed through the blending and conflict of languages between the public. While all media platforms are ardently debated, radio has the unique ability to embrace linguistic diversity, particularly in Africa with its numerous

ethnolinguistic groups. Consequently, radio becomes a contested public space that can generate inclusive local content tailored to the varied expectations of its diverse audience (Mathe & Motsaathebe, 2024).

Whilst a wide variety of languages and dialects is spoken in Kakuma, RefFM adopts the three main languages in its programming: English, Kiswahili and Arabic. The young participants expressed deep frustration with their inability to understand some of the content being broadcast. According to the respondents, no provision was made to communicate every piece of information in all three idioms; this meant that there was always someone who was unable to understand, depending on the language chosen at any one moment. Suggestions included the unrealistic option of translating all content in all the languages spoken in the camp, including the minority languages, as the most uneducated are unable to converse even in the three dominant ones.

Sometimes, on the radio, you can just listen to that mother tongue. And you don't know that mother tongue, and you don't know what they are talking about. It's better you use a language that everyone understands.

You feel that Kiswahili, English, and Arabic is still not enough because there are other bigger groups. You should also add like French, as you'll find there are many people who speak French here in the camp. Congolese are there, Burundians, and also other people. Yes, there are so many.

We are not of the same nationality: we are from different countries. The presenter will be from Burundi, the person who is going to give out information will be using Burundi language. You, who is from South Sudan or who is from any other country apart from Burundi, you will not be comfortable listening to that language, you will not be getting any information because the language used is not good for you. The person who is not understanding the language will be affected, because he or she will not have an interest or be paying attention.

Maybe today I have nothing to do. Maybe I am just idle there at home. It is the turn of a broadcaster from Burundi who is speaking their language. It will affect me, meaning I will not be having that attention to listen to the radio. Maybe I will end up shutting off the radio because the information that is being given out is not understandable for me, so it will affect me mostly.

At least bring people together and ask them what their concerns are toward the languages been used in their radio station, because most of us, mostly our parents, to be honest, most of them didn't go to school. So, they should at least listen to them. What are their views concerning the language being used on the radio? Are they comfortable or they are not comfortable with it?

You end up asking questions like, "What did they say? What was it?" It may be something offensive, so it discourages you.

Identity is dynamic, diverse, and hybrid, just like language. African languages remain diverse and mixed, and identity has evolved due to the continuous

interaction among different ethnic language groups. As a widely used communication medium, especially in marginalized communities, radio should mirror these hybrid identities and languages. Mathe and Motsaathebe (2024) describe multilingualism as “the capacity for coexistence and its representation in the media” (p. 5). This coexistence involves tolerance, adaptation, and recognition of speakers of various indigenous languages. Given the social realities of ethnic interaction, multilingualism naturally manifests among radio speakers and social actors.

This idea of coexistence through multilingualism, however, does not appear to have taken root in Kakuma. The quotes presented above from participants suggest that language diversity is still not embraced in the camp, and that this difference is rather viewed as a divider than as part of the identity of Kakuma community, especially among the youth. Other comments from respondents also point to the need to strengthen the radio station’s role and content, with a vision of celebrating rather than singling out differences.

There is a need for RefFM to promote people’s culture. Culture unites peoples. It brings people together. There is a need for RefFM to establish what we call *cultural dance* [from *Kiswahili*]. They should organise a day, a cultural day, whereby every nationality within Kakuma and Kalobeyei come with their own cultures and present them.

The thing I see offending me on RefFM is when a specific tribe is mentioned, it is mentioned that maybe this tribe is doing this or that. Let’s say, for example, you find that they are discussing the issue of drinking alcohol, of drunkards. Then you find that they mention a certain community, for example, let me say, the Lotuko. But actually, when I see the whole camp, many different tribes drink. Yet, they only mention one. And how do you feel? That is what is disappointing.

Those presenters, they refer to the people who are here in the camp, especially the musicians, they refer to them as local musicians. We, as musicians, we feel bad because how can you call someone ‘local’? Local means something that does not have any use.

### **Enabling Arts and Sports**

Young people also believe that the radio station plays a key role in motivating the youth, providing opportunities to them to feel recognized and motivated both by broadcasting inspirational artistic content and by offering a platform for their creative expression.

For us artists in Kakuma, nothing makes us feel better than when our name is mentioned on the radio. These days, when your name is mentioned in the radio, you feel like you are flying, you even walk around telling people, “My name was mentioned in the radio, have you heard?!”

The radio station is entertaining. The songs that are being played are inspiring and they advise people on various matters.

We have an artist called Elastic. He wrote a song that motivates lots of youth on how to rebuild themselves. Some people have degrees, some have certificates, but most of them don't get a job. Because of this, some start destroying themselves, doing negative things, getting into drugs and stuff. That's why music can motivate them to rebuild themselves.

Several participants mentioned that the radio station should also become involved in the organization of events that engage and entertain the youth, with the aim of supporting young people in the camp.

The radio station could organise artist competition with artists from Kakuma and Kalobeyi, get them together.

As RefFM, you have to do something for entertainment, at least to engage the youth. Organise some event or competition so that the station reaches another level as part of the entertainment.

Others want to see local artists and sports tournaments not only mentioned but also more directly supported by the station, contributing to a stronger sense of community.

Like, our musicians, if they want to sing they can go and perform there. Our dancers, they can also go there if they want to dance.

If you want to release your album, go and release it in the radio station. What I also would like to see is that they follow up with artists, for new artists to be interviewed.

Us youth, we love football, we love football like nothing. We play football, but now in the radio stations, if they don't talk about Kakuma football or even Kalobeyi football and I am youth, whatever they will be talking about feels like it's not my concern. But when they come and talk about football - for example, Kakuma Premier League is going to be held today and there is a game, and this player is going to be there, etc. - because I am youth and I play football, [...] yes, this kind of content makes feel good.

At the same time, radio can also facilitate engagement with sports for young people, both by announcing the activities that are taking place and by promoting safe behavior among the audience.

When we have games, maybe we have a game here in Village 2 playing with Village 1, radio can be useful to announce to other people outside these areas that the game is happening.

RefFM should mobilise the youth. They should give importance to that League. They should condemn the bad habit of the fighting that happens during the games. They should also tell people to stop drinking alcohol, smoking and the other things that will bring on the fighting.

The findings here suggest the need for media outlets to diversify and engage in activities that promote arts and sports. Such diversification is critical in engaging young people in ways that avert undertaking negative activities such as crime

### ***Knowledge Sharing and Problem-Solving***

An important component of RefFM as a community radio station in Kakuma is that listeners are able to call into the station to share their problems live and seek advice. Participants recounted examples that stood out for them, and which they felt were particularly useful.

I heard a guy who was complaining about his sister's early pregnancy. He was asking for advice, because she was in school but then she got pregnant. It was just the two of them in the household and they didn't have anybody to help them. They needed advice from people out there. That's when I heard people trying to help. [...] They gave him advice and at the same time motivated the girl.

Once they brought up a topic about these gangs in Kakuma who are committing crimes. How can you avoid them? How can you avoid being tempted by them to do such a thing? What can you do? Then this guy called the radio and said, "To me, I can avoid this by being absent, not walking with these people. I can be at home at the right time. I can avoid walking at night or going to places where I am alone, like in the bush. I can avoid such places".

Respondents also continued to advocate for the radio station to take on a more active role in helping young people, especially those facing the greatest struggles. According to them, RefFM should also act as a connector between the youth and relevant agencies, in order to provide more comprehensive support.

The youth, what they do is ask for support. [...] For instance, musicians, they ask for their music to be promoted on the radio station. Others ask questions on the difficulties that they are facing in the community. There are so many people that are going through drug abuse, so they ask for help.

What they should add, once a youth calls them and maybe tells them his or her problems, they should also be able to find a way to help them, not only by advising them, but also by taking action and reaching out to the organisations supporting the youth, at least to see how they can help instead of just advising and then leaving them.

What is discussed here underscores the position that radio can play in providing avenues for audiences to vent out their challenges as well as to find spaces for psychosocial support. Participants in the study indicated that they were offered opportunities to express deep concerns and engage in dialogue with fellow youth over the same issues.

The importance of media outlets having in place referral mechanisms was also underlined.

### ***Business Support and Skills Development***

Another less prominent but still significant remit within RefFM's portfolio is its ability to support informal businesses that are set up by young people in the camp by promoting them to the wider public. The station also offers tips on how to start and run a business, and announces relevant training opportunities available in the camp.

There is what we call the "business advertisement" whereby, I come with a certain business, I present it to the radio station, then I tell them, "Please, I have this business, so I need you guys to promote me so that I can have customers who come to me and I can get something in my pockets." I really need RefFM to do that.

They have to encourage the youth on their talent; the talent that they have, they have to put more effort to support it. They support, by doing what? By telling people to subscribe to their YouTube channel, and by sharing their [social media] channels.

Sometimes they advise people on how to engage in business, so that they are able to feed their families.

This suggests the critical role that radio can play in acting as a business connector. Accordingly, participants expressed the need for RefFM to provide advertising support to the camp community, especially for business start-ups but also emerging artists.

### **Humanitarian Work**

#### ***Assistance to the Public***

When it comes to humanitarian work, one of the first remits for radio in the context of emergencies is that of providing assistance to the public through important announcements. The information relayed spans a range of subjects from security to logistical problems affecting the camp, and it may come also in response to issues raised by the community itself.

Sometimes, they do announce if there's insecurity inside the community: say, in our area we have this and this happening, and if we need advice we have to go to the police [...]

Security information: whenever there is a problem, we'll be informed to stay at home.

Maybe there is a shortage of water somewhere, maybe in Village 1 or Village 3. RefFM will notify people that this and that is happening, and that's why there is no more water coming this way because the main pipe is passing through Village 3. Sometimes we do have people who cause pipe leakage. They do break pipes. [...] Through RefFM, people are made aware that it is because of this and that, and that's why we are not having enough water in the area.

We get useful feedback from them because they tell us, "Now that we have your concern, it's going to be channelled to a specific organisation that is in charge of that particular problem you have." This is useful. For example, when we raise issues with the ATM, they are not the ones who are going to tell us what to do. They're going to channel it to the agency and then they come back with an answer. Sometimes they give us this information, which is a good thing.

Radio can act as a bridge between audiences and humanitarian agencies. The role that radio plays in relaying information about security, for example, is amplified by the study participants. In this capacity, radio offers assistance to the public by giving information on the realities faced by communities to the agencies concerned with the issues affecting the camp, such as security and other operational aspects.

### ***Health-Related Information***

Information announcements that deserve separate attention in a humanitarian context, due to their significance, include those related to health. Here, the radio station plays a key role in disseminating not only messages but also verified facts to the camp residents, which are produced in collaboration with the aid agencies operating there.

There's lots of useful information. For example, when they announced the outbreak of cholera on the radio, we were able to protect ourselves because they told us what to do.

The outbreak of cholera started in Kakuma 1, which is the first camp up there. You find that through the radio, they pass that information on the outbreak, and that it's an emergency. People also follow up with the speakers.

They normally deliver messages to people like, "You have to sleep under your mosquito net" in order for us not to be affected by malaria; or we have to clean the latrines and other things in order for us not to be sick with cholera. This is the kind of info we get through REF-FM.

These experiences illuminate the connection between health and communication. Through radio, health information is delivered in Kakuma and residents are then able to take precautions. These include the use of mosquito nets at night, which is a precautionary measure to prevent malaria.

### **Information on Food Supply**

Of equal importance is information related to food distribution, which is a critical component of humanitarian operations in a large refugee camp such as Kakuma. Receiving accurate and timely announcements on when and how food is distributed can make a life-saving difference for a population that has no means of procuring its own sustenance.

They announce information on *Bamba Chakula* [food vouchers] through the radio, so that you know on what days the money [for food] will come this year.

WFP [*the World Food Program*] deals with *Bamba Chakula*. Any question arising, sometimes WFP staff are there [on the radio] to answer. If there is any hard question, they normally pass it on to the agency responsible. Most of the time, we get the feedback through the radio station.

People can also give feedback on what they see as the best option to receiving crucial services.

In May last year, they were asking people their view about the ATM [*credit card used for services*]: “How do you guys feel about ATM? Is ATM good?” We used to have that, and then it changed into the normal way where people [receive items directly] and we no longer use the card. My answer was that I prefer to use the ATM rather than us getting in line there, understanding, receiving some soap . . . The ATM is easier: you take the card and remove money from your account. Then you can buy the items you want.

These comments from participants demonstrate that critical information on food supply can be relayed to communities through radio.

### **Conflict Prevention**

In a humanitarian context of protracted displacement, where the majority of the displaced have fled their country as a result of war, establishing mechanisms to prevent the occurrence (or recurrence) of conflict is vital. Young people recognize the function that the community radio station has in counteracting problems that have the potential to ignite broader violence in the camp; they also point out to the type of communication that is adopted in radio when reporting negative news.

All gangs have their own representative, right? According to me, people listen to their elders. The good thing about RefFM is that they can get these representatives to talk to the elders [. . .]. To talk to the elders in a real way so that the elders can explain that, you know, life is something important, and you can't just play with it.

RefFM should engage the community and, for instance, select someone here in Kakuma to indicate which topics the community wants to talk about; then take

them to Kalobeyei and debate those. From there, there is a way to peaceful coexistence and to bring people together.

I don't like it when they say [in the radio] that in Kakuma there is a certain tribe who likes fighting, or that they are the ones who cause certain fights. I think that the name of tribe doing bad things should never be mentioned. It should never be there at all.

They should talk more about this [gang fighting]. Because some of our people here, they don't listen to RefFM's advice. We ran from South Sudan. We have killed each other, but here we come and go to school together. We should not be fighting each other. That is why I want them to continue talking about it.

The discussion on this remit underscores the role of radio in conflict prevention. At the same time, it finds that radio can cause or escalate conflict. RefFM can be active in conflict prevention by bringing elders to speak to young people on radio and cautioning them on the negative consequences of joining or interacting with gangs. Different types of radio shows featuring well known personalities from the camp can be used to promote peaceful coexistence.

### **Community Development in Humanitarian Contexts**

The data collected and analyzed underscore the contribution that radio can make in facilitating community development within humanitarian contexts and the dual nature between development and humanitarianism. Kakuma refugee camp is a case of protracted displacement in an emergency situation that demands interventions that have this duality. Refugee camps are characterized by overcrowding, challenges related to sanitation and hygiene, lack of clean water, issues related to food security, safety and violent conflicts. The existence of large populations within limited spatial areas, different communities, cultures and languages further complicates the social dynamics within and around camps. As suggested by the findings, problem solving in such circumstances remains an essential practice and key to the attainment of community development. Study participants point to how community radio can play a part in this, especially by providing a platform to share experiences and receive words of encouragement or advice.

The work of RefFM radio in the camp environment demonstrates the importance of fulfilling both the development and the humanitarian needs in refugee camps. The centrality of mutual coexistence among people living in the camp appears vital to the realization of its mission as a community radio station. Mutual coexistence is therefore pivotal to all development and humanitarian efforts. The participants in the focus group discussions highlight the need to promote diversity and facilitate positive relations among camp residents by fostering social and cultural engagement. Through this

action, refugees in Kakuma are enabled to interact across societal boundaries such as ethnic lines, class, religious affiliation, gender and age. RefFM has achieved this by facilitating opportunities for individuals and groups to engage in activities that promote their identities; yet, more tailored content can be developed to this aim.

Giving voice to individuals and communities through such engagements also appears as critical. This is realized by allowing refugees to prepare their own content for broadcasting. Further, empowerment and inclusion of the refugee community is achieved through skills development, imparting and sharing knowledge, and providing the opportunity for refugees to become problem solvers. The relevance of information on security, health and food supply in the empowerment of refugees features prominently and seems to converge with the development objective of RefFM's work. This is an important aspect of this dual role of radio in camps.

The data also reveal the significance of content. Participants expressed both their pleasure and displeasure with it, and proposed the nature of content they deem fit. Importantly, radio content will share the perceptions of people and groups, which in turn creates a sense of identity and belonging. Through content, it is possible to develop familiarity with those that we feel do not belong and to accept diversity. How the values, norms, lifestyles and manifestation of others' lives are presented dictates the attitudes we form toward them. Participants in this study, for example, decried the representation of one group as violent, since they felt that this influenced the refugee community to presume that all members of this group could be characterized as violent. This in turn has an impact on whether and how individuals from diverse communities can work together in pursuit of community development. The outcome of this is critical in the context of a confined and protracted reality of a refugee camp such as Kakuma.

## Conclusions

Through the views of young people in Kakuma who participated in a series of focus groups, this article has shed light on the role that radio can play in contexts of displacement such as refugee camps. These realities are supported by aid agencies that carry out both development work, with a view on building more sustainable mechanisms for communities, and humanitarian work, centered around assistance toward immediate needs. The findings have shown that community radio in camps needs to adopt a unique approach in its content production and delivery, which facilitates work done at both levels. This is especially true when it comes to young people.

The use and perception from the youth of RefFM radio, supported by FilmAid Kenya in Kakuma, demonstrate how the station's role is currently that of contributing to meeting short term needs while building a sense of

community among the diverse youth living in the camp through its function as information provider. This contribution can be enhanced by developing a more targeted “refugee community radio” programming that brings together both development and humanitarian goals and builds an innovative community engagement approach that aid agencies can tap into in their effort to reach the encamped youth more purposefully.

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## Notes on Contributors

Valentina Baú is Co-Director of the Humanitarian and Development Research Initiative (HADRI) at Western Sydney University. She conducts research on the application of Communication for Development (C4D) in Peacebuilding, documenting and evaluating C4D approaches that employ different media and communication channels to contribute to social change and sustainable peace in the aftermath of violence. Valentina is Chief Investigator on the Australia Research Council Fellowship *Development communication, media and peace in protracted displacement*, investigating the use of C4D and CwC (Communicating with Communities) interventions aimed at promoting peace and social cohesion among young people in contexts of protracted displacement. She has worked in different African countries, Asia, and the Middle East, collaborating with international NGOs, UN agencies and the Italian Development Cooperation, both in a research and communication capacity. Her experience involves the implementation of both research and media projects with victims and perpetrators of conflict, displaced people, refugees and people living in extreme poverty.

Michael Omondi Owiso is the dean in the School of Development and Strategic Studies and Director, Odera Akang’o Campus at Maseno University-Kenya. He also holds a senior visiting research fellow position at Kings College, London. He has taught subjects in the fields of political science, international relations and development studies at various universities in Kenya and abroad. He was previously in the humanitarian sector for over 17 years during which he made contributions to the peacebuilding field. During this time, he also worked closely with displacement-affected communities in various settings including camps and urban centers in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. He has conceptual and practical experience in dealing with conflict, peace, security and development issues in the Eastern and Horn of Africa region. He is a champion of participatory methods to development and education. He is also a consultant in the above fields.

## ORCID

Valentina Baú  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0212-8644>

Michael Omondi Owiso  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0954-4293>

## IRB Approval

This research has received approval from Western Sydney University Human Ethics Committee, Ref. no. H14904

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