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**Swansea University**  
**Prifysgol Abertawe**

**Beyond ‘boxed in’:  
Reconfiguring refugee children’s  
participation in protection in Kyaka II**

**Anna Clare Skeels**

Submitted to Swansea University in fulfilment of  
the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy

**2014**



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## Summary

This thesis is concerned with a 'problem' in a humanitarian context: an identified gap between the rhetoric and 'reality' of refugee children's participation in their protection and a refugee protection process that is thought not particularly participatory for the child. Through directly engaging with refugee children and humanitarian practitioners - in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, Uganda - it seeks to explore empirically the extent to which this is the case and whether refugee children's increased participation in refugee protection procedures might produce a better, safer alternative for children.

From a theoretical perspective, this thesis engages critically with a significant body of academic literature on the theory and practice of children's participation as well as related literature on the conceptualisation of 'childhood' and 'the child'. It explores the ambiguity and tensions in children's participation, particularly in relation to their protection, and responds to debates surrounding participation, agency and power. It engages with the literature on forced migration, refugee camps and the construction of the refugee (child). Linking these to the debate on children's participation in protection, it explores notions of 'vulnerability' and 'agency' and the transformative potential of participation for a reconstruction of refugee children with consequences for their everyday spaces and lives.

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## Contents

<b>Chapter One: Introduction - “children’s life in refugee camps”</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 The protection of refugee children</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.3 Research aims and objectives</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>1.4 The research context</b> .....	<b>13</b>
1.4.1 Kyaka II Refugee Settlement .....	14
<b>1.5 Methodology, ethics and positionality</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>1.6 Thesis overview</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Navigating the tensions - participation, protection and ‘the refugee child’</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>2.2 Child participation</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>2.3 Participation and the re-conceptualization of the child</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>2.4 ‘Patchy’ participation</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>2.5 Participation and power</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>2.6 Spatiality of participation</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>2.7 Participation and child protection</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>2.8 The refugee camp as a political space</b> .....	<b>64</b>
<b>2.9 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>70</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Towards a participatory methodology and an ethical approach</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>3.2 Research approach and design</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>3.3 Ethical research with refugee children</b> .....	<b>83</b>
<b>3.4 Participatory research methods in practice</b> .....	<b>91</b>
<b>3.5 Data analysis and writing up</b> .....	<b>103</b>
<b>3.6 Conclusions</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Participation ‘in a box’: refugee children’s participation in protection in Kyaka II</b> .....	<b>110</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>110</b>
<b>4.2 Refugee protection in context</b> .....	<b>110</b>
<b>4.3 Child protection in Kyaka II</b> .....	<b>116</b>

4.4 Mapping refugee children’s participation .....	120
4.5 Participation, but in a box? .....	125
4.6 Conclusions .....	138

**Chapter Five: Mind the gap: children’s participation in the refugee protection process .....** 139

5.1 Introduction .....	139
5.2 Arrival and Reception Centre.....	140
5.2.1 Arrival .....	140
5.2.2 Reception Centre.....	145
5.3 Protection interviews: registration, Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and Best Interest Determination (BID).....	154
5.3.1 Registration .....	154
5.3.2 Refugee Status Determination (RSD) .....	161
5.3.3 Best Interests Determination (BID) .....	165
5.4 ‘The Office’ .....	170
5.5 Barriers to participation: what gets in the way?.....	176
5.6 Conclusions .....	182

**Chapter Six: Conceptualisation of ‘the child’ in the refugee protection process .....** 184

6.1 Introduction .....	184
6.2 Refugee children at risk? .....	185
6.2.1 Protection risks: flight and the ‘condition’ of refugees.....	186
6.2.2 Protection risks: children, in a refugee settlement .....	188
6.2.3 A more nuanced view of ‘risk’?.....	194
6.3 Silencing refugee children: “it’s me to talk” .....	198
6.3.1 Coming from ‘culture’ .....	198
6.3.2 Practitioners, organisations and institutions.....	202
6.4 Narrator and informant .....	205
6.5 Exploring children’s importance .....	209
6.6 Conclusions .....	214

**Chapter Seven: Reconfiguring refugee children’s participation in their protection .....** 217

7.1 Introduction .....	217
7.2 ‘Making room’ for change.....	218
7.3 Creating a ‘child friendly space’?.....	222



<b>7.4 Fear...and how to ‘come closer’ .....</b>	<b>234</b>
<b>7.5 Methods - and the importance of play.....</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>7.6 Conclusions .....</b>	<b>259</b>
<b>Chapter eight: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>8.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>8.2 Key findings .....</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>8.3 Multiple agendas, reviewed .....</b>	<b>268</b>
8.3.1 Academic contributions from the research .....	269
8.3.2 ‘Following the ‘capillaries’ to where policy is made.....	274
8.3.3 ‘Alternative practices in everyday spaces’ .....	281
8.3.4 ‘Reciprocal benefits’ for refugee children .....	289
<b>8.5 Changes to come? .....</b>	<b>293</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>295</b>
<b>Appendix A - Adult Consent Form.....</b>	<b>295</b>
<b>Appendix B - Practitioner Information Sheet (Interviews and Workshops) 296</b>	
<b>Appendix C - Consent Form for Parents/Caregivers .....</b>	<b>299</b>
<b>Appendix D - Older Children’s Information Sheet .....</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>Appendix E - Older Children’s Invitation .....</b>	<b>301</b>
<b>Appendix F - Interview Guide: Semi-Structured Interviews.....</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>Appendix G – Children’s Workshop Plan .....</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>Appendix H – Interpreter Terms of Reference &amp; Guidelines.....</b>	<b>309</b>
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>313</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>315</b>

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## List of Figures

Figure 1: Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, west of Kampala towards DRC border .....	15
Figure 2: Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, in a rural area of West Uganda.....	16
Figure 3: Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, a case study approach.....	75
Figure 4: Introduction: explaining confidentiality; gaining consent, 11-16 workshop, Reception Centre.....	92
Figure 5: Introduction: playing games as 'ice breakers', 6-10 workshop, Byabakora.....	93
Figure 6: Child friendly methods: puppets, 6-10 workshop, Reception Centre.....	93
Figure 7: Child friendly methods: drawing 6-10 (girls) workshop, Byabakora.....	94
Figure 8: Certificate of appreciation, 6-10 workshop, Bukere.....	94
Figure 9: Agree / disagree activity, 11-16 workshop (boys), Bujubuli Secondary School.....	95
Figure 10: 'What's the time Mr Wolf?' 6-10 workshop, Reception Centre.....	95
Figure 11: Unaccompanied teenage boy enjoying the chance to talk about his concerns, Bujubuli.....	96
Figure 12: Drawings help children to share information, unaccompanied children workshop, Mukondo.....	98
Figure 13: A more visual approach, 6-10 workshop, Bukere.....	99
Figure 14: Female community interpreter, 6-10 workshop, Kaborogota.....	101
Figure 15: Managing many children, 6-10 workshop, Bukere.....	103
Figure 16: Prioritising the problems on arrival, unaccompanied children workshop, Bujubuli.....	108
Figure 17: Prioritising problems with 'the office' and interviews, unaccompanied children, Bujubuli.....	108
Figure 18: The administrative 'base camp' in Bujubuli zone.....	111
Figure 19: The Reception Centre in Swe Swe zone.....	111
Figure 20: Refugees waiting for interview with the Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC).....	113
Figure 21: Practitioners' participation 'map' showing home, police, community, school.....	121
Figure 22: Practitioners' participation 'map' showing school, organisations, Refugee Welfare Council.....	122
Figure 23: "Two children arriving in Kyaka II": drawing by teenage boy, 11-16 workshop, Bujubuli.....	140
Figure 24: "We are going to welcome the refugee": drawing by teenage girl 11-16 workshop, Bujubuli.....	141
Figure 25: "Refugees from their homeland": drawing by girl, 11-16 workshop, Bujubuli.....	142
Figure 26: Refugees crossing the border: drawing by teenage boy, Health Centre, Bujubuli.....	142
Figure 27: Ranking "problems for children" on arrival, 11-16 workshop, Reception Centre.....	144
Figure 28: The Reception Centre tent: drawing by 7 year-old girl, 6-10 workshop, Reception Centre.....	145
Figure 29: Girls practice puppet show script, 11-16 workshop (girls), Bujubuli ...	146
Figure 30: The problems children face in the Reception Centre, 11-16 workshop, Reception Centre.....	147
Figure 31: Photograph taken of the inside of the Reception Centre tent.....	148

Figure 32: "Man is beating his wife": drawing by teenage girl, 11-16 workshop, Bujubuli.....	150
Figure 33: Drawing of the registration process by teenage girl, 11-16 workshop, Bujubuli.....	154
Figure 34: The "registration place": drawing by ten year-old boy, unaccompanied children workshop, Mukondo.....	155
Figure 35: Problems for children with registration, 11-16 workshop, Mukondo Primary School.....	157
Figure 36: "She says 'you go!': acting out registration, 11-16 workshop, Mukondo Primary School.....	158
Figure 37: And they leave: acting out registration, 11-16 workshop, Mukondo Primary School.....	158
Figure 38: Photograph of RSD interviews in Kyaka II, Bujubuli.....	161
Figure 39: Drawing of RSD interviews in Kyaka II, 6-10 workshop, Bujubuli.....	161
Figure 40: List of problems faced by children in RSD interviews, 11-16 workshop, Mukondo Primary School.....	162
Figure 41: "The office": drawing by eight year-old, 6-10 workshop, Bujubuli.....	170
Figure 42: Problems with "the office": 11-16 workshop, Bukere.....	173
Figure 43: The "referral cycle": children move to-and-fro between offices for assistance.....	174
Figure 44: 'Body map' of protection risks, 11-16 workshop, Bukere.....	189
Figure 45: 'Body map' of protection risks, 11-16 workshop, Bukere.....	190
Figure 46: Congolese children playing in a Child Friendly Space, Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.....	224
Figure 47: Somewhere to play from on arrival: drawing by unaccompanied teenage girl, Bukere.....	227
Figure 48: Prioritising 'help on arrival'including the importance of 'play': unaccompanied children workshop, Bukere.....	228
Figure 49: A child friendly Reception Centre and the importance of play: 11 – 16 workshop, Reception Centre, Swe Swe.....	229
Figure 50: A child friendly Reception Centre and the importance of play (footballs in foreground): 0-10 workshop, Reception Centre, Swe Swe.....	229
Figure 51: 'School good': a child friendly Reception Centre close to school, 6-10 workshop, Buliti.....	230
Figure 52: School, home and football: a child friendly Reception Centre, 6-10 workshop, Buliti.....	230
Figure 53: Older teenager's drawing of a child friendly Reception Centre, 11-16 workshop, Bukere.....	231
Figure 54: Children playing and listening to the radio while waiting for registration.....	231
Figure 55: Children playing and eating porridge while waiting for registration.....	232
Figure 56: Two of the many children waiting for RSD interviews - and their drawings.....	232
Figure 57: Adults need to "go out to children in the community".....	237
Figure 58: Mapping the desired qualities in adults: knowledge held.....	240
Figure 59: Mapping the desired qualities around a practitioner.....	240
Figure 60: Mapping the desired qualities in adults: hands to help and skills.....	241
Figure 61: Children want adults who are 'friendly', approachable and kind.....	242
Figure 62: Play resource kit in a box for the Reception Centre.....	247
Figure 63: Play resource kit contents.....	247

Figure 64: Children get involved in painting a banner for the Reception Centre, Swe Swe.....	248
Figure 65: Some of the children in front of their banner, Reception Centre, Swe Swe. ....	248
Figure 66: The banner fixed to the side of the Reception Centre tent, Swe Swe.....	249
Figure 67: Child friendly poster: "What happens in Kyaka II". ....	250
Figure 68: Children stand in front of the poster outside the Reception Centre.....	250
Figure 69: The poster on a wall outside a classroom, Bujubuli Secondary School. ....	251
Figure 70: Creating a more child friendly interview room. ....	251
Figure 71: Creative resources in a more child friendly interview room. ....	252
Figure 72: Child draws himself, brothers and sister in a BID interview.....	253
Figure 73: Journey mapping through drawing a BID interview. ....	253
Figure 74: Journey mapping through drawing in another BID interview. ....	255
Figure 75: Drawing relationships to others in the household. ....	256
Figure 76: Mapping out a typical day. ....	256

## List of Abbreviations

AGDM	Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability in Humanitarian Action
ARC	Action on the Rights of the Child
BIA	Best Interests Assessment
BID	Best Interests Determination
CFS	Child Friendly Space
CPWG	Child Protection Working Group
CMPR	Centre for Migration Policy Research
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EVI	Extremely Vulnerable Individuals
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GIZ	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i>
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HIF	Humanitarian Innovation Fund
IP	Implementing Partner
NFI	Non-Food Items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PSN	People with Special Needs
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
REC	Refugee Eligibility Committee
RSD	Refugee Status Determination

RWC	Refugee Welfare Council
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
UAM	Unaccompanied Minor
UASC	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WRC	Women's Refugee Council

## Chapter One: Introduction - “children’s life in refugee camps”

“Dear reader wherever you are, I would like to take this opportunity to tell you about children’s life [sic] in refugee camps. There are still children who are not capacitated yet to have self-esteem to talk about issues which concern them, to ensure the community and the world provides both moral and material support and help to solve their problems which they are facing. I would love to see agencies/organisations which deal with children protection [sic] ensures that seminars and campaigns are conducted in order that children are capacitated to be able to express their problems and to be heard” (Ndume, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Introduction

This voice of a child from a refugee camp is an appropriate place to start in a thesis on refugee children’s participation. It helps to set the scene in several ways. Firstly, it tells the reader that there are problems involved in refugee children’s participation in protection in a refugee camp environment. It establishes that refugee children in camps have protection concerns but may not be able (or may lack the self-esteem) to tell people about them. It also suggests that humanitarian organisations may not always be providing the right support for these children or enabling them to express their problems and to be heard.

Secondly, it indicates that there might be a relationship *between* participation and protection: the suggestion being that if refugee children are capacitated to talk about their issues and concerns it might help them to get the protection that they need. There is also an indication that being heard might be at the heart of ensuring that some of their other needs are met.

Thirdly, the quotation helps to say something about approach. It introduces the process of refugee children talking to adults, wherever they are, and adult capacity to appropriately engage, listen, understand and respond, a methodological and ethical challenge equally faced by this research. The quotation represents the words of one

---

<sup>1</sup> Baruani E. Ndume, a 16 year-old refugee from Nyarugusu Refugee Camp, Tanzania, was the 2009 International Children’s Peace Prize Winner. Ndume, B. (2009) Acceptance speech for International Children’s Peace Prize, [Online], Available: <http://childrenspeaceprize.org/2010/05/31/childrens-life-in-refugee-camps> [17 Aug 2011].



refugee child in a thesis which explores how children's voices are often filtered, silenced or even manipulated by adult perspectives, agendas and power.

Finally, it makes it clear that issues of participation and protection are about day-to-day living, children's *lives* in refugee camps and, as such, warrant more than purely conceptual concern. As discussed later, this thesis has multiple aims, including improvements in policy and practice as well as benefits for refugee children themselves, aims that present their own particular challenges and concerns.

Using the quotation as a starting point, this introduction explores each of these issues in turn and begins to position the research. The following section starts with outlining the 'problem' of refugee children's participation in their protection in a humanitarian context, including in the refugee protection process. This consideration of humanitarian practice leads us into a complex conceptual terrain: intellectual debates about children's participation and protection, space, agency and power and the conceptualisation of the refugee child. The chapter draws together these practical and conceptual concerns and outlines the research questions for the thesis.

These research questions are then situated within a refugee camp setting - Kyaka II Refugee Settlement in South-west Uganda - the context for the empirical research. The methodological and ethical framework within which the research questions 'sit' is also outlined and the challenges to be addressed about how the research itself is 'done'. This provides an opportunity to position myself - as researcher, author and practitioner - within the research as well as to consider who the research benefits. Lastly, an overview of the chapters to come provides a 'road map' for the thesis as a whole.

## **1.2 The protection of refugee children**

Children can be defined, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter 'the CRC') as:

“...every human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (UNHCR, 2012:7).

The term “refugee”, enshrined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter 'the Refugee Convention') and its 1967 Protocol, applies to:

“...any person who...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it” (Malkki, 1995:501).

Under Article 33 of the Refugee Convention, refugees are protected in the country of asylum by the principle of *non refoulement*, which means that they cannot be forced to return to a country where they are at risk of persecution.

A refugee, by definition, is therefore an individual who is unable to access the protection of his/her own country and has the right to seek protection elsewhere. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Refugee Convention sets “standards that apply to children in the same way as to adults” (UNHCR, 1994:17): children with a well-founded fear of persecution, forced to migrate across international borders, are entitled to international protection as refugees.

According to Bhabha (2004:141), “the forced migration of refugees has...emerged as one of the critical human rights issues of our time”. Amidst such forced migration, refugee children are thought to be the most vulnerable. They are frequently the most affected by such crises with their lives severely disrupted as a result. An estimated 18 million children under 18 have been forcibly displaced from their homes due to conflict world-wide: a third of these being refugees whose families have fled across international borders (Reed et al., 2011, Davey et al., 2010). In many refugee camp settings, children under 18 represent more than 50% of the population and UNHCR (2012:7) notes that “almost half of all forcibly displaced persons globally are children”. Within the current demographics of displacement, children are therefore highly significant.

The extensive protection risks facing such children amidst displacement are well documented (Boyden and Hart, 2007). Children are often the most frequent victims of violence, disease, malnutrition and death and older children in particular face the additional risks of trafficking, armed recruitment, gender based violence, abduction, exploitation and rape (Kastberg, 2002:4). Additionally, the social disruption of displacement can mean the loss of family, friendships and other support networks,

lack of access to education or other critical social spaces and a sense of futility, loneliness and isolation (IASC, 2007). UNHCR's *Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care* (1994) set out such risks as the Commission perceived them for refugee children at the time:

“Refugee children face far greater dangers to their safety and well-being than the average child. The sudden and violent onset of emergencies, the disruption of families and community structures as well as the acute shortage of resources with which most refugees are confronted, deeply affect the physical and psychological well-being of refugee children. It is a sad fact that infants and young children are often the earliest and most frequent victims of violence, disease and malnutrition which accompany population displacement and refugee outflows” (UNHCR, 1994: preface).

The forced migration of refugee children therefore raises concerns for their protection and the need for an effective and appropriate humanitarian response. Whilst any host country is responsible for protecting the rights of all refugees on its territory, it is, if necessary, assisted by mandated international protection bodies such as UNHCR, whose primary purpose is to protect the rights and well-being of refugees world-wide. Indeed, a raft of UNHCR policy and practice documents (UNHCR, 2003a, UNHCR, 2008, UNHCR, 2011b, UNHCR, 1994) outline the ‘core’ procedures for the granting of international protection: a refugee protection ‘process’ from arrival and reception to registration in the country of asylum, through Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and on towards achieving a ‘durable solution’<sup>2</sup> for each refugee (UNHCR, 1994:138). These main procedural stages - reception, registration and Refugee Status Determination - apply in some form or another to the majority of refugees.

UNHCR (2000:2) describes reception as:

“...measures related to the treatment of asylum seekers from the time they make their claims either in country or at the border...until a final decision is taken as regards their asylum request”.

Such measures can include conditions upon arrival at the border, access to legal counselling, freedom of movement, accommodation (for example, in Reception Centres or alternative types of collective housing); various means of subsistence and

---

<sup>2</sup> ‘Durable solution’ is a more permanent resolution for refugees through voluntary repatriation, local reintegration or resettlement to a third country. UNHCR [Online] Available: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646cf8.html> [13 Nov 2013].

access to education, employment and medical care. Whilst states have discretion to choose what forms of support they will offer asylum seekers, the conditions must be “adequate for the country in which they have sought asylum” and their “basic rights and dignity must be protected” (UNHCR, 2000:3). For Lego (2012:81), reception thus denotes a variety of procedures established by a host country to ultimately receive refugees into its society, with physical protection (from refoulement) and humanitarian assistance at the core.

Registration is the process of recording, verifying and updating information in order to document UNHCR’s ‘persons of concern’<sup>3</sup>. It is described by UNHCR as a “key protection tool”, “the first step in the legal and physical protection of refugees” and “the starting point from which all assistance and services flow” (UNHCR, 2006:72). As a standard procedure, every principal applicant<sup>4</sup> and each accompanying adult family member / dependant should have an individual and confidential registration interview. Child applicants, unless they are unaccompanied or separated children,<sup>5</sup> or are pursuing an independent refugee claim as a principal applicant themselves, are not interviewed individually (UNHCR, 2003a:3-11).

Finally, RSD is defined as a “core protection function” whose “purpose is to determine whether asylum seekers fall within the criteria for international refugee protection” (UNHCR, 2003a:1-1). Principal applicants and accompanying adult family members / dependants are required to submit a claim against eligibility criteria for refugee status and undergo a RSD interview, with various safeguards and appeal procedures in place. Children applying for ‘derivative’<sup>6</sup> refugee status are not required to undergo an individual RSD interview. As such, RSD thus “defines the

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Persons of concern’ are defined as “all people whose protection and assistance needs are of interest to UNHCR” - not just refugees but asylum-seekers, stateless persons, internally displaced. UNHCR [Online] Available: [http://unhcr.org.au/unhcr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=179&Itemid=54](http://unhcr.org.au/unhcr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=179&Itemid=54) [13 Nov 2013].

<sup>4</sup> ‘Principal Applicant’ – this person can ‘lead’ the application for refugee status in a family / household (see: ‘derivative status’ below).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Separated children’ are ‘children who are children separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives’. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members. ‘Unaccompanied children’ are ‘children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.’ CPWG [online] Available: [http://www.unicef.org/violencestudy/pdf/IAG\\_UASCs.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/violencestudy/pdf/IAG_UASCs.pdf) [2 May 2014].

<sup>6</sup> ‘Derivative status’ can be applied for by family members / dependents of a recognised refugee in accordance with their right to family unity. Family members / dependents who fall within the criteria for refugee status in their own right should be granted refugee status rather than derivative status (UNHCR, 2003:5-1).

obligations of UNHCR” towards each applicant and has “profound implications for the life and security” of each of the individuals concerned (UNHCR, 2003a:1-1).

It is clear that this refugee protection process and its constituent procedures has significant legal and administrative weight, as well as multiple and far reaching consequences for those involved. In terms of the effective protection of refugees, including refugee children, the successful negotiation of this process is essential. This is particularly the case for those children who, as Bhabha (2004) points out, are increasingly travelling alone to seek protection and who will, to a certain extent, be navigating these complex procedures on their own.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, UNHCR’s Best Interests Determination (BID) procedures, providing further guidance for the appropriate protection of such refugee children, are also an important part of the refugee protection process (UNHCR, 2008).

The protection of refugee children is, then, protection from the risks faced during displacement and from violence, exploitation and abuse as well as these refugee protection procedures working towards ‘durable solutions’ and protecting children as *refugees*:

“UNHCR delivers protection to its children of concern by responding to their specific needs and the risks they face. This includes: protecting and advocating against all forms of discrimination; preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation; ensuring immediate access to appropriate services; and ensuring durable solutions in the child’s best interests” (UNHCR, 2012:8).

In 2002, however, an external evaluation of UNHCR’s refugee protection activities highlighted significant operational gaps in relation to the protection of refugee children (2002). It outlined what it saw as fundamental organisational obstacles to children’s protection, for example a lack of mainstreaming of child protection within general refugee protection activities, with refugee children considered peripheral or overlooked as a result. The evaluation pointed out that many UNHCR practitioners considered a traditional approach to refugee protection sufficient to “automatically meet the needs of refugee children” and, as a result, children’s specific concerns were not being incorporated into the delivery of UNHCR’s core protection work

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<sup>7</sup> Guardians are usually appointed for unaccompanied and separated children to ensure that the child is properly represented, his/her views expressed, and decisions taken in line with his/her best interests.

(2002:9). As one UNHCR Consultant later reflected, in relation to the key learning from the evaluation:

“Simply put, too often ‘protection’ fails to address children’s specific needs; the Organization must adopt a mentality of ‘core protection includes children’”.

In terms of recommendations, the evaluation (2002) suggested that UNHCR work increasingly with refugee children as partners, facilitating their participation in order to better address their protection needs. A related NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) Statement, also circulated in 2002 commented that refugee children should become “central to all programming and discussions about refugee....protection” and suggested that “UNHCR could play a catalytic role if the reality of children’s lives informs programming”.<sup>8</sup> The suggestion here is that the protection of refugee children might be more effectively operationalised by an increase in children’s participation.

Indeed, child protection and children’s participation have become increasing matters of concern for UNHCR over recent years. The need to enhance the protection and care of refugee children has been profiled repeatedly by UNHCR since the publication of its first *Guidelines* on refugee children, initially in 1988 (UNHCR, 1994). In 1993, UNHCR adopted its policy on refugee children, setting out aims and objectives and emphasising how children were central to its protection mandate (UNHCR, 1993). In 2003, the High Commissioner announced five specific commitments to refugee children for their protection, including protection against sexual exploitation, violence and abuse (UNHCR, 2003b) and in 2008 guidelines were produced on determining the best interests of the child (UNHCR, 2008). Most recently, UNHCR’s *Framework for the Protection of Children* (2012) embodies “an expression of a renewed commitment to the protection of children”, recognising the “centrality of children’s protection to UNHCR’s work” (UNHCR, 2012:7-9).

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<sup>8</sup> Statement on Meeting the Protection Needs of Refugee Children: Global Consultations on International Protection, prepared by members of NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child Sub Group on Children in Armed Conflict and Displacement, May 2002, [Online] Available at: <https://icvnetwork.org/doc00000866.html> [5 Jan 2011].

The participation of refugee children in their protection has also become an area of increasing concern for UNHCR, initially profiled through its policy on Age Gender and Diversity (UNHCR, 2011a):

“UNHCR seeks to ensure that all persons of concern enjoy their rights on an equal footing and are able to participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their family members and communities” (UNHCR, 2011a:1).

Making reference in particular to the participation of children, the policy notes that:

“Children can often bring unique and valuable perspectives and solutions to the problems confronting them and their communities. Their participation in decisions affecting them, as well as their best interests and a strong focus on their protection and well-being, are essential” (UNHCR, 2011a:4).

Similarly, the document *UNHCR Operational Protection in Camps and Settlements* (UNHCR, 2006) emphasises the meaningful participation of refugees, including children, as one of the essential principles of refugee protection and suggests that, through participation, refugees can become partners in the protection process.

Most recently, UNHCR’s *Framework for the Protection of Refugee Children*, launched in 2012 (UNHCR, 2012) makes a strong rhetorical commitment to refugee children’s participation in their protection as well as refugee protection procedures delivered in keeping with children’s specific needs. However, whilst UNHCR and its partners are delivering humanitarian protection responses around the world, the degree to which these are participatory for children *in practice* is unclear. In addition, children’s views and opinions on refugee protection procedures, how and in what ways they would want to engage with these and what, if anything, they would like to see change remains relatively unknown.

### **1.3 Research aims and objectives**

Refugee children’s participation in their protection is an intellectual problem as well as a practical one, relating to significant areas of academic debate and revealing additional - more theoretical - questions that also need to be addressed. This requires an exploration of what is *conceptually* possible in terms of refugee children’s participation in protection as well as a consideration of what might be achievable in practice.

There has been an explosion of academic literature and research on children's participation over the last 20-30 years, which has for some become a participation 'mantra' (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010:346). This increased focus on children's participation has been linked to several factors, with significant emphasis placed on the adoption of the CRC and, in particular, on its Article 12. UNICEF (2009) summarises Article 12 of the CRC as "respect for the views of the child" with every child having "the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously". In full, Article 12 states that:

"State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law" (UN General Assembly, 20 November 1989).

As such, Article 12 sets out the State's duty to ensure the child's right to participation, including – and of particular interest here – in "any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child". Also of interest here is the importance of participation within the CRC as not only a right in itself but as a guiding principle, instrumental to the realisation of all the other rights of the child, including children's right to protection. Overall, the conceptualisation of children as rights holders through the CRC confers agency on the child, takes an active rather than passive view, enabling and empowering in relation to children's participation.

Children's participation is, however, a far from uncontested field. Child participation is defined, spoken about and conceptualised in multiple ways with the rhetoric often at odds with children's experiences in practice. Such gaps between the rhetoric and 'reality' for children have led to debates over the transformative potential of participation and its relationship with power. Indeed, power, suggests Dona (2007:210) is "intimately connected to the diverse ways in which participation unfolds". For some, participation reinforces unequal relations of power between adults and children: for example, Lansdown and Hart (in Alderson and Morrow, 2004:100) suggest that "adults remain the major barrier to effective participation by



children”. Fairclough (2003:199) questions whether participation might be just a “cultivation of surface democratic forms beneath which the same exclusive relations of power carry on”. For others, power is more fluid, operates differently; contains openings and opportunities for change: there is always the “radical possibility of the event” (Thrift, 2000:217).

The relationships between participation and power, differently conceived, are articulated and embodied in space resulting in a range of geographies of children’s participation (Ansell, 2009, Kesby, 2007, Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010). Children’s participation can be assigned to, associated with or even confined to particular places and spaces at a range of levels with significant results. The space of the refugee camp and how it is conceived in relation to participation, power and agency is critical for refugee children’s participation and needs to be explored. Positioning child participation conceptually amidst power and space is therefore necessary to gain a more complex understanding of children’s participation in practice through empirical research.

Whilst participation in theory conceptualises the child with agency and competency, the notion of protection often infers vulnerability and dependency on the part of the child. This creates a conceptual tension – even paradox – when considering children’s participation *in* their protection and how the child is seen. For example, as noted by Hart (2006:9) in relation to conflict-affected children:

“Attention to the experiences, roles, needs and aspirations of young people in specific conflict zones *is rendered impossible* by an approach that assumes ‘trauma’, ‘vulnerability’ and ‘victimhood’ as defining and universal characteristics of children who have lived through war” [emphasis added].

The conceptualisation of protection - and of children in relation to their protection – also needs to be reconsidered, then, if we are to make room for children’s agency and participation at all. Indeed, for Boyden and Mann (2005), protection, like participation, is an “uncertain art”, facing multiple challenges both practical and conceptual in nature. Hart and Tyrer (2006:9) emphasise the need to avoid the view within child protection “of children as inherently vulnerable”. Protection needs to be considered in relation to the operation of power and “vulnerability - as a condition” must be viewed as “produced” or constructed rather than as integral to the notion of the child (Hart and Tyrer, 2006:9). For Hart and Tyrer (2006:8), whilst “children, on

the whole, occupy a status within society that renders them less powerful than adults”, they also have capacities and coping strategies and can contribute to their protection. More fundamentally, therefore, as with participation, an exploration of children in relation to their protection is about the conceptualisation of ‘childhood’ and the ‘child’.

Of course, this thesis is not concerned with children in general but with children who are *refugees*. This brings additional conceptual complexity to the research. A substantial body of literature explores the concept of ‘the refugee’, its construction in relation to protection and implications for refugees’ agency and participation. In relation to refugee participation, Harris (2000:20) indicates that, in practice:

“People living through the cyclical deprivations of displacement in an environment of complex and protracted violent conflict seldom have the opportunity of a meaningful say in shaping the decisions and factors that affect their lives.”

Others, however, go beyond this notion of lack of opportunity to suggest that the way that refugees are constructed in relation to their protection *precludes* their participation. Pupavak (2008), for example, writes about the “cultural trope of vulnerability” associated with refugees, reinforcing their right to protection but taking away any agency or ‘voice’. Exploring refugee children’s participation in their protection therefore means to address the assumed vulnerability inherent in the protection discourses related to both children *and* to refugees.

There are multiple conceptual complexities and tensions to consider, then, in any research on refugee children’s participation in their protection. The ‘problem’ in humanitarian practice outlined earlier, as well as the suggested importance of refugee children’s participation for their effective protection, also merit further investigation, an empirical exploration of this aspect of refugee children’s lives.

Indeed, according to Bhabha (2004:142), there has been insufficient research on refugee children and on the systems protecting them, even though they represent a significant proportion of the refugee population. Similarly, Clark (2007:258) notes that there has been limited focus on children forced across international borders and “the ways in which children shape and experience such migrations”. Thomas et al. (2003) suggest that the nuances of children’s experiences amidst forced migration

have yet to be captured and Boyden and Mann (2005) state that there is insufficient empirical evidence on the experiences and views of children “coping in extreme situations”, including those of forced displacement. This, they suggest, has led to an “erroneous conceptualisation” of both the problems and the solutions in relation to children’s protection, feeding into the misapplication of policy and practice (Boyden and Mann, 2005:3).

Bringing these practical and theoretical areas of concern together, the central research questions for this thesis can be articulated as follows:

**How is refugee children’s participation practiced, conceptualised and understood in relation to their protection, in particular within the refugee protection process? What does this mean for the conceptualisation of the refugee child and for refugee children’s lives? What, if anything needs to change?**

This thesis starts, then, with a ‘problem’ in a humanitarian context: an identified gap between the rhetoric and ‘reality’ of refugee children’s participation in their protection and a refugee protection process that is thought not particularly participatory for the child. Through directly engaging with humanitarian practitioners and refugee children, it seeks to explore empirically the extent to which this is the case and whether refugee children’s increased participation in refugee protection procedures might produce a better, safer alternative for children.

From a theoretical perspective, this thesis engages critically with a significant body of academic literature on the theory and practice of children’s participation as well as related literature on the conceptualisation of ‘childhood’ and ‘the child’. It explores the ambiguity and tensions in children’s participation, particularly in relation to their protection, and to respond to debates surrounding participation, agency and power. It engages with the literature on forced migration, refugee camps and the construction of the refugee (child). Linking these to the debate on children’s participation in protection, it explores notions of ‘vulnerability’ and ‘agency’ and the transformative potential of participation for the reconstruction of refugee children and for their everyday spaces and lives.

#### 1.4 The research context

Such research questions cannot, of course, be addressed in a vacuum and require a context within which they can be empirically explored. Whilst UNHCR works on the protection of refugees in a range of settings, this chapter began with children's lives in *refugee camps*, a research context which can be justified in a number of ways.

Firstly, despite a growing consensus against encampment as an international refugee response (Black, 1998:7), camps continue to be an iconic feature of protracted refugee situations world-wide (Jamal, 2003:4). As Kastberg (2002:4) points out, this can mean that refugee "children may spend their entire childhood" in these settings. According to Hunter (2009:12) "seven out of ten refugees in sub-Saharan Africa reside in camps" with an "on-going use of camps and refugee settlements as virtually the sole method of delivering assistance" in that region. Harrell-Bond (2000:1) suggests that, as a result, "camps have become almost synonymous with the refugee experience". As a refugee context, then, refugee camps are prolific, iconic, current and contemporary. More importantly, many are substantially populated by children under the age of 18. At the end of 2012, 56% of the population of planned or managed refugee camps world-wide were children and, at 60% of the population, children's representation within transit and reception camps was even higher (UNHCR, 2012:35).

Secondly, the perception of the refugee camp environment does not tend to be associated with refugee participation more generally. Black (1998:4) describes camps as "tented cities, supplied wholly from the outside", fostering dependency and Jamal (2003:4) suggests that they are places where refugees are in "a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo". For children living in a refugee camp setting, as already mentioned, getting their voices heard can be problematic and Harrell-Bond (2000:1) questions whether refugee camps are "good for children" at all. Indeed, Harrell-Bond (1998:22) suggests that, as a whole, in terms of listening to the voices of refugees, policy needs "some rethinking" in camps. For Hunter (2009), the extent to which refugees are allocated to camps or settlements in Africa is an indication in itself that "refugee rights are not respected": camps are "motivated by a desire to control". Similarly, for Malkki (1995) refugee camps are not so much about meeting

the needs of refugees but “instruments” for restricting the movement of people and the operation of power. The refugee camp is therefore a complex, important and challenging context within which to explore the participation of refugee children.

Finally, a refugee camp context is also important logistically as a setting for this research. A high proportion of refugee camp residents, as already outlined, are often refugee children, providing an appropriate, accessible and diverse population from which to recruit children as participants for the research. Refugee camps also provide a concentrated ‘arena’ within which to observe the operation and management of the refugee protection process and its constituent procedures. For example, reception in camps often takes place in a designated reception *centre* and registration and interviews for Refugee Status Determination are often conducted from a specific administrative base. The geographical concentration of a refugee camp also has other practical advantages, for example all agencies, refugee children and support workers are available ‘in situ’, enabling a more effective delivery and management of the research because all associated travel and networking is contained within one ‘site’. However, despite the practical and logistical advantages of research in a refugee camp context, there are, of course many challenges still to be negotiated in such settings. These are explored further in Chapter Three.

#### *1.4.1 Kyaka II Refugee Settlement*

Kyaka II Refugee Settlement is located in Kyenjojo District in South-west Uganda. It is 81.5 square kilometres in size and neighbours three Ugandan Sub-Counties: Kyegwa, Mbarara and Ruyonza. The settlement is situated due west from Kampala towards the Congolese border (Figure 1) and approximately 70 kilometres by road from the nearest large town of Mubende in a predominantly rural area (Figure 2). Although labelled a *settlement* rather than a camp, according to Black (1998:4), the term camp can also be used to describe “smaller more open settlements as well as larger overcrowded ones more dependent on help from the outside”: any distinction between refugee ‘camp’ and ‘settlement’ is therefore far from clear and this will be explored further below.

Kyaka II began as part of the Ugandan Government’s relocation of Rwandan Tutsi refugees into distinct settlements and, since the early 1980s, has also received Rwandan Hutus, refugees fleeing conflict in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of

Congo (DRC), and a small number of refugees from the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia and Somalia). At the end of December 2002, there were 3,159 refugees reportedly living in Kyaka II (Hovil and Dryden-Peterson, 2003:16). In 2005-6 an emergency 'influx' of refugees from the DRC more than trebled the population of the settlement from 5,000 to over 16,000 inhabitants and, at the time of this research, Uganda was again experiencing a period of 'emergency', with the arrival of over 40,000 refugees from the DRC, linked to insecurity in the east of that country (UNHCR, 2013). Some of these refugees were transported as groups to Kyaka II. At the time of writing, Kyaka II had a population of 16,428 refugees (Women's Refugee Commission, 2013:3), predominantly Congolese, almost half of whom were children under the age of 18.

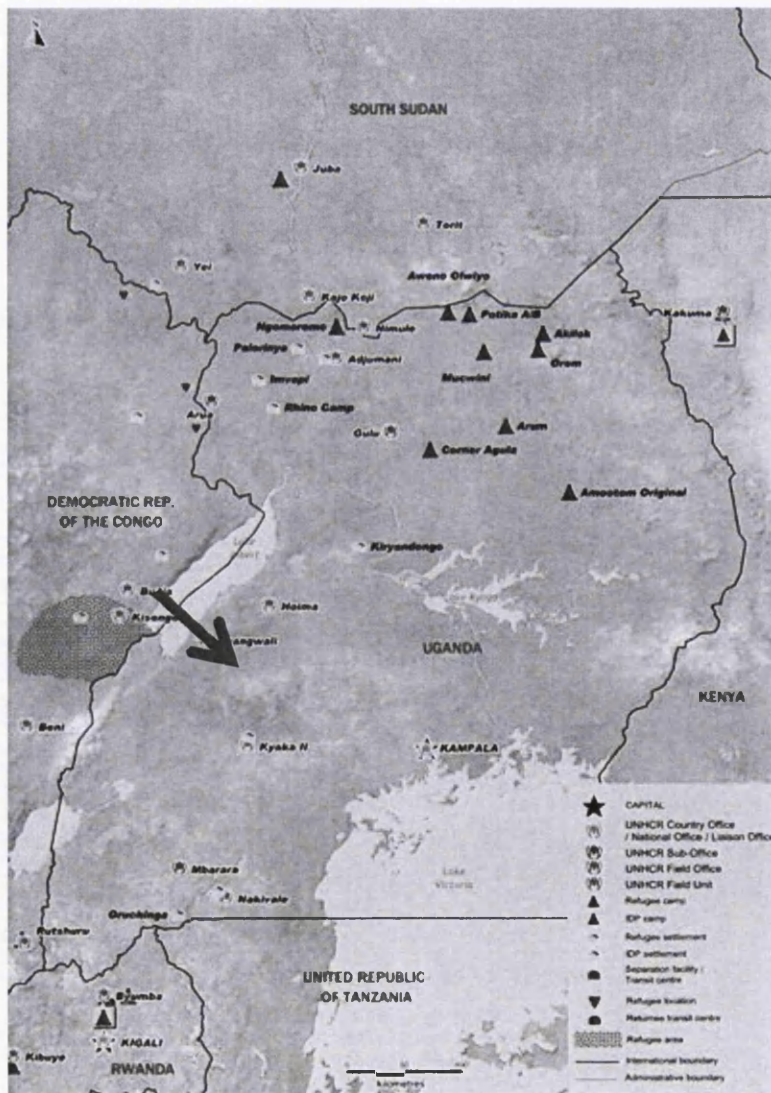


Figure 1: Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, west of Kampala towards DRC border



Figure 2: Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, in a rural area of West Uganda.

Kyaka II - operational for over 30 years - is therefore a well-established settlement and can be defined as a protracted refugee context. In fact, Dryden-Peterson and Hovil (2003:16) suggest that the area of Kyaka II first hosted refugees even earlier, in the 1950s, following political turmoil in Rwanda. Crisp (2000) defines a “protracted” refugee situation as one in which refugees have “lived in exile for more than five years” and where they “still have no immediate prospect of finding a durable solution to their plight by means of voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement”. The majority of refugees in Kyaka II, as already outlined, are Congolese, with no imminent possibility of return to a still volatile DRC, limited opportunity for resettlement and facing a range of barriers to their local integration into Ugandan society.

As a rural ‘settlement’, protracted in nature, with a recent emergency ‘influx’ and a young refugee population, Kyaka II reflects the wider Ugandan refugee context. Uganda has “a long history as both a generator of...and a host country for refugees” (Hovil and Dryden-Peterson, 2003:5) and, according to UNHCR, is currently ‘home’ to more than 190,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers, the majority coming - and continuing to come in significant numbers - from the DRC (2013). In terms of the protection of these refugees, Uganda is a State Party to the Refugee Convention (ratified in 1978) but also to the 1969 OAU (Organisation of African Unity) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (UNHCR, 2011c:103). Unlike the Refugee Convention, the OAU Convention

attempts to address the fact that “more often than not, modern refugees are not individually persecuted but rather flee generalized violence”, for example civil war (as in the case of the DRC), and it includes this in its definition of a refugee (Hunter, 2009:8). These two Conventions form the basis for refugee protection in Uganda and the Ugandan Government, as signatory to both, is responsible (through its Office of the Prime Minister / OPM) for determining the status of refugees (Huff and Kalyango, 2002:4-5).

Whilst over 48,000 of the 190,000 registered refugees currently living in Uganda are self-settled amongst its urban population, the majority are based in rural ‘settlements’ - like Kyaka II - in the South-west and North of the country (UNHCR, 2011c) . Historically, Uganda has predominantly hosted refugees in such ‘settlements’, described by Dryden-Peterson and Hovil (2003:6-7) as “large, isolated areas of land located in rural areas”, intended to be “a more permanent departure” from the temporary “transit camp” and to offer refugees a greater degree of self-sufficiency. However, the distribution of refugees into such ‘settlements’ as distinct from ‘camps’ in Uganda has been an area of much debate. Hunter (2009) views self-reliance in Uganda’s refugee settlements as somewhat of an “operational myth” constituting in reality “little more than making small plots of land available for refugees to use, within the geographical confines of the settlement”. According to Hunter (2009:19) as of 2007 54% of Uganda’s refugee population was under 18 years of age and in some settlements this figure was as high as 60 per cent of the total population, with 20% of four refugee settlements children under the age of five.

Reflecting broader trends, therefore, both within Uganda and at a global level, Kyaka II is a long-standing refugee ‘camp’ in Africa, its population balancing between dependency and self-reliance and with almost half of its population under the age of 18. Within this context, UNHCR, the Government of Uganda and other humanitarian partners are managing the process of refugee protection with children.

### **1.5 Methodology, ethics and positionality**

Undertaking this empirical research in Kyaka II necessarily involves complexity in relation to the appropriate use of methodology and what might constitute an ethical approach. Beyond refugee children’s participation in protection as a conceptual concern, participation and protection are also procedural matters, related to



interacting with refugee children as participants in the academic research process. This requires a consideration of children's participation as research method, a conceptualisation of the child not just as an object of - but engaged in - research and a number of complex debates.

The rise in (or 'mantra') of children's participation as a focus of research has already been referred to, its connection with the CRC and its particular conceptualisation of the child. Beyond this, however, many have also documented the increased reference to children's participation in the research process (Morrow and Richards in Christensen, 2004:328, Carter, 2009, Ansell, 2009, Uprichard, 2010). There has been a parallel rise in the use of participatory research methodologies with children as well as a re-conceptualisation of children as 'researchers': a shift in the literature in terms of who undertakes research on children and how this is done.

This shift is also attributed to the adoption of the CRC: a re-conceptualisation of the child as a more active and participatory agent in relation to academic research. For Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) an increased focus on the child, the child's voice and agency has meant that research has shifted from a focus on children to research with or even by children. Powell and Smith (2009) and O'Kane (2008) suggest that children have become less viewed as 'objects of enquiry' of research and more as active participants in the research process. For Barker and Weller (2003), this view of children as social actors with their own contributions to make has led to more inclusive research methodologies, allowing children to participate in the research process where previously they had been known predominantly through adult proxies alone. As a result, Bluebond-Langner and Korbin (2007:42) have described the CRC as a "pivotal event, not only in the development of policies for children but also in terms of scholarship".

A sense of children as more active participants in rather than distant objects of research is fitting for a thesis which seeks to describe and explain refugee children's participation in their protection based primarily on the views and experiences of refugee children themselves. This thesis does not start from the position that there is an objective truth or reality 'out there', waiting to be revealed, and instead recognises that 'meaning is not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1998:9). People – in this case, refugee children and humanitarian practitioners – confer meaning(s) in context

and this research seeks to access these perspectives, understandings and views. Children - as social actors and 'beings' in their own right - have their own diverse ways of experiencing, understanding and interpreting the world and, as a result, have distinct, unique and additional contributions to make. Engaging and interacting with refugee children – rather than just contemplating them from afar – is therefore essential.

The process of accessing 'children's worlds' and employing participatory research methodologies with children to achieve this is, however, far from straightforward and is complicated by a number of debates.

Firstly, there is debate within the broader field of qualitative research, around the methods and strategies used to gain a knowledge set that is experiential and interpretative in nature and whether this can be shown to have 'validity', 'reliability' and 'rigour' as an approach. This thesis, focusing on the views, experiences and understandings of refugee children and humanitarian practitioners, is a form of qualitative enquiry and must be situated within, and be able to speak to, the broader concerns of this methodological debate. This involves a consideration of coherence in the research framework and design and the strategies employed to support a more robust approach as well as 'real world' (Robson, 2002) application of the research in practice and the degree of flexibility required.

Secondly, there are questions - more epistemological in nature - around the extent to which adults (and adult researchers) can actually gain access to - or come to 'know' - children's views, since they are not and cannot be children themselves. Christensen, drawing on Geertz, (Geertz in Christensen, 2004:173) poses the question: "how can adults engage with children's world?" when, by virtue of their age, status and "otherness", adults cannot become a "native insider" to children's "social and cultural lives. Addressing this question involves a consideration of the positioning of the adult researcher in relation to the child as well as whether participatory research methods might be able to produce a closer approximation to or better representation of children's views. Both the participatory methods employed by this research themselves as well as the participatory process within which they are situated need to be explored in relation to how they might facilitate access to 'children's worlds'.

They also need to be considered in relation to the practical barriers and challenges faced by research in a refugee camp context.

Thirdly, there is an ethical debate around children's participation in research and the particular power differential involved. As Christensen (2004:166) suggests, "power is inherent to research" and this is considered to be particularly so in relation to research with children due to their relative age, status, level of development and dependency. The ethical questions generated by this power imbalance have fed caution in relation to children's participation in research and the threat it might present to their safety and well-being. Children can be viewed as too vulnerable to be engaged in research and in need of protection from the risks involved, particularly in relation to research that is considered 'sensitive'. This debate is particularly relevant for a thesis that seeks to encourage the participation of refugee children (a 'vulnerable' group) in research on child protection (a 'sensitive' area) in a refugee camp context (a 'risky' research environment). Engaging in this debate involves a consideration of participatory research methods and whether, in relation to (refugee) children, they can be considered to be more ethical, to address this imbalance of power in any way. It also involves outlining the various safeguards that can be put in place during research with refugee children to support their protection in context.

Of course, research with *refugee* children raises its own ethical challenges and complexities and imbalances of power. Refugee settings are politically complicated, sometimes insecure, with refugees conceptualised as traumatised, vulnerable and dependent and with limited autonomy or control (Pittaway et al., 2007). Parallel debates therefore exist around the protection of 'vulnerable' refugees from the research process and any associated 'harm'. For some, however, refugee research should be reconceptualised, moving beyond a "harm minimisation" approach towards achieving "reciprocal benefits" for refugees (Pittaway et al., 2007). This ethical position also has a methodological dimension, questioning the quality and appropriateness of research methods in relation to their benefits - both in the short and longer-term - for refugees.

Amidst such methodological and ethical complexity, it is important to address the position(s) of the researcher in relation to the research. There has been a substantial critique of academic literature where the researcher is absent as author and the

research viewed as removed from any interaction with or impact upon the people and places being researched. This lack of ‘positionality’ - presenting an allegedly objective and factual account of ‘others’ and their lives - is misleading to say the least: for Geertz (1988:144-5) all such descriptions are “home-made, the describer’s descriptions, not those of the described” – and the research therefore says as much about the author-researcher as it does about those being researched. Any discussion of approach, methods or ethics in terms of this research therefore needs to involve positioning *myself*.

As a practitioner working on children’s participation and child protection for over 15 years, including in a refugee context, I am a strong supporter of a child rights-based approach. I believe in children’s right to participation and to protection and, having been exposed to protection violations against refugee children as well as resistance to their participation, am interested in the relationship between the two. Can refugee children’s participation be seen as instrumental to their protection in a refugee camp context rather than just wasting practitioners’ valuable time?

If this thesis has a predominant bias or ‘standpoint’, then, it is from a belief in refugee children’s right to participate and a hope that, through such participation, they can be better protected. This then says something about how I choose to view or conceptualise children, “their decision-making competence and human potential and how this can and should be respected and represented” (Maguire in Carter, 2009:861). Children for me are rights holders, with the capacity for social action and agency and the potential for affecting change. As a result, I am motivated to hear what refugee children have to say about their own protection, the procedures and the organisations that are there to protect them.

This research is not, of course, an uncomplicated process of acting on these motivations and finding things out in a ‘vacuum’. I am aligned to any number of institutions – the Centre for Migration Policy Research at Swansea University; the humanitarian organisations supporting the research (UNHCR, Save the Children) and the bodies providing the resources and funds (UNHCR and the Humanitarian Innovation Fund, hosted by Save the Children)

These institutions are enabling in different ways. Swansea University, for example, provides an academic 'home' for the research and, as such, confers credibility (for example through academic procedures, standards and ethical review). The Centre for Migration Policy Research (CMPR), inter-disciplinary in nature and focusing on applied and policy-relevant research, extends such credibility beyond a purely academic domain.

Funding for the field research comes from UNHCR and Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) Small Grant schemes. Significant additional work was required to apply for, monitor and report against these funds. However, a project Steering Group, as a requirement of the HIF Grant, has meant that I was able to draw on support from Save the Children and UNHCR throughout the research. Similarly, grant requirements for dissemination of the research findings provides opportunities to share the learning of the research with practitioners and policy-makers in the refugee protection field.

Support for the research from UNHCR and Save the Children comes out of previous employment and familiarity with both organisations. I managed Save the Children's Participation Unit for seven years and, as part of the organisation's humanitarian response team, was deployed to country programmes overseas (Kenya, Zimbabwe, Somalia). More recently, I undertook freelance work in a range of locations for UNHCR (Jordan, Kenya and Nepal), including in refugee camp contexts. This work focused specifically on consulting with refugee children on their protection. Results from the consultations were fed into UNHCR's *Framework for the Protection of Children*, an emergent policy directive which went on to advocate for a participatory and child friendly approach. Through such contacts and experience, I was therefore well-placed to secure a refugee camp context and host for this research and to align the research with the protection policy context within UNHCR.

These associations and affiliations – in particular with UNHCR – thus facilitate the process of the research, support and enable it in multiple ways. They can make it possible. However, such powerful and influential organisations have their own agendas, expectations and requirements and association with these organisations can also restrict the research directly or indirectly, mean that it is framed in a particular way.

UNHCR, for example, has multiple requests from researchers world-wide for access to its camps and settlements and to engage with academic institutions on applied research. It also has multiple submissions for financial support from its Small Grant scheme. The 'fit' of research with current UNHCR priorities and policies and gaps in institutional knowledge is thus important for the provision of such support. This is particularly the case if, as with this research, UNHCR is contributing not only funds through a Small Grant but also, at both headquarters and field level, UNHCR staff members' time. It is also likely that particular avenues of exploration, for example those deemed at the time to be too controversial or political or not in keeping with organisational priorities, might be closed. This research, with its focus on protection procedures *within* camps and how to improve them, rather than questioning the macro structures and operation of refugee protection per se, fits with a current UNHCR policy directive on more participatory child protection and is therefore most likely a more 'acceptable' area on which to collaborate on research. As such, it limits the questions and challenges that will be posed through the research and the level of any potential change.

The research and the researcher are, to a certain extent, through such organisational affiliations and associations, 'boxed in'. This is likely true for much applied research, connected up to institutions and donors and negotiating the agendas and influences involved. However, this is not to say that challenges to the practice of UNHCR and other organisations cannot be posed. The empirical research is focusing on what are core protection procedures for UNHCR, fundamental to its work on international protection, and, in an area that has already been criticised for its lack of refugee children's participation, opening this up for further critique. Whilst not focusing on the *raison d'etre* of organisations such as UNHCR or refugee camps as a whole, this is still a relatively 'macro' protection domain and area of concern. In addition, in Chapter Two, and throughout the empirical chapters, there is consideration of the refugee camp as political space, with attention given to the politics and power struggles involved, including the role of institutions like UNHCR. Thus while this is not the focus of the research per se, it is far from silenced or ignored.

Such positioning amidst different institutions is, then, enabling but also ‘muddies the waters’ of research. There is a tension between the research and policy and practice agendas and some negotiation of ethical territory involved. For example, according to Mulgan (2003), in the face of a “continuum of uncertainty”, where some forms of knowledge are generally accepted and well-established and others contested and open to debate, it is not enough to simply present the results of research to an organisation and expect them to change. There has to be at least some awareness and consideration of what such organisations are prepared to hear, of areas in which they are able or willing to make changes for children if impact on children’s lives is required. The researcher has to position herself carefully and *with credibility* in both academic and humanitarian fields, therefore, responding to the “dual imperative” of research that is to be both policy and practice relevant and academically sound (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). This can be complex and challenging to achieve.

Alongside any consideration of researcher positioning, there also needs to be a discussion of power. Being a white, adult, middle class, educated student and citizen from the UK, supported by these academic and humanitarian organisations and funded to gain knowledge, make contacts and learn new skills, I am already carrying a significant package of privilege with me into my research. Contrast this with the general position of my research respondents – displaced children, forced to live in relative poverty in a refugee camp, deprived of many of their basic rights and freedoms and possibly the support of their family, community and friends – and the power differential is already immense.

This power differential has multiple consequences and cannot be ignored. As Christensen (2004:166) points out: "power is...not an external contemplation of social life but part of it" and it “involves some form of intrusion into people’s lives”. I have to consider how I will be ‘intruding’ into refugee children’s lives and the lives of their communities and the work of the humanitarian organisations in the settlement. I need to think about how refugee children will view and respond to me and how this will impact upon the process and outcomes of the research.

Such impact on and response from refugee children and their communities is tied up with the institutional affiliations set out above. The role, for example, of UNHCR in the lives of refugees and the organisation’s influence, along with government

partners, over refugee status determination, can create certain dynamics and expectations when these organisations locally endorse and support research. For example, adult refugees might feel that it is important to be involved or to gain some status through the research and to be seen to be somehow participating by the organisations in Kyaka II. There might be the misperception that such participation could lead to advantage or privilege in relation to their family's protection or other areas of concern. Adults might put pressure on children to attend research workshops or to approach the researcher, to raise certain matters rather than others, to be seen to say 'the right thing', particularly if the results are to be fed back to OPM or UNHCR.

At an individual level, the researcher might be viewed as having a privileged relationship with UNHCR in the settlement and therefore to represent a potential conduit or 'fast track' route for progressing individual refugees' cases and concerns. At a more general level, there might be raised expectations around the outcomes of the research, even if (as outlined in Chapter Three) the limitations of what is possible are clearly outlined to those involved. If the researcher is associated with UNHCR and the Government of Uganda, and these are the organisations that 'make things happen' in the settlement, then the researcher will be viewed in turn as influential by some refugees. However, whilst individual concerns can be reported by the researcher, to the organisations in situ and the findings of the research shared with these organisations operational in Kyaka II, there are significant limitations to what the researcher can be engaged in and what can or will be addressed as a result.

In relation to positionality and power, in addition to how the researcher interacts with and relates to refugees, it is also important to reflect on how refugee children from Kyaka II are portrayed. James (2007:262) suggests that it is important to question the "rhetorical power" of the voice of the child (who is selected and excluded from representation, whose point is being made and whose agenda is served); to pay attention to the politics involved. A consideration of the "politics of representation" is also essential in any attempt at cross-cultural research. Smith (in Clifford and Valentine, 2003) questions whether it is appropriate to write about and represent other cultures, critiquing the extremes of such representation: where other cultures are viewed as wholly alien or, as the result of globalisation, considered much the



same. Smith argues for a more “dynamic” view of culture which takes account of factors such as age, sex, race, caste, gender, i.e. the difference *within* (Clifford and Valentine, 2003:183). Similarly, Dona (2007:219) provides a reminder of the “endeavours in representation” involved in refugee research and how such representation is critical in relation to improving the lives of refugees. Dona (2007:222) critiques the ‘refugee’ label and its essentialist nature and also argues for “multiplicity” in the way refugees and their experiences are portrayed. Throughout this research, it is therefore essential to be mindful about the diversity and complexity of ‘children’, ‘refugees’ and ‘culture’ and how the notion of ‘the refugee child’ can be constructed and employed. The process of attempting to be more transparent about my own position, power, assumptions and agendas – being ‘reflexive’ – is an important strategy for the research and addressed further in Chapter Three as well as returned to in relation to the research findings in Chapter Eight.

Finally, closely linked to this discussion of researcher ‘positionality’ is the question of who the research benefits. The answer is not straightforward. As already pointed out, there are research as well as policy and practice agendas involved. The research also aims to benefit refugee children themselves. According to Matthews and Limb (1999:68):

“...research on the lives of children should not just be reported for its own sake, but should lead to outcomes which encourage empowerment, participation and self-determination...”

Child participation is fundamentally a process of children being able to express their views and opinions on matters that affect them and having these views and opinions taken into account. Not only is the participation process itself (if of a good standard) thought to be beneficial for children – building personal and social skills and improving self-esteem – but the longer-term impacts are thought to include services and policies more relevant to children and their needs. By linking this research with an identified policy and practice gap and with key humanitarian organisations who have a major role to play in the protection of refugee children, it is hoped that information gathered from empirical work with children can feed directly into the organisations who have the capacity to undertake change. Indeed, connecting up empirical research on refugee children’s views with protection policy at a more

‘central’ and international level is important. As Ansell (2009:204) notes, for children’s participation to make a difference, it is often important to look beyond the local spaces of children’s everyday interactions and the areas where their voices are currently being heard:

“We should follow the ‘capillaries’ away from children themselves (in both time and space), to empirically investigate flows that are not directly visible to children (though some might be explored by them), into spaces from which children are physically absent. Policies are made and events take place beyond children’s perceptions that they cannot comment on, yet profoundly shape their lives. The political spaces from which children are physically absent are as important as those in which they are present.”

Pittaway et al. (2007:310) argue that, in relation to refugee research in general, there needs to be a “fundamental re-conceptualisation” of “the research relationship” to one focusing on “reciprocal benefits” for refugees:

“...it is unethical for researchers merely to document the difficulties of refugees and their causes without, wherever possible, offering in return some kind of reciprocal benefit that may assist them in dealing with these difficulties and, where possible, in working towards solutions”.

Such reciprocal benefits might include developing skills and capacities, changing social attitudes, guiding policy or improving the quality of humanitarian response. Indeed, for Malkki (1996), the humanitarian interventions “routinely activated” amidst forced migration are not “the best of all possible worlds” and it is possible to “come up with something better”. Ramalingam et al. (2009) suggest that such new ideas will come from the “margins” as well as the “traditional operating core”. This means solutions to the ‘problem’ of refugee children’s participation in their protection may well come from refugee children themselves.

## **1.6 Thesis overview**

This thesis is structured around a narrative which moves from ‘what exists’ in practice in terms of refugee children’s participation in their protection in Kyaka II to practical and policy-related areas for change. At the same time, a parallel conceptual narrative starts from a complex and contested theoretical field, full of tensions and challenges but also openings, and uses these openings to reposition ‘boxed in’ (Hart and Khatiwada, 2003) perspectives on participation, protection and ‘the refugee child’. Along the way, methodological and ethical debates around what is possible and desirable in terms of participatory research with refugee children are explored

and addressed. Relating back to these narratives or themes, each chapter contributes additional theoretical and empirical material. An overview of Chapters Two to Eight is provided below.

**Chapter Two** provides the theoretical framework for the empirical material presented in this thesis. It does so by considering children's participation in relation to more abstract concepts such as agency, power and space. This chapter, and the thesis as a whole, argue for a conceptualisation of children's participation as inherently ambiguous, uncertain and contested, tied up with the operation of power and control, articulated in and impacting upon space. Although in principle children's universal right, a deeper, critical view reveals that there are multiple challenges to children's participation, not least in the child protection discourse which tends towards a *lack* of participation as being in the 'best interests' of the child. Tension thus exists *between* children's participation and their protection, reflected in competing conceptualisations of the child. Since the focus of this thesis is refugee children's participation *in their protection*, this presents a certain paradox to be resolved. Such conceptual tensions must also be set within the refugee camp as political space and tied up with the operation of power this involves. This chapter embraces the complexity of children's participation which provides avenues to be explored through empirical research.

**Chapter Three** sets out the methodological and ethical considerations informing the research and explores whether participatory research with refugee children might be methodologically and ethically 'better'. The chapter also presents detailed information about how the research was carried out in practice - the research design and process and the research strategies employed - positioning this in relation to debates around achieving 'quality' in qualitative research. The thesis is reflected upon as a piece of 'real world' (Robson, 2002) research and the practical challenges involved in conducting research with refugee children on protection in a refugee camp context are outlined.

**Chapter Four** represents the first substantive empirical chapter in the thesis. It builds on the introduction to Kyaka II set out earlier in this chapter and provides some more specific context in relation to the protection of refugee children. It then presents an initial 'map' of refugee children's participation in their protection in

Kyaka II, based on the views of practitioners and refugee children themselves. After outlining certain “enablers” (Crowley, 2012) or supports for children’s participation that are in place, the chapter goes on to provide an initial layer of analysis and critique, exploring the different ways that refugee children’s participation might be practically and conceptually ‘boxed in’ (Hart and Khatiwada, 2003).

**Chapter Five** examines in detail refugee children’s participation in the refugee protection process, predominantly from the perspective of refugee children themselves. It argues that the ‘core’ refugee protection procedures - arrival and reception, registration, Refugee Status Determination, Best Interests Determination - represent a significant gap in relation to refugee children’s participation and provides evidence for this at each procedural stage. The chapter reflects on the main practical and conceptual barriers preventing refugee children’s participation in the refugee protection process and suggests that these relate, in turn, to a limiting conceptualisation of the refugee child.

**Chapter Six** considers the conceptualisation of ‘the child’ in the refugee protection process in the context of Kyaka II. It explores how the view of the refugee child can have implications for how children are seen in relation to their participation, contributions and competencies; how they are treated by the adults around them; how they engage with protection procedures and the protection outcomes that result. Through consideration of the empirical material, different conceptualisations of ‘the refugee child’, as ‘operational’ in Kyaka II, are revealed and explored. An alternative conceptualisation of the child is suggested, in keeping with a refugee protection process that might be more participatory for children.

**Chapter Seven** reflects on the previous three empirical chapters - and the challenges to children’s participation they outline - and explores alternatives, both practically and conceptually, in terms of refugee children’s participation in the refugee protection process. The chapter draws on the theoretical complexity of children’s participation set out in Chapter Two to suggest conceptual openings that can be explored. The practical and conceptual barriers to children’s participation described in Chapter Five are returned to and addressed.

The thesis concludes in **Chapter Eight** with a summary of the key findings and concrete implications of the research, including some recommendations for policy and practice. It also returns to the aims and objectives of the thesis, as set out earlier in this chapter, exploring how value has been added in terms of academic research and debate, practice and policy-relevant research and benefits for research respondents, in particular for refugee children themselves.

## **Chapter Two: Navigating the tensions - participation, protection and ‘the refugee child’**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Refugee children’s participation in their protection is an intellectual problem as well as a practical one, relating to significant areas of academic debate across a range of fields. To explore the participation of refugee children in their own protection therefore means to negotiate a complex conceptual terrain. As Shier (2010) points out, the challenge is to navigate the constraints and tensions involved. Indeed, since the aims of this research are more than academic, with its ‘sights firmly set on a more effective and empowering practice’ (Shier, 2010:35) for children, it is essential to find a conceptual way through.

This chapter steers a path through the literature and debates on children’s participation and child protection towards a productive position from which to approach the empirical research. It begins with a discussion of the ‘meteoric rise’ of children’s participation in the academic literature - along with its coverage of participatory models, standards and structures - and relates it to the adoption of the CRC and its reconceptualization of ‘childhood’ and ‘the child’. Whilst this literature says something useful about the process, methods and ‘quality’ of children’s participation and about the nature of interaction between adult and child – for which there is a place - it is constrained by its overly technical perspective and limited in its interpretation of participation and power. As such, it inadequately addresses the ‘patchiness’ of children’s participation, viewing it as something that can just be ‘done better’ - with improved techniques and time - rather than due to the contested nature of children’s participation itself. Similarly, whilst the view of ‘the child’ from the CRC is enabling and aspirational in relation to children’s participation, its over-emphasis on children’s agency, sets children apart and, in turn, neglects the structural constraints that they face.

In order to address this gap, an alternative literature is also reviewed, one which presents child participation as tied up with power, and children’s agency as more complex and constrained. At the other extreme of a continuum from participation, conceptualised as technical and apolitical, is a position which suggests that participation is inherently tyrannous – a systemic reinforcement of unequal and

unjust divisions of power. Reflecting on, and rejecting, both of these extremes, a more fluid and contested view of power and agency, in relation to refugee children's participation, is developed. This is a view which, whilst it accepts that there is a broadly asymmetrical relationship of power operational between adult and child, as well as between humanitarian practitioner and refugee, does not accept that the participation of all refugee children, in all places and at all times is completely constrained. This view requires a more detailed consideration of the operation of power in context and opens up at least the possibility of refugee children's participation leading to some form of change.

This consideration of children's participation and power is enhanced by a discussion of the concept of 'space'. A relational conceptualisation of 'space' - as the articulation of, and as influential upon social relations and the operation of power - can open up a range of productive critiques. For example, the importance of participation in context, the use of scale and the circumscription of space in relation to children's participation are brought to the fore. It is clear that attention must be paid to the way children's participation is spatially expressed, whose interests this serves, and what this means for the articulation of children's views and concerns and their potential to effect change. Drawing on debates over participation, power and space, it is suggested that transformation and change in relation to children's participation can be conceptualised in different ways.

Given that this thesis is concerned with children's participation *in their protection*, any conceptual discussion needs also to be related back to relevant child protection debates. It is important to consider how children might be viewed differently in relation to their protection than their participation, as well as how the relationship *between* children's protection and participation might be conceptualised. For example, the 'vulnerability' of children often associated with their need for protection can be positioned in opposition to the agency that their participation requires. This presents a paradox that needs to be resolved. However, there are strong arguments, soundly empirically-based, that show that children can be both 'vulnerable' *and* 'agents', that their participation is beneficial, if not essential, for their effective protection. This more hybrid, fluid view of 'the child' and association of participation *with* protection is used to inform the research. Beyond this, how politics is implicated in the child protection discourse and the construction and

‘spatialisation’ of child protection is also explored. In doing so, the argument for viewing children’s participation in their protection, not just in technical terms, but also from a political and spatial perspective is reinforced.

Finally, since this research is concerned with the participation and protection of children who are *refugees*, the chapter concludes with the construction of ‘the refugee’ and situates the discussion in the space of ‘the refugee camp’. The refugee camp is the most iconic space of refugee protection, much critiqued in relation to refugees’ participation and is not simply a physical but also a *political* space. Whilst this thesis is not a critique of the existence of refugee camps per se and their unsuitability for children, indeed for most refugees (Harrell-Bond, 2002; Black, 1998; Jamal, 2003; Kaiser, 2006; Malkki, 1995; Malkki, 1996 and others), it explores the spatiality of refugee children’s participation in their protection in a refugee camp context, as well as some of the constructed identities and politics involved.

## **2.2 Child participation**

‘Child participation’ has become a commonly repeated refrain, or ‘mantra’, in numerous settings growing in scope and magnitude over the past twenty to thirty years. This has been reflected in an ‘explosion’ of literature on child participation in the academic field. O’Kane (2008) suggests that there has been an increased focus on children’s views and experiences since the 1980s and both Powell and Smith (2009) and Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) chart the development of a significant body of literature advocating for children’s participation as a whole. Indeed, a simple literature search on ‘child participation’, for just the last ten years, produces thousands of references and shows a proliferation of publications across a wide range of academic arenas. Similarly, a search on ‘child participation’ in high profile journals on children’s issues, such as *Children and Society*, produces multiple articles tracking academic debate on the subject over the last decade or so.

Beyond this broad academic interest, significant literature can also be traced within different disciplines. For example, Johnson (2010) tracks the popularity of child participation in Development Studies in the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, Ansell (2009:208-90) notes an increased focus on child participation in the discipline of Geography leading to the “hidden geographies” of children “now gaining critical mass” and in the relatively new field of Childhood Studies, much of the academic



literature produced, since it evolves from the particular experiences of the child, can be connected to children's participation. With such prolific activity, it is perhaps not surprising that Wyness (2009:345) describes child participation as a "well established" research field.

In terms of children's participation in practice, Graham and Fitzgerald (2010:345) write about a "widespread focus on child participation" in diverse community and government organisations in Australia and overseas, Cockburn (2007) describes a multiplicity of child participation initiatives in voluntary and statutory agencies in the UK, whilst Kjørholt (2002:68) documents a rise in child participation in public discourse in Norway and an "overwhelming focus" on children's participation internationally, including in less developed countries. This wave of child participation in practice is multi-dimensional in nature. In the UK, it has involved new policies (and, in some cases, legislation), standards and charters, participation posts and 'champions', as well as new structures and institutions. Hill et al. (2004) note an increased focus on participation mechanisms in the UK: some more formal and 'adult' in nature, for example children's parliaments or fora; others more child-initiated and child-led. Outside the UK, Williams (2005) writes about the mechanisms for street children's participation in New Delhi: a children's council, a working children's union and a children's newspaper.

Participation can often be defined simplistically as 'taking part', 'turning up' or 'joining in' and is used as such in a range of contexts in relation to children. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008:507) note, however, that 'participation' used to mean "taking part...necessitates some predefined activity in which the participants can take part". Participation, they maintain, involves much more than this.

*Chapter One* took its definition of child participation from Article 12 of the CRC: children's right to express their views and opinions on all matters affecting them and to have those views and opinions taken into account. This full and more complex definition is more about decision-making than taking part. In rights-based language, it positions children as 'rights holders' and adults as 'duty bearers', who have an obligation to enable the participation of the child (UN General Assembly, 20 November 1989). Seminal texts on child participation draw their definitions from this broader understanding within the CRC. Hart (1992:5) describes participation as

“the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives” and Williams (2005:82) uses O’Kane’s definition of participation as “an on-going process of children’s active involvement in decision-making (at different levels) in matters that concern them” and their lives. Powell and Smith (2009) similarly draw on Article 12 in the CRC to state that participation is not just the involvement in decision-making but knowing that one’s actions are taken note of and may be acted upon. Children’s participation thus defined is a process of decision-making connected to the potential for change. From a rights-based perspective, participation therefore has a far ‘weightier’ definition than simply that of ‘taking part’.

With child participation thus defined as a process, involving adult/child relations within a rights-based approach, theoretical models of children’s participation and practice standards are set out in the literature, acting as ‘benchmarks’ to measure the quality and progress of participation. Perhaps the most well-known theoretical model is Hart’s (1992:8) *Ladder of Participation* whose eight “rungs” go from “manipulation”, “decoration” and “tokenism” at the bottom of the ladder through to more participatory “child-initiated shared decisions with adults” at the top. Hart’s (1992) view is that a range of degrees of children’s participation are possible and desirable as long as the process is voluntary, informed, intentional and meaningful. Hart’s (1992) work is referenced by Shier (2001) who removes the rungs that do not for him constitute participation (manipulation, decoration, tokenism) and offers an alternative model. Shier’s (2001) *Pathways to Participation* consists of five levels of child participation, each involving three stages of commitment (“openings” “opportunities” “commitment”) as part of working towards a full and meaningful participatory process. More recently, other models have rejected the idea of participation as a linear progression of different stages, for example Treseder (1997) has developed a circular model showing different “degrees” of participation as equally valid, possible at different times and with the potential for multiple trajectories for the development of children’s participation. The quality of the participatory process for all, however, must remain consistent throughout.

Practitioners have drawn on these models to create participation standards which more clearly define and measure a good quality participatory process. In the UK, for

example, the National Youth Agency has developed the *Hear by Right* standards; internationally, the Save the Children Alliance has developed participation standards for their work around the world (Save the Children UK, 2005). Similar to Hart (1992) and Shier (2001), these practice standards emphasise the importance of the quality of the participatory process. They emphasise the informed and voluntary nature of participation as well as the importance of feedback, inclusion and a range of other criteria for meaningful child participation. The content of such practice standards are echoed in the academic literature – for example, Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) state that, on the basis of their empirical work, children want participation to be about change, adequate information, choice, mutual interdependence and recognition. For Lansdown (2001), participation is about information, inclusion and transparency. For Chawla and Heft (2002), it includes choice and respect.

This burgeoning ‘wave’ of literature on child participation has been productive: it has ‘written in’ children, their views and perspectives, given them value and consideration, across academic fields and areas of practice in which they have previously been relatively absent. It has also set out how the ways in which the interaction and dynamic between adults and children is fundamental to children’s participation (for example, the ‘rights holders’ and ‘duty bearers’ of the CRC) and contributed something about the nature of that interaction and how it might be manipulated in different ways (for example, the ‘tokenism’ and ‘decoration’ rungs of Hart’s *Ladder?*<sup>add date?</sup>). As such, this literature has provided a first level of critique of children’s participation and its articulation amidst power. Through setting out standards and a discussion on the quality of participation, this literature has taken a more technical or methodological approach – which, as will be shown below, has its limitations – but which, in its discussion of appropriate methods for engaging with children in a meaningful way, has its value. Such methods and their benefits for children are further discussed in relation to this research in Chapter Three. The definition set out for children’s participation in this literature as an on-going process and universal right, rather than a series of isolated participatory activities or events, is more enabling and aspirational for children even, if as discussed below, this is much compromised in practice. Finally, the coverage in this literature of participatory mechanisms and structures, the clubs, fora and governance committees that have accompanied the rise of children’s participation in practice, is a defining feature of

children's participation and one which starts to situate participation amidst organisations and institutions, rather than just being about individuals' interactions. It is also a feature which can be limiting and constraining and, as such, is given further and more critical consideration below.

### **2.3 Participation and the re-conceptualization of the child**

The increased focus on children's participation over the past few decades, in both academic and practitioner fields has been attributed by many to the CRC's adoption in 1989. With the acknowledgement of children's rights, including their right to participate, the CRC signified a fundamental paradigm shift in the dominant conceptualisation of 'childhood' towards an increasingly enfranchised, competent and capable construction of 'the child'.

According to White and Choudhury (2007:532), "the issue of agency" was "key to this" transformation. The introduction of the CRC meant the "discovery of children as subjects" rather than being solely objects of others' actions, they were viewed as actors or "agents" themselves. For Kellett (2012) agency is described simply as "activity", the point at which (and extent to which) children's views are able to translate into actions. Agency is about children's ability to act independently, to make choices and to effect change.<sup>9</sup> O'Kane (2011) describes the shift in perspective towards children as having agency under the CRC as children becoming "social actors in their own right, active in the construction and determination of their own experiences, other people's lives and the societies in which they live." This re-conceptualization of children to rights-holders, with agency, with the advent of the CRC and its implications for their participation is explored in more detail below.

The predominant view of childhood in the late 20th century is described by Valentine (in Matthews and Limb, 1999) as one where the child is set apart from the adult world and viewed in terms of vulnerability, incompetency and dependency. In addition to not being particularly enabling for the child, this is a universal view of childhood which does not acknowledge diversity: it does not take poverty, disability,

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<sup>9</sup> Kellett, 03/23/2012, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791231/obo-9780199791231-0013.xml>

gender, ethnicity, class or any other influential factors into account. For Carter (2009), from this standpoint, children are seen as a homogenous group, negatively defined in terms of what they are not: as 'other' in relation to adults.

In relation to this view, Kjørholt (2002), drawing on Qvortrup, suggests that children are conceptualised as "human becomings" rather than "human beings", a theoretical approach which Powell and Smith (2009:125) call "an age stage developmental perspective on childhood". From this perspective, children are viewed as on a path to adulthood, all passing through the same stages in the same sequence and developing psychologically and socially into adults (Matthews and Limb, 1999). This conceptualisation of the child is of a partial human being, less formed, equipped, capable than an adult and not yet ready to engage fully or have agency in an adult world.

Whether viewed as adults or citizens-in-waiting, children are therefore seen as having nothing different or particular to contribute – they are 'less than' adults. As such, Barker and Weller (2003) note that children are only viewed as worthy of research or interest within broader studies of education or the family rather than in their own right. Similarly, Darbyshire et al. (2005:419) describe this approach to childhood as one where children are solely seen as "part of a larger unit, subsumed under families, schools and households" and information is only gathered on them through adults by proxy. Children are not viewed as capable or able to engage on their own terms.

This view of children and childhood has particular consequences for children's participation. It says something about children's agency, the degree to which they can act independently, engage in and impact on their own environments and lives - and those of others - with any intention, leading to any transformation or change. Certainly such a developmental view of the child and children's participation is still held by many and has consequences for children, their agency and power.

This socialisation model of childhood experienced a dramatic shift with the adoption of the CRC in 1989, outlining the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of the child. As outlined in Chapter One, the CRC set out in its Article 12 children's right to participation. Lansdown (2001) notes that, with their rights

thus established in international law, children became recognised as subjects of rights and, as such, entitled to be heard. The adoption of the CRC, Graham and Fitzgerald (2010:346) suggest, meant that children went from being “invisible” to having “legitimacy” and “voice”: they were recognised as being “fully human” and thus placed onto the political and policy agenda in their own right (Matthews and Limb, 1999:73). According to Sinclair (2004), children were reconceptualised as social actors with their own perspectives and contributions, the ability to impact upon and construct (and be impacted upon and constructed by) their environment in unique ways and competent to make decisions about their own lives. They were “active social beings, constructing and creating social relationships”; no longer the “cultural dupes of socialisation theory” (Sinclair, 2004:111), they had agency of their own.

For Gallacher and Gallagher (2008:499), this marked a paradigm shift from the previous universal view of children to “childhood as socially, historically, geographically constructed and diverse”. If children were influenced by and able to influence their environment and society, then childhood in one place could not be the same as in another. For Jenks (in Barker and Weller, 2003) this problematized and transformed the ‘natural’ category of the child into the ‘cultural’. Compared to the developmental perspective, childhood was viewed in a totally different way:

“...the biological facts of infancy are but the raw material upon which cultures work to fashion a particular version of ‘being a child’” (James and Prout in Matthews and Limb 1999:67).

James (2007) sees this shift reflected in an initial change in focus within different disciplines, for example: Anthropology, Psychology, Social and Cultural Studies, Geography, History and Law - all becoming interested in children’s perspectives and experiences as social actors or ‘agents’. Indeed, for Bluebond-Langer and Korbin (2007:242), Anthropology helped to enable a more complex and contextual representation of the child: its ‘hallmark’, they suggest, to reject the universal view and to view childhood as manifested in different times and different places in different ways. James (2007) also documents the growth of Childhood Studies – an academic field drawing on all of the disciplines above and concerned with the socially constructed character of childhood. Others do likewise, writing about “the new sociology of childhood” (Darbyshire et al., 2005), “the new social studies of

childhood” (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008) or the “new paradigm of childhood” (O’Kane, 2008) as a separate and unique field.

With this paradigm shift, ‘the child’ is differently constructed and this is enabling for children and their participation. Certainly, compared to the view of child participation as “craft apprenticeship” (Storie in Matthews, 1999:143) with children just learning to be citizens with age from adults - this is a more open and promising avenue to pursue. It also indicates that what children have to offer is something different to adults (and from each other), rather than something less. Crucially, children are seen as decision-makers, having agency and with their own unique contributions to make, as opposed to being dependent on adults, merely ‘becomings’ rather than ‘beings’.

This shift is essential in order to provide the theoretical and practical space for children’s voices and experiences and to consider children’s participation in a fuller, more complex and empowering way. At a practical level, this perspective gives value and importance to children and what they have to say, critical in a world where children and their perspectives are so frequently side-lined and ignored. In addition, the notion that childhood can be multiply manifested or constructed requires that we contextualise ‘the child’ – find out what it means to be a ‘child’ in different settings and how children’s views and experiences are articulated, or silenced, as a result. This contextualisation is essential for any exploration of children’s participation in a case study context and the contributions that children are able, or not allowed, to make.

#### **2.4 ‘Patchy’ participation**

Despite the oft-repeated refrain of children’s participation, the models and standards which set out parameters for meaningful practice, and the rights-based conceptualisation of the child with agency, such rhetoric remains in stark contrast with children’s ‘reality’ in practice. In relation to the CRC, Shier (2001:108) writes that the right to participation is the “most radical and far reaching” part of the Convention but that it is also “the most violated and disregarded in almost every aspect of children’s lives”. Indeed, although all except two countries in the world have signed up to the CRC and children’s right to participate, significant violations of this right are widespread. The UN Day of General Discussion on children’s

participation in decision-making and Alternative Reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, to take two examples, are full of cases where children have not been listened to, have not been involved in decision-making and nothing has changed as a result. Similarly, James (2007:261) writes about “patchy participation”, where the increased rhetoric about children’s voices is combined with the reality that children are “silenced in their everyday lives”. In contrast to the much-repeated refrain, child participation in practice is thought by many to need substantial improvement. Indeed, Hart (1992), in the 1990s, described practice as “frivolous” and “exploitative”. Over twenty years later, Cockburn (2007:446) notes that good practices are still “exceptions” rather than “routine”.

There are many reasons why child participation could be “patchy” in practice. Children may face numerous barriers to their participation including lack of awareness of their rights, low confidence, self-esteem or limited communication skills. Some children are less able to realise their right to participate than others due, for example, to disability, poverty or the inappropriateness of participatory mechanisms in relation to their needs (Sinclair, 2004). In addition, adults may not be aware of children’s right to participate and may lack the skills, knowledge and understanding to enable or support this. Even where children’s participation is supported, it may be that only part of the process is carried out and essential components, such as feedback to children on what has happened as a result of their participation or providing evidence of any action taken, are not in place. Children themselves may experience “consultation fatigue” as a result of being constantly asked their views and seeing no action as a result, as well as children losing faith in the participatory process and its ability to achieve any substantial change (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010).

Whilst it is important to identify such barriers to children’s participation, it is also essential to avoid conceptualising children’s participation in purely technical and developmental terms. Addressing the obstacles to children’s participation viewed as a matter of changing methods, approaches or mechanisms, only takes us so far. Although child friendly methods and techniques are important for enabling children’s participation – for example, they recognise that children understand and communicate differently about their worlds than adults and may require different



means for expression – it is also important to explore the constraints to children’s participation that are not purely technical in nature.

Indeed, children world-wide do not ‘hold’ their agency unfettered, surrounded by well-intentioned adults technically enabling their participation progressively and in multiple ways. Children do not realise their rights in a vacuum, but are implicated in unequal relationships with other children, adults and organisations, differently positioned in a variety of socio-political, cultural and economic contexts, amidst all the complexities and tensions – and, most crucially, dynamics of power – that this involves.

In this context, the technical issues - just trying to ‘do’ participation ‘better’ - are not the main obstacle to children’s participation in the international development field: the barriers are *institutional*. For Hart et al. (2011), constraints are ‘cultural’ (values and attitudes) and ‘structural’ (practice and procedures) - rather than just methodological in nature. Organisational procedures can reinforce particular attitudes and dispositions towards children - for example, their exclusion from decision-making based on an assumed lack of competence - and naturalise them to the point that they are not questioned. As a result, what is needed is “institutional change”. However, with a predominantly technical focus on children’s participation “the values and practices of the organisations seeking to promote participation are rarely considered” (Hart et al 2011:331). What we should really be focusing on, they maintain, is the operation of *power* – internal to the agencies and organisations involved, between these institutions and local partners (adults and communities) and with children themselves.

This shift to an institutional perspective on children’s participation is important, a process of including and critiquing the organisations involved, rather than positioning them ‘behind-the-scenes’. Elsewhere, Hart’s work (Hart, 2007; Hart, 2012; Hart and Lo Forte 2013), based on extensive and long-term research in the OPT, involves a thorough exploration of institutional motives and interests, driving children’s participation and the child protection agenda in context (discussed further below), with a critique of international actors such as UNHCR and humanitarian organisations, who are also the focus of this research. For example, Hart (2012) maintains that agendas pursued are connected up to motivation for self-preservation,

as well as avoidance of contentious issues which might unsettle relationships with host governments or threaten donor support. Certainly such organisations do not and cannot exist in a vacuum, completely unconnected to cultural, social and political dynamics at multiple levels but have their own agendas and their own complex relationships with power. To thoroughly explore children's participation in our case study context, it is therefore important to adopt an institutional perspective, rather than just considering the day-to-day relationships between children and adults in isolation.

White and Choudhury (2007:536) similarly critique an overly technical approach to children's participation, which they see as the "many studies praising the potential of children's participation and advising how to 'do it better'", and argue for further exploration of the "complexity and contradictions of power that it can involve". There is a "danger of overcompensation" with the CRC's conceptual shift towards 'the child' with agency:

"...of ignoring the structures through which agency arises, overestimating individuals' autonomy; and underestimating the real constraints that men and women, young and old, face" (White and Choudhury, 2010:43).

For White and Choudhury (2010), agency is not held, property possessed or 'carried', but is 'borrowed' and 'built' (from people and from the environment). Agency, they suggest, is a context-dependent 'composite' or 'assemblage', drawing on different resources (human, material, social, cultural) as well as varying levels of adult support and expressed by children in different ways, subsequently shaping their participation. This takes place within, rather than outside, the social system, in context with its formal and informal political structures and constraints.

White and Choudhury (2007) suggest, like Hart et al. (2011), that the structures of power that operate in relation to participation include the organisations and institutions promoting children's participation. Through their case study of children's participation in Bangladesh, White and Choudhury (2007:534) show how children's agency is compromised by the international organisations involved and 'the kind of participation' that they 'are ready to promote'. The model of participation pursued in Bangladesh, White and Choudhury (2010) suggest, ignores the 'structures of violence' operational in context and the bigger political questions

that need to be addressed. The organisation involved thus ‘tugs the point of the compass towards itself’ in a ‘co-option’ and ‘projectisation’ of children’s participation, maintaining children’s engagement and articulation within its own ‘physical and discursive comfort zones’ (White and Choudhury, 2007:547).

Such contributions from Hart et al. (2011) and White and Choudhury (2007; 2010) are illuminating against the backdrop of a more technical approach because they introduce a consideration of politics (power) and context (space) to an analysis of children’s participation and begin to problematize it in relation to both. Such works provide such useful insight because the authors base their arguments on repeated and rich empirical work, in challenging settings (OPT and Bangladesh) over time. For example, Hart’s (2012) work on the spatialisation of child protection in the OPT is the result of fieldwork in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 2009, prior qualitative research on different occasions over a number of years, interviews and extensive engagement with both practitioner and academic literature. His earlier work, on participatory programming with Palestinian children, draws on empirical material from over 50 questionnaires with youth volunteers, semi-structured interviews and a photo essay by practitioners and youth (Hart, 2007). Hart also uses a technique of crystallising his argument around practical case studies from the context of the OPT, for example the development of a particular youth organisation (Hart, 2007) or children’s ‘tortuous path’ to school (Hart and Lo Forte, 2013).

These are not, then, a-spatial, apolitical models theorising about children’s participation in abstract terms but works engaging with the complexity of the contexts within which children are living. As such, children’s participation becomes an expression of social relations and power struggles in a particular setting, rather than being considered in isolation. Whilst adult-child interaction in broad terms is one subject of mainstream literature on children’s participation, these works go on to explore, in detail, the particular interests, power relations and areas of influence involved. Similarly, whilst children are conceptualised with agency within mainstream works drawing on the CRC, agency here is presented as more complex and contested, built and challenged in context in different ways. It is no longer separated out as part of ‘the child’, uninfluenced by structural constraints.

## 2.5 Participation and power

Although child participation is often associated with power (viewed, for example, as an empowering process for children), power is often not conceptualised in relation to participation. Neither is the detail of how power is played out through participation fully explored. Indeed, “almost all discourse about ‘young people’s participation’ refers back at least implicitly to notions of power” but does not involve “explicit identification, clarification and deconstruction of what is meant by power and how power operates” (Hill et al, 2004:89). For example, the more technical literature on children’s participation, such as Hart’s *Ladder*, sets out the progressive empowerment of children through a series of stages rather than situating this in a political context or problematizing power itself. It is an over-simplistic or ‘naive view’ of children’s participation which conceptualises it as such a straightforward empowerment process or “handing over of power” in absolute terms from adult to child. A more detailed exploration of the conceptualisation of power in relation to children’s participation is therefore required.

One work in the development field which sets out a particularly critical perspective on participation’s relationship with power is Cooke and Kothari’s (2001) association of participation with ‘tyranny’. They argue that tyranny, as defined in their work as “the illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power”, is “systemic” within participation, if not “inevitable” (2001:4). Cooke and Kothari (2001:5) chart the origins of participatory development in Chambers’ (1994) Participatory Rural Appraisal or PRA, a methodological approach aiming to “increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalised peoples in decision-making over their own lives”. For Cooke and Kothari (2011), there has been an “inexorable spread” of participation in development discourse with a significant shift from ‘top-down’ development to a widespread participatory approach but with relatively little change or empowerment of beneficiaries as a result. Set against a drive within the development field for “methodological revisionism”, i.e. the belief that with improved techniques, by “doing better”, participation can empower, Cooke and Kothari (2001) set out a “serious and fundamental challenge to participatory approaches”, if not to advocate for “their abandonment” as a whole. They do this through a cumulative presentation of case studies from multiple contributors, all of which demonstrate an “increase in

power to the powerful” as the result of participatory development interventions (2001:10).

Despite the ‘shock value’ of its title, as a reaction to years of the “rhetoric of empowerment” associated with participation within international development and what they see as disappointing results, Cooke and Kothari’s (2001) volume might provide a considered, balancing effect. The arguments from their contributors for how development interventions can be co-opted by more powerful individuals or groups, reinforcing existing local relations of power rather than challenging them, are convincing. Similarly, the barriers thought faced when attempting to access ‘local knowledge’ (for example, how people respond and communicate in a group as opposed to as individuals and their range of motivations for engaging in development interventions) are carefully thought through. From my own experience of working in refugee and other emergency contexts, this complexity, of how people engage with humanitarian agencies and initiatives in context and how interventions can be manipulated in a range of ways by different individuals and groups with different interests, has much resonance. It is also naïve to think that, as practitioners, participation involves the pure collection of local information rather than the shaping of it by our very presence and what we represent, interpreting it through our own ways of understanding the world. Participation, as Cooke and Kothari (2001:15) point out, is not ‘out there’ but constructed – by NGOs, policy-makers, practitioners and academics – and we must have some “rigorous reflexivity” on the processes and consequences of such constructions.

As a result of their collaborative exploration, Cooke and Kothari (2001) rightly question how and where power is expressed within participation. Participation, they suggest, is significantly constrained and their recommendation for a much more considered and nuanced approach to participation and the workings of power in its ‘varied and subtle manifestations’ is welcome. Unlike Cooke and Kothari (2001), however, I do not accept that all participation is “inevitably tyrannical” (in fact, they themselves only pose this question rather than answering it definitively) i.e. that participation will always and everywhere systemically conceal and reinforce existing oppression and injustice. Since tyranny can also be defined as ‘absolute power’, denying any agency, this standpoint taken in relation to children’s participation

leaves us with ‘nowhere to go’. As such, participation as ‘tyranny’ takes us to the opposite extreme of the apolitical models and standards for children’s participation that leave power to one side, but promotes similar ‘blanket’ application – both, I would maintain, are unproductive for theorising the complexity of children’s participation.

Whilst it is not explicit, there is an indication within Cooke and Kothari’s (2001) volume that power cannot always be ‘held’ by dominant interests or those who are traditionally in power. If, as is argued, participation (and power) is capable of being manipulated and co-opted, might this not also mean the potential of some degree of co-optation by those considered more ‘vulnerable’? Indeed, there are examples from the literature, based on detailed empirical research in challenging contexts, where ‘vulnerable’ children, despite facing multiple constraints to their agency, have been able to manipulate power relations through their participation – in different ways and at different times - and benefit themselves as a result in a number of ways (for example, Clarke, 2007; Steffen, 2010). A more complex, fluid conceptualisation of power - as neither absent nor absolute, with some fluidity but also constrained - amidst children’s participation, is therefore required.

Kesby (2007), for example, states that participation is very much entangled with power and that we need a more sophisticated perspective than one in which participation just needs to be ‘done better’ for it to succeed:

“Even when participation is ‘done properly’, ‘deeply’, and is driven by participants themselves, it will nevertheless always already constitute a form of power” (Kesby, 2007:2814)

Drawing on Foucault’s notion of power as an ‘effect’, rather than a ‘commodity’, Kesby (2007) suggests that power is not something that some people ‘hold’ or possess in absolute terms but a network of relations within which power shifts and is differently expressed. As an ‘effect’, power is “an action, behaviour or imagination brought into being in a specific context as a result of the interplay of various communicative and material resources” (Kesby, 2007:2815). People can therefore be in a position to mobilise resources in a range of ways at different times and participation thus becomes a “resource to draw on to constitute an agency capable of transforming existing” relations of power at particular places and times (Kesby,

2007:2818). Kesby (2007) uses his experience of an HIV education and empowerment programme in the context of rural Zimbabwe – and the benefits recorded by its participants – to explore this more fluid conceptualisation of participation and power. His attempt to reject participation as ‘tyranny’ (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) by retheorising it in relation to power and space within a particular case study setting is a useful, grounded, theoretical response.

Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) also draw on Foucault’s relational notion of power to suggest that power is not something that can be simply given away by adults to children, through the process of children’s participation. Rather, it is relational and shifting, a network or web of power within which, through dialogue, identities, voices and meanings are constructed and played out. Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) view participation as a struggle over recognition for children linked to identity, status and power. Although children’s participation contains “emancipatory potential”, it is, Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) suggest, also riddled with “unresolved tensions, questions and power”. This ambiguity, they contend, is “now more readily acknowledged as constituting children’s participation” rather than something that will simply “go away” (2010:343).

Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) take their empirical material from their work at their university’s Centre for Children and Youth, as well as their engagement with a Youth Consultative Committee and work with children on family law. Quotations used from children are relatively sparse and more evidence would be useful to support their theoretical approach, although the importance of dialogue and the nature of adult child interaction amidst participation is well made. In addition, working with the views of children and young people – and using these to reimagine children’s participation theoretically - is an important place to start.

The implication here, is that children’s participation involves empowerment and control in constant tension with one another and that this is a terrain to be constantly negotiated rather than one that can be definitively resolved. There is no blanket tyranny or simple handing over of power from adults to children through improved methods or techniques: power is always fluid, complex and constrained. This perspective on power is productive because it is positioned between the extremes of participation as tyranny and an unbridled agency and tries to theorise the complexity

of ‘real world’ participation. It is also a framework that is able to incorporate not only power and control but also some forms of resistance and change.

Indeed, essential in this conceptual positioning of participation in relation to the operation of power is what this means in terms of change for children. For Hickey and Mohan (2005), participation that is truly ‘transformative’ needs to be relocated amidst a “radical politics of development”, address the “wider structures of marginalisation” and has a set of criteria to meet. This form of participation, they maintain, must be part of a broader project challenging existing power relations, not working around them for more technically efficient service delivery; must be directed at underlying processes of development, rather than at policy processes or interventions and must have an explicit focus on bringing people into the political process. Hickey and Mohan (2005) draw on a number of empirical case studies to demonstrate “lived experience” in relation to participation, contexts where politics matters but where participation does not ultimately or inevitably, in such cases, lead to ‘tyranny’. This cumulative presentation of their case provides an empirically as well as theoretically-based response to Cooke and Kothari (2001).

This research, with its focus on children’s participation in refugee protection procedures in a refugee camp setting - rather than, for example, contesting the existence of refugee camps per se - would not meet Hickey and Mohan’s (2005) criteria for a ‘transformative’ approach. However, this does not mean that it cannot make a contribution to meaningful change. Indeed, to suggest as such would be to deny any agency on the part of children and refugees living in a refugee camp setting. Because this research is situated within and informed by an awareness of the broader political structures and relations of power as operational in the refugee camp context, it can inform, in Hickey and Mohan’s (2005) words, a more transformatory approach.

## **2.6 Spatiality of participation**

There is a complex spatiality to children’s participation, the consideration of which takes us beyond documenting the locations where participation is said to ‘take place’, into a more detailed analysis of participation in particular socio-political contexts. Whilst some view space as a static, frozen, inert, autonomous ‘container’ for people, objects and activity, for others space is a social construct, an expression of the



relations between people, as well as implicated in shaping social relations in turn (Massey, 1992).

Because space is viewed as social, it is also tied up with power relations and the unequal distribution of power. Space, asserts Massey (1992), is ‘utterly political’. From this perspective, it is important to guard against definitions of space which “deprive it of politics and the possibility of politics”. What is required instead, she argues, is a consideration of the “power-geometry” of social relations, spatially expressed. Space, then, ‘matters’: it has a role in the construction of society and society in the construction of space with implications for people’s everyday lives.

This perspective on space is important. Children’s participation is often considered devoid of any complex consideration of the concept of space. There are innumerable studies of children’s participation ‘taking place’ in different settings – the school, the playground, the health centre – with these spaces simply containing children’s participation without any consideration of the social and power relations involved. The focus is often on a trajectory of increasing participation, spreading over space and time, rather than on problematizing how participation in different contexts is spatially articulated or expressed. Apolitical theoretical models of children’s participation, such as Hart’s (1992) *Ladder*, are mainly removed from the complexities of context and space, suggesting the possibility of ubiquitous and unproblematic application. At the other extreme, the suggestion that participation is systemically and inevitably tyrannous has a similarly unproblematic ‘blanket’ relationship with space. For this reason, authors like Mannion (2007) advocate for ‘going spatial, going relational’ and a re-framing of children’s participation in terms of social relations, power and space.

A more active, relational and political conceptualisation of space finds currency in the literature on children’s participation. There are works that place participation in context, providing discrete examples of how children’s participation is politically, socially and spatially expressed (for example, White and Choudhury in Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; White and Choudhury, 2007; Hart, 2012). Children’s participation has also been viewed in terms of a ‘politics of scale’ (Ansell, 2009). From this perspective, spatial (social, political and discursive) levels are made ‘out of bounds’ to children with consequences for their everyday lives. Associated with this

‘politics of scale’ (Ansell, 2009), there is an increasing critique of the circumscription of children’s participation, as enclosed or separate spaces or as ‘boxed in’ (Hart and Khatiwada, 2003; Hart, 2012), drawing out the implications for children and the articulation of their views and concerns. More removed from a consideration of physical space, other authors have focused on discursive or ‘dialogic’ space, the ‘space’ of communication between adults and children, as well as the dynamics and power relations involved (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010). This is important lest we forget that, wherever it takes place, children’s participation relies on interaction between the adult and the child. Finally, there is the suggestion that a reconceptualization of children’s participation in terms of space might mean a reconfiguration of the social and power relations involved (Kesby, 2007). These different perspectives on children’s participation, power and space and their relevance to this research are considered in more detail below.

As previously discussed, Hart et al. (2011) and White and Choudhury (2007; in Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010) highlight the importance of context for children’s participation and, in particular, an awareness of the structural forces and power relations operational in each case. This contextual focus also finds currency, as well as a more overtly spatial emphasis, in the work of Hickey and Mohan (2004), itself a response to Cooke and Kothari’s (2001) polemic on participation as tyranny.

Participation in international development, suggest Hickey and Mohan (2004), is at an ‘uneasy crossroads’, both ‘ubiquitous’ and ‘reviled’, and they attempt to find their ‘place’ amidst the debate. Compared to Cooke and Kothari (2001), Hickey and Mohan (2004) offer a less condemning, more flexible and contextual view of participation and power. They argue that participation needs to be considered in relation to time and space: that there can be overlap in terms of times and spaces that either weaken or strengthen participation in context. From a temporal perspective, they argue that it is important to consider the history of people’s agency and behaviour in relation to their potential for participation. In relation to space, they suggest that politics, resistance, identity, situated practice and lived experience must all be considered: what they define as a “spatialised take on participation”

Participation, for Hickey and Mohan (2004), is not, therefore, automatically and systematically tyrannous across space, but, depending on the context (both in space

and time) and different influential factors, can have more or less potential for change. This perspective is valuable. It is an argument for a more detailed exploration of the 'setting' of children's participation, the contextually-specific factors and inter-dependencies involved. Also, as has already been discussed, it reflects the complexity of participation since empirical work in a range of contexts demonstrates at least *some* degree of agency, at certain times and in certain places, on behalf of the supposedly systemically vulnerable (Clark, 2007; Steffen, 2010). By taking an approach that is both spatial and temporal, Hickey and Mohan (2004) contradict any notion that participation can be fixed in relation to space – there are not pre-defined spaces where the participation of children is always possible but shifting opportunities (and restrictions) across space and over time.

Discourse analysis also places children's participation in a spatial-historical and cultural context. It questions the meaning and shape given to 'child participation' in particular places and times and the agendas this serves. Kjørholt (2002), in her historical approach to children's participation in local, rural communities in Norway, describes a shifting definition of participation, varying to suit different (adult) agendas and invites us to explore whose definition is being used and why. Kjørholt's (2002) historical research reveals that the conceptualisation of children in participatory projects in Norway in the 1990s can be aligned to the political discourse of sustainable local communities. According to Kjørholt (2002:64) discourse theory suggests that at a certain time and in certain places, particular discourses will be presented as "certain and inevitable" and will affect what action is possible as a result. These discourses will, however, be culturally constructed and linked to political and social processes in context and to the exercise of power. For Kjørholt (2002:77), children's participation has not one meaning, then, but: " 'child' and 'participation' are nodal points, floating signifiers that different discourses fight to cover with meaning". She suggests that the child participation discourse can become attached to fields, agendas and interests other than children's rights and that we need to ask ourselves: "What are the reasons for the flourishing of interest in 'children's participation' in our times?" (Kjørholt, 2002:65). She also maintains that, because such discourses are constructed, space and time specific, they should be challenged and contested.

This contribution by Kjørholt (2002) reinforces the importance of a contextual approach to children's participation, as well as the multiple constructions of participation that are possible in time and space. She invites us to critique the particular form - or forms - of children's participation presented – discursively, spatially – and to 'look beneath' at the social, cultural and political relations and motivations involved. Such an invitation is important to carry forward in a consideration of how the different actors – government, humanitarian agencies and refugee communities – conceptualise children's participation in the case study context for this research.

Ansell (2009) reflects on children's participation in terms of a "politics of scale", and advocates for an increased focus on the "macro" in terms of children's agency as well as the local level. This work by Ansell (2009) is theoretical, drawing on and reflecting critically on the work of others on the conceptualisation of children's participation in relation to scale, in particular within the field of Geography. Ansell's work (2009) makes a convincing argument by building a cumulative bank of evidence from the literature of a particular almost normalised approach. Empirical material, or one case study exemplifying this and its implications might also, however, have been a welcome addition.

Ansell (2009:192) suggests that children are too much considered in terms of the small-scale - "limited to the micro-geographies" of their "everyday encounters" - ignoring wider political, social and economic processes that have a very real impact on children's lives. Indeed, a systematic literary search on children's participation produces endless small-scale studies of children's participation in their everyday environments related to school, home and play. Ansell (2009) draws on Holloway and Valentine to show how children can be relegated to "private", "home" and related spheres and spaces rather than broader fields. In this sense, she argues, both children's lives and the academic studies of children are restricted. For Ansell (2009:201), such binaries of local and global, private and public are not a useful conceptualisation of scale and a "flat ontology", where children are able to engage with both the local and the global simultaneously, is more appropriate: "children, then, encounter near and distant places in multiple conscious and unconscious ways".

This sense of children's participation being confined to different spaces and scales – and its consequences - finds wider currency in the literature. Hart (2008:409) considers space, power and children's participation within the field of international development, suggesting that “little of the discussion around the politics of participation” in that field “has emerged in relation to efforts involving the young”. Like Ansell (2009), Hart (2008:409) critiques what he calls the “spatial imagining of children's lives” which give “primacy” to “the local”, disconnecting children's participation from the operation of more “macro” or “meso” structures of power. For Hart (2008), such a disconnect “leaves unchallenged the forces that reproduce poverty and marginality”, forces that have relevance for children and for their lives. Similarly, for Mohan (in Hickey and Mohan., 2004:295):

“Participatory methods are...commonly criticised for ignoring policies and practices that cannot be addressed at a local level, thereby denying the wider politics of the situation they seek to redress”.

Even in participation in research, suggests Uprichard (2010:7), children are confined to the local and every-day: “at the risk of stating the obvious, children are quite capable of talking about many, many things – not just about their childhood lives.”

This discussion of the ‘politics of scale’ (Ansell, 2009) involved in children's participation has relevance because it shows how children's participation can be depoliticised through its manifestation in space. It is also important as it highlights the forces, for example as operational at global or international levels, that impact on children's lives. However, whilst being mindful of such constructions and aware of the importance of positioning children and their participation across a range of spaces and scales and the politics involved, it is important not to dismiss the micro level completely. Indeed, Dona (2007) is concerned with participation at the opposite end of this ‘politics of scale’ – with the small-scale, everyday practices of refugees. Attention must also be paid, Dona (2007:218) suggests, to the operation of power at *this* level – “the underside of the everyday aspect of power relations”, an exploration of Foucault's “microphysics” of power. Examples of power as operational at this scale include refugee community acts of resistance or retaliation against children's participation or adults' cultural conceptualisations of children which restrict their participation. In response to the quotation from Uprichard (2010) above, then, I would maintain that, through empirical research, we *also* want to hear

about (refugee) children's 'childhood lives', the local sites at which they are experiencing daily interaction with adults and agencies and the micro power struggles involved, even if these are manifestations of wider structural and political forces at work.

A corollary to Ansell's (2009) 'politics of scale' is a growing awareness of the different ways that children's participation is spatially and conceptually restricted, or 'boxed in', with implications for children's lives as a result. Hart and Khatiwada (2003) suggest that we must be wary of children's participation which takes place "in a box", confined to separate project spaces or initiatives and with no connections to the policy-making spaces where important decisions affecting children and their lives are made.

Elsewhere, although focusing more on child protection than child participation, Hart (2012) develops this notion of enclosure and the circumscription of space as well as the conceptual, practical and political consequences involved. For Hart (2012), child protection discourse and praxis in humanitarian settings incorporates a particularly 'spatialised' way of thinking: "an assumption that the circumscription of space results in the better protection of the young". Hart (2012) questions whether this physical and conceptual separation or 'enclosure' of children is effective in terms of their protection as well as its political motivation and explores this in detail, based on extensive fieldwork and qualitative research in the setting of the OPT.

Hart (2012) begins by revealing the historical and cultural contingency of such 'spatialised' thinking in relation to children and protection. For example, he cites how the enclosure of refugees in camps had historically politically-motivated origins and how a predominantly Western practice of 'islanding' children has informed humanitarian child protection practice. Such 'islanding' has led to a conceptualisation of 'the child' in opposition to 'the adult' and of the protective environment based on a model that prioritises the importance of family, community and home. For Hart, such enclosures represent only a partial picture of protection and the child.

Based on this thinking, Hart (2012) outlines the spatial dimension of humanitarian child protection practice as pursued in the OPT, as well as its inadequacy for the

effective protection of children in context. For example, home-based psychosocial protection interventions are reactive rather than preventative, and fail to address the main sources of psychological distress related to the Occupation, operational at another scale and which cannot be controlled within the home. Similarly, programmes which target violence in schools and aim to establish them as ‘zones of peace’ fail to acknowledge that violence in these spaces is an expression of the wider political violence associated with Occupation in the OPT. By enclosing child protection in this way, Hart (2012) maintains, humanitarian organisations thus depoliticise child protection and fail to adequately protect children from the risks they face every day in context as a result.

Such spatialised practice, for Hart (2012), performs a function for humanitarian organisations: the enclosure of child protection activity makes targets easier to achieve and evaluate, enables an avoidance of sensitive and controversial political issues which might then impact on funding and donor or government relations as a result. Hart’s (2012) concern is that this approach relying on protection through circumscription of space, which he feels means that children’s protection needs are not fully addressed, is widely accepted and normalised at the global level in the international child protection field. This argument is well-made using empirical material from one case study context, as well as linking this up to broader child protection discourse at global level, as evidenced in the ‘grey’ literature.

For Wyness (2009), it is important to explore children’s participation and space from a more abstract perspective and he argues for a “deeper *social* space” [my emphasis], one with increased adult: child interaction. Similarly, Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) view participation as a struggle over recognition for children, linked to identity, status and power, and recommend a “dialogic approach”, focusing on an improved space of interaction between adult and child. With this approach, participation can be viewed as a space where there can be “mutual meaning creation” between adults and children and where adults can position themselves differently in relation to the child. The (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010:344) hope is that this might lead to a “deeper acknowledgement of the status and voice of children as participants in contemporary life”.

This invitation to also think about participation amidst power and space as “dialogue” is useful for this research. Graham and Fitzgerald’s (2010) concern is the quality of interaction between adults and children and about their relationships, rather than the physical spaces where these ‘take place’. They are talking about the role of respect for the validation of children in the dialogic process – not just adults ‘listening to’ children in order to extract information but forging a different relationship and producing something combined, and more representative, as a result. This, they suggest, creates “space for a certain kind of ethical practice” (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010:352), one that might be more collaborative and closer to children’s views.

The aspiration for a more meaningful, ethical process of children’s participation remains important even if questions remain about *how* this might be done. Whilst children’s participation cannot be viewed *solely* in terms of everyday adult child interactions - there are broader social and power struggles at work – such interactions impact upon children and their lives. In this sense, conceptualising participation as more about a way of being with or relating to children on an on-going basis rather than something that only certain adults in certain places occasionally ‘do’ is more constructive for children. It also moves us away from the notion that children’s participation can only ‘take place’ in a particular or circumscribed space.

Kesby (2007) puts forward a re-theorisation of children’s participation in relation to space. He critiques the “binary logic” of separate spaces of participation (or empowerment) and of control. For Kesby (2007:2819), as already discussed, power is conceptualised as relational rather than in absolute terms, as fluid and shifting, therefore participation is “always already” a form of power – it is ‘power in a different associational guise’. For Kesby (2007), it is therefore not possible to “differentiate and divide empowerment and power in and through geographical space”, in all spaces, they are already entangled (Kesby, 2007:2819).

Kesby’s (2007) “re-conceptualisation of empowerment in spatial terms” is one in which participation is viewed as a “performance”, temporarily challenging the discourses that order everyday spaces, agency and the social relations involved. The question therefore becomes how to sustain this “performance” of participation: how to “distanciate” or extend empowerment and an alternative configuration of social



relations so that they can have “purchase” outside of the “site” of participation and also so that they do not create further risks as a result (Kesby, 2007:2824).

Participants, Kesby (2007:2827) maintains, must be engaged in this work, towards creating “alternative practices in everyday spaces”.

Kesby’s (2007) retheorisation of participation in relation to power and space is grounded in the context of rural Zimbabwe. Participatory discourses and practices are viewed as spatially embedded, so that power and empowerment need to be situated in “real struggles in material spaces and places” to be fully understood (Kesby, 2005:2054). Such an approach - theorising participation in relation to space as well as the operation of power – for Kesby (2007) enables participatory practice to be “renewed” and “more theoretically aware” in context as a result. Participation, therefore, requires a conceptualisation in terms of space as well in relation to power.

Kesby (2007; 2005) works hard to integrate this sophisticated theoretical approach to his participatory practice in rural Zimbabwe and suggests ‘the reader’ must decide if ‘working with’ participation in this way can apply to their own context. This approach, combining theoretical ambition with a case study context and the complex ‘reality’ of material practices, for me, is productive and has much to offer a consideration of refugee children’s participation in their protection. It remains to be seen whether it can be productive in this particular research context.

## **2.7 Participation and child protection**

A conceptual understanding of children’s participation becomes further complicated when situated within a child protection context. Firstly, this is because, for some, the discourse of child protection is one which, rather than emphasising children’s ‘agency’, inherently encompasses notions of ‘vulnerability’ and ‘risk’. Where ‘the child’ is defined from this perspective, as relatively incompetent, incapacitated and dependent on adults for protection, there is limited ‘room’ for participation.

For example, Mayer (2011) argues that concepts of “risk” and “vulnerability” are inherent within the “contemporary child protection discourse” in the humanitarian field and, in turn, associated with a particular conceptualisation of the child.

Children and childhood, she maintains, are “conflated with vulnerability” and this produces a “universal” view of child protection: one that is group-based, essentialist

and gendered as “womenandchildren” (Mayer, 2011:11). It is also a view of child protection in which children are wholly dependent for their protection on adults and/or the State. Mayer (2011:16) demonstrates this link between children as “vulnerable” and “at risk” and the definition of child protection in different places at different times. She shows, for example, the rise of child protection in 19th century Britain as a “moral duty to save children from their helpless position of poverty and immorality” and the “forensic approach” to child protection in Britain in the late 1980s and 1990s legitimising state intervention into family life. She also maintains that these notions of ‘risk’ and ‘vulnerability’ are integral to UNHCR’s refugee protection interventions for children, depriving them of any agency. When “children are viewed and defined in terms of their vulnerabilities” in this way, their participation is limited and stifled as a result (Cockburn, 2007).

Secondly, and connected to this discourse of vulnerability, participation can be viewed as a further protection risk, for example causing inappropriate disclosure by children resulting in mental and emotional distress. As such, participation is conceptualised as a threat to vulnerable children and their well-being; something they should be protected against and which may not be in their ‘best interests’ as a whole.

Viewed thus far, children’s participation in protection, in conceptual and practical terms, therefore, presents a paradox. Vulnerable children in need of protection and resourceful children with agency are positioned on opposite sides of a divide. However, a bank of literature on children’s participation and protection, drawing on detailed empirical work in a range of settings, argues that the ‘reality’ of children’s experience conflates neither with free agency nor a permanent state of vulnerability and risk. Children are thus conceptualised in a more complex, fluid manner and can be ‘vulnerable’ *and* ‘actors’ at the same time. Related to this, there is a burgeoning – and, for me, convincing - argument in the child protection field that children’s participation is beneficial, if not essential, for their effective protection.

Johnson (2010:184) critiques the dominant conceptualisation of children as vulnerable and “victims” in need of protection amidst a “growing recognition” that “vulnerable” children in situations of crisis are both able and willing to participate in their own protection. For example, Theis and Thi Huyes (in Johnson et al., 1998:3) have explored the resources of children amidst adversity and the strategies they use

to protect themselves, to fight or evade exploitation and abuse. Similarly, Pridmore (in Johnson et al., 1998:159) has considered the ‘resilience’ of children, not just their ‘vulnerability’, amidst forced displacement. As a result of these and other studies, Hart (2002:36) notes that:

“...there is a growing understanding among academics and practitioners that children are not simply victims who must be protected or rehabilitated but are also actors who, even in the midst of widespread violence and upheaval, may have a valuable role to play.”

Clark (2007) provides a more nuanced view of young refugees and their vulnerability in her study of Congolese young people in Uganda which problematizes the NGO definition of ‘vulnerability’ and its lack of correspondence to the lived realities and self-identification of young refugees. She argues that “adults depend on children and young people to undertake a variety of tasks”, placing them in roles and positions of competence and responsibility. She also argues that young people can self-identify as ‘vulnerable’ in context and use the concept of ‘victim’ to play games to get what they need (Clark, 2007:293). As a result, assumed vulnerable characteristics do not hold true for all members of the categories in all circumstances at all times” and the author argues for a more contextual and relational view of vulnerability involving a more in-depth analysis of relationships in context and a “deeper” methodological approach. This would enable the identification of why refugees are vulnerable in certain circumstances and contexts, the process of addressing the causes, and working towards positive change.

Clark’s work is valuable since it draws on the “lived realities” and “self-identification” of young refugees: it takes their views and experiences as its starting point, rather than global level organisational protection categories, in order to better understand ‘vulnerability’. Clark (2007) also uses the life story or narrative of one particular Congolese refugee to show how identity and vulnerability can change and shift over time. This combination of a number of young refugee ‘voices’ along with the detail of one refugee’s narrative in one context is particularly effective for reflecting on categories of vulnerability and risk.

Steffen (2010) is equally dissatisfied with the view of children as permanently vulnerable. She uses empirical material from a range of participatory methods with children in her study of child participation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

(OPT) to maintain that children's experiences are not in keeping with such notions of childhood. In the OPT, children are "already decision-makers with significant responsibilities: combatants, breadwinners, heads of households, carers" - and already engaged in active participation for their own survival and protection (Steffen, 2010:1). Indeed, in most humanitarian or 'crisis settings', it is maintained, a "lack of protection in daily life is a common reality for children" and "children will seek protection or attempt to protect themselves in whatever way they can", acting in both positive and negative ways (Steffen, 2010:6). Children are not, then, purely passive and vulnerable, sitting around waiting for their latent participation to be 'activated' by an NGO. With this more nuanced view of children's vulnerability, Steffen (2010:12) suggests a 'collaborative alternative' is needed to better conceptualise children's participation in their protection in these contexts. She suggests a 'protective solidarity' with children would recognise their agency *and* vulnerability and involve supporting them and their communities to explore issues and to take decisions to manage their day-to-day crises and lives.

Denov (2010) maintains that whilst children in emergencies are frequently constructed through a framework of extremes (as "extreme victims, extreme perpetrators or extreme heroes") in reality "the lives of these children fall within the grey, ambiguous and paradoxical zones of each". Children amidst crisis, for Denov (2010) exist in an environment where "the realities of victimisation, participation and resistance" are "experienced and carried out by children in a shifting and dialectical fashion" (2010:2). They are, at different times and in different ways, vulnerable, resourceful; resilient and at risk.

Moving away from the conceptualisation of children in terms of their protection as permanently vulnerable and at risk - and therefore protected *by* others and devoid of agency - is a growing view, therefore, that children can be both 'victims' *and* 'actors' - they can participate *in* their own protection. Whilst it would not be correct to say that the participation of children in their protection is without risk - for example, for Hart (in Johnson, 1998:30), some children's experiences of trying to reveal their protection concerns have led to retaliation and shame, fear and silence as a result - there are many who argue that participation is instrumental to children's protection. For example, Lansdown (2001:7) makes the point more specifically in relation to

children's protection from abuse, stating that: "denying children a voice encourages impunity for abusers" and "children have to be able to tell their stories to those with the authority" to take the action required. For refugee children in particular, Liden and Rusten (2007:273-5) argue that their participation can be crucial for determining child-specific forms of persecution and for these children's access to international protection as a result.

A relevant milestone in the argument for children's participation in their protection is Newman's report on *Voices out of Conflict* (2004) and her paper on *Protection through Participation* (Newman, 2005). Both focus on children affected by political crisis and forced migration. Drawing effectively and cumulatively on the views from and work of protection organisations such as IRC and the Women's Commission, as well as academics at the Refugee Studies Centre (Oxford University), Newman (2004) captures a shared dissatisfaction with the international protection regime and its ability to effectively address the protection needs of adolescents and youth. This failure, she suggests, is not due to external obstacles but to the misconceived ideas of practitioners and policy-makers about young people and their protection concerns in situations of crisis, for example overly focusing on physical protection and security against external attack at the expense of the dangers from within communities themselves. Newman maintains (2005) that adults frequently misinterpret young people's lives, failing to address their most pressing concerns or reveal their sources of fear and distress and even undertake actions that are detrimental for their protection. For Newman, the conceptual shift required is towards participation as 'a paradigm for protection'. She views this as the most 'viable means' for improving the protection of war-affected adolescents and youth:

"Young people's participation in protection mechanisms is necessary in order to make them more relevant, effective and sustainable and to improve young people's chances of survival and well-being in situations of extreme adversity" (Newman, 2004:3).

Such a shift reconceptualises young people from beneficiaries of humanitarian action to actively being involved in their design. Young people, she suggests, already have "a strong basis for protection" amongst themselves and already "use their agency in a variety of productive, imaginative ways" (2005:26).

What is useful about Newman's (2004; 2005) work is that it is conceptually aspirational but is also firmly related to institutions and their humanitarian practice 'on the ground'. Participation as a paradigm is not just a discursive shift but is discussed in relation to multiple practical challenges: the many cultural, logistical, social, political, financial and ethical constraints. There is an awareness of the institutional barriers to participation in protection, the 'traditional' way of 'doing' protection which is pre-determined at international headquarters rather than 'based on young people's beliefs, practices and realities' in context (Newman, 2005:29).

There is, then, a politics to child protection in the humanitarian field, tied up with the institutions involved. Mayer and Evans (2012) explore the global protection priorities and strategies of UNHCR, how child protection is institutionally constructed, and set this against community perceptions and the experiences of young refugees in Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal. Mayer and Evans (2012) show that how childhood and categories of children in need of protection are defined by UNHCR does not reflect the risks faced and strategies put in place by children and their communities in context. They argue that it focuses on unaccompanied and separated children as the most vulnerable to the neglect of other children who are also vulnerable and at risk of harm. They also show how children use strategies for their own self-protection, for example early marriage can be used in this way, and can thus be perceived contextually as a form of resilience rather than by UNHCR as solely protection risk. By engaging children in their research and in the articulation of their protection priorities in context, Mayer and Evans (2012) aim to demonstrate the inadequacy of a blanket approach to child protection which does not take these local views into account.

Based on their research, Mayer and Evans (2012:533) critique the normalised thinking and pre-defined categories of risk associated with global child protection interventions and advocate for a much more contextual and participatory approach. There is, they maintain:

“...a need for researchers, policymakers and practitioners to spend time with young people living in different situations in order to understand how they perceive the risks they face and what choices and solutions are available to them.”

The authors encourage further research on UNHCR and the child protection interventions that are operational in other settings and a reflection on the degree to which the international approach to child protection is responsive to local contexts and concerns. Their insights, they suggest, may be relevant to other settings where UNHCR is responsible for responding to children's protection needs.

## **2.8 The refugee camp as a political space**

The refugee camp is the most iconic space associated with refugees and one that is highly political. Drawing on extensive and impressive bank of documentary evidence, Malkki (1995) shows how the 'spatial isolation and management of refugees' in camps has specific historical origins, tied up with the operation of power. Pre-dating the discursive and institutional association of refugees with international humanitarianism, Malkki (1995) shows how, towards the end of World War II, there was a specifically 'military gaze' on displacement - a fear of the potential insecurity associated with the mass movement of refugees throughout Europe. Indeed, the refugee camps at the time were thought to have appropriated many of their spatial and disciplinary practices from military models. At this point historically, from 'ad hoc' and temporary beginnings, "...the refugee camp became enmeshed as a standardised, generalizable technology of power in the management of mass displacement". As such, the refugee camp became "a vital device of power":

"The spatial concentration and ordering of people that it enabled, as well as the administrative and bureaucratic processes it facilitated within its boundaries, had far-reaching consequences. The segregation of nationalities; the orderly organisation of repatriation...; medical and hygienic programs and quarantining; 'perpetual screening' and the accumulation of documentation on the inhabitants of the camps.... were some of the operations that the spatial concentration and ordering of people enabled or facilitated" Malkki (1995:498).

In the 1950s, refugees began to be perceived as more a humanitarian problem than a military one, for example with the establishment of UNHCR in 1951. Malkki shows how once again, 'the refugee camp as a productive device of power played a vital role':

"The camps made people accessible to a whole gamut of interventions, including study and documentation, and the postwar figure of the modern refugee largely took shape in these camps" (1995:100).

Refugee camps then are political instruments for both governments and humanitarian organisations like UNHCR. Despite their current-day presentation as standardised or normalised practice, the inevitable solution to the mass movement of refugees, Malkki draws on Loescher (in Malkki 1995:504) to highlight their function for governments and their ‘intensely political’ motivation: “mass migrations create domestic instability, generate interstate tension and threaten international security.” Similarly, Malkki (1996:378) critically reflects on UNHCR’s explicitly non-political role and how humanitarian interventions “tend to be constituted as the opposite of political ones”, an opposition that is “taken for granted”. Refugee movements, and their spatial control, are, as Malkki points out (1995:505) “inescapably political phenomena” but UNHCR’s apolitical positioning has, in her view, contributed to the “relative absence of critical questioning of the refugee camp as an apparatus” for the control of space and movement in relation to refugees. Whilst elsewhere Malkki (1996:379) makes it clear that she does not “dismiss humanitarian interventions as useless”, she does advocate for refugees, refugee camps and humanitarian interventions to be differently conceptualised and framed.

Moving beyond this historical perspective, the refugee camp as a political space in the Ugandan context in particular is given consideration by Kaiser (2006). For Kaiser (2006), a reflection on refugee camps (or ‘settlements’) in Uganda is reminiscent of wider political debates around encampment and whether camps are ‘an appropriate, effective and ethical way of meeting the needs of refugees’ (2006:597). Host governments, notes Kaiser (2006), tend to prefer encampment as a refugee policy – it makes refugees visible (and therefore encourages burden sharing, for example by UNHCR), contains any security threat they might represent and controls any unmanaged dispersal. Uganda’s settlement policy, deriving its legal basis from the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA), demonstrates the ways in which national security and a drive to repatriate ‘alien’ refugees is the predominant concern for the host government and its encampment of refugees. In addition, there is evidence that the preference and policy of encampment is supported if not encouraged by UNHCR (Kaiser, 2006). Certainly elsewhere, authors such as Jamal (2003) and Black (1998) have written about the benefits for humanitarian organisations and the management of their interventions for keeping refugees in



camps. For Kaiser (2006), there is a clear political and institutional drive in Uganda to confine refugees to settlements and restrict their movement in space.

Based on extensive and rich qualitative research over a ten-year period in multiple research sites in Uganda, both inside and outside of refugee settlements, Kaiser (2006) explores the 'needs and desires' of Sudanese refugees and *their* attitudes to encampment. She uses this empirical material to question the portrayal of refugee settlements in the Ugandan context as 'un-problematically successful'. Whilst Kaiser (2006) stresses that, based on her empirical research, refugees' attitudes to living both inside and outside of refugee settlements in Uganda are not uniform - indeed, they are overlapping, fluid and change over time, with both 'reasons to stay and reasons to go' - there are some strong motivations for refugees not wanting to be so spatially confined. She notes that Ugandan refugee settlements are in isolated rural areas, where the potential for self-reliance is compromised by the quality of the land, the poor climate, distance to markets and insufficient capital and agricultural inputs as well as decreasing assistance over time under the country's Self-Reliance Strategy as the protracted nature of the refugee's situation extends. However, due to the restriction of GoU and UNHCR assistance to refugees to those in settlements and the limitations placed on livelihood opportunities outside of the settlements, refugees are, notes Kaiser (2006) caught between 'a camp and a hard place' and she goes onto conclude:

“The findings of the research suggest that most refugees who live in settlements do so because they have no option but to rely on the minimal assistance which is provided to them there, even though conditions in settlements are far from optimal” (Kaiser, 2006:616).

Kaiser (2006) is clear that it is not a “neutral fact” that refugees are impoverished and tend to stay in settlements to gain the assistance provided for them but that the “political and institutional response” to refugees in Uganda *constructs* a situation where capacities and opportunities for livelihood generation are stripped away from them and settlements are presented as the “answer to their problems” (2006:616).

This conceptualisation of the refugee camp, both from Malkki's (1005;1996) historical perspective and Kaiser's (2006) context-based approach, makes it clear that the refugee settlement cannot simply be a spatial 'container' for research on refugee children, their participation and protection but must also be part of what is

problematized and critiqued. The humanitarian organisations and government institutions operational in context, their particular agendas and the restrictions placed on refugee children as a result of living in this setting is part of the 'picture' of refugee children's participation and needs to be reflected upon. Whilst the refugee camp does not have to be – as will be shown below – presented as a 'total institution', with absolute control over the life and experiences of refugees, a critical edge must be maintained, one that keeps in mind the camp as political space.

Harrell-Bond (2002), based on her own empirical work and that of others in refugee camps across East Africa, considers another, more micro, level of the politics associated with refugee camps. Moving away from the broader governmental and institutional levels, Harrell-Bond (2002) focuses on the day-to-day interaction of refugees with humanitarian practitioners (or 'helpers') within refugee camp or settlement settings and the power dynamics involved. For Harrell-Bond (2006), examining such relationships at the micro level provides a reflection of what is 'going wrong' on a larger scale with humanitarian interventions since the "main context within which the distribution of internationally funded assistance to refugees takes place is the refugee camp' (2002:56).

Power in camps, Harrell-Bond (2002) maintains, is exercised through coercion and discipline and she provides multiple examples of 'inhumane' treatment 'meted out' to refugees, for example at UNHCR or IP offices or whilst waiting for refugee status cases to be heard, from those 'delegated to help them'. For Harrell-Bond (2002), the basis of this inhumane treatment in such camps lies in the conceptualisation of aid as charity rather than the fulfilment of basic human rights, placing the 'giver' (practitioner) in a position of power over the 'receiver' (refugee), a judge of who is 'deserving' in the face of limited resources and complex in-country dynamics. Added to this, notes Harrell-Bond (2002) is a particular lack of institutional accountability to refugees - an 'absence of mechanisms in UNHCR for determining citizen or consumer satisfaction' – so that refugees and practitioners are 'trapped' in an asymmetrical relationship of power. Harrell-Bond's drawing of attention to this issue and use of a significant amount of empirical material that might otherwise be 'hidden' or 'ignored' is an important contribution to the literature as well as to a full contextualisation of refugees' lives and the challenges of living in camps.

There is also some research on the refugee camp in relation to refugee children. Harrell-Bond (2000:1) questions whether “refugee camps are good for children. She outlines a plethora of reasons why children in particular might not want to be confined to refugee camps: restriction of their movement, overcrowding, insecurity, family breakdown, lack of hygiene, clothing, food; lack of education and pressure to contribute through labour to the household economy (Harrell-Bond, 2002). Refugee camps are, she maintains, more about serving the interests of bureaucratic institutions rather than most appropriately addressing refugee children’s needs.

Whilst here Harrell-Bond’s (2002) list pertains to more tangible and physical restrictions on children living in a refugee camp context, it is essential to consider the ways in which children might also be confined through their conceptualisation as ‘refugees’.

Malkki (1995, 1996) and others (Rajaram, 2002, Pupavak, 2008) have taken a critical approach to humanitarian discourse and its positioning of refugees, including in relation to their participation. Malkki (1995) writes about the “essentialist discourse” of NGOs and the media – constructing ‘the refugee’, ‘the refugee experience’ and ‘the refugee condition’, “leaching out” any politics and history from refugee identity. For Malkki (1996:398), any diversity and complexity amongst refugees is concealed by such representations: “refugees stop being specific persons” and become “pure victims”; a “mere, bare, naked or minimal humanity” (Malkki, 1996:390); a helpless, “huddled mass” (Malkki, 1995:511). Pupavak (2008:271) documents a humanitarian discourse, predominantly characterised by refugee women and children, portraying refugees as helpless, vulnerable and “troubled victims”. Rajaram (2002:254) explores the representation of refugees by humanitarian organisations and finds them portrayed as “mute” victims, defined in terms of their needs rather than their rights. A common trope identified by all three in this discourse of vulnerability is what Pupavak (2008:276) calls a “health and trauma paradigm”, with a construction of refugees from “the medical viewpoint” (Dona, 2010:3) as incapacitated, traumatised and helpless. For Malkki (1995, 1996), Pupavak (2008) and Rajaram (2002), these discourses remove any agency, decision-making power or ‘voice’ on the part of refugees – there is no room for their participation and they are silenced as a result. Malkki (1995:511) points out that the silencing of refugees has significant

consequences for the interventions that take place in refugee crises. Indeed, Malkki (1995:511) suggests, it is amidst such conditions of forced displacement that the “question of voice truly reveals its importance”.

Refugees can therefore be fixed in identity as well as in refugee camp space.

Pittaway et al. (2007) argue against this dominant conceptualisation of ‘the refugee’:

“It is wrong to think that the experience of being displaced, living under external protection, lacking day-to-day security, poor health, lack of reliable information about home, all of which are common to the refugee experience, undermine autonomous agency altogether” (Pittaway et al., 2007:309).

Ramadan’s (2013:65) article on “spatialising the refugee camp” - “an analytical strategy for understanding refugee camp space” - presents a more nuanced view of refugee participation. At one level, Ramadan (2013:65) presents the refugee camp as a ‘container’, a space within which humanitarian assistance and refugee protection take place:

“The refugee camp is a temporary space in which refugees may receive humanitarian relief and protection until a durable solution can be found to their situation”.

However, at another level, he goes on to show that there have been many other conceptualisations of the refugee camp, for example, as space of hospitality, discipline, exception or identity. The refugee camp therefore becomes a constructed space, produced and reproduced in different ways.

In association with such changing conceptualisations of the camp, refugee agency and participation are differently viewed. Ramadan (2013) takes as an example Agamben’s refugee camp as “space of exception”, existing outside and ‘other’ to mainstream society with refugees silenced, disenfranchised and disempowered. This conceptualisation of the refugee camp and of refugees without agency - reduced to “bare life” - is one that he rejects. Ramadan (2013:70) suggests a more relational view of refugee camp space - the refugee camp as product of the inter-relations between refugees:

“The camp is the people within it and the relations between them: the space and the society are one formation, a ‘camp-society’.”

In this view, the refugee camp is constituted and functions spatially through the “everyday geopolitics” and material practices of refugees, in turn viewed more constructively as “a form of political agency” rather than “the silent expressions of ‘bare life’” (Ramadan, 2013:67). Camps for Ramadan (2013:70) can be “active arenas of agency” within which refugees can resist marginalisation and organise themselves accordingly in a multiplicity of ways.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

A conceptual exploration of refugee children’s participation in their protection in a refugee camp setting is challenging but provides a rich intellectual field for empirical research. In this chapter, I have explored the literature on children’s participation and positioned myself in relation to a set of intertwined concepts and amidst a number of key debates. Rather than approaching refugee children’s participation through a single conceptual lens, which might reduce complexity, a multi-theoretical conceptual framework is retained. This is an approach which is richer as a result. Indeed, refugee camps and settlements are highly complex settings (politically, socially, ethically...) and it is important to avoid being too reductive, to try to retain such complexity whilst conducting empirical research. In addition, the children in such settings, their experiences, views and concerns, are often under-researched and under-theorised. A broader-based multi-conceptual approach thus provides a multi-directional ‘launch pad’ for further research, opening up avenues that need to be explored. From a pragmatic perspective, since the research is more than theoretical and about children’s lives in refugee camps, it needs to remain open to any tools (both practical and theoretical) which might provide a more productive way forward. This multi-dimensional theoretical framework thus informs the research and is used to reflect on the empirical material. It is also returned to when considering the research findings and academic contribution of the research. A summary of the main components of this theoretical approach are outlined below.

Firstly, a conceptualisation of child participation in technical and methodological terms has its value. Child-friendly methods and the quality of the participatory process – the nature of interaction between adults and children – are important. This is because this is about how children *experience* their participation in practice and this needs to be empirically explored through the research. This approach can be of

value alongside, and does not need to be completely discarded in favour of, the approaches and perspectives below.

Secondly, a rights-based conceptualisation of 'the child', a child with agency and the right to participate, is critical, if aspirational in many contexts, when children are so frequently dismissed, undervalued and ignored. It places value on children, their specific contributions and what they have to say. The exploration of this conceptualisation of the child demonstrates that children can be constructed in different ways. How children are predominantly conceptualised can influence the potential for their participation, be enabling or limiting as a result. The notion of 'the child' should, then, not be taken for granted but its constructions in context and the implications of these explored.

A purely technical approach to children's participation with a conceptualisation of children in terms of their agency, however, conceals the power struggles and constraints involved. Children's participation is political and the interests and agendas of a range of actors (refugee communities, humanitarian agencies, government bodies) and their impact on children's ability to participate in their protection needs to be explored. Power and agency are not conceptualised in absolute terms but as more fluid, relational and contextual. The complexities of children's agency and the operation of power in context in relation to children's participation in their protection thus require investigation. A more fluid conceptualisation of power opens up the possibility of change, albeit at certain levels or scales.

The politics of children's participation finds expression in and is constrained by space. Space is not just a 'container' within which participation 'takes place'. Children's participation is influenced by context, can be associated with different spaces and scales, be enclosed or boxed in, an expression of power dynamics at work and with repercussions for children's participation and lives. How and why children's participation takes a particular spatial form, whose interests this serves, how this impacts on children and what reconfigurations (spatial, social, political), if any, might evolve are important areas for the research. Indeed, this spatial perspective on refugee children's participation in their protection provides a more tangible 'way in' to its consideration in context and to an exploration of its relationship with power.

Children tend to be conceptualised as vulnerable and at risk in relation to their protection, which presents a barrier to their participation. An alternative view and one proposed here, is that children's participation is instrumental to their effective protection and that children can be both vulnerable and have agency. They can be conceptualised in a more hybrid and nuanced way. It is important to explore through the case study the association of children and their protection with vulnerability and risk, the functions this serves and how this impacts on their participation. It is also important to explore the nature of the relationship between child protection and participation as conceptualised for children in context and what this means for children as a result.

Refugee children's participation in their protection can be explored in relation to power and space from multiple perspectives. For example, at a more macro level, questioning the existence of the refugee camp itself and implications for children's protection and participation. Such a critique is relevant, appropriate and important to pursue. The wider political issues of refugee camps, their impact on the lives of children constrained within them and the wider structural processes at work cannot be ignored. For this piece of research, whilst the focus is on the power dynamics at play and their spatial expression *within* a refugee camp context, in particular in relation to refugee protection procedures, these more micro-level dynamics are, it is argued, also important to explore. They have significant implications for children's interactions with adults, for their protection and everyday lives and ultimately connect up to and have potential to speak to the wider issues and concerns.

Prior to reflecting on the empirical material from Kyaka II in relation to this theoretical framework, the research methodology is explored in Chapter Three.

## **Chapter Three: Towards a participatory methodology and an ethical approach**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter One set out in brief children's changing - and more participatory - position within research. Whilst opportunities for children's participation are indeed on the increase, Hart (2006:9) suggests that statements are still made about children when "we should be producing knowledge *with* them" [emphasis added]. Hart and Tyrer (2006:16) maintain that "even now, much of the research about children takes little or no interest in their views". For Hart (2006:9), we still need to be "putting children in the picture" through their increased participation and there is an imperative for a more "child-focused approach" to research.

It was also suggested in Chapter One that there are also a number of methodological and ethical challenges involved in engaging (particularly refugee) children in research and attempting to access children's perspectives and views. This chapter sets out the approach taken to the research before reflecting on some of these key concerns. It explores what might be the "most appropriate" methods (Matthews and Limb, 1999:64) for accessing "children's worlds" (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008:502) as well as the ethical dilemmas involved in research with refugee children. The chapter then describes the methods used with refugee children in practice in Kyaka II, and the practical challenges involved. Finally, the complexities of data analysis and the writing up process are outlined, as well as some of the strategies employed to validate the research.

### **3.2 Research approach and design**

The purpose of this research is to describe, explore and attempt to explain refugee children's participation in their protection in a refugee camp setting and to outline any areas for change. Since the research seeks to engage with humanitarian workers and refugee children to access their perspectives, views and ideas - to gain an in-depth understanding rather than to gather scientific 'facts' - it can be described as a piece of 'qualitative' research.



The key components of qualitative research are often described as research that is interested in meanings, interpretations and understandings and which tends to be holistic, context specific and inductive, with limited assumptions made in advance (Robson, 2002, Bong, 2002, Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). As a result, some of the approaches most commonly associated with qualitative research are the case study (a context specific framework requiring lengthy involvement) and a general inductive or ‘grounded theory’ approach (developing theory ‘upwards’ from the data ‘on the ground’).

A case study has been deliberately selected and provides a range of benefits for this research. A case study, as Robson (2002:178) points out, is a research *approach*:

“...a *strategy* for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence...” [emphasis added].

It incorporates different research methods but it is not a method in itself. The case study involves the development of detailed knowledge based on long-term involvement and data collection using a range of different methods, cross-referenced or ‘triangulated’ to build up a detailed understanding in context. Given that this thesis aims to comprehend present-day refugee children’s participation in protection from multiple perspectives within a refugee camp setting, a case study framework provides the kind of in-depth understanding required. The research - and the methods employed - are situated, framed and grounded by the case study and, as such, enable a coherent, cumulative, detailed and considered approach.

Such a detailed focus within a case study context does not preclude the wider application of research or connecting up with broader issues and concerns. Although, as Robson (2002:179) points out, there is some ambiguity towards the case study approach - an “uncertainty about the place and value of studying cases” - for Ziebland, Pope and Mays (2000:115) “a single case study design may be the most successful way of generating theory”. Indeed, whilst a case study approach might be criticised for its lack of transferability, the focus of this research is on protection procedures that are common to most refugee settings around the world. In this sense, there is the opportunity to broaden out from this case study to other camps and refugee contexts; to the implications for the protection of refugee children as a

whole. For Johnson (2010), this widening out process from a case study is essential to look at the “macro-sociological” context and power dynamics that exist at this level. Similarly, for Williams (2005), the spaces and scales involved in any case study need to be viewed in relation to children’s areas of influence and their ability to effect any policy change. The inter-relationship between children’s participation, space and power was considered in Chapter Two: it will be returned to in Chapter Eight in relation to how this empirical case study might ‘speak’ to policy and practice in different spaces and at other scales.

In practice, the case study approach for this research involved a total of four months living in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement (Figure 3), spread out over three different visits between March and October 2012. The first two visits were focused on data collection; the third a follow-up visit, returning to former participants, seeking to gain feedback on, confirm and build on the interim findings of the previous two periods spent in the ‘field’. During these visits, the researcher was based in the settlement full-time: living and working alongside humanitarian practitioners and in daily contact with refugees, both informally and through the research interventions themselves.



Figure 3: Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, a case study approach.

In Kyaka II, the main respondents for the research were refugee children (6-16 years), as well as humanitarian practitioners from UNHCR and its partner organisations working on protection in the settlement. 21 practitioners were

interviewed as part of the research and 330 refugee children engaged through participatory workshops (230 children aged 11-16 and 100 children aged 6-10). Practitioners were selected based on their role and remit in relation to refugee protection, for example UNHCR staff responsible for delivering protection interviews with refugee children in Kyaka II. These individuals were identified via key contacts in the field, based on written permission from UNHCR in Geneva. An email with a summary of the design and purpose of the research and a consent form to complete were sent to all adult respondents. A face-to-face introductory meeting was also held to explain about the research with each respondent prior to consent being formally given and interviews taking place (Appendices A and B).

A diverse group of refugee children (those attending school and not in school; girls and boys; separated and unaccompanied children; children from different communities in the settlement) was deliberately selected for the research. This was in keeping with the focus of the thesis: refugee children's participation in protection rather than the experiences of one particular group of refugee children per se. Those engaged in the research were between 6 and 16 years old - a broad age range to include younger children who, for a range of reasons (including assumed capacity, protection risks) are often excluded from research. Girls were also pro-actively selected, recognising the more restrictive view of the girl child in the refugee community and the additional barriers to their participation.

Refugee children were identified by Community Protection Workers: refugee incentive workers with a child protection remit working for GIZ. These Community Protection Workers had most contact with and knowledge of the children (and their families) living in Kyaka II. The Community Protection Workers were provided with a translated information sheet on the purpose of the research to use as a basis for explanation to community leaders, parents, guardians and children and consent forms for adults and guardians to complete and sign (Appendices C, D and E). They targeted and recruited children in groups of 10-15 (for example 10 secondary school girls; 10 unaccompanied children). For identification purposes, selected children were given named invitations with details of the workshops they were due to attend. An age-appropriate briefing was given to all children face-to-face at the beginning of all workshops for the purpose of their additional and informed consent.

As with much qualitative research, the process of sampling research respondents was purposive in nature. This process is not intended to be statistical or random, nor is it claiming to be representative in any numerical way. It reflects what is being studied and why. Ziebland, Pope and Mays (2000:115) note that qualitative studies are not designed to be statistically generalizable: they are not about a significant or representative sample size. Instead, sample size in qualitative research tends to be linked to the research question and analytical requirements of the research, for example there have been sufficient respondents when the point of data saturation has been reached.

A case study, as already mentioned, is a research strategy: it incorporates methods but is not a method in itself. For Holloway and Todres (2003:346), qualitative research must take a “family” approach to the selection of research methods: there needs to be some association between them. This research, the purpose of which is to access, analyse and interpret the experiences, understandings and perspectives of refugee children and practitioners, is based on interaction, exploratory communication and observation and employs a set of methods appropriate to this task.

The methods used with practitioners in Kyaka II included semi-structured interviews and, to a lesser extent, group participatory workshops. Participatory workshops, using age-appropriate activities, were the main method used with all groups of refugee children and constituted the methodological ‘core’ of the research. Observation was used to gather information on the settlement context and the operation of different aspects of the refugee protection process and for ‘triangulation’ purposes (outlined in more detail below). Photographs were taken of the children’s workshops and the research context in general and some of the children’s post-workshop evaluations were filmed. These methods are all qualitative in nature, complementary to each other and often associated with a case study approach. The methods, a rationale for their use and some reflections on their application in context, are outlined in more detail below.

Interviews can be classified according to their degree of structure or standardisation (Robson, 2002:270). Unstructured interviews, for example, have a general area of interest in mind but allow the conversation to “develop where it will”. Semi-

structured interviews, on the other hand, have predetermined questions but also the flexibility for change, depending on the interviewee. Questions in semi-structured interviews tend to be more open and exploratory, interested in individuals' understanding and accounts, and where these might lead. The underlying interview structure includes introductory comments, key questions on a list of topic headings, a set of prompts for the interviewee and closing remarks (Appendix F).

Semi-structured interviews were deliberately chosen for this research because of their association with a more flexible qualitative research design and with research interested in perceptions, meanings, beliefs and views. 21 interviews were held with humanitarian practitioners during the research in Kyaka II. The interviews focused on what practitioners were doing, thinking and feeling about children's participation in protection in the settlement. Whilst this information might, to a certain extent, be found in the 'grey' literature - for example, reports from UNHCR - such desk-based research does not reveal what is happening currently 'on the ground' and the particular challenges involved. It does not give us the views and opinions of individual practitioners, any 'culture' or accepted wisdom of what works in context nor the opportunity to have a 'live' discussion to explore any issues in-depth.

There are a range of issues to be considered when using semi-structured interviews. For example, in practical terms, Robson (2002:274) explores recording data in interviews and other considerations in relation to language, interview environment and time. In Kyaka II, research interviews were digitally recorded and then later fully transcribed. Whilst recording interviews seemed the most accurate way to proceed, some interviewees were anxious of the implications of 'going on record' in this way and had to be reassured in terms of their anonymity as well as the ethical nature of the research. Interviews with practitioners were conducted in English without the need for an interpreter: Ugandan practitioners were fluent in English as were the Community Protection Workers who were interviewed. Interviews were held in a confidential environment - either in an empty office, a private room or space outside. Getting most practitioners to agree to an interview was not difficult; ensuring this took place was more of a challenge due to the multiple demands on their time.

In addition to individual interviews, two participatory workshops were run with groups of practitioners from different organisations in Kyaka II: one at the beginning and one at the end of the field research. Compared with individual interviews, group workshops can enable the mapping out of a contextual, cultural or organisational view and interaction between participants can lead to information that is different in nature due to discussion amongst colleagues and the generation of debate. In practical terms, workshops also allow a large amount of information to be gathered from several busy people with competing priorities in one location in a relatively short space of time.

In practice, the participatory workshops held with practitioners in Kyaka II not only produced useful empirical information - for example, annotated 'maps' of refugee children's participation in protection (shown in Chapter Four) - but also provided an opportunity to meet, build relationships with and get advice from practitioners as a 'community', as well as to be transparent and to share information about the research. There was appreciation on the part of practitioners for their opportunity to engage in the research: one participant described the workshop - because of its "creativity, activities and games"- as the "first of its kind" for practitioners in Kyaka II.

Observation was used in the research both as a data collection method and as a form of data 'triangulation'. Observation can be a sensitive and flexible research method, which values the subjective understanding of the researcher and enables the study of people 'in situ' or in context. Triangulation is a cross-checking process using a combination of different methods in the same study to enhance the rigour of the research (Robson, 2002:174). In Kyaka II, observation included general observation whilst working in and moving about the settlement; visits to different camp locations, observation of specific protection procedures and conversations with practitioners and refugee children day-to-day. Observation also involved 'sitting in' with interpreters and protection staff on a series of different protection interviews with unaccompanied refugee children. This formed a particularly important part of the observation – and triangulation - process since observations could be compared with children's own views on these protection interviews recorded through other means.

Observation in research is often spoken about in terms of 'participant observation'. Laurier (in Clifford and Valentine, 2003:138) asserts that there is no set template for participant observation except the process of recording, data analysis and commentary, building up "detailed descriptions from the ground". Laurier also describes observation as "a simple skill of doing and watching" (in Clifford and Valentine, 2003-146). It is important, however, to critique this, pointing out the impact of any observer (researcher) on the environment, the behaviour of the people around them and the 'filter' of the observer's perspectives on any observations recorded. As outlined in Chapter One, representation is not a straightforward, objective process but the "describer's description" (Geertz, 1988:144-45): the observer influences, shapes and edits the observations being made.

As a strategy for addressing the complex 'positionality' of the author, the aim is to be as explicit as possible about the different influences on the research, any bias or error - to be 'reflexive' - and to try to write this into the work itself. One tool for such reflexivity is the research diary: a notebook updated on an on-going basis, recording the thoughts, ideas and moods of the researcher alongside the process of data collection. The research diary records a 'story' or narrative about the research based on the personal reflections of the researcher, including the 'events' (personal, social, humanitarian, security-related) that all have an impact on the research. As such, it helps to situate the work amidst different fields of influence and show the shifting positioning of the researcher in relation to the research. It is important to note, however, that researcher reflexivity about positionality needs to include influences both within and outside the empirical research context. There are institutional and organisational limitations on the research, as outlined in Chapter One, that extend beyond 'the field'.

Photography and film were also used in the field research both to document the research process and materials and feedback from refugee children. In the same way that observation is not a simple skill of doing and watching, photography and film are not just a straightforward means of recording what we see. Much has been written on the use of visual methods in research and the 'production' of visual images - for example, Hughes-Freeland et al. (2007:92) explore a "politics of perception" and critique the "disembodied vision" they consider integral to the

visual discourses of NGOs. They suggest we need to consider the importance of “being visible” for marginalised groups alongside that of “having a voice” and argue for a more “radical ethics of seeing and image production” as a result (Hughes-Freeland et al., 2007:95). It is therefore important to be mindful of the images produced, from whose perspective, what is excluded or omitted and what is being communicated as a result about the ‘subjects’ of the research.

In practice in Kyaka II, the use of photography and film to record children’s workshops and feedback presented both logistical and ethical challenges for the research. The venues used for the children’s workshops were often too dark, overcrowded, noisy or full of distractions for clear visual images and audible dialogue to be recorded. Through a process of ‘trial and error’, more appropriate venues for filming away from the main workshop activities had to be secured over time. Consent was gained specifically for taking photographs and the use of film from parents / guardians and the children themselves and it was important for children to feel that they could share their views on film in a more private space, where they were more comfortable to talk. Providing hard copies of some of the photographs to the children after the workshops was important for recognition of their input and contribution to the research.

As noted above, participatory techniques used in workshops with refugee children formed the methodological ‘core’ of the research. There are multiple participatory techniques for engaging with and getting the views of children: drama and role play, drawing and model-making, story-telling and puppetry: a generally more creative, active, game-based and interactive approach to research. This research drew on such methods to design participatory workshops for groups of refugee children (aged 6-16 years) in Kyaka II. Through a range of games and activities, children were encouraged to identify the challenges to their participation in the refugee protection process and to suggest areas for change. 16 workshops were run with different groups of children in a range of different contexts mapping out their concerns. 10 groups were then revisited - in a second phase - to review a summary of this information and reflect on how refugee protection might be delivered differently for children.



The debate around such participatory methods and the ways in which they might be considered more effective and appropriate for research with children needs to be briefly outlined. In his description of child-focused research, Hart (2006:9) emphasises the point that children must be able to participate in the research process and “rejects the notion that children’s experiences, needs and aspirations are adequately articulated by adults however well-intentioned”. However, debate exists about whether access to children’s knowledge by adults - whether through participatory methods or any other means - is achievable at all (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008, Carter, 2009, O’Kane, 2008, Davis, 1998, Matthews and Limb, 1999). Gallacher and Gallagher (2008:502) , for example, argue that the idea that researchers are able to access “children’s worlds” assumes that children are able to “fully know themselves” - a view of children that they reject. Christensen (2004) questions whether adult researchers can engage with children’s worlds since adults cannot be “native insiders”, i.e. they are not children themselves.

For some, the answer has been for the researcher to try to position him/herself in a different and less ‘adult’ role. Davis (1998) draws on the work of others to provide examples of this, for example the “non-authoritarian adult” (Fine, 1987; Corsaro, 1985), the “least adult” (Mandell, 1991) and the “friend” (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988). All of these advocate for some alternative position for the researcher involving working more closely with children or a breaking down of the barriers between the adult and the child (Davis, 1998:329). Whilst there is merit in considering an alternative positioning of the adult researcher - how and in what ways he/she relates to the child - there is still the sense that adults can never be complete participants in children’s worlds. For an adult researcher, as an adult, access to and interpretation of children’s views and understandings will always be incomplete.

O’Kane (2008) and Davis (1998) argue that participatory research techniques offer greater access to the views of the child or, at least, allow children’s views and opinions to come to the fore. O’Kane (2008) suggests that participatory methods using song, drama, drawing, mapping and story-telling recognise the biological and structural constraints on children and allow for communication that builds upon their abilities. Davis (1998:328-9) cites an extensive bank of literature on participatory, child-led alternatives to the “social scientific tradition of face-to-face interview

techniques” that he feels can make children feel more part of and able to engage in research. For example: the use of pictures and photo prompts (Curry and Russ, 1985; Backett and Alexander, 1991); communication through paintings and stories (James, 1995); drawing families or writing about futures (Levin, 1994 and Hallden, 1994) and using toys, video or role play to act out the issues in children’s day-to-day lives (Lentz, 1985; Beresford, 1997 and Hill et al 1996).

Different participatory methods are, of course, appropriate for children of different ages and abilities but, for O’Kane (2008) and Davis (1998), the overall benefits of such methods include that they are more familiar, less threatening and build trust and relationships quickly. As a result, they suggest children can feel more part of and in control of the research process; children are more comfortable and better able to communicate their views and are thought to have a more positive experience of research as a result. It is important to note that, for some (O’Kane, 2008, Davis, 1998) it is not just that more information might come from children through using such participatory methods and techniques but that a different *kind* of information might be gained, one that is not accessible through other means.

### **3.3 Ethical research with refugee children**

Research with refugee children is not only a methodological challenge but also a highly ethical one. For Sinclair (2004:116), ethics reflect the “power relations between researchers and subjects”. For some, research with children is particularly distinguished by a certain differential in power. O’Kane (2008), for example, maintains that research with children involves a power imbalance because of the difference in status between children and adults. Valentine (in Carter, 2009:161) claims that issues involved in research with adults are “refracted in particular ways in child-orientated research” because of these “unequal relationships of power”:

“...the way that adults mediate access to children; the legal complexities of children’s position as minors; and the particular nature of the environments...in which researchers usually encounter young people”.

Similarly, for Morrow and Richards (in Thomas and O’Kane, 1998), “the biggest ethical challenge for researchers working with children” is “the disparities in power and status” between an adult and a child.

For adults conducting research with children, then, a particular power differential is thought to be involved, creating a major ethical challenge as a result. In a refugee setting, where basic survival needs and human rights are priorities and children have been displaced from their home, their support networks and have very little control over their own lives, it could seem highly unethical for any research to take place with these children at all.

Such ethical concerns have fed a caution in relation to research with children, including refugee children, on the basis that it is too imbalanced, risky or sensitive, and might cause further harm. Indeed, in relation to participatory research methods in such emergency contexts, Chambers and Mayoux (2003) consider them time-consuming for respondents, extractive rather than empowering, falsely raising expectations and revealing information that can be damaging to children in other ways. For Coomaraaswamy (in Johnson et al., 1998:162) research in conflict situations in particular can be a process of revisiting painful experiences and involve much doubt over the researcher's ability to appropriately and adequately respond.

In an academic research context, an argument for sacrificing children's participation in order to better protect them has received considerable attention. Carter (2009:858) discusses this perspective in detail and labels it as a "tick box approach" to the child. She describes what she sees as an "institutional discourse" on child vulnerability which poses children as "risky" in relation to research and which comes from the practice of research governance and ethical review. For Carter (2009), reviewers and ethics committees position themselves as "champions" for vulnerable children, protecting them against the "barbarism" of research and preventing their participation. Protective measures, she argues, are of course necessary but "acknowledging children's vulnerability should not preclude their involvement in research".

Carter (2009) and Powell and Smith (2009) argue against this perceived total vulnerability of children and what they view as an overly protectionist stance in relation to children's participation in research. Carter (2009:861) notes that those children who are perceived as being most in need of protection are marginalised from engaging in research but that paradoxically, this "failure of inclusiveness within children's research silences the voices of the children who are most in need of being

heard". She argues that it is both possible to recognise children's vulnerability and to support and encourage their participation.

Powell and Smith (2009) maintain that children's right to participation in academic research is being compromised, in particular where children are considered most vulnerable and the topic of research is considered 'sensitive'. They note that "the decision to include or exclude children can be made without children even knowing about the research" (Powell and Smith, 2009:126). Whilst they feel there is some degree of "inherent" vulnerability in children they also note a "structural" vulnerability - constructed in an academic context - which hinders children's participation. Williamson and Goodenough (2005) also pick up on this issue of "over protection" in relation to 'sensitive' issues in children's participation in research and argue against it. Lansdown (2001) articulates a strong case for an alternative approach:

"Research involving interviews with children in child protection procedures shows that children perceive themselves as capable of dealing with distressing and difficult information often denied them by adults. Common sets of scenarios were presented to groups of children and to groups of professionals working in the child protection field. Consistently, the adults identified a need to withhold information from children in order to protect them. Equally consistently, the children took the view not only that they could cope with the information, but would resent being denied access to it."

The sense here is that children have more resilience and are less permanently vulnerable in practice in relation to research than they are being portrayed. It is also clear that interests other than children's are operational in the name of their protection. Indeed, Alderson and Morrow (2004) suggest that we might need an alternative means of conceptualising the ethics of research with children, with our concept of 'harm' including the *over* protection of children from research. Ethics, they suggest, should be about rights, respect and equality in relation to children and research rather than being framed simply in terms of children's protection. Alderson and Morrow's (2004:63) concern is that the current ethical approach is "so tight" that we might "shut the door on what children have to tell us".

A similar ethical debate takes place in relation to research with refugees: their protection from, versus their participation in, refugee research. Rather than emphasising refugees' vulnerability and need for protection, Pittaway et al. (2007)

suggest that research on refugees needs to also recognise a level of resilience and agency and take into account and respond to some degree of autonomy for refugees. Indeed, Pittaway et al. (2007:309) suggest a more “relational” and fluid view of autonomy, with refugees developing self-determination amidst relationships and changing socio-political conditions and with autonomy representing a “complex cluster of capacities” at any one time. Like Carter (2009) above, Pittaway et al. (2007:300) critique institutional ethics committees and their traditional approach, considering them “ill equipped” to regulate on ethical research with refugees.

Although it would be true to say, then, that many refugee children experience vulnerability and are in need of protection, it would not be right to exclude them from research per se. As outlined in Chapter One, there is a problem or gap in relation to refugee children’s participation in their own protection – including as voiced by refugee children themselves – a problem that will not be addressed by their further marginalisation from research. Research with refugee children is both risky and problematic – it *is* complicated – but this does not mean that the line of least resistance should be chosen, excluding these children completely from being involved.

How, then, to proceed in a way that engages with such ethical concerns? Some of the debate around the concept of ‘informed consent’ is useful in this regard as is discussion over the ethics of a more participatory methodology and a “care and sensitivity” in approach (Matthews and Limb, 1999:64). Each of these three areas is discussed in turn below.

Informed consent is considered critical for conducting a responsible and ethical piece of research and is defined by Alderson and Morrow (2004:96) as the “central act in ethics”. Coyne (2010:228) sets out ethical guidelines for engaging children in research, including the informed consent of parents / carers and children themselves, and defines informed consent as a “person’s voluntary, positive agreement” to take part. For Powell and Smith (2009), the informed consent of the child is crucial to avoid any coercion or deception by adults involved in research and the risks and restrictions of having a ‘blanket’ consent from parents. The essential ethical elements of informed consent for Coyne (2010) are: the freedom to decide about participation, the clarity of the information about the research and the decision-making capacity of

the child. For Powell and Smith (2009:126): “even preschool children are able to give informed consent if approached ethically” in this way.

Coyne (2010) also, however, argues for a flexible approach to informed consent: one which recognises children’s competence and right to participation, but also their need for protection. Christensen (in Hill et al., 2004) and Johnson (in Johnson et al., 1998) argue that in on-going research with children, it is necessary for consent to be subject to recurrent negotiation or to be an iterative process: ethics and informed consent should be revisited as the circumstances and conditions of the research - and of children themselves - develop and change.

For Pittaway et al. (2007:299), obtaining genuine informed consent is also a “central ethical challenge” in research with refugees. They suggest that whilst informed consent assumes autonomy on the part of research participants, that they understand the implications of giving their consent and that they are in a relatively equal relationship of power with the researcher, such conditions do not exist in many refugee contexts in practice. The relative vulnerability and dependency of refugees, their limited autonomy (particularly in protracted settings), the decrease in refugee confidence and lack of trust amidst displacement as well as unrealistic expectations of what any outside intervention - including research - might achieve, all contribute to additional “complexities of consent”.

Like Christensen (in Hill et al., 2004) and Johnson (in Johnson and Ivan-Smith, 1998)), Pittaway et al. (2007:307) endorse a more “iterative model” of consent for research with refugees: “enabling the establishment of ethical relationships between researchers and participants” that are not fixed but “responsive” to their changing concerns, values and needs. Consent is thus viewed as a process of on-going negotiation and shared understanding, rather than a one-off written or verbal agreement. It is something that evolves over time; a “partnership” between researcher and participants which is more grounded in respect.

A more nuanced and iterative model of informed consent is one that can be more flexible to refugee children’s circumstances and needs and attempts to encompass both participation and protection. In Kyaka II, information was provided for refugee children and made as age-appropriate and accessible as possible throughout the

research. For example, important information on the research was conveyed to younger children using drawings on their arrival at the workshops and children's own willingness to participate in the research – in addition to consent from their parents or guardians - was repeatedly confirmed. During the workshops, children were reminded that they were able to leave at any time. Of course, because children are in complex relationships with and influenced by a range of adults and other children, it can be hard to determine whether they are truly free and able to choose. However, the fact that some groups of refugee children asked if they could meet again, and that almost all children turned up to follow-up sessions weeks after the initial workshops, shows that these children were able to exercise some degree of choice: 'voting with their feet' in terms of their participation in the research. As one Community Protection Worker commented to me in Kyaka II: "the number that turned up shows that they are interested: normally, if not interested, they would not come for the second time..."

One argument – put forward by O'Kane (2008) – is that the ethical challenges involved in research with children can, at least in part, be addressed by the research methods employed. Participatory techniques, O'Kane (2008) argues, can be less invasive, more transparent and help to break down the power imbalance in research, enabling children's views and agendas to come to the fore. Similarly, Davis (1998:328-9) states that adult power can be countered through participatory research methods by using techniques which are familiar and unthreatening to children and which draw on their particular areas of 'expertise'. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) suggest that, as such, a participatory approach is able to give children more control over the research process and is therefore more ethical as a result.

For others, however, participatory methods are not more empowering for children engaged in research. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008:505) argue that the notion that power can be given by adults to children and that children's agency is activated by participatory methods is problematic: participatory techniques, they maintain, "do not straightforwardly equate with 'freedom'". For Gallacher and Gallagher (2008:501), participation has become both an aim and a tool in an "ethical quest" towards empowering children but "it is important not to be distracted by the ethical allure of 'empowerment', 'agency' or 'self-determination'" attached to a

participatory approach. A participatory methodology, they argue, is no more ethical than any other methodology used in research.

Pain (2004) also takes a less favourable view of a participatory research methodology with children. For Pain (2004), as for Gallacher and Gallagher (2008), the notion of children's empowerment through participation - transferring power from adult researcher to children as respondents - is too simplistic. Participation, she argues, can even reinforce traditional power relations between adults and children and increase inequalities of power. The operation of power, for Pain (2004:657), is much more complex:

“There is a tendency to assume that power can always be transferred, that academic researchers have this intention and that participants are willing to be empowered in this way.”

Finally, Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) suggest that the ethics of research with children can be enhanced by a “care and sensitivity in approach”. For Hill, Davis et al. (2004), children in research have the same rights as adults but special protection measures may be necessary to take account of their greater vulnerability to exploitation or harm. For Davis (1998), this means that the researcher has an ethical responsibility to deal with the emotions of children (Levin in Davis, 1998:328) and to be aware of the pressures involved in research - for example fear of failure, threats to self-esteem, reactions to invasions of privacy, conflict, guilt, or, embarrassment (Beresford in Davis, 1998:328) - and to avoid questions that further confuse, cause upset, harm or risk (Morrow and Richards in Davis, 1998:328).

Indeed, opening up discussion about protection concerns can be emotive and highly sensitive and must be carefully managed and supported to enable refugee children's well-being throughout. In the research with children in Kyaka II, a number of safeguards were put in place. For example, there was a careful process of recruitment, mindful that some refugee children might have more resilience at the time or be more in a position to participate in the research than others. Some children, for example, might have spent their entire lives in Kyaka II, others would have just arrived. Some children would have had their refugee status confirmed, others would be waiting for their status to be secured. Secondly, within the workshops themselves, care and attention was given to children's discussion of their



protection issues and concerns. At the beginning of each workshop, children were informed about the confidentiality of their responses as well as the limits of such confidentiality should they disclose any exploitation or harm. Children were made aware that the focus of the activity was on general protection concerns rather than their own personal histories and that, for the latter, specific staff were on hand to provide appropriate on-the-spot support. Referrals to relevant agencies could then be made. It was important that distressing issues were not aired in too open an environment and that children did not feel under pressure to publicly disclose. In practice, some individual protection disclosures were made, supported and referred on - for example, one unaccompanied child's concerns about inappropriate foster care. As noted by Pittaway et al. (2007:316), sometimes such "intervention in the lives of research participants may be ethically required."

Doing no harm in research involves more than responding to children's distress or emotions, however. For example, bringing unaccompanied children together as a group for research purposes can make them more 'visible' and therefore more susceptible to exploitation or harm. Support mechanisms therefore need to be put in place, for example supervision by those responsible for on-going contact after the research has taken place. Other considerations of harm in relation to research with refugee children include respect for context and culture and avoiding creating unrealistic expectations from the research.

Research needs to be particularly sensitive to the expectations and norms of a different cultural context, what is and is not acceptable and how the research might be perceived. For example, in terms of children's participation, this may well be viewed differently in a more conservative culture in which children, particularly girls, may not be encouraged to speak out about their issues or concerns. Matthews (1999) notes how the participation of children can be viewed as detracting from the stability of family life and the 'natural' authority of parents in some cultures and can be viewed with mistrust in a context where there is a lack of even adult participation as a whole. There must therefore be respect and sensitivity in relation to context and culture and associated attitudes towards children, their rights and their participation in research. Participatory techniques and activities must pay attention to what is

culturally appropriate in context, be informed and avoid inappropriate activity or harm.

For a careful and sensitive approach, the limits to children's participation must also be clearly defined, i.e. it is important not to set up expectations of change or of futures for children that are not achievable or possible through the research. This sentiment is expressed simply by Pittaway et al. (2007:311): "make it clear what the research can and cannot deliver". There must be no broad, strident message about children's right to participate when this may not be supported or tolerated in context, whether in the home, community or school. Consideration also needs to be given to creating and enabling opportunities for children's further participation after the researcher has gone:

"Any project that provides an opportunity for children to participate and to take control of activities in a manner that their society does not otherwise offer runs the risk of leaving them disappointed or frustrated..." (Hart and Khatiwada, 2003:27)

Consideration for refugee children's culture and context as well as carefully managing their expectations from research is part of a broader emphasis on respect which, according to Alderson and Morrow (2004), must be in place for children as research participants throughout. Alderson and Morrow (2004:47) write about a form of "practical respect" which is evident in the methods used, the degree of privacy and confidentiality allowed and the ethical approach to research with children as a whole. Similarly, Pittaway et al. (2007:306) advocate for a research relationship with refugees - responsive, negotiated, evolving and collaborative - in which "real content" is given to the "principle of respect".

### **3.4 Participatory research methods in practice**

Setting out an approach to research and the ethical debates involved does not mean, however, that research proceeds in practice as planned. Holloway and Todres (2003) argue for some degree of flexibility in qualitative research and, certainly in relation to what Robson (2002) calls "real world research", room for flexibility is important. Taking a case study approach involves the 'reality' of diverse interactions with a range of people in a "real world" setting and what this means, in all its complexity, for research. How the research is conducted, then, is, to a certain extent, contingent on what is happening in particular places and at particular times. As outlined

previously, this is particularly the case in terms of research with children in a refugee camp setting. Refugee camps are often challenging, volatile and insecure environments, dealing with large amounts of people in crisis with varied, complex and urgent needs. The organisations responsible for running the camps are frequently working under extreme pressure, with limited resources and multiple demands, and often within a complicated and dynamic context. Conducting research in a refugee camp setting is challenging, not static and involves “real world” change. Any description of participatory research methods in practice with refugee children in Kyaka II must therefore also include an account of the challenges involved.

All of the participatory workshops with refugee children in Kyaka II followed the same basic structure: (1) introduction to the workshop, protection safeguards for children and gaining children’s informed consent (2) games to introduce children to each other and to ‘break the ice’ (3) activity-based sessions (drawing, puppetry, role play) to generate discussion on children’s participation in protection – either their concerns or their suggestions for areas for change (4) presentation of certificates and small rewards (5) evaluation of workshop and plans for feedback and return (Figures 4 through 8). The structure for the workshops (Appendix G) and the methods used aimed to increase children’s ability to share information (letting them have fun, feel comfortable to talk) as well as to provide them with a positive participatory experience within the workshop itself (for example, recognition certificates and small rewards).



Figure 4: Introduction: explaining confidentiality; gaining consent. 11-16 workshop, Reception Centre.



Figure 5: Introduction: playing games as 'ice breakers', 6-10 workshop, Byabakora.



Figure 6: Child friendly methods: puppets, 6-10 workshop, Reception Centre.

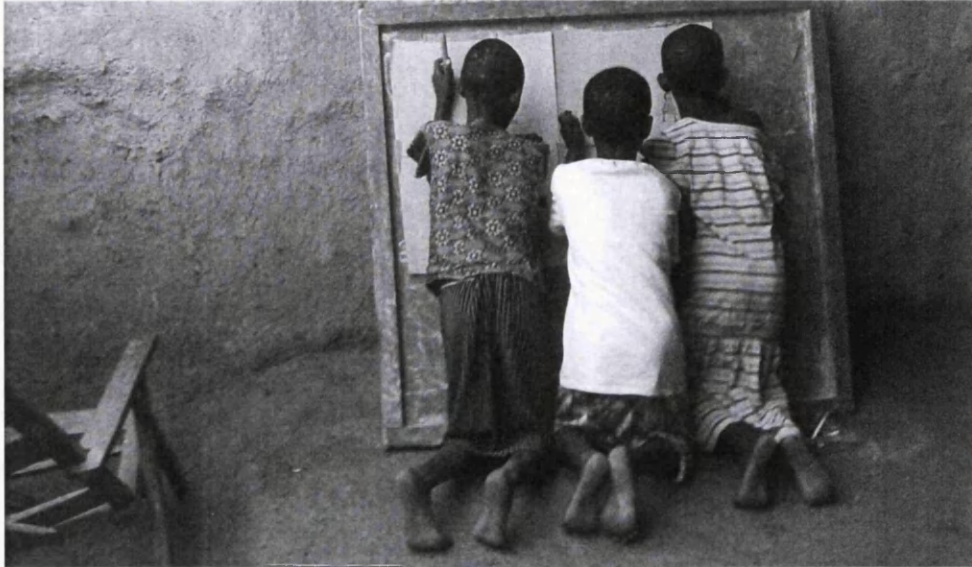


Figure 7: Child friendly methods: drawing 6-10 (girls) workshop, Byabakora.



Figure 8: Certificate of appreciation, 6-10 workshop, Bukere.

Since the age range targeted by the children’s workshops was extensive, the participatory methods used needed to be age-appropriate. Separate workshops were run for groups of children aged 11-16 and 6-10 and their methods and content adapted accordingly. For example, games with older children were more complex and challenge-based (‘work as a team to...’; ‘demonstrate your views on...’) whereas those with 6-10 year olds were a more basic form of play (‘chase and

catch...') (Figures 9 and 10). Role play was used as a technique with older children whereas drawing was a more straightforward method for 6-10 year olds; older children were asked for detailed ideas on areas for change whereas younger children were asked to draw the differences they wanted to see.



Figure 9: Agree / disagree activity, 11-16 workshop (boys), Bujubuli Secondary School.



Figure 10: 'What's the time Mr Wolf?' 6-10 workshop, Reception Centre.

Both refugee children involved in the workshops and the Community Protection Workers supporting them were asked to review the participatory methods employed. Their comments support the use of a more participatory methodology or approach. Firstly, in their evaluations, almost all children stated that they had enjoyed the activities involved, suggesting that the environment that was created was a positive

one with diverse children feeling comfortable and at ease. An unaccompanied teenage girl from one workshop said: “when they play like children, they feel very ok” and another teenage girl said “she had never played before like that”, it had “really made her very happy” and that it was “how it’s supposed to be.”

Secondly, many children said that they had felt able to talk about their concerns in the workshops indicating that not only were they having fun but that they were also able to engage. A teenage boy from Bukere said he liked the “way asking questions concerning children’s lives” (Figure 11) and a younger boy that he was “happy because...explained problems as a child”. From the comments received, there was the indication that many of these children were not often asked about their protection issues and concerns.



Figure 11: Unaccompanied teenage boy enjoying the chance to talk about his concerns, Bujubuli.

Thirdly, several children connected their enjoyment of the activities with their ability to talk about their protection i.e. it was because of the participatory methods used that they had felt comfortable and able to share their views. A child under ten years old from a workshop in Mukondo said that “through games and drawing they were able to expose their feelings and also to explain their problems” (Figure 12). The Community Protection Workers also suggested there was a link between children’s ability to talk in the workshops and the participatory methods used. One commented:

“Children in camps are very shy and don't have the chance to talk to adults. They appreciate your way to use games and pictures - without that, you would not get any information from them.”

This feedback on participatory methods from children and practitioners in Kyaka II is illuminating for the aforementioned debate over how to access children's views. Carter (2009:861) claims that the notion that such research methods can be used to get closer to the child's world view - if that is even possible - says more about the researcher's interest in those techniques than about the children they are researching. Whilst this research is indeed interested in participatory methods and techniques, the feedback from refugee children in Kyaka II shows the value of using these methods *for them*.

The ethical debate over a participatory methodology and the power division between adult and child can also be considered in relation to the empirical material from the research. Feedback from research respondents in Kyaka II suggests that the participatory methods used may have had some impact on the power imbalance between adults and children - at the very least in situ and at the time of the research. For example, one of the Community Protection Workers involved in the workshops with children commented that, through the research, children had “got to talk with older people”, something which had been “denied to them somehow before”. Another Community Protection Worker said that where they had struggled with communicating with younger children before - “sometimes we fail to reach that age” - the research had helped them to “become closer” to these children: “they no longer fear us”. As a result, he said, they had “heard a lot from children” in the workshops about their issues and concerns:

“We started where children was fearing to talk, but we finished where children was now used to tell what was needed from them.”

Whilst Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) may be right that transferring power from adults to children is problematic conceptually, I agree with Pain (2004:660) that such participatory methods can often be “a vast improvement” on more “conventional modes of research” in relation to how they practically position and enable the child. Participatory methods can be more ethical in that they allow children to increasingly speak for themselves rather than be spoken for by adults, respecting their rights under the CRC. They can also have a range of positive impacts on adult practice and



on children themselves. For Pain (2004), this is important as the ethics of a participatory approach are not just about removing negative consequences for children but also about promoting positive change. Therefore, if we want to find out what children think about their own protection, despite the conceptual pitfalls, participatory methods might well provide us with the best available option that we have.

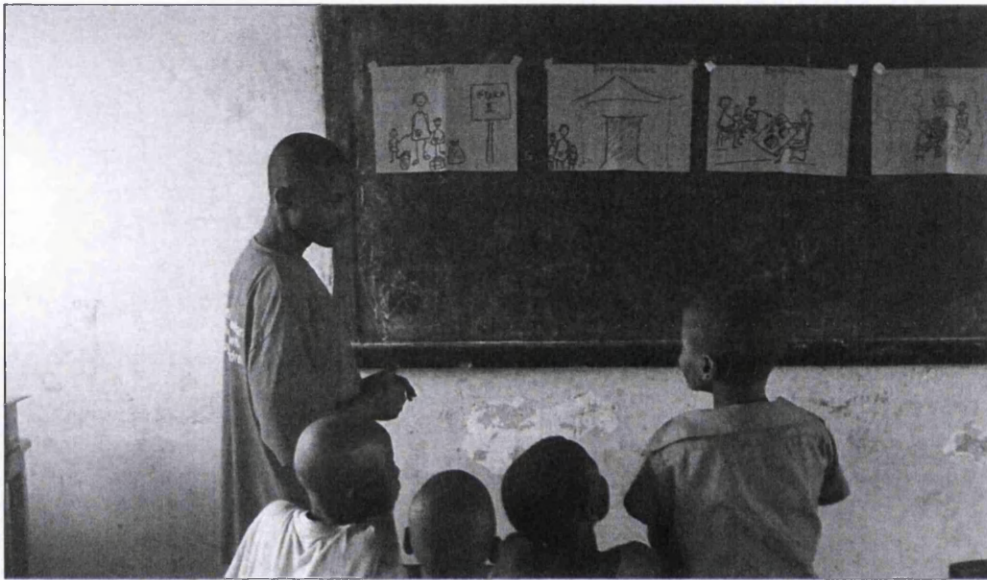


Figure 12: Drawings help children to share information, unaccompanied children workshop, Mukondo.

To argue the merits of a participatory methodology with children in research does not mean, however, that there are no challenges involved. Whilst refugee children's response to the participatory workshops was very positive overall, the broad age range proved difficult in practice. In relation to younger children in particular, amendments were required. For example, three out of ten children in one workshop early on in the research process found the "questions difficult". My research diary includes reflection on the status of workshops with 6-10 year-olds as a result:

"Two groups of younger children this week - important to do following...try different approach to session: names, discussions, then games and rewards... How make better for children? Try going through registration process visually with them - what happens?" (Figure 13)

Because it was at times harder to get information (or as much information) from younger children, the Community Protection Workers suggested not involving these children at all. However, whilst a participatory workshop for 6-10 year-olds in

Kyaka II did not produce a large volume of detailed verbal/textual information on refugee protection, it did provide information through other means, for example through the drawings that these children made. It also provided relevant information about younger children's lives, their concerns and a sense of their well-being. There was also the opportunity to observe these children and to compare their views with older children: for example, where younger children showed less awareness of the organisations in place to protect them, it suggested that, unlike older children, they relied on a circle of protection that was much closer to home. It was important, therefore, that the expectations in terms of what was produced through participatory methods, as well as the methods themselves, were age-appropriate in the research.



Figure 13: A more visual approach, 6-10 workshop, Bukere.

Some of the other practical constraints faced by the participatory research with children in Kyaka II are captured in a comment by one of the Community Protection Workers involved:

“The project faced problems like language barrier...time management due to delay in transport; shyness among little children who could not express their views; too much noise; rain which interrupted other programmes; crowdedness [sic].”

If accessing the opinions of children is difficult in itself, this is even more so through another language and the use of an interpreter. This process adds another level of confusion as well as one more adult - with their own views and agenda - ‘filtering’

what is being said. The process of interpretation for children in a research context raises a number of questions, both practical and ethical in nature. Interpretation is something that takes effort to organise properly and is very time consuming for research. This is particularly so when it is interpretation for children, since the skills required are not just fluency in relevant languages but also an ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with a child.

An interpreter also has significant control over what is communicated to children and what in turn they are 'allowed' to say. By relying on someone else as communicator, we cannot be sure that the right messages are being conveyed about the intentions of the research nor can we know the degree of influence of culture, beliefs or attitudes on how the interpreter regards and interacts with the children involved. Much might be lost in translation and children's views mediated and edited before they are 'returned'. For such reasons, Pittaway et al. (2007:304) describe reliance on interpreters as "ethically problematic" and stress that, rather than just a vehicle for passively passing information on, interpreters are "active" in "the production of research accounts". Similarly, Dona (2007:212) labels interpreters, amongst others, as "unofficial participants" in research: they have a vital role in and influence over the research process but it is often one that remains unobserved. Despite such pitfalls, refugee children need to be able to communicate in the language of their choice, particularly when the topic is as potentially sensitive and critical as their own protection.

Language in workshops with children in Kyaka II was indeed a challenge, with English only spoken by some of the secondary school pupils in the settlement. Kiswahili, as well as a range of other community languages, was predominantly spoken by most of the children involved in the research. Interviews for an interpreter were held on the second day of the field research, with refugee adults screened for both their language skills as well as their experience of working effectively with children. The interpreter recruited was provided with a 'terms of reference' as well as guidance on child-friendly interpretation prior to getting involved in the research (Appendix H).

Whilst I recorded in my research diary that I had made a "good choice" - that the interpreter chosen was "gentle with children" and able to translate into two or three

languages - on occasion, an additional interpreter had to be involved (Figure 14). For some of the children from one particular community who were involved in the research, their main language was not well-known. This meant a lengthy and complex process of translation: from child to interpreter; between interpreters themselves and then from my interpreter to me. In terms of accessing and understanding children's views, these layers of interpretation added further confusion to what children were trying to say.

Despite the challenges involved, however, interpreters - in research terms - are also a resource. They represent a source of important contextual and cultural knowledge and may have community links, familiarity and a working or informal history with the children involved. The researcher can work in partnership with the interpreter, involving him/her from the very beginning and building on these skills and qualities to enable and facilitate the research. The role of the interpreter can be critical.



Figure 14: Female community interpreter, 6-10 workshop, Kaborogota.

Beyond interpreters, research can be influenced by other adults in context, for example, parents, relatives or practitioners who might have anxieties, concerns or expectations in relation to the research. For Wyness (2009:345), these adults have a "crucial and complex role" in terms of their influence and control over children, their participation and what they are allowed to do and say. Powell and Smith (2009) note that these adult "gatekeepers" can restrict or influence children's participation in research and that building relationships with them is essential. Indeed, the

experiences and concerns of adult refugees are extremely important in how research must be managed and can be received. Researchers can face a range of - understandable - reactions including hostility, mistrust or suspicion and can be confronted with a range of degrees of vulnerability associated with past conflict, persecution or abuse. A strategy of being 'visible' in the refugee community, meeting and talking with adult refugees and more senior community members and working alongside refugee Community Protection Workers to deliver workshops enabled greater support, trust and rapport 'on the ground' for the research.

It is also important to note that other children, those who are not research respondents themselves, are also able to exert influence over and impact on the research. This may take the form of just wanting to join in, causing distractions and disturbance for the researcher and children involved (Figure 15), or the dynamics between children can affect their participation and the information that is shared. Whilst this must be managed for the research to proceed, it is also important to think about benefits for refugee children other than the research respondents themselves. As a result, where possible, efforts were made to deliver parallel activities - for example games or drawings - for other refugee children. This was also important for wider community acceptance of the research.

Securing the right venues and managing relations with adults and children in the communities around them – allowing them to feel respected, acknowledged, informed and, where possible, involved, but not impacting negatively on the children directly engaged – therefore took some degree of diplomacy and organisation in Kyaka II. The use and delivery of different participatory methods with refugee children in workshops also needed to be reflected upon, reviewed and refined. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) maintain that participatory methods need to admit to being fallible, like all other methods of research. However, whilst it is important to acknowledge that any understanding of children and their views gained through participatory methods will still be 'partial' or 'incomplete' - and that these techniques, like all research methods, will face multiple challenges in practice - feedback from the research in Kyaka II suggests that there are still dividends with a more participatory approach.



Figure 15: Managing many children, 6-10 workshop, Bukere.

### 3.5 Data analysis and writing up

For Miles (1979), qualitative data analysis is an “attractive nuisance”: on the one hand, it is a process that involves “rich, holistic 'real' data” and which reduces researcher “bias, narrowness and arrogance”; on the other, it engages with data that tends to “overload the researcher badly at almost every point” (1979:590). This “nuisance”, Miles (1979:601) maintains, must be paid attention to if qualitative data analysis is to be more than just “story-telling” or “a mysterious, half-formulated art” (1979:593).

For research that is exploring respondents’ views in a case study context, an inductive or ‘bottom up’ approach to the generation of theory - beginning from the data ‘on the ground’ - would seem to be appropriate. There is appeal in the notion of a more ‘grounded’ theory - a process of what is 'out there' taking precedence over the researcher’s ideas - particularly when refugee children are the main focus of the research and their views are so often overridden or ignored.

‘Grounded theory’ provides a specific inductive approach which lays claim to a certain amount of rigour. Corbin and Strauss (1990:5) outline the “canons” of grounded theory, describing procedures which are “designed to develop a well-integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study”. Rigour in grounded theory is thought to come from these set procedures which need to be followed, for example “concepts” (basic units of

analysis) which “earn their way into the theory” through a “coding” process by being repeatedly present or grounded in the data (1990:7); a process of “constant comparison” to “challenge concepts with fresh data” (1990:10) and to account for all patterns and variations found; the formation of “categories” which are higher level, more abstract, relational and explored. Ziebland, Pope and Mays (2000) describe the coding process in grounded theory in more detail:

“Coding is the process of going through all of the raw data, reading and re-reading, and categorising it - based on phrases, incidents, types of behaviour - into the margins in the form of multiple codes... a systematic, inclusive and coherent approach in which as many...codes are developed to reflect the ‘nuances’ revealed in the data. Once all the data is coded, the categorising process is further refined by grouping or ‘cut and pasting’ the codes into a lesser number of key themes. Some sections of the data will involve categorisation into multiple themes and codes” (2000:114).

Coding is particularly complex in grounded theory since it takes multiple forms including “open”, “axial” and “selective” procedures which are defined in detail by Corbin and Strauss (1990).

Despite its suggested rigour, however, grounded theory has its limitations, for example the inter-relation of the different forms of coding can be confusing and complex to understand. In addition, Bazeley (2009) critiques the notion of theories “emergent” purely “from the ground”, suggesting there is always some connection to the literature or to a priori themes and that the process of theory generation is more “messy” in nature. Certainly, in relation to this research, whilst it aims to be more inductive than deductive - open to what refugee children and practitioners have to say - it is situated amidst a bank of relevant literature and critiques, has declared policy relevance in terms of its objectives and argued already that children’s participation might have benefits for their protection.

As an alternative, Thomas (2006) argues for a less technical inductive form of data analysis rather than a ‘traditional’ grounded theory approach. This avoids the complexities of the latter but retains a systematic and inclusive coding process and, Thomas (2003) maintains, produces similar results. Indeed, many of the procedures outlined from grounded theory above can be retained. This is important for Bazeley (2009), for whom qualitative data analysis needs to be much more than a process of

“identifying themes”, a “garden path analysis” producing a “nice description” but leading us “nowhere” as a result.

In practice, data analysis broadly followed the procedure outlined by Ziebland, Pope and Mays above (2000). Firstly, all primary data sources were typed and transcribed, uniquely referenced, then read and re-read for familiarity. Code and memo notes were written in the margins of the text and a notebook updated with reflections on the coding process and the ideas generated as a result. Whilst some such code notes can be said to have come from the raw data, “earning their way” into the process, other ideas for codes came from conceptual material I had previously read or conversations I had already had.

Returning to the raw data, each primary source was read through in detail and numerous codes written into the margins describing segments of text. All codes – initially over 200 - were listed separately as a ‘code frame’, then narrowed down and more clearly defined. The raw data was then systematically checked against the code frame, so that all text was ultimately coded. Nuances or ‘no fit’ cases from the text were not ignored or hidden but generated new codes.

Reflecting on the code list and the coding process, groupings of codes or larger categories began to take shape. This process of moving from initial descriptive codes to less numerous themes has received critical attention. Bazeley (2009:6-8), for example, advises against themes as just “meta-categories”: the data should be “challenged” and “extended”, be more conceptual and abstract, move beyond description.

Data analysis is, of course, not only about this process of data reduction, the creation of codes and conceptual categories but also about the writing up of the research. For Ryan (2006), writing up is a means of taking the analysis further and involves “giving meaning and intent to action, and...reading meaning and intent in the actions of others” (Schratz and Walker in Ryan, 2006:101). Writing is essentially, then, still a process of theorising about the data and involves “the taxing business of trying to grasp what is actually going on” as well as trying to expose the (hidden) rules behind what people are saying / the unexposed (Eagleton in Ryan, 2006:104). Rather than simply a process of transferring data across into another written form, writing up (as



at all stages of the research) is a process of selection and representation, subject to the control, editing and interpretation of the author and any other actors involved. Shier (2010:9) notes how this interpretative process begins when children's words are first recorded onto paper: "...there are a number of ways in which children's views can get diluted and dissipated and the first of these is often the initial stage of writing it down...".

James (2007) highlights this process of selective representation by asking how children are given a voice, by whom and for what purposes and by rejecting any notion of an authentic, unproblematic account (2007:262). For James (2007:269-70), there needs to be more critical reflection when writing about what children say; a greater awareness of the constructed nature of the account and a recognition of the pitfalls, tensions and predicaments involved amidst representation.

Such critical reflection or reflexivity was outlined in Chapter One and - through the use of a research diary - integrated as part of the research design. Extracts from the research diary kept for this thesis help to demonstrate the complexity of research in the field. For example, one comment shows some of the personal challenges involved:

"Feeling bit tired and overwhelmed: pressure to get it right and get data and for children to understand..."

Other records indicate where the research process did not proceed as planned or where there was anxiety around what was being achieved:

"Feel bad as was not quality of participation wanted i.e. did not finish off properly and talk about feedback. Is this just the nature of workshops with these children in this environment?"

"Concerned re: info from younger ones and lack of contact or info on protection process - but often excluded, do come out with things: need to know from their perspective."

Including such comments from the research diary is important – it demonstrates the thinking that goes on 'behind the scenes' and which influences the research as well as the complexities and 'imperfections' of research in practice. It can enhance both

the validity and reliability of the work and contributes to a more ethical and honest approach.

The trustworthiness of research findings can also be assessed through feedback from research participants themselves (Thomas, 2006:4). For Thomas (2006), such 'stakeholder checks' can enhance the credibility of findings, allowing those who may have a specific involvement or interest in the research to comment on research interpretations and their consistency with their own personal experiences and views. Powell and Smith (2009) outline how they fed back summaries of their research to respondents, following up with questions, transcriptions and reworked summaries to get a more collaborative research result. Others, for example Smith (2006), outline a process of contract negotiation (Baxter and Eyles in Smith, 2006): a different form of 'check' where research respondents negotiate about access to research findings with the researcher at the beginning of the research process.

Member checking was undertaken with practitioners in Kyaka II. Interim research reports were compiled and circulated to key contacts in the settlement on a monthly basis during the time spent in the field. A protection practitioners' workshop at the end of the fieldwork period, as well as a broader 'open' presentation to all practitioners working in the settlement, invited comments through sharing some preliminary findings from the research. One practitioner commented on the quality and transparency of the research in this respect. A further workshop was held during the return visit to the field to identify the key messages coming out of the research and to discuss practical changes that practitioners might make to child protection in Kyaka II.

A process of member checking was planned with refugee children in the settlement. Issues such as literacy, language, children's access to information as well as repeat access to the children themselves had to be addressed. The checking process was conducted face-to-face with children during the follow-up field visit to Kyaka II. Prior to this visit, the data from the children's workshops was collated into a set of key messages and themes. These themes were then fed back through activities and drawings to the children's groups during the return. Based on their views, children were invited to confirm or reject, prioritise (providing another level of understanding) or, if necessary, amend (providing additional content and detail) the

information presented to them. Whilst the children confirmed the key themes overall, they also ranked them in importance and due weight was added into the data analysis as a result (Fig 16 and 17).

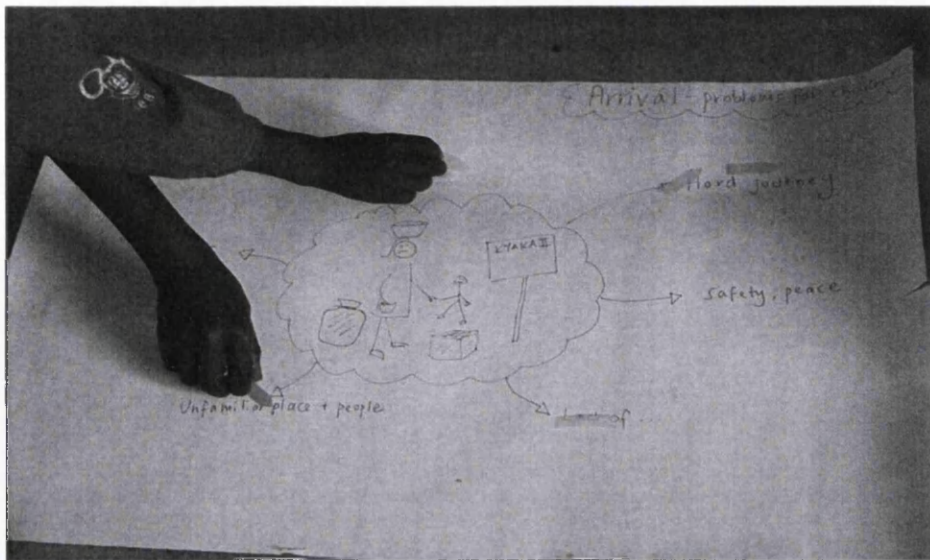


Figure 16: Prioritising the problems on arrival, unaccompanied children workshop, Bujubuli.

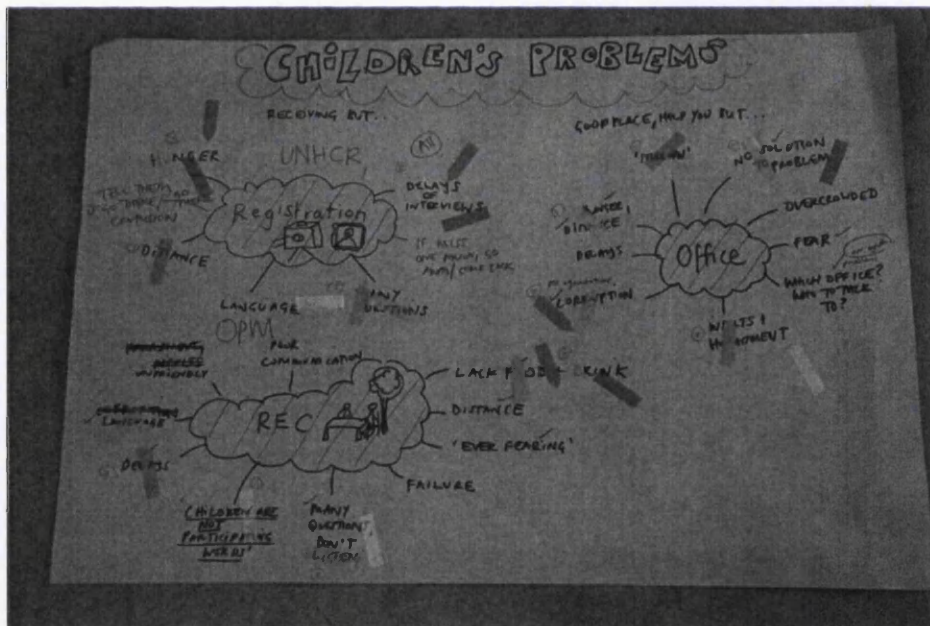


Figure 17: Prioritising problems with 'the office' and interviews, unaccompanied children, Bujubuli.

Apart from such member checking processes, there were other dividends from a return. The children were able to evaluate the research methods used with them in previous workshops and to outline any impact that they had seen as a result. The children's memory and understanding of the research, months later, showed that the

methods used had been effective in engaging with them as children. Chambers and Mayoux (2003:7) maintain that researchers need to involve beneficiaries “not only...as respondents” but also by giving them “access to the information generated, a role in its analysis and identifying the practical implications for change” (2003:7). The return visit provided an opportunity to think through with children, as well as practitioners, what these changes in context might be.

### **3.6 Conclusions**

This chapter has set out the multiple methodological and ethical complexities involved in the participation of refugee children in research on protection in a refugee camp setting. Through its consideration of the research approach and design, as well as the ‘narrative’ of the research in practice in Kyaka II, this chapter has shown how these complexities were negotiated and addressed. An exploration of such methodological, ethical and practical challenges is essential since the focus of the research is *also* the participation of refugee children in protection. The following chapter is the first of four, setting out the empirical findings from the research on refugee children’s participation in their protection in Kyaka II.

## **Chapter Four: Participation ‘in a box’: refugee children’s participation in protection in Kyaka II**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter builds on the brief introduction to Kyaka II Refugee Settlement set out in Chapter One. As the first substantive empirical chapter in this thesis, it ‘sets the scene’ in more detail, providing information on the refugee protection process ‘in situ’ and child protection activity in particular. It also provides an initial ‘map’ of refugee children’s participation in their protection, based predominantly on the views of humanitarian practitioners working in Kyaka II. As such, this chapter draws on the empirical data from the case study context to start to address the research question outlined in Chapter One.

This chapter is not, however, a purely descriptive account of refugee children’s participation in protection in a particular place or location. There are already multiple geographies of children’s participation describing the spaces within which child participation ‘happens’ (Matthews, 2001, Sinclair, 1998, Hart, 1997). Instead, this chapter draws on the conceptual literature outlined in Chapter Two and starts to situate participation and protection in Kyaka II amidst space and power. It provides an initial critique of where children’s participation in their protection does and does not ‘take place’ and how it might, in various ways, be “boxed in” (Hart and Khatiwada, 2003) as well as some of the interests involved. As such, the ‘mapping’ of refugee children’s participation in their protection in Kyaka II begins a critical exploration of how children’s participation is constructed, conceptualised, framed and understood and the consequences for refugee children.

### **4.2 Refugee protection in context**

Kyaka II Refugee Settlement is divided geographically and administratively into nine ‘zones’ (Swe Swe, Byabakora, Kaborogota, Kakoni, Buliti, Bujubuli, Itambabiniga, Bukere and Mukondo), in turn composed of 26 ‘villages’ (Mukondo 1, Mukondo 2....). One of the zones, Bukere, is considered the main social hub, market and ‘centre’ for refugees; another, Bujubuli, is the administrative centre. The offices and accommodation of UNHCR, the OPM, the Ugandan Government Department responsible for refugees) and other humanitarian agencies are located at ‘base camp’

in Bujubuli as well as the police station, the main health centre for Kyaka II and, nearby, the settlement's only secondary school (Figure 18). The Reception Centre, a large tent housing newly arrived asylum seekers, is located in Swe Swe zone (Figure 19).



Figure 18: The administrative 'base camp' in Bujubuli zone.



Figure 19: The Reception Centre in Swe Swe zone.

In terms of refugee protection in Kyaka II, OPM and UNHCR take a joint lead, working with other humanitarian partners as well as the refugee community itself. In keeping with its international obligations, the Ugandan Government, through

OPM, leads on refugee settlement, physical protection and security as well as the granting of refugee status as outlined in Chapter One. The settlement's "Commandant" (OPM officer in charge) defined OPM as: "the Government arm handling refugees, monitoring and co-ordinating refugee programmes", as well as "the custodians of the Government land on which refugees are settled."

The Commandant described "two categories of asylum seekers" coming to Kyaka II. Firstly, those crossing the border and arriving at transit centres as a "group" or "influx", for example, the large number of Congolese at the time of the research at the Kitoro transit centre on the DRC/Uganda border. These asylum seekers are given "prima facie" refugee status by OPM as a group i.e. they are automatically recognised as refugees, given basic assistance and await transport to designated refugee settlements like Kyaka II. The Commandant described the process for "prima facie" refugees on reaching the settlement:

"At the settlement, they are received as a convoy, given food, water, medical screening and a place to sleep. The day after, they are registered by OPM and UNHCR to receive identity and ration cards. There is also vulnerability screening for unaccompanied minors (UAM), extremely vulnerable individuals (EVI) and people with special needs (PSN). This is done by Community Services (OPM, UNHCR) at the Reception Centre. After registration, they are given food and non-food items (NFIs), and OPM then allocates land for them to settle on."

The second "category" of asylum seekers is individuals or single families travelling directly to Kyaka II. Although they are also received at the Reception Centre on arrival, documented and registered by OPM and UNHCR, these asylum seekers have to go through the process of RSD, as individuals or household units, in order to be recognised as 'refugees'. A team from OPM from Kampala – the Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC) – is responsible for conducting the RSD interviews in Kyaka II. The Commandant, again, explained:

"On arrival, they are documented by OPM and UNHCR (finger printing, photographs), screened to check they have not already registered elsewhere in other settlements as a refugee. At the Reception Centre, they get food and shelter and wait for the REC to determine their status. Those that are granted status are then registered (identity and ration card) and provided with food, NFIs and land to settle. Those who are refused refugee status have 90 days to appeal but are given no support in this time."

At the time of the research, there were people in the Reception Centre who said they had been living there for months, waiting for the REC to come from Kampala to interview them. As can be seen from the quotations above, such a wait is critical since acquiring refugee status means not only international protection but also the provision of food, NFIs and land (Figure 20).



Figure 20: Refugees waiting for interview with the Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC).

UNHCR has an established Field Unit in Kyaka II and a member of staff outlined what she saw as UNHCR's protection remit in the settlement:

“The protection of the refugees includes a number of activities or a number of things. You need to look at the basic services for the refugees in the settlement, things to do with education, their health, and livelihood.... But remember that, in the refugee situation, we have also other elements. At some point we start looking at the durable solution...voluntary repatriation when the time allows for the refugee to actually return back to their country of origin...settlement here in the country where they get their status as refugees...And the third option of resettling them to a third country.”

Protection for UNHCR is therefore the provision of basic assistance for refugees as well as the refugee protection process from arrival to ‘durable solution’. Durable solutions available for those living in Kyaka II are mainly voluntary repatriation or resettlement. Voluntary repatriation was described by a UNHCR practitioner in the following terms:

“Repatriation is when a refugee voluntarily presents themselves to the office of UNHCR or the Office of the Government of Uganda and says they would



wish to go back to their country of origin. This is only done when the UNHCR and the Government of Uganda has critically looked at the reasons that made the person flee from their country and knowing that it's clear that...the cause for the flight has now ceased.”

At the time of the research, there was much discussion over the impending repatriation of Rwandese refugees living in Kyaka II, in keeping with a UNHCR Cessation Clause, ending the status of such refugees, to be invoked at the end of 2012. One Rwandese Refugee Community Worker expressed his fears of a return after living in Kyaka II for more than 20 years.

Resettlement was defined by another practitioner from UNHCR in Kyaka II as “one of our last resorts” and a complex process for refugees to go through:

“If the reasons or the forces that led to somebody’s flight are still existing and the person is not able to stay within the country of asylum, then the person is resettled from that country...there’s a specific criteria ... for a person to qualify...you’re subjected to another resettlement screening interview. Then somebody may be given the chance to go.”

The same practitioner also spoke about the limited local integration of refugees, a solution not actively promoted in Uganda and thought attributed to the “perceived resource burden” accompanying refugees (Hovil and Dryden-Peterson, 2003:2):

**Respondent:** “...considering the different Government policies with regard to local integration, it’s a solution that is far from reality for most of the persons of concern that we receive. Much as a person might express interest, we believe sometimes when there are so many people from abroad it can easily affect the situation of our country in certain ways.”

**Interviewer:** “It doesn’t happen?”

**Respondent:** “...yeah, it doesn’t normally happen.”

As mentioned in Chapter One, such limitations on local integration, barriers to repatriation and infrequent resettlement can mean a protracted or “in limbo” state for many of Kyaka II’s refugees.

The implementation of UNHCR’s refugee assistance projects are often entrusted to implementing partners or IPs: usually specialist government departments or agencies with particular expertise, for example in food supply, education or health. The delegation of activity is through a signed, legally binding document (or

implementing agreement) setting out conditions, obligations and the transfer of funds. In Kyaka II, the German organisation GIZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*) had been UNHCR's main implementing partner for some time, managing sectors including Livelihoods, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), Community Services and Development and – most importantly for the purpose of this research: Protection. Until the end of 2011, GIZ had also been delivering programmes in Education and Health.

Other humanitarian partners working in partnership with OPM, UNHCR and GIZ in the settlement included the Norwegian Refugee Council (food storage and distribution on behalf of World Food Programme); African Humanitarian Action (health and nutrition including two health care centres), Windle Trust (primary and secondary education); the Finnish Refugee Council (adult literacy); Right to Play (issue-based play with children in the community and schools) and the Ugandan Red Cross (family tracing in particular for unaccompanied and separated children). Refugee Welfare Councils (RWCs), as well as a range of other adult refugee committees and bodies existed at different levels within all nine zones and 26 villages in Kyaka II, to ensure refugee participation in settlement management and affairs and to contribute to refugee protection.

From this description of refugee protection in Kyaka II, what comes across is the settlement as a political space as well as some of the power dynamics involved. As the institutions leading on refugee protection in context, OPM and UNHCR are the decision-makers in terms of the status and living conditions of refugees. They are the 'givers' (Harrell-Bond, 2002) in a predominantly asymmetrical power relationship between humanitarian actors and refugees: international protection and, with it, all the practical humanitarian assistance which that involves (food, water, shelter, land) comes from them.

Refugees are aware of this dynamic and what it means for their survival and lives. They are also, once provided with such protection, fearful of its loss, for example in the case of the large-scale repatriation of Rwandan refugees. With the preferred 'durable solution' in Kyaka II being repatriation rather local integration ("much as a person might express interest") or resettlement (as a "last resort") there is always, for refugees in Kyaka II, the possibility (and potentially the fear) of a return. In the

meantime, associated with a protracted refugee setting such as Kyaka II, refugees are left with the hardships and uncertainty such a state of 'limbo' involves.

There is also an indication from one of the respondents above of an additional power struggle between Ugandan nationals and refugees, a resistance against integration: "so many people from abroad...it can easily affect the situation of our country in certain ways." Indeed, at the time of the research, an OPM official was killed by Ugandan nationals whilst trying to re-open a neighbouring settlement to provide land for Congolese refugees. Whilst the refugee protection process is described in procedural terms by humanitarian practitioners in Kyaka II, it is important, therefore, to draw out some of the power dynamics involved. This contributes to a contextual understanding of refugee children's participation in their protection.

### **4.3 Child protection in Kyaka II**

What, then, of the protection of refugee children? As already noted in Chapter One, almost half of the population of Kyaka II are children under the age of 18. Of these children, some may have arrived with their families to the settlement or come as unaccompanied and separated children, others, of course, were born in Kyaka II and have lived there all their lives.

The OPM Commandant outlined some of the protection concerns relating to these children in Kyaka II including finding foster families for those children who have arrived unaccompanied or separated, cases of SGBV (Sexual and Gender Based Violence) and child labour as well as trafficking of children to work as maids or house guards across Uganda. A lack of awareness of children's rights generally in the refugee community, including children's right to education, was additionally identified as a protection concern. Refugee children can, of course, also bring a range of protection issues with them from their country of origin and may well have faced other protection risks during their 'flight'. The securing of refugee status and the international protection and assistance that this involves is a major protection concern for children, as for all refugees. The multiple protection risks faced by refugee children in Kyaka II are given more detailed consideration in Chapter Six.

Child protection for UNHCR was defined in Chapter One as:

“...protecting and advocating against all forms of discrimination; preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation; ensuring immediate access to appropriate services; and ensuring durable solutions in the child’s best interests.” (UNHCR, 2012:8)

In keeping with this definition, practitioners in Kyaka II - for example, an OPM Protection Officer below - describe their child protection work in terms of activities for preventing discrimination and abuse but also a stretched protection process through which all refugees move:

“So the protection needs to stretch out: it starts from receiving them, listening and considering the cases that would meet the criteria for the granting of asylum in Uganda, to trying to settle them so they integrate, to special needs....”

In Kyaka II, UNHCR works towards this aim through its main implementing partner for Protection, GIZ, as well as with OPM, non-governmental partners and the refugee community as a whole. Although there is no specific post dedicated to the protection of refugee children in Kyaka II, UNHCR and partner staff deliver on child protection in a range of ways in accordance with this UNHCR definition. For example, in terms of protecting and advocating against all forms of discrimination, GIZ and Windle Trust promote equal access to education for children with disabilities and provide additional educational support to ‘vulnerable children’, for example child-headed households and orphans<sup>10</sup>. A practitioner from GIZ spoke in more detail about this work:

“We promote education by encouraging all parents to take children to school, including identifying persons...with disabilities and then link them to special needs education so that they can be like any other child. We discourage discrimination among the children, for example the persons with disability and those without disabilities too.”

Programme activity on preventing discrimination also involves supporting unaccompanied and separated children living in Kyaka II. Part of the work of GIZ is to link these children to livelihood programmes, ensuring that they have the means to survive. A fostering system in the settlement provides protection and care for children without parents or guardians, as a practitioner from GIZ explained:

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<sup>10</sup> UNICEF defines an orphan as a child who has lost one or both parents. A child-headed family or child-headed household is a family in which a minor (child or adolescent) has become the head of the household.

“With regards to protection, GIZ for example has a big role to do with unaccompanied children: we call them the ‘unaccompanied minors’. We have arrangements we make with people in the community. We ask them, it is choice: ‘We have a child. Are you in a position to take care of this child so that they can continue living normally, like they had parents before?’”

With respect to preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation, GIZ and UNHCR have established specific posts, structures and mechanisms both in schools and in the community to enhance the protection of children. For example, all schools have a male and female teacher responsible for child protection, SGBV clubs have been established in primary schools and Child Welfare Committees in the community, random child protection spot checks are carried out to monitor children’s well-being in foster homes and other locations across the settlement and there are community sensitisations and campaigns (for example, the annual 16 Days of Activism) on protection as a whole. For children’s immediate access to appropriate services, both UNHCR and GIZ, working in partnership with agencies like the Norwegian Refugee Council, provide essential food and non-food items and for refugee children’s basic needs.

Finally, in terms of the refugee protection process and ensuring durable solutions for refugee children, protection tools such as the BID (Best Interests Determination) and BIA (Best Interests Assessment) procedures are employed by UNHCR and GIZ to guide decision-making and to determine the ‘best interests’ of the child. A BID is defined by UNHCR as “the formal process with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine the child’s best interests for particularly important decisions affecting the child” (UNHCR, 2008). This could be resettlement but it could also be, for example, placing a child in alternative care arrangements or foster care. A BIA, states UNHCR, is “an assessment made by staff taking action with regard to individual children, except when a BID procedure is required, designed to ensure that such action gives a primary consideration to the child’s best interests” (UNHCR, 2008). Both BIA and BID take the form of one-to-one interviews with the child which are recorded on a formal BIA or BID form.

The GIZ Manager in Kyaka II described the BIA as the “entry document” or “initial assessment” for refugee children’s protection, conducted after registration: “the first thing that should be in the file of each child”. For her, the BIA was a way of getting the “immediate solution” in place, for example initial appropriate accommodation for

an unaccompanied child. The BID was something that “should follow”, conducted “when you’re choosing foster placements” or making “bigger decisions” for a “long-term solution”, for example resettlement. Practitioners from Community Services within GIZ and UNHCR conducted BIA and BID interviews in Kyaka II and, as pointed out by a GIZ practitioner, worked in collaboration to do so.

Whilst the BID and BIA are interventions used specifically for the protection of particular (and relatively few) children in Kyaka II, there are of course other protection procedures that move refugee children more generally from the point of arrival in the settlement towards the durable solution that is best for them. The components of the refugee protection process outlined in Chapter One – reception, registration, RSD – also apply to refugee children, as do the durable solutions of resettlement, local integration and repatriation available to refugees.

As acknowledged by some practitioners in Kyaka II, however, such refugee protection procedures needed to be applied differently where children are concerned, particularly unaccompanied and separated children. For example, a UNHCR practitioner said “special arrangements” are made for referrals of unaccompanied children arriving in Kyaka II, with “GIZ receiving them and providing necessary support”. Another spoke about how children under 18 registering alone are first referred to GIZ Community Services to verify their ‘separated’ or ‘unaccompanied’ status:

“This is very crucial because it helps us to...liaise with GIZ to identify foster care for these children who are maybe unaccompanied or to link the separated children with their relatives within the settlement.”

A UNHCR colleague said he felt his responsibility was to work with children “to ensure that *all* the interventions...targeted to children” [emphasis added] were “to their best interests”, ranging from “their first contact” to “their accessibility to durable solutions”. How children in particular experience the refugee protection process will be returned to in significant detail in Chapter Five.

It is possible to ‘read between the lines’ of this description of child protection in Kyaka II, drawing on the conceptual literature to do so. Firstly, the Commandant’s list of child protection concerns includes risks coming from the refugee community (violation of children’s rights, SGBV), risks that children experience or ‘bring’ with

them during flight (for example, rape, psychosocial problems) and risks which take them away from the protection of the settlement (trafficking, child labour). Protection risks are then 'out there', separated from humanitarian agencies and the work that they do. However, it is clear from the work of Harrell-Bond (2002) and Kaiser (2006), that there are child protection issues associated with the existence of refugee settlements themselves and the conditions within them (inadequate livelihoods, domestic violence) as well as with the practitioners who work in such settlements (inhumane treatment of refugees). For Harrell, Bond (2002), there is also reluctance by humanitarian organisations to reflect critically on or include their own practice as a matter of concern. This is not to negate the important work that takes place addressing multiple protection risks to children within Kyaka II but to point out that it is possible for humanitarian agencies and practitioners, through their work, to create additional child protection risks themselves.

Secondly, important information on power relations in context is also contained within this description of child protection in Kyaka II. The lack of awareness of children's rights in the refugee community, identified by the Commandant above, suggests a certain power dynamic between children and adult refugees, one that is not particularly enabling for the child. It also introduces the importance of cultural as well as institutional influences on children and their protection. This is explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

Thirdly, drawing on the theoretical literature from Hart (2012), there is a spatial dimension to child protection as articulated in Kyaka II. Child protection interventions in Kyaka II are delimited in space (e.g. *school-based* protection posts, *SGBV clubs*) - as well as, here, also in time (e.g. *days* of activism, *annual* protection events) - and, as such, divorced from other spatial perspectives and related protection concerns. This circumscription of space will be revisited in relation to refugee children's participation in their protection below.

#### **4.4 Mapping refugee children's participation**

In a participation mapping workshop, many examples were provided by practitioners in Kyaka II of opportunities for children to give their views and opinions on their protection in the settlement. One respondent from GIZ echoed the quotation at the

beginning of this thesis when she spoke about how children were being “capacitated” in different ways to talk about their protection problems and concerns:

“We have a number of activities... that are designed to build the capacities of these children, to empower them with, like a child to be able to say what they feel they are not happy about, without any fear.”

In the participatory workshop, practitioners from OPM, GIZ, Windle Trust and UNHCR - as well as the Community Protection Workers supporting the research - produced two group maps of children’s participation in their protection for Kyaka II. Opportunities for children’s participation included avenues at church, at home, in school, in the community (through Refugee Welfare Committees) and through humanitarian organisations working in the settlement, including health services and the police (Figures 21 and 22).

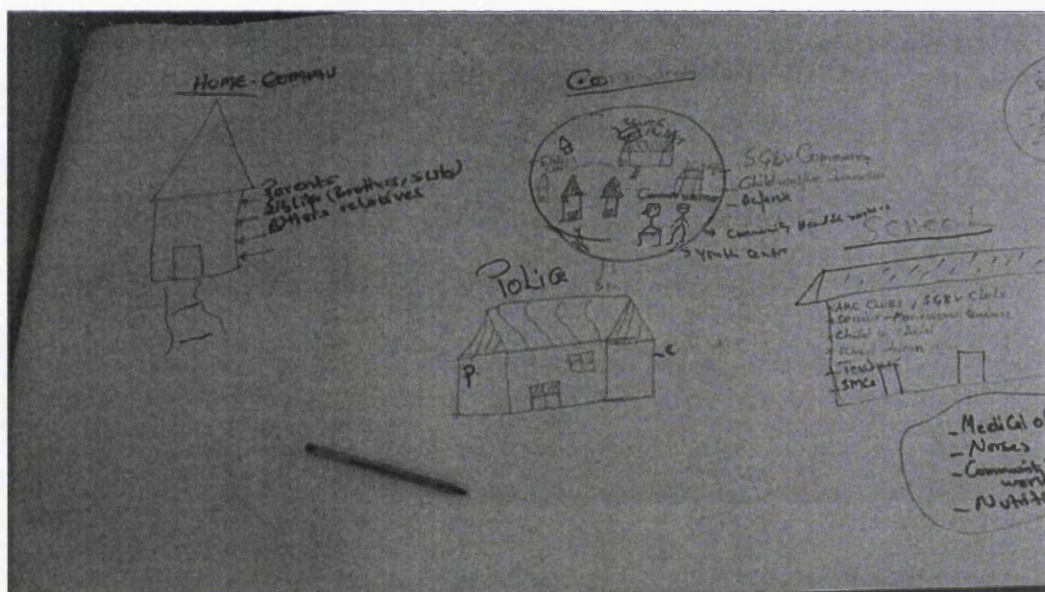


Figure 21: Practitioners' participation 'map' showing home, police, community, school.



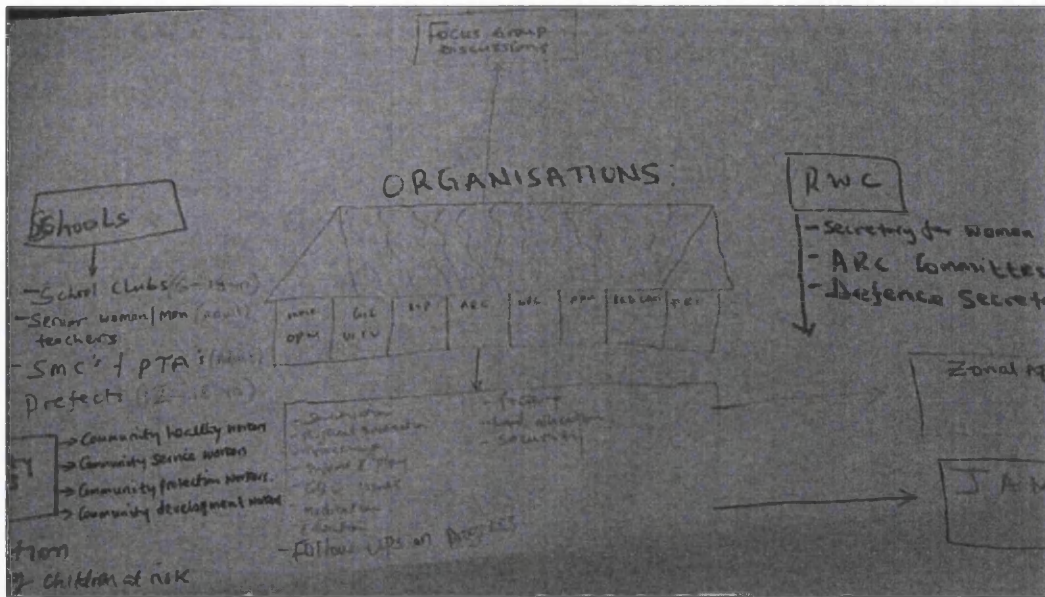


Figure 22: Practitioners' participation 'map' showing school, organisations, Refugee Welfare Council.

As part of their maps, practitioners listed examples of individuals in place in each of these areas who they thought could engage with children about their protection. At home, children could talk to parents, siblings and other relatives; at school, to designated teachers; in their community, to elders, Community Health Workers or church pastors; at UNHCR and GIZ to Protection and Community Services staff including those responsible for conducting BIAs and BIDs. What came across from the practitioners' maps was a network of people and places they thought children could go to in order to share their views and concerns.

Beyond just listing such individuals, practitioners identified certain roles as being more focused on supporting children's participation than others. Community Protection Workers talked about how they were working out in the settlement zones, visiting the villages and meeting with the children. One Community Protection Worker said that children would "normally talk to them", they would "exchange conversations" and tell them the problems that they faced. Within UNHCR, Community Services were viewed as the main communication point for the child, as the Resettlement Officer put it: "they're the first people in contact with the refugees".

In addition to such designated individuals, practitioners described structures and activities supporting children's participation in their protection. Specific examples of participatory structures for children included ARC (Action on the Rights of the

Child) and SGBV Children's Clubs in schools and Children's Representatives (two under 16s) on some Refugee Welfare Committees in the community. In addition, although fairly newly established and not yet fully operational, Children's Welfare Committees based in the community were also described. These Committees, explained one practitioner from GIZ, were "specifically dealing with children", with "mostly children" as members and engaging refugee children in their own protection: "...the mechanism of sorting the immediate cases that would be present within the community - people that are basically reporting to us".

Examples of activities promoting children's participation in Kyaka II included play-based sessions and workshops run by Right to Play. Through such play sessions, children were considered able to discuss their protection concerns and also communicate them to others - as one practitioner from Right to Play emphasised: "it carries a message behind it"; "it's not just for the play". The same practitioner also spoke about workshops for children:

"...in relation to child participation, where we teach children their rights...of course, while training them decision-making's one of their rights, so we encourage them to make their decisions, especially on issues related to early marriages, defilement<sup>11</sup>, rape and early sex."

An activity that many practitioners identified as particularly participatory for refugee children in Kyaka II was the (usually annual) protection assessment, connected to UNHCR's strategy on AGDM (Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming). The UNHCR Field Manager outlined how such protection assessments were used by UNHCR and its partners to engage with diverse groups of refugees, including children, and to draw out their particular experiences and concerns:

"...we get to know the protection concerns of the community, the challenges they are facing and the next solutions or steps to take to solve those challenges. And during this assessment children are involved as a specific age group: that is from 10 to 13, then five to 10."

A UNHCR member of staff from Kampala explained the origins of the AGDM protection assessment, its specific purpose to get the views and concerns of more marginalised groups of refugees. She talked in particular about refugee children who: "in the past were not able to participate directly, but were always represented

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<sup>11</sup> In Ugandan law, defilement is the act of having sex with a girl under the age of 18.

by adults”. Other practitioners also spoke positively about refugee children’s ability to participate in AGDM assessments in Kyaka II. One workshop participant from GIZ said she was “optimistic” about children’s ability to share their views and concerns, based on her experience of previous assessments: “The children openly told us what they feel is hurting them, what they feel is good, and how they feel we can help them in future.”

The examples above of refugee children’s participation in their protection are not, of course, related specifically to the refugee protection process – indeed, only BIA and BID interviews were mentioned by practitioners as particularly participatory in this regard. For example, one GIZ member of staff commented:

“BID or BIA is all about having the child at the centre of the decision-making. We don't have to force or impose - it is up to them.”

The BID, another GIZ practitioner maintained, gave children the opportunity to make their own decisions about issues as important as foster care or resettlement to another country: “It is upon the child to say 'yes, I am okay with this’”. She added:

“...the BID process is for sure a tool that also emphasises child protection, and emphasises particularly the essential step that should always be taken to listen to the child, to get the consensus from the child, to let the child express himself/herself freely without conditioning.”

Some practitioners talked in more detail about the conditions that they thought made the BIA or BID process participatory for children. One UNHCR member of staff from Kampala talked about a “play box” she owned of child friendly resources – “some papers, some colours, some toys” – and which she used in the BID interview; another about how she thought children should be informed properly, and age appropriately, about the BID interview before it was held.

Whilst these comments are positive in relation to refugee children’s participation in the Best Interests Determination process, there is a growing critical literature on the principle of best interests and BID. For example, Liden and Rusten (2007) suggest that there is a contradiction between the notion of best interests and the principle of participation: the former suggesting refugee children are vulnerable and in need of adult protection, the latter that they are individuals with the right to respect for their own opinions. Refugee children’s experiences of participation in BID interviews in

practice in Kyaka II are explored in Chapter Five; the tension between protection and participation, as well as competing views of the refugee child, is given fuller consideration in Chapter Six.

#### **4.5 Participation, but in a box?**

From an initial consideration of such participation maps, and from a ‘technical’ perspective, some positive conclusions about children’s participation in Kyaka II might be drawn. For example, the designated posts / individuals, structures and activities described suggest a general commitment as well as a pro-active and deliberate approach to supporting refugee children’s participation in their protection in the settlement. The accounts of participatory protection assessments purposefully engaging with children and the deliberately participatory objectives of BIA and BID protection interviews indicate an attempt to identify and address refugee children’s specific protection views and concerns. This gives value to children and what they have to say.

There is also an initial sense of what is considered to ‘work’ in context in terms of children’s participation in their protection in Kyaka II: the kinds of support thought necessary to be in place. For example, the importance for practitioners of designated individuals who children can talk to and who encourage and enable their participation is clear, as well as certain strategies for how children’s participation might be supported: separating children from adults, creating a comfortable and enjoyable environment, providing children with appropriate information and an opportunity to play. There is also emphasis placed on practitioners ‘going out to’ children in the community, for example Community Protection Workers supporting children’s participation on a more continuous and informal basis. These “enablers” (Crowley, 2012) of children’s participation are important and will be returned to in this thesis later on.

However, despite such positive pictures of children’s participation in their protection from Kyaka II, as discussed in Chapter Two, there is often a difference between the rhetoric and the ‘reality’ (Kirby et al., 2003) and more than technical considerations involved. Cockburn’s (2007:446) assertion that good practices are often “exceptions” rather than “routine” invites a deeper exploration of our case study context and its empirical material and a consideration of power and space. A deeper

analysis involves children's own feedback on their participation in their protection and some reflection on how, for children and practitioners, participation might be differently defined. A more critical view is then taken on the spaces where children's participation is permitted to 'take place', which groups of refugee children are included or excluded as a result and the protection matters on which these children are able or allowed to articulate their views. Each of these is considered in turn below, resulting in an increasingly "boxed in" (Hart and Khatiwada, 2003), enclosed or circumscribed (Hart, 2012) picture of refugee children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II and a significant gap to be addressed.

Unlike humanitarian practitioners in Kyaka II, refugee children did not mention participatory clubs or committees, activities or assessments in their workshops, but were most clear on certain adults or groups of adults that they could talk to about their protection concerns. Children mentioned, for example: teachers, matron, doctor, counsellor, headmaster, community governors, family and elders. One 11-16s group listed Protection Officer (UNHCR), parents, neighbour, Chairman, Commandant (OPM), pastor and police. One child from this group of 11-16 year olds commented afterwards that: "they all help". In response to two generic statements in their workshops: "children know where to go when they feel unsafe" and "children can talk to adults about their problems" - encouragingly, the majority of children agreed.

Rather than talking about specific structures set up to enhance their participation, then, children tended to mention certain individuals and the circumstances that demonstrated that adult's ability to listen and to provide support. Such individuals included both adults from the refugee community as well as practitioners from organisations working in Kyaka II. For example, a teenage girl from Bujubuli told me:

"If you are being disturbed by a certain man and he becomes a barrier to you, you can go to the police."

More specifically, a secondary school pupil spoke to me about a particular member of staff from Right to Play: "If children have problems, she talks to them and, if difficult, takes them to UNHCR". In relation to adults closer to home, one boy from a group of 11-16 year olds commented:

“When a child gets a problem, can tell to adults...May be coming from school and find someone beats you for no reason. Tell neighbours and even those passing by on the road.”

In terms of which people children talked to most about their protection concerns, the majority mentioned mother / father / guardian, Chairman (of their community Refugee Welfare Committee) and (community) elders, followed by neighbours and other relatives, i.e. those adults closest to home. As might be expected, the children that most prioritised their parents and guardians as people to talk to were those aged 6-10. Away from their homes and communities, a quarter of children who responded said that they could talk to practitioners from UNHCR, GIZ and OPM – because, said one teenage boy from Bujubuli: “they are responsible for us and can help”. Five out of a group of ten unaccompanied children in a workshop said they would speak to GIZ or UNHCR and five children across different workshops mentioned the Commandant from OPM in particular. Children in school-based workshops mentioned the opportunities to share their protection concerns at school and how they might be visited there by GIZ and UNHCR.

However, when asked more specifically about GIZ and UNHCR and support for their protection concerns, many children were less clear. Only two whole workshop groups of ten children said that they knew or had heard of these organisations; in all the other workshop groups it was only one to three. Knowing or hearing of these organisations also did not mean that children had spoken to GIZ or UNHCR about their concerns: for example, a girl from one 6-10s workshop said that she had “seen them” but did not know what they did. Almost an entire workshop group of 11-16 year-olds living in the Reception Centre said that there was “nobody” to whom they could tell their protection concerns.

Set against the participation maps produced by practitioners, this feedback from refugee children in Kyaka II is revealing. It suggests that many of the children involved in the workshops had not been engaged in, or were not even aware of, the participatory structures, activities or assessments put in place. There is also an indication that these refugee children viewed their participation in a different, more fluid way: as conversations taking place with trusted individuals when needed rather than activity channelled through particular structures in predefined spaces at specified times. This more ‘dialogic’ interpretation of child participation - focusing

on the nature of adult: child interaction rather than where this takes place - is something that will be returned to later on.

How children's participation is defined and understood – as outlined previously in Chapter Two - has implications for refugee children and for their protection.

Participation viewed as an activity or event – something that has a beginning and an end – means a restricted sense of agency and less opportunity for refugee children to express their protection concerns than participation conceptualised as an on-going process and a right. For some practitioners in Kyaka II, children's participation was viewed in this activity-based way: school activities that children needed to *take part in*, games or sports where they “participated” and trophies were given, collecting rubbish or other activities where they “participated” in community work.

Participatory assessments or community consultations, for these practitioners, were “events” that children took part in, some happening periodically, others once a year. Unlike children's understanding of their participation as outlined above, this activity-based conceptualisation takes the emphasis away from the nature and quality of the relationship between the adult and the child. It is also a conceptualisation that lends itself to the circumscription of children's participation in space.

In the case study context of Kyaka II, despite being at odds with children's conceptualisation of their own participation, child participation, as mapped by practitioners =, is spatially confined and enclosed in different ways and ‘takes place’ in certain locations and not in others. For example, participation is associated with clearly defined, adult-initiated structures such as children's clubs and committees in specific locations across the settlement which are circumscribed in space. This is where children go to participate in discussions on their rights or welfare or where their participation is ‘done’. Similarly, these structures are most prevalent in the settlement's schools rather than out in the community as a whole. Spatial and institutional ‘zones’ (for example, ‘school’ or ‘church’) are also identified as participatory on the practitioners' maps, with the individuals or roles associated with them localised and circumscribed. Participatory workshops, sessions and assessments ‘take place’ at certain times at certain sites.

Such designated spaces for children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II can be problematized, both in terms of the children who are able (or not able) to have

access to them and the nature and focus of children's participation that they (dis)allow. Each of these will be considered in turn.

Organised structures to support children's participation – for example children's clubs – exist predominantly in the school environment in Kyaka II. School is a place where children are visited by and can interact with practitioners from agencies working in the settlement. A GIZ practitioner spoke about children's participation in their protection through such clubs in schools:

“We have Action for the Rights of Children clubs, as well as Sexual and Gender Based Violence clubs. ...we have had a few instances where children report sexual abuse, for example by their parents or guardians or neighbours...All these clubs at school, someone is able to say something about a friend and we come out to like rescue this child through that...”

This practitioner maintained that, because of their participation through these structures, school children were able to know the individuals in place to protect them and were kept safer as a result:

“...they know that ‘okay we have the Protection sector, GIZ, we have these kinds of...persons who handle these kinds of problems: protection guys that have a role in child protection, then gender based violence’. Whether it is a man or a woman or a child...they know that they still can come up and know that ‘I am going to so and so’ - so in schools we have that kind of structure to ensure that the children are...safe and their rights are as well protected”.

Similarly, a Community Protection Worker spoke about the support for children attending school-based clubs when reporting their protection concerns:

“We have a programme: you saw the clubs? SGBV Club, and Rights of Child?...we meet them...we tell them about SGBV...Sometimes if they get problem, they don't know where to report, where to go, so we advise them...you have to first report to the Headmistress or to the Headmaster...”

For some practitioners in Kyaka II, because they believe that every child in the settlement over six years should be in school, a school-based focus on children's participation is not a problem. However, with estimates from Windle Trust of school-age children actually going to school in Kyaka II ranging from 50 to 70% and with many children who are not in school coming from certain communities in the settlement, this does not bode well for the participation of those children remaining at home. These children are viewed as not used to giving their views; as feeling greater fear around their participation and not being informed or aware of



their protection rights. As one Community Protection Worker put it, such children do not know:

“...how they should go and tell someone that I have been beaten or have a problem with my father or with the neighbour, or someone I have met on the way.”

In their workshops, groups of school children also spoke about “children in the villages” - those not attending school - who faced barriers such as “fear” and “lack of language” which made it harder for them to participate. One teenage boy from Bujubuli said:

“Children not in school have ideas but they don’t share – they carry them in their heads – they don’t have someone to tell.”

Although this divide between school-going children and those not attending school seems to be quite marked in terms of children’s participation, there is of course diversity within this. In the children’s clubs in schools in Kyaka II, it is important to remember that certain children are given the opportunity to participate - school leaders, class monitors, school prefects and play leaders; the head girl of the school or the head boy - and may not necessarily be representative of or feeding back to the wider school community as a whole. Conversely, within those children that are not attending school, some, because of their experiences - for example older children or heads of child-headed households - may be more used to speaking with adults or better able to voice their concerns.

However, despite such diversity, there is a significant emphasis on participation in schools in Kyaka II, a spatial circumscription of participation excluding children who are not in school. A practitioner from Right to Play stated that, in Kyaka II, “children don’t give their views...in any of the protection issues” unless it “arises in schools”. She maintained that feedback and information was not given to children unless they were those in school, whom the organisations would then “simply tell”. School children were viewed by practitioners as “very free”: able to express their views and opinions, including on their protection and rights. This GIZ practitioner maintained that, for school children, it was “very clear for them to say their problems and ask them what they thought”. She added:

“We can go to the schools and you just get a small number you want, which you think is manageable, randomly of course, and from there they will talk, others are so active, they will raise their hands and talk...”

Whilst this paints a positive picture of school children and their ability to engage, this practitioner’s choice of words also suggest something about the relative ease of organising and facilitating children’s participation in schools rather than out in the community. Children are already at a specific location at a specific time, a ‘captured audience’, you can just “go there” and “get” the number you want or “simply tell” them what you want to say. Because they are more educated and supported, they don’t have the fears and “lack of language” of children not attending school, “they will raise their hands and talk”. Whilst it is not emphasised so much here, in Chapter Five it will be seen that Ugandan practitioners often comment on refugee children’s inability to “talk well”, a form of judgement which can affect their treatment as a result.

In addition to children not attending school, practitioners also identified girls as participating less in Kyaka II, limited by a range of factors but predominantly by cultural expectations and gender roles. According to one practitioner from Right to Play, a girl’s “place” was seen as being “in the kitchen and in the house”, with household duties and caring responsibilities to attend to. In Kyaka II, this practitioner said, girls were often taken out of school early and the “idea of girls participating” was resisted by parents because they did not “see the use of it”: “a girl has to go fetch water, fetch food; cook for children” and so her participation is “minimal”. Due to their more isolated social position in the community, girls were described as less assertive, with under-developed communication skills and low self-esteem. There were additional barriers connected to girls not being supposed to talk to adult males – including service providers – not feeling confident enough to speak out or having a sense of shame preventing disclosure of abuse. One practitioner from Windle Trust commented: “if she goes to the office to report, she can feel ashamed - so they decide to keep quiet”. In terms of their participation, this practitioner suggested: “girls will always be left behind”. Children also talked about what they saw as a lack of enough care to “the girl child” in Kyaka II in terms of protection and participation. During the children’s workshops, it was pertinent that the only

children called home early to attend to other matters and responsibilities at home were girls.

Such cultural constraints and limitations on the participation of girls due to gender roles are important to note. However, it is also important to stress that girls are further constrained in Kyaka II by the association of children's participation with the settlement's schools. With children's participation predominantly circumscribed in school-based space and girls predominantly relegated to 'the home', the barriers to girls' participation are organisational - the result of how agencies 'practice' participation and its spatial organisation - as well as cultural in Kyaka II.

Both refugee children and practitioners in Kyaka II felt that younger children faced additional barriers to their participation and to getting their voices heard. One member of a group of 11-16 year olds commented that: "If you are sixteen, you can talk to adults, if younger no". For younger children, he said, it was "hard to get words to talk so others can listen".

Younger children (aged 6-10) in workshops expressed their lack of information about who they could talk to and the difficulties they faced in approaching people with their problems. They were much less aware of opportunities available to them and felt reliant on a circle of support that was much closer to home. For example, one group of 6-10 year-olds were only able to name father, mother, uncle, aunt, brother, friend, neighbour as the people they could talk to about their protection concerns. Most of these younger children were not aware of the different agencies dealing with protection, or had only seen them passing by in a "white vehicle" but not talked to them. They were unsure about these organisations' roles, particularly in relation to protection: "they play with children and give them food", "they receive you, write your name and give you food for emergency... you go to school and get to study for free", were the suggestions from two under-ten year-old children. Some of the younger children talked about not knowing these organisations and "fearing them" as a result.

Refugee children aged 6-10 can, and do, of course attend school in Kyaka II but may not have access to the participatory structures or clubs that are based there. Indeed, the children's clubs I had contact with in primary schools all had members over the

age of ten. Many refugee children are 'behind' in their education due the disruption of their education during flight from their home country, awaiting refugee status and the challenges faced in the Ugandan education system with a different language of instruction. It is not uncommon to have children's club members in primary schools who are therefore aged thirteen or fourteen due to the language and confidence that such participation requires. Children under the age of ten who are not attending school will have a much smaller social circle, closer to home with less opportunity and confidence for engagement in any community-based sessions or workshops, than their older peers.

For children without parents in the settlement, both children and practitioners felt that there could also be increased barriers to their participation. Children felt that not having parents meant that it was harder to get your views heard - "being an orphan" was a barrier in itself as there was no-one to support you. Similarly a Community Protection Worker talked about children being a "UAM" in the settlement - "no parent, they have no father, no mother, no relatives" - and as a result these children were more "complex", more influenced by others, found it harder to talk about their concerns. However, conversely, UAMs or orphans<sup>12</sup> were also seen as in a better place to participate - some practitioners felt that these children had had to become more mature due to the experiences they had been through and were better able to articulate their problems. Children also referred to this - a secondary school girl said UAMs "can't keep quiet. They have to speak out and people listen to them". This mixed view of unaccompanied children in relation to their participation is picked up on again in Chapter Six during discussion on the conceptualisation of the child.

Whether children separated from their parents are more or less confident or mature and able to share their views and concerns, it is important to point out that they may not have access to the spaces where this 'takes place' in Kyaka II. Such children often have increased responsibilities and duties with no biological family members to support them and can be placed in foster care with adults who can rely on them for supporting younger children and contributing to household income. These children are often balancing the demands of work and income generation with school and

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<sup>12</sup> This section shows the confusion in the field in relation to terms such as 'orphan' and 'unaccompanied minor' or UAM, with the two sometimes used inter-changeably. A child separated from both parents or primary care giver as well as other adult relatives does not mean that the child's parents are dead.

struggle to find the money to pay school fees on time. It is unlikely, therefore, that they will have the time and opportunity to engage in the clubs and committees based in the settlement's schools. Similarly, if children's participation is associated with particular 'events' at particular locations and times – for example, workshops, assessments or sessions – these children will have less available time, less flexibility and, if required to travel long distances, less means to attend. Indeed, a practitioner from the Norwegian Refugee Council told me that it was hard enough for these children to find time to attend food distributions in the settlement, let alone other 'events'.

Whilst, as Cornwall (2008:277) states, “most participatory processes do not and literally cannot involve ‘everyone’”, the “question of who participates as well as who is excluded...is a crucial one” (2008:275). Indeed, in relation to the participation of children in their protection in Kyaka II, it can be seen that significant numbers of children - predominant amongst them: children not in school, girls, younger children, children separated from their families – face more barriers than their peers in terms of their participation. These children do not have access to the formalised structures designed to support their participation and even within the clubs and committees themselves, only certain children have influence and are involved. We are left, then, with a substantial number of refugee children who, if not able to participate through these structures and mechanisms, do not necessarily have someone to talk to about any of their protection concerns.

What is important to emphasise is that these children are more excluded at least in part because of how participation, through the work of humanitarian practitioners in the settlement, is conceptualised and spatially confined. There is an indication that such spatial organisation of children's participation is based on what is most easily and rapidly organised and facilitated and what will deliver the best and quickest 'results' than on the more challenging engagement of a fully diverse group of refugee children. There is also an indication that participation as based in schools re-emphasises desirable qualities in, or standards for, refugee children – such as the 'proper' use of language, being able to communicate appropriately in the Ugandan context – rather than attempting to engage with a range of refugee children 'as they are'. The spatial circumscription of children's participation neglects the many

barriers faced by different groups of children in the refugee settlement context, restricting their movement and access to such 'participatory space'. Despite having unequal access to support for their participation, these children, however, are no less exposed to protection risks nor less in need of being able to voice their views and share their protection concerns.

In addition to excluding certain groups of children, channelling refugee children's participation through certain spaces - for example children's clubs and committees, particularly those based at school can be limiting in scope as well as scale.

Firstly, whilst the relative openness of the school environment for children to share their views and concerns has been outlined, children's clubs are adult-initiated and, at least in part, "invited spaces" - "structures set up by organisations and run by adults to facilitate children's participation" (Cornwall in Crowley, 2012:47) - with headmasters, teachers and other adults in authority involved. Whilst they are meant to be participatory for children, "invited spaces" for Cornwall (in Crowley, 2012) and Shier (2010) are also about the operation of control - children are "marginal" to them and "invited into" them to participate in decision-making but not in a position of power:

"Those who hold the most power not only set the agenda around which citizen participation can take place but also generally own and control the spaces in which deliberation takes place and decisions are made" (Shier, 2010:28).

In "invited spaces" there are therefore, for Cornwall (Cornwall in Shier, 2010:28), "entrenched relations of dependency" and "fear" which can "undermine the possibility of the kind of deliberative decision-making" these structures are there to provide. As such, children are 'boxed in' to such spaces and structures not of their own making, controlled by adult agendas rather than their own.

Others also critique such a 'boxed in' approach to children's participation, with participatory structures modelled on, or which mimic, adult-oriented committees and clubs and which, for Shier (2010:35), "keep children in a cupboard" and "wheel them out' for consultation". For Johnson (2010), such children's clubs can be useful mechanisms for facilitating child participation but there are limitations associated with only focusing on these structures alone. Prout (in Hill et al., 2004:85) critiques

in particular the adult-initiated nature of such participatory structures: “Too often children are expected to fit into adult ways of participating when what is needed is institutional and organisational change...”. For Sinclair (2004:106):

“...if participation is to be more meaningful to children and effective in influencing change, it is necessary to move beyond one-off or isolated participation and consider how participation becomes embedded as an integral part of our relationship with children”.

Indeed, refugee children’s conceptualisation of their own participation in Kyaka II is more in keeping with this definition concerned with the nature of adult: child relations, rather than participation associated with particular structures, spaces and times where it is allowed to ‘take place’. A degree of caution can therefore be applied to the designated or “invited” spaces of children’s participation - the adult-initiated clubs and committees established in Kyaka II: as such, they have their limitations. Institutional or organisational change in terms of refugee children’s participation in their protection - including ways to consider participation as part of adults’ “relationship with children” - will be the subject of chapters to come.

Secondly, because these clubs and committees are school-based, the topics of conversation tend to focus on protection issues related to community and school. A GIZ Protection Officer said children were able to discuss gender-based violence in their community, report sexual abuse or speak about issues they were “facing... within themselves”. In relation to school, a representative from Right to Play said children could discuss a range of issues relating to their well-being and their education:

“How are they faring? How are they taught? How is the classroom? How is the playfield? How are the teachers? How are they handling them? How... do challenges come and how are they handled? Whom do you report to? What are some of the cases you have experienced as children leaders in schools?”

These protection issues – and their disclosure by children – are extremely important and it is encouraging if children are able to participate in this way. Such reporting of abuse through school-based mechanisms is, for many children, essential. However, whilst participation through clubs and committees can increase children’s participation in relation to certain areas of their protection – the neglect, violence, exploitation and abuse faced by them in the community, school or home they are not

the places where decisions in relation to the international protection of refugee children are made. These decisions are made elsewhere, by other people, through procedures and in spaces that, to a large extent, are not included in the practitioners' maps of refugee children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II. In these other spaces – reception centres, interview rooms, agency offices - decisions are being made about refugee status and durable solutions, matters that impact on children's protection in different timeframes and at different scales to their 'everyday' protection concerns. There is therefore a large area of children's protection that they may not be being able to participate in, where, for a range of reasons, they may not be able to 'have a say'.

As outlined in Chapter Two, it is important to reflect on children's participation in their protection in terms of a 'politics of scale' (Ansell, 2009). Ansell (2009:190) reflects on the "geographies of children's lives" and their participation and finds that they have "a very parochial locus of interest", restricted to spaces such as the neighbourhood and the school. As Ansell (2009) points out, this restricted area for children's participation is not an accurate reflection of children's multiple engagements with space and scale. It limits children's opportunities to "comment on or intervene in the processes and decisions that shape their own lives". The problem with micro-geographies of children, Ansell (2009:191) contends, is that they leave "unchallenged the processes that affect children across national settings or even world-wide".

Whilst, as already argued, it is important not to disregard the 'everyday' of children's lives and experiences, it is essential to broaden our perspective from their participation as solely 'taking place' in the spaces of home, community and school. This research needs to engage with the procedural spaces of international refugee protection, refugee children's protection as operational at a more macro level, since this is also fundamental to refugee children's lives. Whilst this shift of perspective and scale leaves us still focusing on spaces *within* the refugee settlement, rather than critiquing the refugee camp as protective space itself, such refugee protection procedures connect children up to other spaces and scales, are operational at a global level and affect refugee children world-wide. In context in Kyaka II, from the empirical material discussed so far, it is also a clearly identified gap.



#### **4.6 Conclusions**

This chapter has presented practitioners' 'maps' of refugee children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II. It has drawn on the theoretical literature to problematize these maps in relation to power and space. With a more critical approach, it has been possible to show how a particular construction of refugee children's participation in context - both conceptually and spatially - has meant the further exclusion of certain groups of refugee children from participation in their protection as well as the limitation of children's participation in both scope and scale.

Children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II, then, seems to be truncated in a range of ways and there are a number of interests involved. As a result, their participation in the wider refugee protection process – important procedures, protection matters and spaces that must be negotiated by a refugee from the point of arrival in Kyaka II – remains less than clear. As already suggested, this is also a critical area in relation to the protection of refugee children and one in which we need to know to what degree children are able to be involved in decision-making and to 'have their say', as well as what interests and power struggles are involved. This leads us onto an exploration in particular of children's participation in the refugee protection process and its 'core' procedures. This aspect of refugee children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II is explored in the chapter that follows.

## Chapter Five: Mind the gap: children's participation in the refugee protection process

### 5.1 Introduction

The most recent UNHCR policy directive on refugee children's protection is the *Framework for the Protection of Children* (UNHCR, 2012). Children's participation is rhetorically positioned in this document as a "guiding principle", "integral" to child protection and one of six core protection "goals". The Framework defines children's participation as a right, for all children, "in all matters" that affect them - with children capable of participating in the protection of both other children and themselves:

"UNHCR and its partners will actively support the rights of all boys and girls to participate and express their views in all matters affecting them in accordance with their gender, age, maturity, and capacity. Effective participation recognizes children and adolescents as rights-holders, it builds their capacity and resilience, and allows them to protect themselves and their peers" (UNHCR, 2012:16).

Such aspirations for refugee children's participation in their protection are both encouraging and welcome. For James (2007:261), however, "the increasing rhetoric of children's participation" is often "combined with the reality that children are silenced in their everyday lives". We have already seen in Chapter Four how certain groups of refugee children can face significant barriers to their participation in practice. James' (2007) paradox therefore invites us to look at the rhetoric in more depth in relation to the empirical material from the research; to explore further the complexities and challenges beneath. As with Chapter Four, this involves drawing on the theoretical literature from Chapter Two and a consideration of refugee children's participation in protection in terms of power and space.

Chapter Four presented practitioners' maps of refugee children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II, including examples of children's participation in protection from abuse, exploitation and harm. Practitioners also, however, identified the gaps. For example, despite some positive feedback on the participatory nature of BID and BIA procedures, one GIZ practitioner indicated a lack of children's participation in the refugee protection process as a whole. Another practitioner, from Right to Play, said that they had not "concentrated so much" on "that area" of

refugee children's protection to promote their participation. Indeed, the participation in protection maps that the practitioners produced did not include, for example, the Reception Centre as participatory space for children, alongside the spaces of school, community and home. A more detailed exploration of children's participation in the refugee protection process in this chapter suggests that this is a gap that needs to be addressed.

Moving from the map of what exists to the gaps identified, this chapter outlines refugee children's opportunities for participation at different stages in the refugee protection process: arrival and reception and interviews for registration, RSD and BID. Refugee children and practitioners' views – combined with observations from the field – document the barriers to children's participation at each of these procedural stages and the consequences for their protection. The chapter also considers the barriers to refugee children approaching practitioners in their offices on a day-to-day basis to discuss their protection issues and concerns. There is, overall, a relative absence of refugee children's participation in the refugee protection process and a need to understand the dynamics involved.

## 5.2 Arrival and Reception Centre



Figure 23: "Two children arriving in Kyaka II": drawing by teenage boy, 11-16 workshop, Bujubuli.

### 5.2.1 Arrival

As noted in the previous chapter, children arrive at Kyaka II Refugee Settlement in different ways. For example, they may be transported as part of a larger group of

refugees, 'allocated' to Kyaka II from a transit camp at the Uganda/DRC border. Alternatively, they might have travelled independently – either with or without other family members or adult relatives – and more directly to Kyaka II.

Arrival at Kyaka II is a mixed experience for these refugee children. On the one hand, they have arrived at their destination, it is relatively secure and they recognise that agencies are there to help them. Figure 23 shows a child's drawing of two children arriving at the settlement to a welcoming sign indicating UNHCR is there to assist. Other refugee children also associated positive feelings with arriving at Kyaka II. An unaccompanied child from a workshop in Mukondo said that they "felt ok" on arrival "because where they left, there was war". A primary school pupil commented "refugees have reached Kyaka: they feel good..." Other pupils in the same workshop described the assistance – food, clothes, water, medicine – that could be available when refugees arrive. A girl from a secondary school workshop drew refugees being welcomed and given support on arrival: "material they feel very happy to receive" (Figure 24).

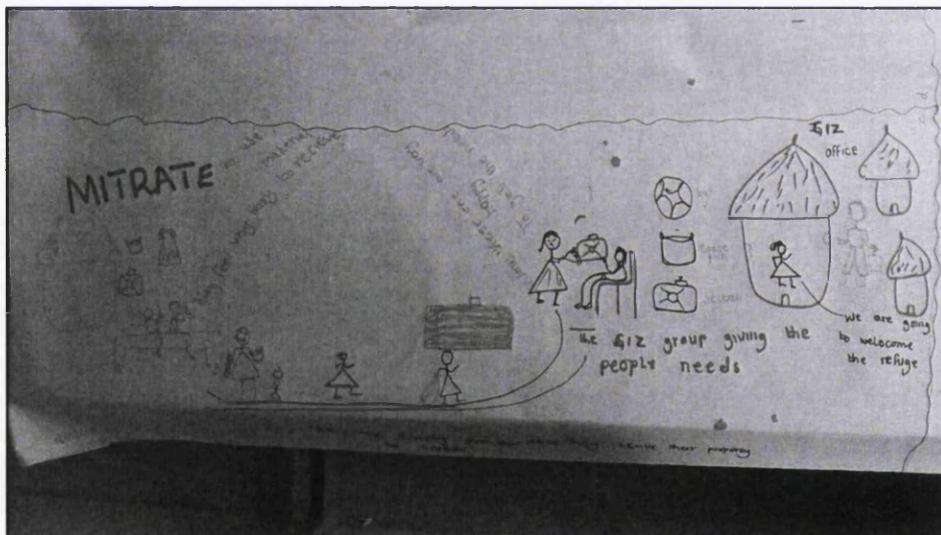


Figure 24: "We are going to welcome the refugee": drawing by teenage girl 11-16 workshop, Bujubuli.

At the same time, however, children's views are also focused on the hardships and challenges of their journey to Kyaka II and those that they encounter when they arrive. In terms of their flight, one secondary school girl lamented having to leave her home behind, leaving "their property to another". A primary school pupil described refugees "feeling bad" because they had left their home country and

“because of civil wars”. One of a group of 11-16 year-olds from Bukere talked in a workshop about being “thirsty in the road when coming, and hunger”, and younger children from a group of 6-10 year-olds in the same zone mentioned back pain (“things they are carrying are heavy”), headaches (“pain from walking”) and “jiggers” (a burrowing insect in their feet). One drawing of ‘arrival’ from a secondary school girl shows a refugee family carrying their possessions with them to Kyaka II; another from a boy waiting at the health centre for treatment shows children crossing the border surrounded by many other refugees (Figures 25 and 26). A young girl in a workshop for unaccompanied children in Mukondo mentioned how she came alone: “left by parents and someone picked them on the way”.

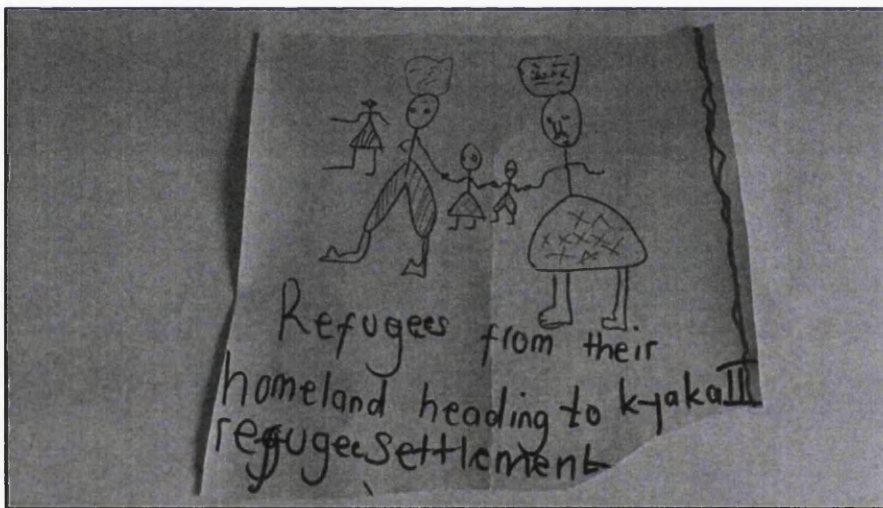


Figure 25: "Refugees from their homeland": drawing by girl, 11-16 workshop, Bujubuli.



Figure 26: Refugees crossing the border: drawing by teenage boy, Health Centre, Bujubuli.

On arrival in the settlement, children also encounter a range of hardships. One child from a group of 6-10 year olds from Bukere said “there is a lot of suffering in Kyaka II”. A role play from a group of children at Swe Swe Primary School showed refugees arriving in the settlement, experiencing such “suffering”, their children crying and in need of help. Several of the children’s workshop groups focused on the difficulties of arrival such as lack of food, nowhere to sleep, poverty and disease. They also spoke about feeling unsafe. Members of a group of 6-10 year olds described the hostility they had encountered when first in Kyaka II: they found that other children could “disturb them”, “abuse them”, “whip them” and “beat their ears” and that you could come from Kampala but “other people already have houses – they refuse you a place to sleep”. In connection with this, an unaccompanied child from Mukondo spoke about “sleeping outside without any shelter” on arrival and “fearing” to do so. Another unaccompanied girl from the same workshop recounted how, despite reaching relative peace, she still felt unsafe arriving in Kyaka II and unsure in an unfamiliar environment: “remembering the way they ran from Congo...not used to place and wonders where she is”.

In the middle of such hardship, uncertainty and disorientation, children felt that they lacked access to information and guidance and someone to talk to about their concerns. One new arrival - an unaccompanied boy living in the Reception Centre - expressed this as follows:

“He is a newcomer and an orphan with no parents...doesn't know someone to tell his problems. Can't get results if talk about it or get answer. Don't trust people outside. Don't know GIZ or UNHCR...”

A group of 11-16 year-olds from the Reception Centre confirmed in a follow-up workshop the hardships children faced on arrival. Through a ranking exercise, they prioritised this issue of children having “no-one to tell” (Figure 27). An adult refugee - a Community Protection Worker in regular contact with newly arrived children - also raised this issue as a concern:

“...on their arrival the children, they are not getting any information... after reaching a settlement there is nobody to come... no information concerning where to go when you're having a problem and whom they are likely to ask...”

A UNHCR Protection Officer who had recently moved to Kyaka II from working in the North of Uganda wanted to know what might be in place to support these children - particularly those arriving alone:

“Then I asked myself the next question: ‘Where do we have a designated place for the children?’ Because I am a bit concerned if you are going to take a child to the extreme, what is going to happen to this child there in that extreme? ...What kind of protection is there for this child?”

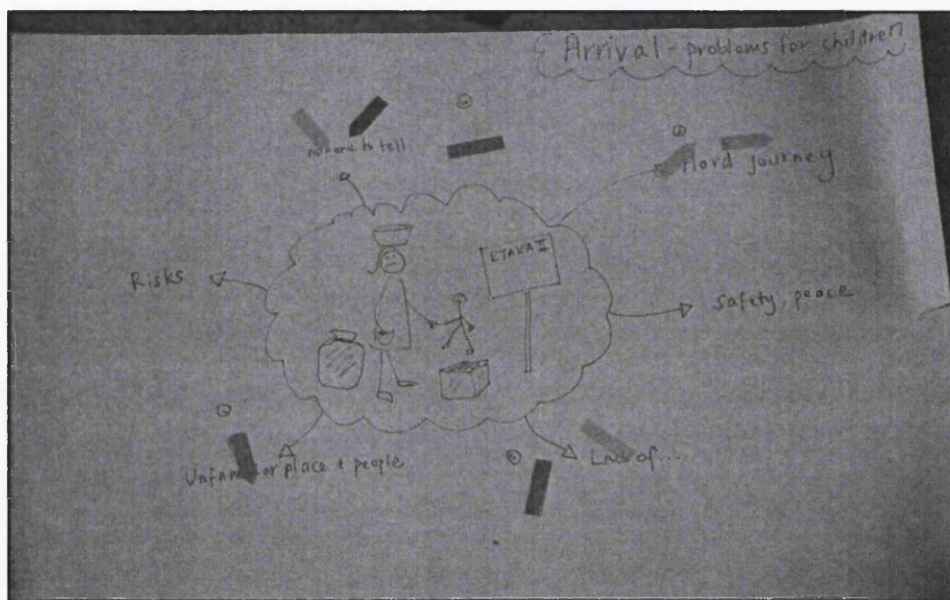


Figure 27: Ranking "problems for children" on arrival, 11-16 workshop, Reception Centre.

Another practitioner expressed her frustration about the reception given to newly arrived children and the lack of support and guidance in place:

“The referrals...are sent from Kampala. Nobody informs us. They send children or families with children. The families are dropped off in here, let’s say nine o’clock on Friday afternoon, and then ‘welcome to Kyaka’ – brilliant - and then what are you supposed to do? We have no idea. It’s Friday afternoon...the people left for the weekend, only the few of them that are in here, they can’t make a decision because their bosses are away... and now you need to figure out where do I put the family? How do I feed them?”

For this practitioner, such an approach did not “add up”: Kyaka II should be a “safer place” for refugees compared to where they were coming from and yet this was not always their experience in practice:

“I’m just dropped in here and I’m thinking ‘yeah, well great: it’s dark, I have no place to sleep, I haven’t eaten the whole day’...and there is nobody really

to provide that entry to tell me ‘this is what is happening, this is how things work in here, this is where you can stay’. It’s really, really bad.”

Although she felt that adults could “somehow cope with it”, for children she said “it really is scary” and she suggested that something needed to be changed about the “entry point” to the settlement to make it more supportive for children who have just arrived.

### 5.2.2 Reception Centre

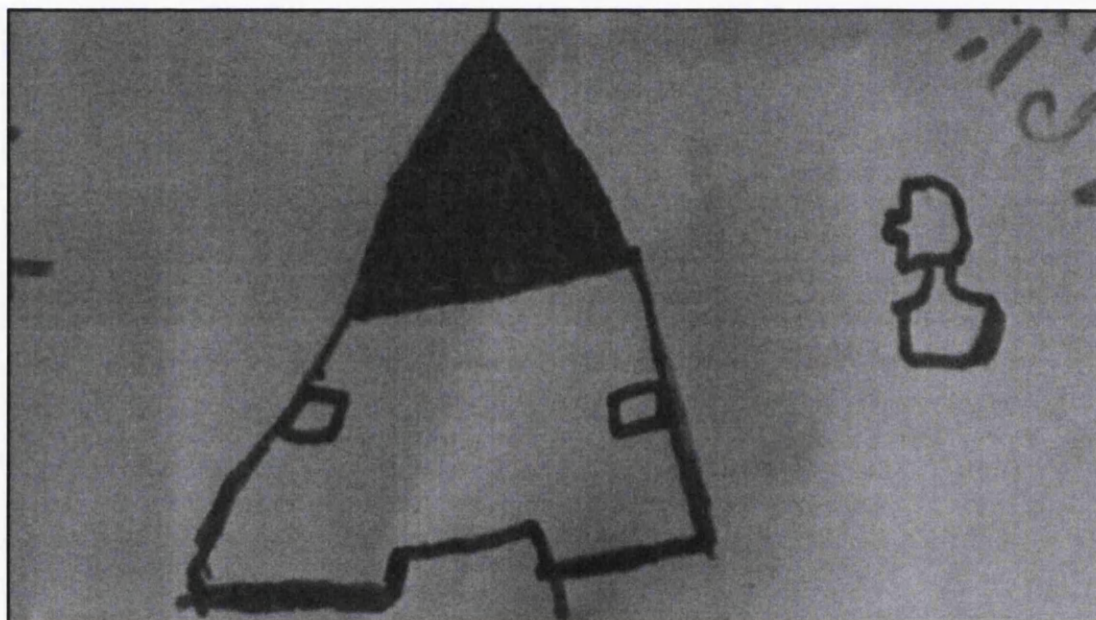


Figure 28: The Reception Centre tent: drawing by 7 year-old girl, 6-10 workshop, Reception Centre.

New arrivals to Kyaka II are taken to the Reception Centre (Figure 28). All children involved in the research felt that the Reception Centre was not a good place for children, although, for a few of them, it was at least a place to stay, to get some assistance and find some safety from war. For example, one of a group of 11-16 year-olds from Bukere said the Reception Centre was a “good place for children” because when they came from their “mother country”, they could “wait there for some good days” and the organisations could help you. An unaccompanied child from Mukondo said it was “a safe place because enough security with local defence” and that you could be provided with some medicine and food.

However, from the children’s workshops in general, the overwhelming message about the Reception Centre was of a place which was extremely challenging for children to live in, presenting additional protection risks and not conducive to



enabling their participation. A role play from a primary school group in Swe Swe showed refugees arriving at the Reception Centre with heavy bags, facing disease and hunger, sleeping badly and with a lack of clean water and poor sanitation. One child commented that children there were “having a bad life”. A hand puppet show by a group of girls from Bujubuli Secondary School played out the hardships of children living in the Reception Centre:

“Here we have UNHCR Officer and here girl children and boy children, women without food and protection, Police Officer. When the refugee children reach Uganda in the Reception Centre they face poor accommodation that’s cold, dirty, sleep on ground, congested, lack of items, poor sanitation, too much to do...” (Figure 29)



Figure 29: Girls practice puppet show script, 11-16 workshop (girls), Bujubuli.

A teenager living in the Reception Centre said that “staying there is very hard for them” and talked about this hardship in terms of “too much coldness” so that they “fail to sleep”, “lots of mosquitoes and no mosquito nets”, having to “look for food” and “poor facilities”. It was, she said, a “bad place to live”. Others in the workshop were helped to list their concerns on a group drawing showing problems children faced in the Reception Centre (Figure 30).

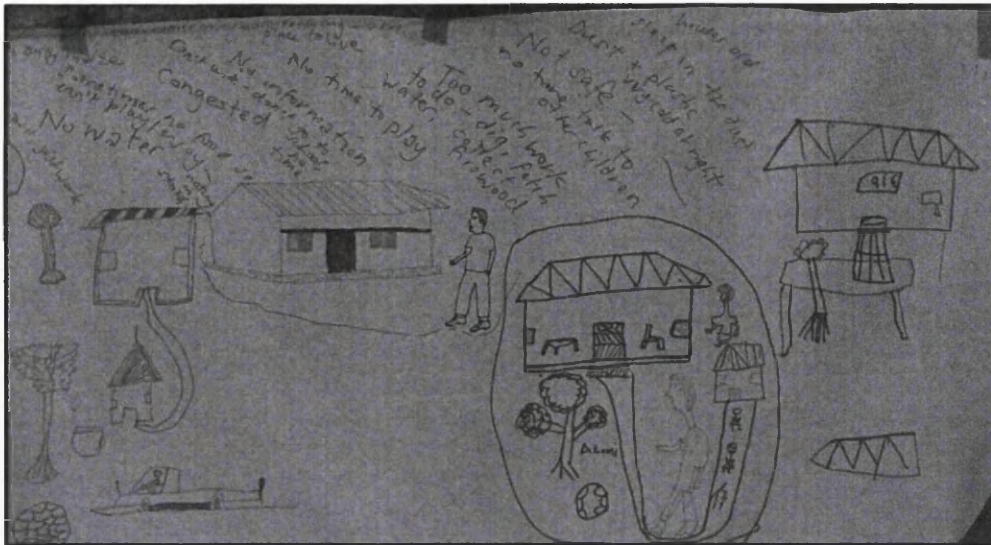


Figure 30: The problems children face in the Reception Centre, 11-16 workshop, Reception Centre.

Members of a group of 6-10 year olds, also living in the Reception Centre, listed similar issues: that they “sleep hungry”, “feel coldness”, face “diseases, dirtiness” and that “life is not good for them there, they are suffering”. These same concerns about the Reception Centre came repeatedly in all the children’s workshops, despite many of the children not having lived in the Reception Centre for some time. All the children mentioned lack of food and water, sickness (an unaccompanied child in Bukere said: “children can easier get diseases” there), poor sanitation and hygiene, inadequate shelter (the same child said: “rain water coming in”, sleeping on the ground and cold at night) and poverty. When asked if the Reception Centre was a good place for children, a group of 6-10 year olds from Bukere listed their concerns and one concluded, “No. Not good for people, it is for animals”.

Alongside their concerns about a lack of adequate food, water and shelter in the Reception Centre, children were also acutely concerned about their lack of education. This is understandable given that, as previously mentioned, some refugees might spend months living in the Reception Centre waiting for the REC from Kampala to come. Groups of children mentioned a lack of books, school uniforms, school materials and an 11-16 year-old from Builiti said that whilst living in the Reception Centre there was “no chance to go to school”. A primary school child from Mukondo said that, as a result of not going to school, children living there “don’t feel ok”. Others said that they did not go to school whilst living in the Reception Centre because they were too busy with work and had no time. In a follow-up workshop

with unaccompanied and separated children in Bujubuli, the group prioritised a lack of education over and above all other problems faced by children living in the Reception Centre.

In addition to these hardships, the physical space of the Reception Centre was a challenging environment for children in other ways, for example children mentioned overcrowding and a lack of space. After conducting a workshop with children from the Reception Centre, I was invited by adult refugees to go into the “kibash” to see their congested accommodation. They also asked me to take photographs to show other people the conditions in which they and their children were living. The environment inside the tent was cramped, dirty and, most likely, very cold at night. Another student researcher in the settlement, also present, mentioned that the conditions in the ‘stores’, where non-food items and provisions were kept, were better than those in the Reception Centre which was housing refugees. I recorded the visit in my research diary later that day:

“Very bad conditions and requests to find out about... mattresses, mosquito nets, cleaning materials and food for Reception Centre. 50-70 people sleep there. ‘Stores’ better! Say they treat people like animals. Took photos: hope not too dark? Was invited to take and show more than just pictures of children – permission given by refugees.” (Figure 31)



Figure 31: Photograph taken of the inside of the Reception Centre tent.

On the follow-up visit to Kyaka II, the open-sided brick building, used previously for food distributions and for children's workshops, had also become accommodation for refugees, housing those who had come 'prima facie' from the border with DRC. Over one hundred refugees were said to be living in that space in crowded and poor conditions.

In addition to providing insufficient space, there was also concern about the lack of demarcations in the Reception Centre. All eleven of one workshop group of unaccompanied children said it had not made them feel safe. As one child explained:

“Because they keep them at the same point: not even in separate rooms. They would abuse them and harass them. They didn't know who because they were new. Small space so harass each other as together.”

Indeed, feeling insecure in the Reception Centre - for a variety of reasons - was a recurrent problem identified by children. A teenager living in the Reception Centre said in a workshop that “people living there not safe”. Children talked about people stealing their things – an unaccompanied child from Bujubuli said thieves were “taking plastic sheeting, basins”; another in the same workshop said you “can find a chicken or a goat, they steal”. Other children were afraid of “intruders” coming into the tent. An unaccompanied child from Mukondo said the Reception Centre had “no door, it was easy for anybody to enter” and she “feared it”. A group of secondary school boys in a workshop said the Reception Centre should be fenced in; one added: “so people who do bad things and rape cannot come in.... It happens”. An unaccompanied child from Bukere said she was afraid of “evil spirits” in the Reception Centre, another from Mukondo “feared people who sacrifice, cut off heads”.

Children also described being mistreated by other children in the Reception Centre and talked about children beating each other and fighting for food and being misleading about how life could be in the settlement. For example, one of a group of 6-10 year olds living in the Reception Centre said that “other children deceive them. They told them the place is nice and good but it is not”. Members of both this group and a group of 11-16 year olds living in the Reception Centre said that they could feel “lonely and frightened” there. As well as feeling physically unsafe, children spoke about other feelings and emotions in relation to living in the Reception Centre.



They got information from neighbours and people staying near the Reception Centre” instead.

Practitioners were similarly critical of the Reception Centre as an environment for children, all agreeing that it was “absolutely not child friendly”. Adult interviewees described the physical hardships for children living there and the problems of the Reception Centre as a physical space. For example, the Norwegian Refugee Council’s food distribution officer described the Centre as “one house that is in a dilapidated state” and a Congolese Community Protection Worker commented that “people crowded, they just sleep in bad conditions”. An OPM practitioner in a follow-up workshop for Protection and Community Services staff said the Reception Centre was a “gap” they knew they needed to address: “the poorest place – where they sleep there are fleas and bed bugs and the way children are received here is not ok”. There were also concerns about children’s protection and safety, both in terms of harm or abuse. The food distribution officer also commented on this in her interview:

“So just imagine: the mothers, children and fathers, I think it’s somehow partitioned, but it’s one open building, you know, so anything can happen. So the chances of children being defiled or being assaulted or what, they are so high, so I don’t think that is also the best way.”

Whilst a new Reception Centre building was under construction, this was taking some time and a practitioner from Windle Trust said that, although they were “working on it”, the existing Reception Centre, with only two rooms, was “not a good place for children to stay”. In a staff mapping workshop, one practitioner said that children were “not protected generally” in the Reception Centre “sleeping with other people” and that there should be demarcations: “areas for children; male/female”. It was, he said, in the budget to construct a new Reception Centre that year. One Community Protection Worker also mentioned the time children spent in the Reception Centre, supposed to be only a “temporary measure” but with some children living there for months while they were waiting for an interview with the REC for an RSD interview. Overall, practitioners were very conscious of these concerns but also keenly aware that resources were a “big issue” and a constraint.

For practitioners, as well as a place of hardship, the Reception Centre was somewhere where children, particularly unaccompanied children, were “ignorant”

about the protection process. As a pastor from Windle Trust put it, children did not know “where do you start and where do you end”, and had a lack of information to guide them in terms of participating in their own protection. A Refugee Community Worker said: “...remember when they first come here... they don’t have even money, single coin, and sometimes they are not really informed where to go”. Children were viewed as very much “in the background” in the Reception Centre, not directly engaged and informed. A practitioner from Right to Play commented: “...if you go to the Reception Centre, they will collect adults, talk to them, but children will be left aside”.

In terms of their participation, one practitioner from Windle Trust said that the “opportunity” was “limited” for children living in the Reception Centre: “they don’t have anybody to talk to them or advise them in any kind of way”. Although a member of staff from GIZ pointed out that there was a RWC in place in the Reception Centre “to oversee whatever is going on”, this structure, unlike elsewhere in the settlement, did not involve refugee children:

**Respondent:** “There is a committee at the Reception Centre but the challenge there is that it always changes...”

**Interviewer:** “And they have children on that one as well, two children?”

**Respondent:** “We have youth. We don’t have very little children.”

**Interviewer:** “I mean under-sixteen? They still have the two under sixteen?”

**Respondent:** “No.”

Refugee children, then, face hardships on arrival in Kyaka II, coupled with a lack of information and support in an unfamiliar environment, presenting a range of challenges to their sharing their views and concerns. This situation does not improve in the Reception Centre. Children face additional hardships, increased protection risks linked to living in the Centre itself and still feel unable to access the information, guidance and support they need. Despite having multiple concerns, they do not feel that they have “someone to tell”.

In relation to participation in their protection, refugee children on arrival and in the Reception Centre, it seems, are not even ‘on the map’. They are “in the background”, “left aside” or not acknowledged at all. There are no established relationships to speak of between these children and those in place to assist them and children fear some of the adult refugees around. The same messages about the

hardships and risks faced by refugee children at these procedural stages come through again and again from speaking with them and with adult refugees. Such conditions are clearly not good for children.

Additional protection risks for children are also *created* by not conceptualising arrival or the Reception Centre as participatory space. For example, the technical structures that support children's participation elsewhere in the settlement are not in place or operational here and yet there are multiple protection risks to children. Practitioners do not think of gathering children together separately to adults and speaking to them here. However, many refugee children, awaiting status determination, are living in the Reception Centre exposed to protection risks and denied the opportunity to share their concerns for extended periods of time.

From the empirical material above, refugee children's protection needs on arrival and whilst living at the Reception Centre in Kyaka II are clear. There is, however, limited, if any, opportunity provided to them to share these concerns. From the accounts above, the care given to refugees in general seems to be somewhat compromised at this stage. Refugees (including children) are 'dropped' into the settlement with limited concern for their well-being. They are housed in a Reception Centre considered by some as appropriate "for animals" but not for refugees.

This situation may be attributed to budget or resource constraints in context, overwork or an inability to meet the demands of an increasing caseload of refugees. Practitioners may feel either unable or unwilling to open up discussion with refugees, and in particular refugee children, over issues that they feel are beyond their control. Since most practitioners in context are Ugandan, tensions about assistance to refugees whilst many Ugandan nationals themselves are struggling to survive might arise. It may also be that, at another level, discussions about conditions in and resources allocated to Reception Centres are outside of institutional "discursive comfort zones" (White and Choudhury, 2010), something that is not to be questioned by refugees. Indeed, on arrival and in the Reception Centre, most people are not technically considered as 'refugees', with the legal status and assistance which that involves. They are therefore perhaps not thought of by some as yet 'entitled' to share their views and concerns, to participate in their protection *as* refugees.

Irrespective of the cause, this situation says something at some level about the power



dynamics operational in context and the value given to refugees. Given such constraints and/or perspectives, it is clearer to see why such spaces are not particularly participatory for children, indeed for all refugees in Kyaka II.

### 5.3 Protection interviews: registration, Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and Best Interest Determination (BID)

The refugee protection process was outlined in Chapter One, including its core constituent procedures of registration, Refugee Status Determination as well as the circumstances requiring a BID. All three of these protection procedures are based on interviews with the refugee(s) / refugee children concerned. In her article *No-one gives you a chance to say what you are thinking*, Crawley (2010:163) emphasises the importance of the protection interview for the decision-making process, “the legal process of being recognised as a refugee” and suggests that its significance “cannot be overstated”. Crawley (2010) also argues that the protection interview is a “crucial stage” in determining whether children’s needs and experiences are articulated – or not – as well as the nature and form such articulation takes. The sections below explore the registration, RSD and BID interviews undertaken with refugee children in Kyaka II and the barriers they present to children’s participation.

#### 5.3.1 Registration

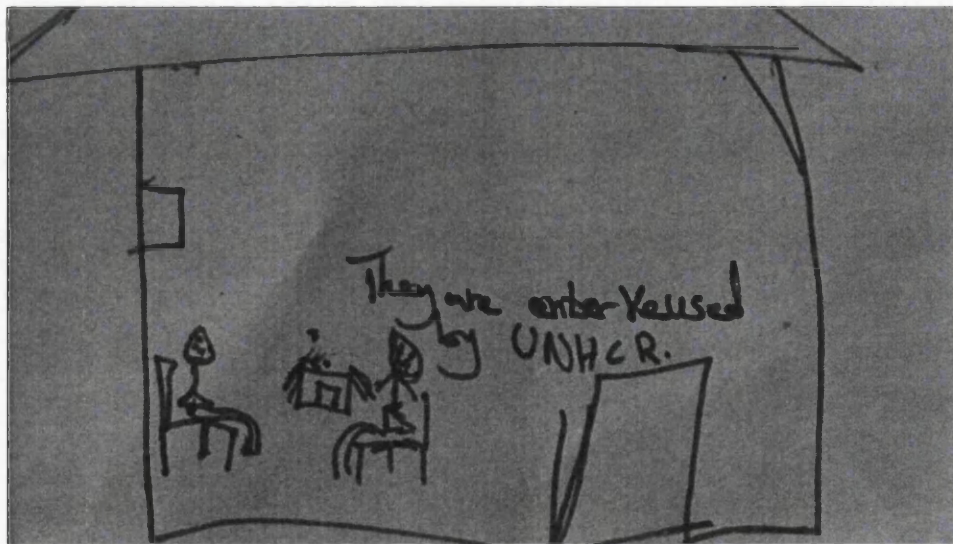


Figure 33: Drawing of the registration process by teenage girl, 11-16 workshop, Bujubuli.

Most children spoken to in the workshops were able to remember, identify and draw the registration process (Figure 33). An 11 year-old from Bukere said it was the

“interview when reached here – photo and finger prints”. A child from a 6-10s workshop in the same zone said “there is a computer where they register children” and another of a similar age said “computer...the finger he remembers, they are putting the finger on this” [finger printing machine]. An unaccompanied child from Mukondo described his drawing: “there is a computer and a table, people. He is using the computer, he is taking snaps” (Figure 34).

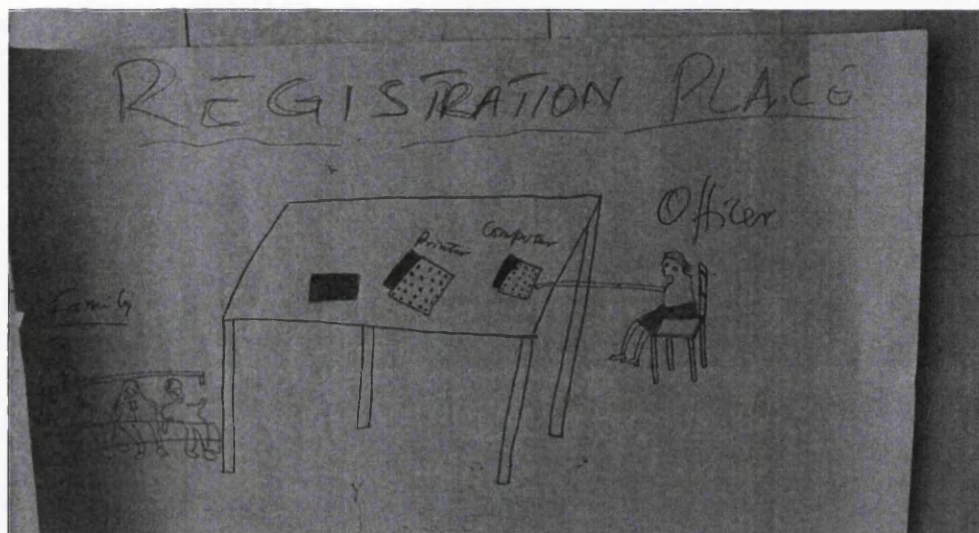


Figure 34: The "registration place": drawing by ten year-old boy, unaccompanied children workshop, Mukondo.

Children have positive feelings about registration as they recognise it as a process which might bring benefits and assistance. Members of a group of 6-10 year olds, when shown an image of registration, said that “it was good for them because when they register they get food”, get “given a ration card”, are able to “get education”, or “treatment”. Similarly, members of a group of unaccompanied children described registration as a good place, because it was good for the organisation to know the number of people in each family and it was the only way to get a ration card. They were happy that they were receiving the food and assistance they required. As with arrival and the Reception Centre, one unaccompanied child mentioned the importance of registration being a “safe place because left war”. Many of the children’s drawings and descriptions of the registration interview show this association between registration and assistance:

“Here we are having the UNHCR officer, here the refugee mother, here the child and the refugee father. I am going to register the new refugees who have just arrived so... ‘what is your name?’ Here we are having this child and

he is an orphan and he is happy because they are going to get food and the ration card. He is happy because this place is good where he can be safe.”

“Going to the UNHCR to be interviewed: the man with his children is being interviewed by the UNHCR officer. Going to the UNHCR to be helped after being interviewed: the UNHCR is giving them things like jerry cans, clothes etc. Here they are happy celebrating. They are going to school.”

More than any other stage of the refugee protection process in Kyaka II, children had positive things to say about their participation in interviews for registration. Primary school pupils from Swe Swe said that they had felt comfortable there, that the officer could talk to children or that the person was “good with children, talks well”. A Refugee Community Worker observing the registration interviews with children also agreed with this, talking about a particular officer as being “very kind” with a “good manner so that the refugee cannot really fear”, playing and talking with the child.

However, in spite of this, children also expressed difficulties with registration interviews, including the long distance some had to travel to reach the office, the delays they faced once there and a lack of food while waiting. Waiting long periods for registration was a particular difficulty raised by several children. A teenager from Buliti said children “take too much time sitting without being attended” and another from the same group complained that “when child goes, person should attend children”. Primary school pupils from Mukondo included in their list of children’s problems with registration the postponement of interviews and delays. A lack of food while waiting for interview was particularly a concern of younger children. A young unaccompanied child remembered “not feeling ok because was...hungry”. Older children also mentioned this, for example a member of a group of 11-16 year-olds from Buliti said children “don’t feel comfortable there because of hunger”.

Once in the interviews, children found language, the amount of questions and, at times, the attitude of the interviewing officers to be barriers to their participation. The Mukondo Primary School pupils mentioned above included “language barrier” in their list of problems with registration and other children identified “luga” (“language” in Kiswahili) as problematic for them. An unaccompanied child from Bukere said that “interpreters were interpreting wrong” in the registration interviews and misrepresenting them. Children often mentioned the many questions involved in registration. A primary school pupil from Mukondo said “many questions are asked

by person interviewing” and a 12 year-old from Bukere said that they were “asking many questions when you have not understood what they are saying”. When asked in a follow-up workshop to rank the problems with such interviews for children, unaccompanied children in Bujubuli prioritised hunger, delays and, in particular, “many questions” (Figure 35).

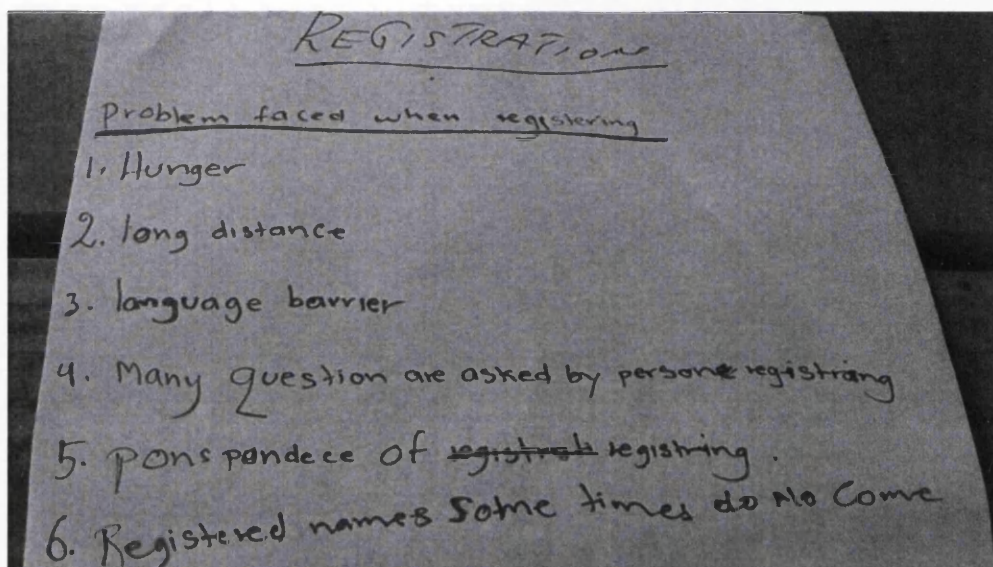


Figure 35: Problems for children with registration, 11-16 workshop, Mukondo Primary School.

In terms of attitudes of officers, a 15-year-old from Bukere said “they chase us” and “some of us were beaten when registering”. A drawing from an 11 year-old in Buliti shows “man chasing children” and he commented: “yes, happened to them”. An unaccompanied child from Bukere said that registration, for her, was not a good experience: “...when being registered, and explain not having parents, instead of helping you, they just leave you and go away”. A primary school pupil from Swe Swe spoke in more detail in a workshop about how children were treated:

“Not good place...when you go there, after talking they chase and say come back another time. When you go back feeling hunger and want help, don't give clear answers when talk to them. Fearing may be slapping or hitting you. First ask why you are not talking well.”

A primary school group performed a role play showing the problems children face in registration interviews. It showed the interviewer getting frustrated, mispronouncing refugees' names, expressing dismay at their family size (“all these are yours?!”) and being rough with finger printing the children. Another primary school group also

performed a role play of registration where refugees were “turned away and told to come back the next week...She says ‘you go!’” (Figures 36 and 37).

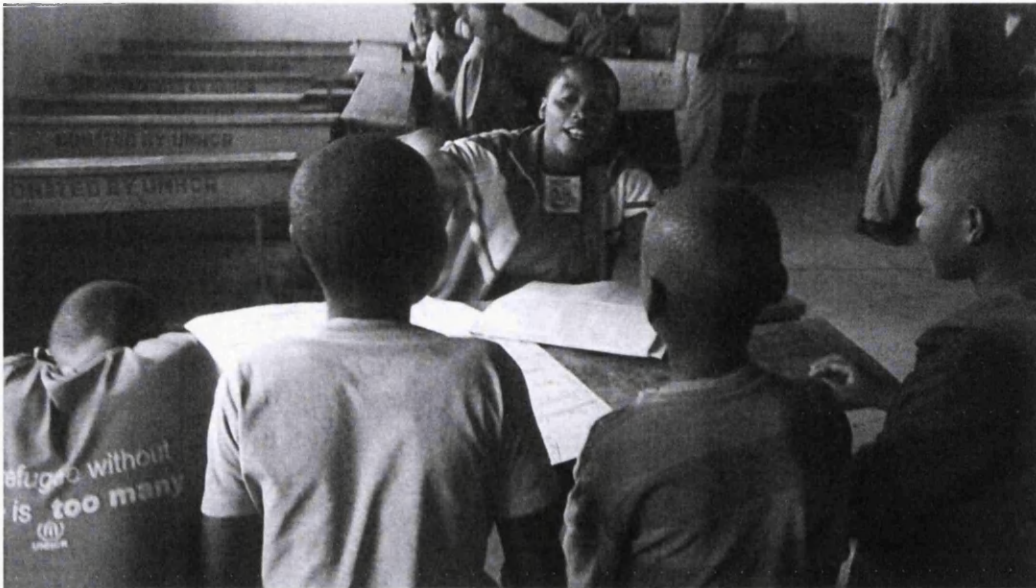


Figure 36: "She says 'you go!': acting out registration, 11-16 workshop, Mukondo Primary School.



Figure 37: And they leave: acting out registration, 11-16 workshop, Mukondo Primary School.

Another group – secondary school girls from Bujubuli – performed a puppet show on registration of children, identifying a range of the issues already mentioned above:

“Here we are having this child and he is an orphan... He is disturbed by the language, he doesn’t understand because he is new and he cannot understand... He is happy because this place is good where he can be safe. Then he is not happy because they have asked him a lot of questions and he is

hungry and waiting for the ration card. Then he needs some people to play with because he is the only one in the family, he doesn't have sisters or brothers. Now some UNHCR officers are harsh to these kids, they chase them because they see they are wasting their time. But because they are polite and they don't want to undermine UNHCR, they will stay until they call their names for the ration cards and the food."

Prior to these workshops, I had observed two registration interviews with female-headed households, each with five children all under the age of ten. The entry in my research diary identifies similar issues to those raised by the children above:

"In interviews, neither the officer nor the translator smiled or made any move to make children comfortable or to be friendly to anyone. Quite rough / dismissive with finger printing. Did not explain anything or ask if they had questions... All were on one bench opposite two laptops and interviewer. Officer was chatting and laughing with colleagues and checking mobile phone. Children looked nervous and scared especially around the photos and finger printing."

Practitioners in Kyaka II also highlighted issues with children's participation in the registration process. Some suggested that children who came as part of a household or family to the registration interview were hardly engaged with at all. As a practitioner from Right to Play commented:

"...when they come for registration or verification, children would be there for them to be verified: 'Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah, you're with your mother, you're a family of six' and it stops there... they will talk to the mother, they will never talk to the child."

A Refugee Community Worker also spoke in interview about how registration would just "depend on the parent" and how children were not "encouraged to just, kind of, talk or just say...or to request". "For a registration", he said, they "just ask the parent" and the children do "not necessarily have a chance to talk to the interviewer or the staffs". The UNHCR Registration Officer herself suggested that this could be the case:

**Interviewer:** "Children...giving their views and opinions, does that come into your role?"

**Respondent:** "Er, not so much, because mine is, basically, registration."

**Interviewer:** "Okay."

**Respondent:** "Yeah, so the only interaction I usually receive with children is when I'm asking information from those that come to the registration alone."

**Respondent:** "...usually those who come with their parents, I usually get the information from the parents or guardians."

Other practitioners spoke about other problems with registration: a UNHCR Community Services officer talked of “resource factors” making it hard to “create some kind of environment for children” and how “the focus is always on how do we register very many people fast?” As a result, he said, unless a child was identified as “at risk”, “the time we spend with the child to talk is always limited, so we don’t give them the chance to express themselves, it’s all about asking ‘what’s your name? What’s your age?’”

This account of the barriers facing refugee children and their participation during registration is revealing in a number of ways. It shows clearly the asymmetrical relationship or dynamic involved in registration and the awareness of children that this procedure is fundamental to getting the assistance that they need. It also shows the barriers facing children as ‘refugees’ (for example, the “language barrier”: the criticism that they are “not talking well”) as well as as ‘children’ (inhumane treatment: being chased, beaten, fear of slapping or hitting), in both cases power struggles operational at settlement level. There is the sense that refugees need to be ‘good enough’ for registration and children behave ‘well enough’ in the presence of the adults around them to receive assistance.

The statement from the practitioner that registration is “not so much” concerned with children, unless they “come to the registration alone” shows how refugee protection procedures can be conceptually set apart from children and their views and concerns and viewed as non participatory space for children. The pressure on practitioners to work at speed, to “register very many people fast” - to put the procedure first - sets out some of the operational challenges faced, also barriers to providing time and space for children’s participation in their protection. As with arrival and reception, there is also the sense that registration as an institutional space is about procedure not participation, it is something not to be questioned or complicated but to be quickly and efficiently “gone through”.

### 5.3.2 Refugee Status Determination (RSD)



Figure 38: Photograph of RSD interviews in Kyaka II, Bujubuli.

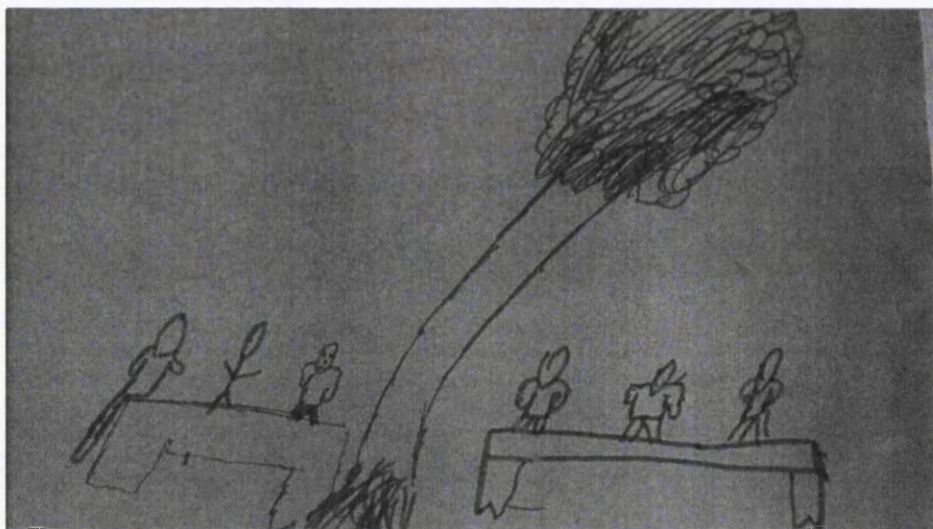


Figure 39: Drawing of RSD interviews in Kyaka II, 6-10 workshop, Bujubuli.

As outlined in Chapter One, RSD is the interview process for determining whether asylum seekers meet the criteria for international refugee protection. Similar concerns were raised by refugee children in relation to interviews for Refugee Status Determination as those raised about interviews for registration. Children talked about the distance travelled, hunger and delays while waiting, the many questions and attitudes of interviewers towards children. An 11-16 year old from Bukere commented that there were: “many questions which is wrong.... They do not listen for you. They do not. They ask you the thing which you don’t know.”



Similarly, an unaccompanied child from Mukondo said they “can ask you many questions and you are still young and fail to answer them”. Primary school pupils from Mukondo wrote that children “fail to answer questions” and noted the “language barrier” as a problem for children in interview (Figure 40). They also included in their list of children’s problems the “unfriendly” nature of interviewers, their “poor means of communication” with children and children “ever fearing” during the interview. As with registration, children felt that they were not able to contribute to the interview: “children are not participating words”.

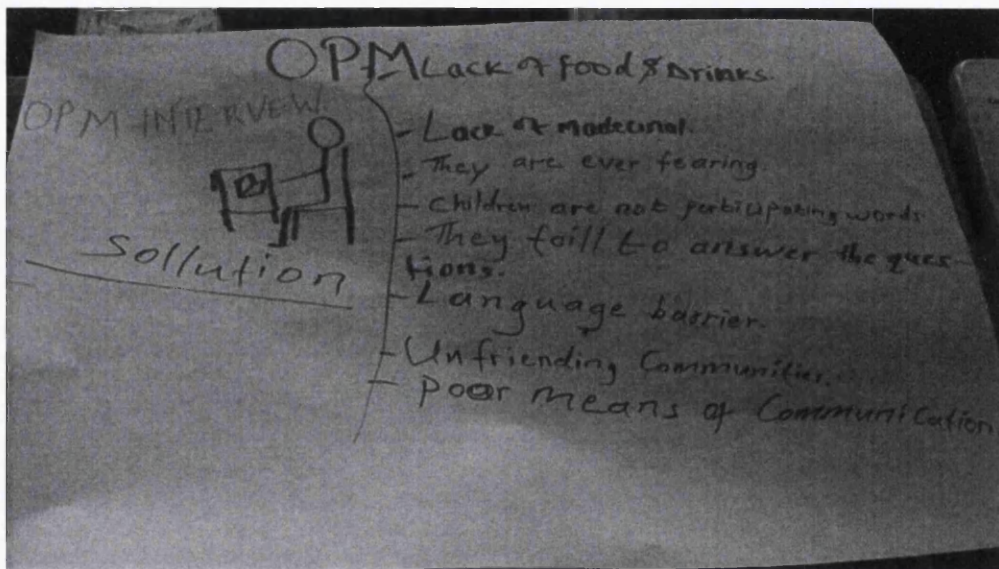


Figure 40: List of problems faced by children in RSD interviews, 11-16 workshop, Mukondo Primary School.

Children were particularly concerned about their lack of participation in RSD procedures due to the implications of an unsuccessful interview. Children spoke about “fearing all their questions” and “fear of being rejected” in terms of refugee status. One unaccompanied child spoke about what she thought “failing” the RSD interview would mean:

“The problem if you fail the interview they chase you away and can’t help you. If rejected, they can’t look after them. Problem with appealing, it takes some years. Even if it takes a long time: nothing to eat and nowhere to stay. Others in Reception Centre keep on eating because you have nothing to eat.”

In a hand puppet show by a small group of secondary school girls, one described the RSD interview process and the fear involved, as she saw it, for children:

“So they are still waiting... and when they enter the OPM office they are asked too many questions whereby they fail to answer. Some are hard and they are not understanding ... they cannot understand the language they are using and sometimes the translators don't translate what really they are talking so... they are waiting until the OPM officer calls them...they fear that they will not get the refugee status ... Some are hungry, some they are harassing them, they are mistreating them some, so they are just seeing, life is not good for them right now.”

Practitioners also had their concerns about children's participation in RSD. In a practitioners' mapping workshop, children's fears about an unsuccessful interview with the REC were echoed by an OPM member of staff: “if the family fail the REC, the children will suffer – no status and can't go back to school” and he noted the difficulty of the process for appeal. For others, there was again the concern that children were not being asked or supported to participate in interviews or were being actively prevented and not able to share their stories, issues and concerns. A child protection worker from UNHCR in Kampala said that RSD interviews for some separated and unaccompanied children were “not true” and had “inconsistencies” because of the way they were delivered: “the RSD notes must be very, very clear and not confusing and the child has to be prepared which is not always the case I think”. In a later workshop with staff from OPM, one practitioner said that “consideration for children is so minimal for REC” and that they “don't have notes or information on children to support the REC interview”. A Right to Play practitioner said that children's participation was “very important” in RSD but that “most times it's the parents who participate” even though “children have the correct information, about their family, their background, where they've been” and also “have concerns that they want to talk about.” A Refugee Community Worker spoke about his experience as an interpreter during RSD interviews where children were not able to share their current protection concerns:

“...they don't ask children their problems when they're doing interviews. So they just focus on father or mother, only on adults: ‘tell the story... what's happened in the Congo, what's caused you to flee, so what happened?’ But they don't say ‘what's happening for you now in Kyaka?’ they don't.”

Another Community Protection Worker similarly commented on how he thought children's current protection concerns could be by-passed in RSD interviews focusing exclusively on “criteria” and “status”:

“I think... they should ask them but they don't really assist... it's only about getting status. So they don't really go for more than that, or 'oh children, what are you eating, how do you sleep here, do you have any shelter?' No they don't, honestly they don't.... maybe they have a serious case, maybe a child is really suffering, is in bad condition... maybe the parents couldn't answer or he can't speak for himself... they could get solution there and then... but they don't, for them they're focusing on status to be granted or rejected, just criteria.”

Whilst in Kyaka II, I was able to observe some RSD interviews. Once in the interview, children with families or as part of household applications for status were engaged very little. They sat in and listened to the adults' stories of 'flight' and were rarely asked questions directly or given the opportunity to participate. A Refugee Community Worker stated that children are not “considered when in an interview” and suggested that the way that questions are addressed present a barrier for the child: “...if any of the questions that you're asking scares the child they don't answer such questions, so the answer is limited by the questions that are being asked.” I observed a seven-year-old unaccompanied boy being interviewed for RSD alone. He was afraid and upset, gave little or no response and the interview had to be paused temporarily because he was distressed. The way in which the interview was being conducted (for example, the interviewer sat opposite child at a table, formal question-and-answer format) and the questions asked (for example, too many questions, too quickly, too much pressure for detail too early on) presented significant barriers for this child.

As with registration, children were waiting for long periods for RSD interviews, often without food. I observed many young children waiting all day without any information or contact from anyone. As one practitioner commented: “...the children that come, although they are children, they are gathered as refugees”. In other words, there is no particular interaction with or acknowledgement of them as *children*. As with registration, practitioners also commented on the pressure of numbers and the need to work quickly during refugee status determination procedures so that as many interviews as possible could be conducted:

“I have to work at a certain speed to meet with the demand and the numbers, so I may not really have that luxury of speaking with these children and having a chat with them.”

Similar to the account of children's participation in registration above, this section shows the importance of RSD interviews for children and the asymmetrical power relationship involved. Children understand that they must not 'fail' so that status is secured. The empirical material also provides an indication again of mistreatment of children by practitioners as both children and as refugees, shaping their experience of this intervention and presenting barriers to their participation as a result. Through criticising their use of language and conducting the interview in a particular way, practitioners can show a lack of respect for and instil fear in children. As with registration, the way RSD is conceptualised and operationalized in practice - with parents participating rather than making room for the contribution of the child - means a construction of the RSD interview as a non participatory space for children. Again, the impact of the pressure of time and operational constraints on how practitioners deliver protection interventions - so that they do not have "the *luxury* of speaking with" children [my emphasis] - comes across. As a result, procedural priorities can by-pass the current protection concerns of children who are not allowed to speak.

### 5.3.3 *Best Interests Determination (BID)*

The BID interview was not something discussed with children in groups in the workshops as only certain children in certain circumstances are required to have a BID (see Chapter Four). However, BID interviews with unaccompanied children were observed during the research. Through this observation and some feedback from the children who participated in them, it can be seen that, despite being purposefully participatory for the child, barriers also arise for children in interviews for BID. In particular, the attitudes of the interviewer and the interpreter were found to be significant together with the way the interview was conducted. In these examples, as with the accounts of registration and RSD interviews, there is a procedural push to get the information needed by practitioners but a lack of respect shown to the child.

As recorded in my research diary, whilst one BID interview was positive in terms of being enabling and supportive for the child involved (discussed later in Chapter 7), others showed the approach taken by the interviewer and translator to be less so. For example, in the case of a BID interview with a ten year-old boy, arriving in

Kyaka II after having been abducted from another refugee camp, my notes recorded the behaviour of the interpreter:

“Translator - arrived late and left to get cardigan. Mentioned early on that had to go / finish. Looked bored (face in hand) and did not smile at all or attempt to build rapport. Did not engage and had to be asked to translate exactly what I was saying to him [the child]. Needs guidance on child friendly translation; rushed at end and boy rushed off - not good. Looked upset and need to take time for him and not just leave because got info we need: process!”

My notes also picked up on the interviewer’s attitude and the interview environment as a whole:

“Resumed BID but he [child] seemed tired and confused and forgetting lot. Nervous and playing with hands. A lot of questions to do a lot of cross-checking. Officer still typing on computer and lots of interruptions half way thru boy's story - mobile phone, someone came in and started conversation with officer etc. Other people working in there and door open at times.”

Notes made on a second BID interview - an unaccompanied twelve year-old boy living with an unaccompanied 16 year-old in the settlement - also identified issues in the interviewer’s behaviour and the interview setting. As with the previous example, this interview was conducted in a very busy office setting. The interviewer was working on two computers at once as well as checking messages online, seemed distracted and made little eye contact with the child. There were, however, some positive aspects associated with this interview, for example the interviewer used a quiet voice, explained my presence and her role clearly to the child and emphasised that the child could “feel free” to speak to her. She asked him if there was “anything else” he wanted to ask her at the interview’s end. A different translator with a more child-sensitive approach was also used. He sat next to the child, talked quietly to him, made good eye contact and reassured him. When asked about the interview afterwards, the boy said that he had “felt comfortable” but “did not understand some of the questions” and that, when he was crying, it would be “better to stop asking the question and ask other ones”.

One practitioner, who was newly arrived in the settlement, expressed her own concerns about BID interviews, where and how they were conducted in Kyaka II:

“...when I look at our interview venue, for me that is not child friendly. If someone is there doing something... another person is getting in, do you

think a child is concentrating? The next thing a child is thinking about is ‘I hope they are not going to take me somewhere else’, or, ‘this is going to happen’, or, ‘this one is listening to what I’m saying’. For me that is very key, and ... I’ve already talked about it with my colleagues and I said ‘...we need to find a, a better way’ ...in a situation where there are too many people involved, I don’t think, even me, I would be happy to mention certain things that I would want to say.”

She also had her concerns about the approach taken by interpreters for interviews with children:

“Yes, we have interpreters but when it comes to the children...you have to do it differently....Now, my concern is are their views really the one being represented, or it’s not?...Because I have not interviewed any child from here but colleagues have interviewed, and sometimes I can see how a child is behaving, then you know something’s not right, okay? Probably they are not even saying the exact thing that the child wants to say.”

Protection interviews for registration, determining whether an individual should be granted refugee status and establishing the best interests of the child do not, it seems, encourage or support the participation of refugee children in practice and are not considered ‘spaces’ of participation for children. The evidence from this research indicates that multiple barriers exist to children’s participation at different levels. Children face physical hardships in terms of distance travelled, hunger and delays which impact on their ability to effectively engage. Such hardships and how they affect children in particular are not addressed. Once in the interview, the way in which the interviewer and interpreter conduct themselves towards children – their mistreatment of children, use of language, style of questioning, general attitude and approach - presents significant difficulties for children to respond. It also shows a combined lack of respect for them as both children and as refugees. The environments within which interviews are conducted - for example, busy office environments with multiple distractions - are often not comfortable or suitable for the child. Most importantly, the opportunity given to children to engage, participate in the interview and share their concerns is limited or, in some cases, non-existent. Overall, this says something important about how refugee children, their contributions and the spaces of the refugee protection process in relation to their participation are seen. Whilst this will be elaborated upon later in this chapter, some

powerful examples of the consequences of this gap in participation for refugee children's protection are set out below.

A case study was provided by a UNHCR practitioner demonstrating the significant protection consequences of children not feeling able to talk in interviews about their views and concerns. A twelve year-old boy experiencing abuse at home - and resulting psychosocial problems - had not been given the chance to "open up" in a protection interview he had attended and had ended up taking his own life. The practitioner explained that due to a lack of time, procedural constraints and an adult-focused approach, the child had not been given the chance to engage: "we lost a child because of this". She went on to explain:

"...when we went down the child was angry inside, even when we called them and we processed their case, and I think during that processing we had not got any time to ask the children. We had already talked to the principal applicant, but we don't get time to talk to the children. Usually when the parents are telling us the stories and any problems we tell the children to go out. Usually I talk to children who are above eighteen years - but those were below - rarely, unless they fled alone, but if they fled as a family, we don't."

For this practitioner, the issue was that they had not "gone deep", had not "gone down" to talk properly to the child, had not focused on the "here and now" of the child's protection concerns but only talked to the principal (adult) applicant, and had missed something critical as a result:

"...but I think if we had actively come down to take the views of the children, asked the children: 'How are you? How are your parents? How is everything at home?' we'd have captured what even the siblings would have told us how their father tortures them. But I'm looking at it like are there children out there who we don't get time to talk to and maybe their neighbours are quiet...?"

The same practitioner provided another detailed case study of a fifteen year-old boy also displaying psychosocial problems. The boy had "watched the father being slaughtered", lived in the forest from the age of seven, watched his cousin being raped, was "carrying" and suffering from what he had experienced but his family were not aware since he had "fled alone":

"...but when I got deep: 'Is your father still alive?' he looked at me and he became aggressive. I'm like, 'Oh, something is wrong' ... I asked the mother 'What is wrong with the child?' and that's when she goes, 'He fled after they came after some time. I don't think ... mentally he's not okay, he has mood

swings, he keeps quiet' ... I called him in, I talked to him and then I realised things were not moving on well, indeed he was not okay.”

In this example, since the boy arrived unaccompanied, a BID interview had to be completed. The boy was encouraged to talk and received some appropriate assistance and support. However, the practitioner was again aware of what would have been missed - and the procedural gaps responsible - if this had not occurred: “My point is, if we hadn’t gone down to ask this boy, no-one would have known because we usually take up principal applicants.”

She also reflected on what this might mean for other children, those not eligible for a BID interview or other chance to disclose:

“...but in some situations where BIDs are not needed... the child may witness something the parents may not witness and if we don't sit down to talk to these children, we shall miss that information. Sometimes they go out; whatever they saw is carried forward...”

The implication of the evidence from this practitioner and these case studies is that refugee children who have undergone traumatic experiences need the opportunity to “open up” and talk. They may have important and relevant protection information to disclose. There is also evidence that this opportunity is not yet available enough within the refugee protection process - and its constituent interviews - as it stands, or only available for certain children through certain procedures at certain times. Indeed, there are multiple barriers that are preventing children’s participation and their disclosure of such protection concerns. An evaluation of UNHCR’s child protection function commented that:

“We find that many of the shortcomings in meeting the protection needs of refugee children arise from too narrow a concept of protection... such as a focus on the legal status of the head-of-household and access to asylum, misses the breadth of risks faced by refugee children.” (Valid International, 2002:67)

Based on the evidence from Kyaka II, this seems still to be the case.



## 5.4 'The Office'

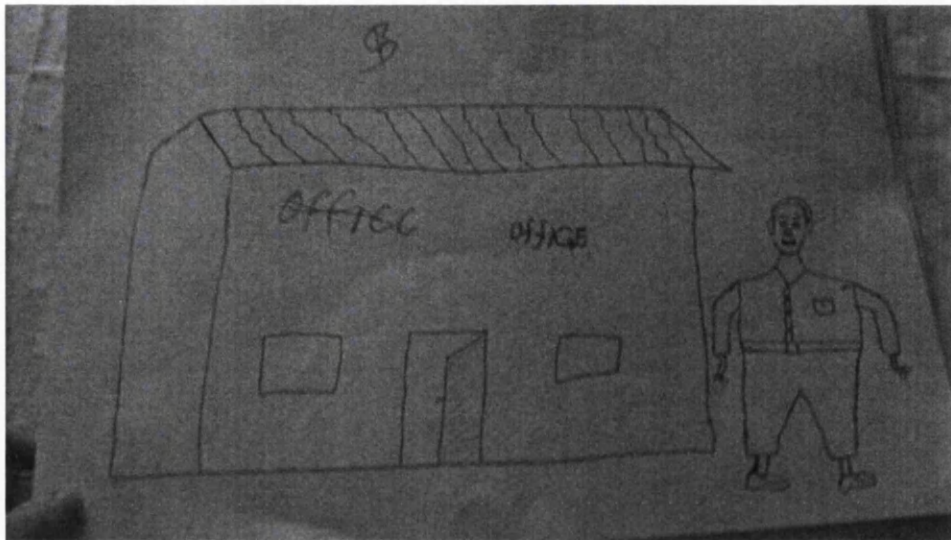


Figure 41: "The office": drawing by eight year-old, 6-10 workshop, Bujubuli.

Refugee protection consists not only of specific, named interventions or stages (including registration, RSD and BID) but day-to-day contact with children around their protection concerns. If, as discussed above, barriers exist to children's participation in these named procedures, children's ability to approach and gain support and protection on other occasions in other spaces from practitioners is critical. This requires visits to 'base camp' or, as children called it: "the office" (Figure 41).

There were positive responses about 'the office' from some children and some knowledge of the roles of the agencies working there. For example, one 11-16 year-old from Bukere said that OPM gives "security for refugees in the settlement" and another in the same workshop that GIZ "help student for education". Another boy said he "was in UNHCR office for a resettlement interview, it was ok". For the children in a group of 6-10s, 'the office' was a place to get help. One said: "They go there to report cases of suffering. They go there to get treatment. You go there when you are beaten. When your house is burned and you report there."

For some of the children's groups, for example from Kakoni and Swe Swe Primary, 'the office' was described as a good place to go: one child said "it's where they solve our problems". Unaccompanied children in a workshop in Mukondo said they had all

been to 'the office'. One child in this group said "children are welcome there" and children at the office were happy because "now their problems be solved."

However, gaining support in practice from 'the office' was problematic for some children. One 16 year-old from Bukere said 'the office' was a "good place for children but not for him". Some children faced problems knowing where to go and how to get there, could feel significant "fear" around approaching the office and the people who worked there and said they encountered delays, hostility, corruption and being "chased away". Children also said they struggled with questions and language; some felt that they received no assistance or solutions for their problems and that they got caught up in what they saw as an endless referral cycle from one office to another. Each of these is considered below in turn.

Kyaka II is a dispersed refugee settlement and distance to 'the office' is a barrier for younger children in particular. I asked a group of 6-10 year-olds in Bukere: "Is it hard for children to go to the office?" "Yes", one said, "it is too far": "he can go...one person but not all of them can go". Younger children in the workshops, as already mentioned, had very limited information on what support was available to them and either were unaware that they could access help at 'the office' or felt significant anxiety about it. A mental health practitioner working in the settlement said children did not know which office to go to with their queries and concerns: "...they don't know where – they know the offices are there, but which office can help me with my problem?" A ten year-old from a workshop in Itambabiniga said: "to go there, they fear". The same child went on, through an interpreter, to say:

"That for them, they don't know that they can go to the office, they just pass through the Chairman. When they informed the Chairman their problem, they thought that Chairman would advocate for them in the offices, but when they addressed their problem to the Chairman, he went there and he's keep quiet, he don't go to address. Then I ask: 'why can't you go there on your own?' They say that they are fearing: whom can they contact?"

Such misinformation, anxiety and fear put these younger children in a difficult place with regard to any protection issues they might want to raise. As one Community Protection Worker outlined:

"...it's hard sometimes to reach here, to reach in the office. Imagine sometimes you may find that the child is like six years, five years...so it's

quite difficult to come here in the office, to knock...then, if they are welcomed, sit down, to tell their problem..."

A practitioner from the Ugandan Red Cross expressed this dilemma for younger children in a very evocative way: "children can fear to come to the office and so they have to *swallow their problem*" [emphasis added].

Even if they did reach the office, younger children talked about hunger, delays, overcrowding and a mixed response from those working in the offices. A young child in a workshop in Bukere said that "they chase them away when they go there for assistance". Practitioners also commented on how these children might be dealt with when they arrived. A Community Protection Worker said that "when children go to the office to explain their problems, it's very hard to be busy officers to hear their concerns" and that, as a result, they end up telling them "you go to your parents". Similarly, an OPM practitioner commented "the way we talk to children in this setting is poor, with computers and phones and not attending to them" and another that, because of this, it was relatively "rare for children to come to the office", only "parents and UAMs and foster parents come." On occasion, I witnessed small children, waiting outside an office, being shooed away.

Older children also talked about being "chased away" from the offices. One child from a workshop for 11-16 year-olds from Bukere said "sometimes they run for you". They also talked about other types of hostility: another 11-16 year-old from the same group drew a picture of the office and commented "people not ok in the office towards children, get sufferings there". One unaccompanied teenage boy was very specific about his experience:

"A person can deny you and be complicated to you. Problems cannot be solved....when you are clean, they will say that you can solve your problem. If you come when you are dirty, they tell you to go away and get clean. Insulting, they insult people. They say that you're an animal. They insult your mother and your father."

Other older children mentioned that there were "a lot of bribes" in the offices. For example one boy from a group of 11-16 year olds from Bukere said "we have corruption insome of the offices". A teenager from Swe Swe Primary School said that when they asked for help, the response could be "first give me the money".

Other older children from Bukere were frustrated that when taking their problems to 'the office' they faced "language barriers", "many questions", "many people and no place", "stubborn" officers and "postponing of appointments" (Figure 42). A primary school group's role play showed officers being unwelcoming towards children, frustrated with them and their language and sending them away.

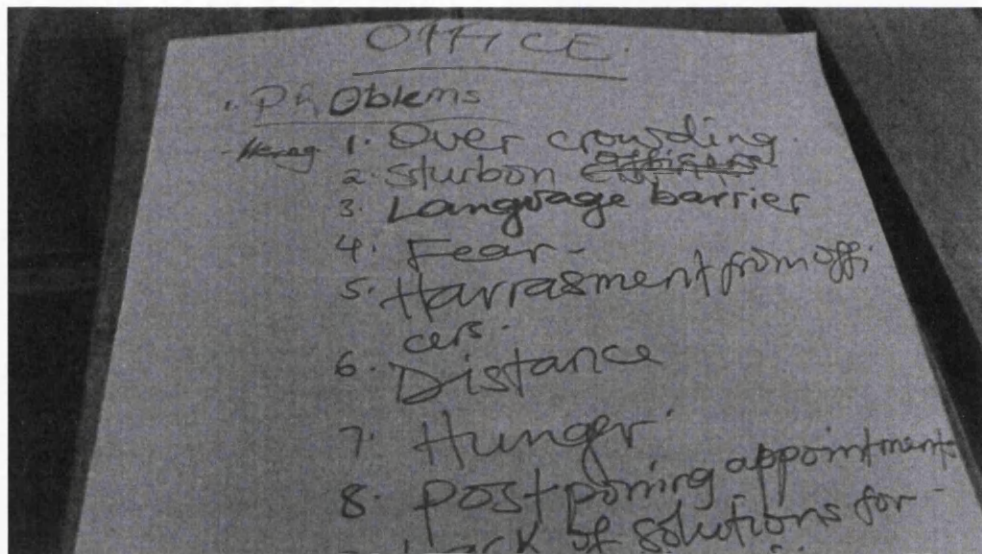


Figure 42: Problems with "the office": 11-16 workshop, Bukere.

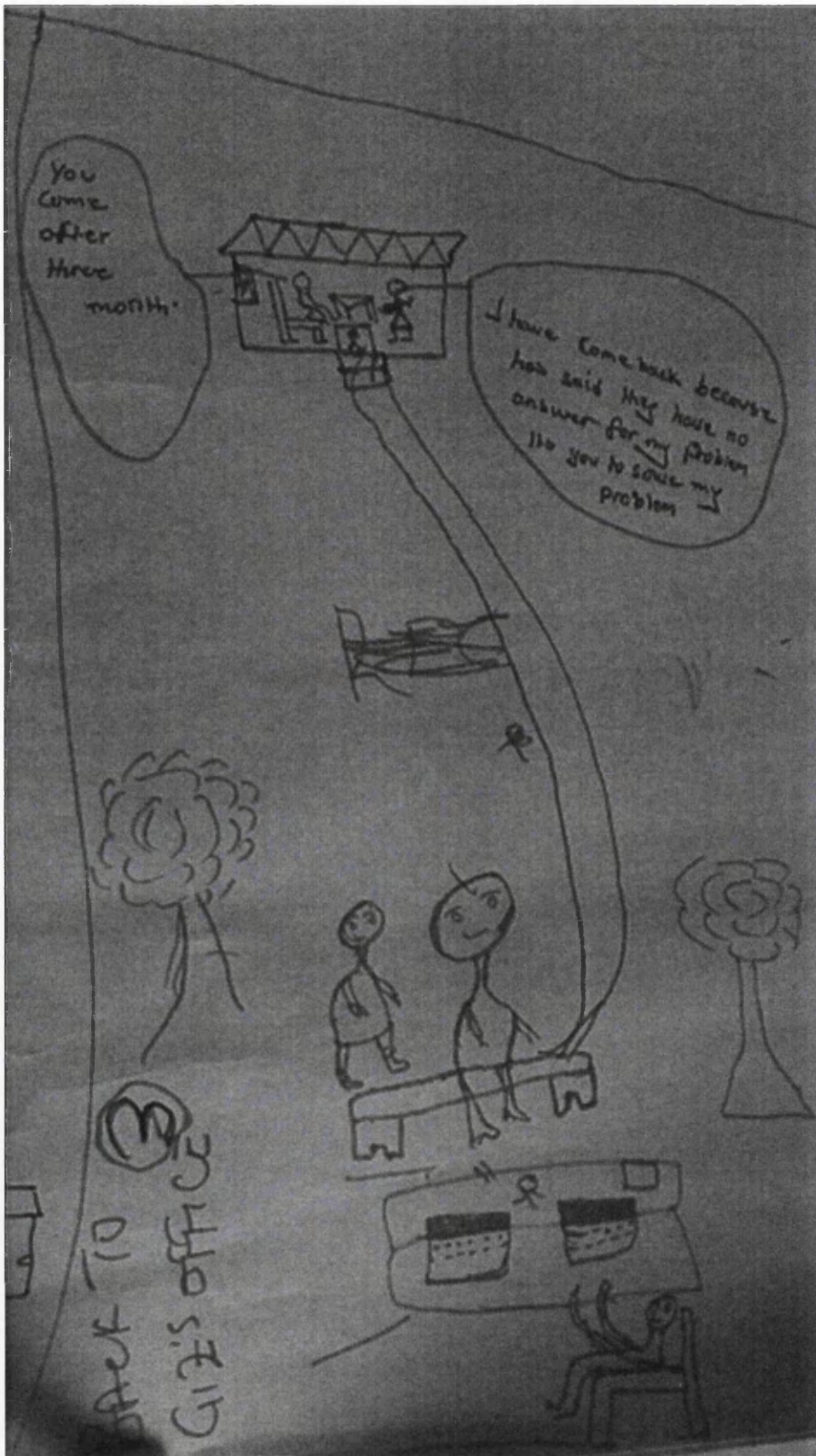


Figure 43: The "referral cycle": children move to-and-fro between offices for assistance.

Some children were particularly frustrated that they could not seem to get the help they needed: one teenager said “may take problem to office and don’t get answer or assistance”; an unaccompanied child that they “cannot solve that problem” and a teenage girl said that they “cannot answer their questions”. The same teenage girl drew a picture of her visit to the office and explained her frustration in more detail:

“She has drawn an office...And this is an officer concerning orphans...she is the one now, she is explaining her problems. For example, she may be having a problem concerning security and she has gone to the office to explain... but she is not even getting the answer...”

Some older children talked about, and showed in role plays and their drawings, an endless referral from one office to another where they were trying in vain to get their problems solved (Figure 43). A make-believe officer exclaims in a role play: “I don’t have solution to your problem...you go there!” A secondary school group of girls capture this to-and-fro in a short puppet show and commentary:

“...two times they came. After reaching there, they are asked many questions. Then they told them that you will come again. Then they are coming back. After coming back they told them that you go, another day you will come because here we are not ready, we are not going to work this weekend. Then the children are going home crying....”

In a follow-up workshop, a group of unaccompanied children rated a “lack of solutions” to their problems in the office as a key concern, closely followed by “insults, harassment and corruption”. However, for other children, despite not getting the assistance that they needed, the office remained a “good place”.

Contact with ‘the office’ to enhance children’s participation in their protection, then, does not appear straightforward or consistent. Children face barriers in terms of information, access and, as with more structured protection interviews, the way that they are communicated with, treated and received. Whilst some children access ‘the office’ for help, there is not a common understanding of it being a place where children are welcome, can go, can talk about their protection concerns where there is someone who will listen and respond.

Micro-level power dynamics operational in Kyaka II are evident from this account of children’s encounters with agency offices. As with children’s experiences of protection interviews, there are accounts of the mistreatment of children when

approaching offices as well as of their fear of the adults involved. Children are also repeatedly being redirected or sent away. On another level, these accounts speak of corruption from practitioners and how children are manipulated as a result. In addition, for younger children, since it is harder for them to have physical access to such offices, they are forced to rely on adults in their own communities for communication and are then misrepresented or misled. None of this practice either respects or gives value to these children and what they have to say.

Children, it seems, then, face significant barriers in relation to participation in their protection at *all of* these 'stages' of the refugee protection process. The cumulative effect is that they 'move' through the process, which presents its own hardships and protection risks, with limited information, opportunity for expression or support. Refugee children are not informed or equipped to participate in interviews and the approach, attitudes and treatment they can - or fear they will - receive exacerbates this problem. At arrival and in the Reception Centre, they lack someone that they can talk to even though they have multiple protection concerns. In interviews, there *is* someone to talk to but children are either not given the space or opportunity to talk or are restricted in various ways. 'The office' potentially provides an alternative time and space for children to voice their concerns but is not experienced or viewed in practice by children as accessible. In summary, there are significant barriers as well as an overall gap in refugee children's participation in the refugee protection process which need to be further explored and addressed.

### **5.5 Barriers to participation: what gets in the way?**

When we compare the 'reality' of children's participation in the refugee protection process with the rhetoric - both that set out in the quotation from the UNHCR Framework document above, as well as the models and standards on participatory practice outlined in Chapter Two, it is clear that, from a technical perspective, the quality and degree of children's participation is poor. Refugee children are not provided with the appropriate information, degree of choice, level of feedback or respect considered essential parts of a good quality participatory process and multiple obstacles are allowed to 'get in the way'. Whilst there seem to be some 'pockets' of meaningful participation in protection in Kyaka II, children's participation in the refugee protection process is, at best, 'patchy', at worst, dangerously close to 'non-

participation' or 'tokenism' (Hart, 1992), little more for children than just 'being there'.

The barriers to children's participation in the refugee protection process are many and these have significant consequences for the protection of refugee children. This is both in terms of opportunities for children to disclose exploitation, abuse and harm as well as their access to appropriate international protection and durable solutions as refugees. Such barriers require further exploration and this can be done on a number of levels. Firstly, the different barriers can be 'grouped' into broader themes or areas that seem to 'get in the way' of refugee children's participation in their protection. This additional level of analysis of the barriers faced is important if we are to suggest any areas for change in the refugee protection process; to offer up any alternatives. Secondly, it is important to consider the nature of such barriers, the extent to which they are not just practical but also conceptual, more fundamentally connected to how children's participation, its relationship with space, and refugee children themselves are conceptualised and perceived. Such conceptual barriers are also linked to power dynamics operational in context: they can be political, institutional. As such, there are more than technical challenges involved.

Whilst the barriers to refugee children's participation are documented separately under the distinct procedural stages above, they may also be 'read across' the refugee protection process as a whole. As a result, a number of broader thematic areas can be identified. Firstly, there are barriers relating to the environment within which children's participation 'takes place'. This includes the conditions under which refugee children arrive in the settlement, the challenging living environment of the Reception Centre as well as the spaces within which protection interviews are conducted. Factors influencing whether these environments are conducive for refugee children's participation in their protection – 'friendly' for children – include the very physical realities of hunger, thirst, tiredness, cold, discomfort and disease. These can affect children on arrival but equally whilst waiting (and faced with long delays for) protection interviews. The actual or perceived safety of the environment – for example newly arrived children's recent experiences of violence, war and loss or the threats of theft and abuse whilst living in the Reception Centre – contribute to feelings of insecurity and also impact on children's ability to participate in their



protection. Finally, the layout of the physical space, where it is located and what it contains, is also important and needs to be 'friendly' and amenable for the child, for example the facilities available in the Reception Centre and the seating arrangements in an interview room.

Secondly, there are barriers relating to the methods employed to communicate with children, in other words how children are engaged in the refugee protection process. This includes the type of information (if any) provided to children about what is happening to them, for example how they learn about refugee protection procedures whilst living in the Reception Centre or Refugee Status Determination whilst waiting for interview with the REC. It also includes the way children are interacted with, for example the many questions and formal question-and-answer format used in registration or other protection interviews. These barriers relate to whether the methods used are appropriate for refugee children, as children, and this connects with the discussion in Chapter Three on participatory methods as more appropriate and ethical for children and/or better able to provide access to children's worlds.

Thirdly, and relating to the above, there are barriers in terms of the approach and attitudes of the adults conducting protection procedures with children. This includes the way that children are responded to and treated – or even ignored – in protection interviews as well as how they and their views are placed “in the background” in the Reception Centre or mismanaged on arrival. It also relates to children's perceptions that they are not given “solutions to their problems” and that they are continually referred on as well as their frequent feedback that - in many of the spaces of the refugee protection process - they do not have “someone to tell”.

These three areas presenting barriers in practice to refugee children's participation: the environment, methods, attitudes and approach - are important to highlight and will be returned to in Chapter Seven in relation to 'areas for change'. Whilst as an itemised list they appear broadly practical - a series of tasks needing to be done in a different way and, as such, they do have value and are able to be in part technically addressed - they are also connected to barriers that are more conceptual as well as political and institutional in nature and this needs to be further explored.

Chapter Four reflected on practitioners' 'maps' of refugee children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II and critiqued these in relation to concepts of participation, space and power. In terms of practitioners' definitions of participation, Chapter Four suggested that these were varied and inconsistent, ranging from participation conceptualised as an inalienable right to an isolated activity or event. Despite a rights-based definition of children's participation being set out in the UNHCR *Framework* above and also employed by some practitioners in Kyaka II themselves, this is not 'carried' by children through the refugee protection process as a whole: they are not seen as rights-holders or able to exercise this right in practice throughout. By association, children's participation is not an on-going, rights-fuelled process of decision-making in relation to their protection but an activity that takes place through certain structures and activities supported by certain posts, in some places some of the time. Conceptualising participation in this way presents a barrier to the refugee protection process as a whole being participatory for refugee children. It is an event or activity that 'takes place' *elsewhere*. Whilst, as discussed in Chapter Two, a view of children as rights-holders needs to be tempered with an awareness of the structures within which agency takes place and the many constraints children face, it is important conceptually for participation to be 'freed up' in terms of its association with particular spaces of protection.

Also in Chapter Four, refugee children's participation in their protection was considered in relation to space. It was suggested that children's participation was 'boxed in', divided geographically and conceptually from the designated spaces of the refugee protection process and restricted in nature, scale and extent as a result. This chapter has argued that there is indeed a lack of refugee children's participation in the refugee protection process, providing evidence to support such a spatial and conceptual divide. Indeed, the participatory structures for supporting children's participation present in the settlement's schools and, to a certain extent, in the communities, are absent in the Reception Centre where many refugee children spend months awaiting status determination. This is not a space that practitioners conceptualise as participatory for children. Additionally, staff conducting protection interviews as part of the refugee protection process, seem not to consider children's participation as part of their role or as appropriate in that 'space'. Agency offices can chase children away from waiting outside rather than welcoming them in to hear

their views and concerns. These are not the spaces where children's participation is meant to 'happen'.

The conceptualisation of children's participation and its relationship with space can then be limiting for children's participation in the refugee protection process. So too are conceptualisations of "the refugee" and "the child". There are multiple examples from the empirical material discussed in this chapter where refugee children face barriers because of how they are perceived, as children (ignored, not seen, chased away) and as refugees (treated as 'animals', criticised for 'lack of language'). The lack of suitable environments or methods for children to support their engagement in the refugee protection process suggests limited value in this context is given to the child. The inhumane treatment, negative attitudes and approach towards refugee children during procedures suggests that they are under-valued as children and as refugees.

Such conceptualisations impact on how children are interacted with in practice and generate other barriers to children's participation in turn. For example, refugee children in Kyaka II spoke often about the spaces of the refugee protection process where they would "fear to go" (for example, 'the office') as well as of their fear of the adults working within them. This is not surprising given the examples of mistreatment or disregard outlined from the empirical material. The issue, then, as one child put it, is not just how can I go to that particular location or place, but "how can I approach this man or this woman?" The relationship between children and adults, the 'space' of interaction between the adult and the child, is therefore, in relation to children's participation in the refugee protection process, also a significant gap that must be addressed.

There are, then, both practical and conceptual barriers to children's participation in the refugee protection process. These barriers, as already suggested during this chapter, can have political and institutional origins or motivations and must be also considered from this perspective. For example, Harrell-Bond (2000:1) documents many of the 'environmental' barriers facing children mentioned in this chapter in her exploration of whether refugee camps are "good for children": a "persistent shortage of food" as "characteristic of the camp", overcrowding, epidemics, poor hygiene and a lack of education. She also includes the importance of "fear" and "rumour" to

children's experiences of living in a refugee camp environment and suggests that fear is "felt by all, but most acutely by the children who huddle in terror through the dark hours" (Harrell-Bond, 2000:6). For Harrell-Bond (2000) and for others, such as Kaiser (2006), many of these barriers - such as chronic food shortage - are tied up with the confinement of refugees in camps. They are the consequences of Uganda's encampment policy and the Government of Uganda and UNHCR's failed self-reliance strategy for refugees. Therefore, although it is possible to consider environmental changes to improve children's participation in their protection, there are wider political and institutional issues to be addressed in context for such conditions for children to substantially improve.

In relation to 'methods' presenting a barrier to children in the refugee protection process, it is clear from this chapter that there are operational constraints: agency and government officials with a lack of time and resources and a significant caseload who feel unable to target interventions more directly to the child. However, there is also an indication that such flexibility is not appropriately valued – for some, it is a "luxury" to be able to speak with and spend time with the child. Whilst children's participation is highly valued in UNHCR global protection policy rhetoric, it may be that such priorities have not institutionally 'filtered through' to other levels, to government partners and implementing organisations working on refugee protection in contexts in the field.

The attitudes and approach of some practitioners towards refugee children during refugee protection interventions can, as has already been suggested, be in part connected to the power dynamics operational within the refugee settlement in the Ugandan context. The assistance and support given to refugees involves an asymmetrical relationship of power that positions refugees in a subordinate position and is also tied up with tensions around the lack of assistance for Ugandan nationals considered also to be in need. From this perspective, refugee children can be seen to be mistreated in context amidst the refugee protection process, presenting barriers to their participation, because they are refugees. However, as also suggested above, such mistreatment can also be an under-valuing of refugee children as *children*.

Returning to the theoretical material from Chapter Two, the gap in children's participation in the refugee protection process in Kyaka II is, then, not a purely

technical problem but also institutional, tied up with the operation of power in context and its expression in space. What Hart (2011) considers 'cultural' (values and attitudes) and 'structural' (practice and procedures) barriers are part of the picture and we should be paying attention to the power dynamics involved. The particular spatiality of refugee children's participation in Kyaka II which excludes the refugee protection process is not just chance but constructed. It is due to the perceptions of practitioners and officials in context that these are not spaces or matters where refugee children are able, should or can be allowed to be involved. There is not the time or the resources or, in some cases, the willingness by practitioners to do so. There are significant repercussions for refugee children's protection as a result.

## **5.6 Conclusions**

For Graham and Fitzgerald (2010:344), "children's experience of participation" remains "increasingly ambiguous, uncertain and contested". For Lansdown (2001:1), this ad hoc and incomplete practice means that children's participation is still in an "experimental phase" and there is much work still to be done by adults to help children to "articulate their lives, develop strategies for change and exercise their rights".

In relation to children's participation in the refugee protection process in Kyaka II, this certainly seems to be the case. How children's participation is defined, which children are able to participate and where children can participate in their protection are all 'patchy' in nature and there are multiple barriers - both practical and conceptual - that seem to get in the way. The political and institutional context presents its own particular barriers and constraints. Although all children are 'passing through' the various stages of the refugee protection process, the procedures are not facilitating their participation and children are facing all kinds of difficulties including, at the extreme, not being able to talk at all.

The fact that refugee children are 'silenced' in this way, not given the space to participate in the refugee protection process, says something significant about how refugee children, their capabilities and contributions are seen. Such views of the child are as restrictive on refugee children's participation conceptually as other barriers might be in practice and a fundamental area of concern. Critiquing the

spaces of refugee children's participation therefore only takes us so far. We need to shift the discussion towards how adults conceptualise - and, as a result, relate to and interact with - the refugee child. For Graham and Fitzgerald (2010:345), without taking this more 'dialogic' approach to participation, children will be consigned to a "reduced mode of being", one which is damaging for their well-being and protection and which might, ultimately, cause them harm. The conceptualisation of the refugee child amidst the refugee protection process - and its different configurations - is therefore the subject of the chapter to follow.

## **Chapter Six: Conceptualisation of ‘the child’ in the refugee protection process**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter sets out the challenges to refugee children’s participation in the refugee protection process in practice in Kyaka II based on children’s experiences at each procedural ‘stage’. It suggests that children’s participation is extremely limited and that the barriers faced by children are not only practical or technical but also conceptual in nature. Such conceptual barriers, as indicated in the previous chapter, include the conceptualisation of the refugee child.

In Chapter Two, it was argued that there is an extensive bank of research from Childhood Studies and other related fields which demonstrates that the definition of ‘the child’ is fluid, shifting historically and geographically and varying with context and culture (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008, Kjørholt, 2002, Powell and Smith, 2009). ‘Childhood’ is viewed as a social construct and, as such, is constantly open to transformation, adaptation and change. It was also suggested, based on the literature, that the diversity and complexity of what constitutes a ‘child’ can be redefined in relation to children’s participation and their protection. For example, for White and Choudhury (2007), the view of the child with agency related to the CRC is thought too simplistic: children’s agency amidst participation should be conceptualised as more restricted and constrained. For Mayer (2011), child protection discourse positions the child as permanently vulnerable and at risk, precluding any room for their individual agency or participation. It is therefore important to explore the conceptualisation of the child in context, how this relates to notions of vulnerability and agency and the implications for refugee children’s participation in their protection.

Reflecting on the empirical material gathered during the course of this research, this chapter explores the different conceptualisations of the refugee child held by practitioners and refugee children in the context of Kyaka II and the implications for refugee children’s participation in the refugee protection process. It begins with the conceptualisation of refugee children in terms of risk.

## 6.2 Refugee children at risk?

Both refugees and children are frequently defined in terms of risk or vulnerability to harm and, by association, as in need of protection. The definition of a ‘refugee’ embodies the concept of risk - a “well-founded fear of persecution” - and these risks must be documented and substantiated for refugee status to be secured. Being considered as in some ways ‘at risk’ is therefore essential if assistance and international protection are to be granted. Children are also often conceptualised in terms of risk - a degree of vulnerability connected to their age, developmental stage and circumstance - embodying for some what it means to be a ‘child’. Awareness of the potentially vulnerable state of some children and the risks they might face is also important if, at certain times and in certain places, they are to receive the protection that is appropriate to their needs.

It comes as no surprise, then, that within the empirical data collected as part of this research, refugee children are frequently spoken about – and speak about themselves – in terms of risk. Multiple threats to children’s protection are described by both refugee children and humanitarian practitioners in *Kyaka II*: risks associated with flight and their ‘condition’ as a refugee and risks from living in a refugee settlement, many of which are risks shared by other children elsewhere but here exacerbated by the circumstances of being a refugee. Certain groups of refugee children are also identified as being particularly ‘at risk’, for example unaccompanied children and girls. Additional risks, as shown in Chapters Four and Five, can also be created for refugee children, for example by the particular spatial configuration of their participation.

It is important to explore this view of refugee children and risk not only because it forms a substantial component of children’s experiences, how children are seen and view themselves - which can be critical for their adequate protection - but also because of the implications for children’s participation which arise from the fact that children are primarily understood in these terms. As previously discussed in relation to the work of Mayer and Evans (2011) and Newman (2004; 2005), there is room to problematize global protection categories of risk and vulnerability through engaging in different contexts with refugee children’s experiences. Children’s ‘reality’ is often more complex. The following sections thus consider the different ways refugee



children are conceptualised in terms of risk and, based on the empirical material, suggest a more nuanced view in relation to risk and the refugee child.

### *6.2.1 Protection risks: flight and the 'condition' of refugees*

Refugee children's stories of flight from their home country are, as would be expected, full of risk, overwhelmingly so. As Harrell-Bond points out (2000:6), "the dangers and horrors of flight itself are experienced by children as well as by their parents..." In BID interviews, unaccompanied children described what they had experienced which made them flee: a seven year-old Rwandese boy described how his mother and older brother were killed – "shot and cut"- and a twelve year-old Congolese boy how his house was attacked by Mai Mai. A sixteen year-old boy from the DRC recounted how he found his siblings buried in a tomb when he got home. Other children spoke about the journey to Uganda itself: a ten year-old Rwandese boy described how, at the age of six, he was stopped at the border and put in prison for three days; another unaccompanied Rwandese boy under the age of ten how, his mother "already killed and the other people fled", he was running "when he was crying" and hiding alone "in the bush" for five days.

During the interviews, practitioners also commented on the risks facing refugee children during flight. One protection worker stated that in conflict and war "the children are the ones who are really affected". The GIZ Project Manager gave an account of the harrowing histories of flight shared with her by adolescent refugees:

"You see that they're down and then they just tell you 'when we were fleeing our country we were hiding in the forest for three months. Our parents were killed behind but they just told us 'you run!' The neighbours told us 'you run because otherwise we would have to kill you'. And then...they came to the forest where they knew that they were there and they told them 'now we have to kill one of you otherwise the army will kill us, so now you decide who we're going to kill'".

A practitioner from OPM recounted how "hundreds of children" fleeing from DRC and presenting in Kyaka II with such histories could become overwhelming for practitioners at times:

"In 2007 and 2008 it was a humanitarian disaster: the kind of children received, you know, there was so much trauma that...you had to go back and sit and say 'no I can't go back and work.'"

Many children therefore arrive in Kyaka II refugee settlement having already been subjected to a significant degree of risk and, as children frequently described, “suffering” as a result. As one practitioner from Right to Play explained:

“...these children flee their countries of origin because of war, so they come with lots of troubles on their hearts, lots of trauma, so they're not able to live at peace with themselves inside; even with others. And if you can't live at peace with yourself and even others, then your health also is in problems, your health ... is at risk.”

Indeed, another interview with a mental health practitioner in the settlement showed that children presented with a range of health risks linked to their flight. Some children under the age of five had experienced migraines and epilepsy due to their mothers “running off from the rebels” and being “beaten up and down” whilst pregnant. Other children had been diagnosed with “trauma”, were thought “mentally disturbed” or “psychologically tortured” due to the “different difficulty moments” they or their families had “passed through”. This practitioner described how one teenage girl had witnessed rebels “chopping off the head” and raping people she knew, had been beaten herself and forcibly separated from people she was “clinging to” and had then run into another group of rebels whilst escaping through “the bush alone”. He recalled her words to him:

“So whenever I remember that thing, I feel a lot of...I lose life, I don't see the meaning of life whenever I remember the group that I had, the people moving, the torture we went through”.

“You see”, he summarised, “how post-traumatic stress disorder can go on?”

Within some of the literature on displacement, in fact, refugee children in general are considered a ‘high risk’ group in relation to mental health and psychosocial complaints. A significant proportion of refugee children – like many of those in Kyaka II – are forcibly displaced from their homes due to conflict and exposed to violence, considered the strongest predictor of poor mental health outcomes (Reed et al., 2011). Many refugee children will also have experienced continued and cumulative exposure to violence: not only political violence, but rape and domestic violence within the high stress or insecure environment of a camp. In some camps, for example in Darfur, a high percentage of children are thought to have met the diagnostic criteria for clinical conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Reed et al., 2011).

Due to such forced migration, the protective supports normally available for children at all levels are eroded. The risk of diverse social and psychological problems is increased or pre-existing problems are amplified and children are considered highly vulnerable as a result. Children are thought more susceptible to illness, malnutrition and abuse, to have a relatively dependent social status and to be at a susceptible stage of physical and mental development compared to most adults. The psychosocial problems experienced can be acute in the short-term but also undermine children's well-being and mental health longer-term (IASC, 2007:1). Indeed, as outlined in Chapter Five, refugee children who had been living in Kyaka II for some time still spoke about their "suffering": remembering their past experiences, where they came from and what they had been through. An OPM practitioner suggested in his interview that these children were in a "condition" that "needed a lot of psychosocial support".

#### *6.2.2 Protection risks: children, in a refugee settlement*

Protection risks facing refugee children are not just those linked to the circumstances of their flight, but include those related to living conditions in the refugee settlement as well. As discussed in Chapter Five, refugee children spoke about a lack of adequate provision or assistance, for example shelter, sanitation, education, health care, clean water and, in particular, food. Children, according to many who participated in the workshops, did not have enough to eat. A teenager from Bujubuli Secondary School documented in Kiswahilli his food allocation in detail – "just 15kg per month", "we only eat maize grain" – and stressed that it was "not enough". Another teenage boy said: "we are suffering from eating beans every day". Younger children were also concerned about food – two under-ten year-olds from Byabakora said their "mother may fail to give them food" and other younger children just said simply "no food" when asked about their concerns. Children also spoke about a 'lack of' other items, for example a child from Itambabiniga noted his parents' "failure to buy clothes" and under-tens from the Reception Centre listed their lack of "things": "no plastic sheeting, no clothes, no books, no shoes..." When asked what they would want to tell an officer from UNHCR if he/she visited, these were some of the issues that younger children raised.

Children also mentioned the risks of poverty, illness, hard work at home and the difficulties of the protracted situation associated with living as a refugee. In their workshop, a group of 11-16 year-olds from Bukere produced a 'body map' of the protection risks as they saw them for children living in Kyaka II (Figures 44 and 45): writing "we have too much jobs at home", "we pay too much money and our parents doesn't [sic] have it", "we are tired of the life in Kyaka II". During other workshops with 11-16s, similar comments included: "as we live our lives we are poor", "we are tired of poor living" and "we have spent many years in Kyaka II". One teenage boy from Itambabiniga said: "some of our parents are poor – they are good at drinking alcohol – knowledge we have, but money is the problem".



Figure 44: 'Body map' of protection risks, 11-16 workshop, Bukere.

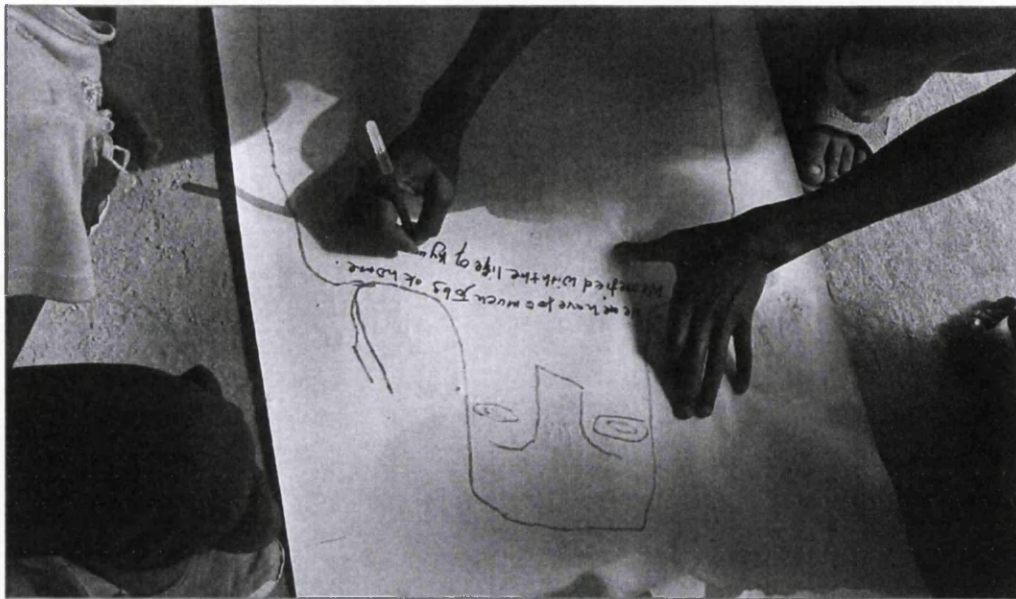


Figure 45: 'Body map' of protection risks, 11-16 workshop, Bukere.

Children also spoke about other protection risks facing many children, not just those who were refugees – for example abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect. A list of protection concerns from a group of 11-16s in Bukere included a lack of protection, raping as well as violence and SGBV. An unaccompanied girl from Mukondo spoke about being beaten and harassed by other children and a child in a workshop for 6-10 year-olds talked about parents “violating children’s rights by beating them seriously”. Other young children in a workshop in Itambabiniga said children were very affected by family violence and family neglect. Younger children were also aware of other forms of harm and the risks involved, for example a group of 6-10s from Byabakora listed: “sickness, being knocked over by vehicle, hurting and banging themselves, being bitten by snake.”

Practitioners also presented a catalogue of protection risks facing refugee children in the settlement. In addition to poverty and illness, they also talked about mistreatment, abuse and neglect. A Rwandese Refugee Community Worker said: “with our children you find, ‘my father beat me’, ‘...my mum refused to give me food’”. A member of staff from UNHCR added that “they’re abused at home, at school” and another Rwandese Refugee Community Worker said “here, in the camp, the punishment of children is very, very, very tough”. He went on to give an example of the type of punishment children received:

“Because sometimes here... in the camp...the children just can refuse to go to get fresh water. Then the punishment can be to just...not give them food the whole night. Maybe too late to just...stop them to enter the house. Maybe they...sleep outside the facility... ‘you not enter the house until you bring...water or just you...collecting firewood’. Then, also, there’s just the serious beating them.”

For the UNHCR Field Manager “sexual abuse, physical abuse” or “psychological” was the area where children were “suffering most”.

In addition to such abuse, practitioners outlined how children were often exploited in the settlement, responsible for excessive amounts of household work. As the UNHCR Field Manager put it, children were “basically used as labour” - in many cases beyond what they were physically able to do. For the mental health practitioner mentioned above, this was a “common, common thing” that children presented to him with, having to “do what they cannot, doing work which is not particularly relevant to their age”. He spoke at length about an unaccompanied girl, fostered by a single mother with four young children, who was experiencing severe epileptic fits linked to the amount of domestic work she was given to do. For Harrell-Bond (2000:8), “there are many households in refugee camps where the labour of children is critical to its survival.”

Some children were viewed as being more at risk in the settlement and more vulnerable than others by practitioners, in particular unaccompanied children and girls. The UNHCR Field Manager explained that unaccompanied children - because they do not have an adult member who can take care of them - are considered more vulnerable and, as a result, given special attention in terms of protection.

Unaccompanied children were viewed by others as sometimes at risk in their alternative care arrangements where they were thought to be suffering from mistreatment and neglect. A Rwandese Refugee Community Worker spoke about this after one of our workshops with a group of unaccompanied children:

“You find if it’s an orphan, a caretaker, he don’t [sic] treat as he treat their own: you find there is a difference. You find when reaching time for eating... an orphan, send him to fetch water, the children remaining eating. When a child comes back he finds the others have already eaten, then he given what remains. So he eats and there is nothing he can do.”

These unaccompanied children (which he called ‘orphans’), he considered, were “very, very vulnerable to being abused.”

Children also mentioned the risks facing unaccompanied children. One unaccompanied ten year-old child spoke about his experiences of living in the Protection Centre temporarily alongside another family:

“Family not giving him food... When he tells them, tell him to ‘go fetch water’ so can eat. Goes and fetches water.... Don’t want to take care of him and don’t want to feed him... Not eaten anything today.”

A group of 6-10 year-olds from Byabakora, when asked to write their protection concerns around the outline of a refugee child, included that a child might “lose parent, go to guardian” who then might fail to look after that child. Another group - older boys from Bujubuli - said that they might “tell guardians about needing school fees, clothes, food but does not happen”. Unaccompanied children living in the Reception Centre spoke also spoke about unaccompanied children - who they also called ‘orphans’ - and one child commented that they “...don’t have parents so have to work, no play or enjoy, work hard, just work.”

Girls were also thought to be especially at risk in a range of ways, particularly in terms of household labour as well as exploitation and abuse. Several practitioners described how some girls in the settlement were involved in commercial sex. A Congolese Refugee Community Worker commented: “Now, even girls just eleven to fifteen years, they are now just used by what, by men”. At the time of the research, workshops were being conducted by the Women’s Refugee Council (WRC) with adolescent girls in the settlement, focusing on their experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse. Protection risks for girls discussed in these workshops included defilement, commercial sex, sex for services, early marriage and in-marriage rape.

Particularly pertinent for girls in Kyaka II was the additional risk of being viewed as a commodity, to be used for adult convenience or to be bought and sold. A female member of Right to Play commented on girls being married off for income by their families: “the girl is there for money...not for going to school”. Another female practitioner described this situation facing girls in the settlement in more detail:

“Some community members...when they look at girl child... for them, when you reach a certain age because of the poverty level, they wanted you to go and get married. So they would start asking, you know, they would start talking some languages that the children would not want to hear: ‘Ah, for

you... you are ready, and, you know, you can now get somebody'. You know, we do have this. So that in a way is actually breaking, you know, the rights of the child."

In a practitioners' workshop, a member of staff from OPM underlined the importance of considering what refugees had been through to get to Kyaka II, with parents not able to support their families and having to marry off girl children "to get rid of the burden". "Poverty at home", he said, "is a key issue". Children were also concerned about such additional pressures and risks to the 'girl child' and these were discussed in particular by adolescent girls attending the WRC workshops mentioned above.

All of these risks, combined, position refugee children in Kyaka II as vulnerable and in need of protection. Refugee children are already fleeing risk and are then presented with further and multiple risks in the settlement both as children and as refugees. As previously mentioned, for some (Harrell-Bond, 2002; Kaiser, 2006), such risks are tied up in particular with the confinement of refugees to settlements and camps. As seen in Chapter Five, the refugee protection process itself also inadvertently presents its own set of risks for children, for example those described by children related to living in the Reception Centre. As outlined in that chapter, not only do refugee children face such protection risks in the refugee protection process but they also feel that they do not have someone to talk to. This situation is captured well by the mental health practitioner previously mentioned:

"But people are going through problems, children are going through problems. They have seen their mothers being raped, they have seen their mothers being killed; they have seen their fathers been chopped off their heads and they are there, but *they don't have someone to tell...*" [emphasis added].

Without regular consultation with children throughout the refugee protection process, adults may not be aware of such risks to refugee children living in Kyaka II. Indeed, for the GIZ Protection Manager, the multiple risks facing refugee children in the settlement had not been recognised enough, children had not been considered in practice as a "vulnerable group" as a whole. As Chapters Four and Five have argued, additional risks are *created* for refugee children by the particular spatial and conceptual configuration of children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II and the silences and exclusions that result.



### 6.2.3 *A more nuanced view of 'risk'?*

A conceptualisation of all refugee children in Kyaka II purely and solely in terms of vulnerability and risk, however, would be neither representative of the empirical data nor constructive for considering children's participation. Indeed, such a conceptualisation of the child in a range of contexts has already been challenged, drawing on children's experiences, by many (Clark, 2007; Steffen, 2010; Mayer and Evans, 2011; Hart, 2012). The concept of risk has a function and, when applied, can give children - or groups of children - special consideration which can be important for their protection. However, whilst it is important to acknowledge the multiple risks faced by refugee children, this does not mean that all refugee children are at risk everywhere, all of the time. On further analysis of refugee children's and practitioners' comments about children and risk, a more complex picture can emerge.

Firstly, whilst it might be recognised that some children arrive "extremely traumatised" to Kyaka II, with time, counselling and support, many children are able to adjust, adapt and, with help, address certain elements of risk. For the mental health practitioner previously mentioned, interaction with such children did not have to "focus on the sickness alone". In other words, children are more than the sum of any protection risks that they face. Children also change their relationship to such risks over time. In documenting his one-to-one work with a "client", this practitioner showed how an eleven year-old girl went from being treated by him for epilepsy and a "reducing mental state" to later working with him as a translator to help improve the mental health of her peers. Presenting initially with a range of health risks to his clinic, the girl was discovered on a home visit to be over-burdened with physical labour by her foster carer, uncovering another form of risk:

"I went to visit her. Reaching there, the kid had not even sat down, even she had not yet been given something to take [i.e. eat], the mother was like: 'you better get the jug and go for water.'"

For the foster carer, the girl was considered as a necessary "second mother" to her younger children, all depending on her for their care. She was therefore viewed very differently at home in relation to risk. Through helping the mother access other household support, the practitioner was able to take some of the burden from the older girl, in turn freeing her up to attend sessions in his clinic and to eventually work as an "educator" for other children, at which "she's doing well". In this

example, risk is temporary, shifting and contextual, fluctuating in nature and over time in relation to the child. Indeed, Boyden and De Berry (2004a) note in their consideration of De Berry's study of adolescent girls in Northern Uganda during conflict that, whilst these girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse, this is not an inherent vulnerability but a result of the pattern of social life endured in camps. Also, such vulnerability is not all encompassing, the girls showed courage and resilience in the face of risk.

Similarly, a practitioner from Windle Trust commented on the difference in vulnerability between refugee children when they had just arrived and the same children later on in the refugee protection process. As time goes on, he suggested, "with the help of other organisations...they adapt." A protection officer from GIZ also captured the temporary nature of refugee children's vulnerability but with the importance of children's sustained right to participation underneath:

"...there are those that come who are extremely traumatised, but by the time they get back to counselling and as they adjust to the new environment...that doesn't have to deny them any opportunities to participate in anything, just like any other child...They have the right to."

This notion of refugee children as rights holders is explored later in this chapter.

As indicated in Chapter Two, a critique of the positioning of refugees and refugee children as permanently vulnerable and/or "traumatised" can be found within the existing literature. Despite the multiple risks facing refugee children, it is certainly not the case that all are "traumatised" by their experiences, a specific clinical condition that is thought only applicable to relatively few (CPWGI, 2003:3). For Suarez-Orozco and Carhill (2008:89), the link between the stress of forced migration and higher rates of poor mental health outcomes is insufficiently evidenced as a whole. Indeed, for Clark (2007), some of the psychological impact of displacement on children is "assumed detrimental", overlooking non Western coping strategies in the face of adversity or views of displacement itself. For De Berry and Boyden (2004a:xvii), in relation to conflict-affected young people, they maintain that "while it is difficult to exaggerate the horrors of war, it is quite possible to overuse concepts such as trauma" and they suggest that young people's responses are "multi-faceted and nuanced" and that, "even when profoundly disturbed or troubled, the young frequently exercise remarkable resilience". Therefore, as Malkki (1995:10) points

out, despite forced displacement causing all kinds of disruption and distress, we have to be careful in our conceptualisation of the refugee (child): "...we must not assume that refugee status in and of itself constitutes a recognizable, generalizable psychological condition". Others, for example Hart (2012) and Newman (2005) are equally critical of this "trauma paradigm" associated with the conceptualisation of refugee children or children amidst adversity. For Newman (2005), there needs to be a "more modified view" of the young.

The literature on the psychosocial and mental health impacts of displacement also considers the resources held by children as well as the harm done. Children are viewed as having assets (problem solving, communication, negotiation, support) that can protect their mental health and psychosocial well-being and foster greater "resilience" ('the ability to cope relatively well in situations of adversity' (IASC, 2007:3). Therefore, although it may be the case that 'refugee children carry their memories of past events and live with the continuing consequences' (Reed et al., 2011), they can also be viewed as having some of the resources and skills to address this within themselves. More broadly, as outlined in Chapter Two, there is growing literature that emphasises children's agency and resilience amidst adversity as well as their vulnerability: children, suggests Newman (2005:26) "use their agency in a variety of productive, imaginative ways".

Secondly, an exposure to risk can sometimes and to a certain extent be perceived as contributing to strength. One secondary school pupil, when asked if she thought refugee children could help to keep each other safe, talked about the resources that children could draw on from having shared experiences and problems; from facing risks, losing relatives and experiencing war:

"Even a young girl can keep some child safe. Why? Because we are all from different families but may have the same problems - lost relatives during wars - the talents we have and know how to make a better life."

For a few practitioners, some children – for example, unaccompanied children – were thought to be more resilient and mature because of the level of their exposure to risk. Indeed, Boyden and De Berry (2004a:xviii) suggest that some children, due to changes in their status, role and circumstance due to conflict, have to take on "proto-adult roles" at home. One Refugee Community Worker commented that because of

the difficult experiences these children had faced, their situations made them “think as adults” and they were better able to approach officers and organisations and to negotiate the refugee protection process as a result:

“...because you know when a child grow in critical condition, in bad condition, they’re really strong and they really know how to talk. And because of that...they reach...they can talk... they can get assistance because they’ve passed through many circumstances.”

This perspective on risk is interesting because, from other viewpoints, unaccompanied children are viewed as being particularly ‘at risk’. It therefore shows a more complex view of refugee children who, despite their vulnerability, are still able to participate in their own protection. This perspective is reinforced by the range of children facing diverse and multiple risks that were able to engage in and give their perspectives on this research.

This notion of what constitutes an ‘adult’ and a ‘child’ in a refugee protection context is therefore not clear-cut – some children can be viewed as more ‘mature’ or more ‘adult’ in certain ways and this can alter how we view children in relation to their participation and protection. Indeed, as previously cited, for Lowicki (2002) it is “absurd and belittling” to not conceptualise children who are facing so many risks and engaged in so many responsibilities as able to participate in their own protection. Similarly, as we have already seen, for Steffen (2010) these children are already engaged in participating in their own protection on a daily basis.

We do, however, need to exercise caution when viewing refugee children with ‘adult’ responsibilities as being more resourceful rather than as at risk. For example, children engaged in excessive labour or enduring hardships whilst living in Kyaka II were seen by some practitioners as having to be “grown up” whilst they were in fact still young. Rather than being better able to access protection, this meant that these children had neither the time nor the freedom to talk about their views and concerns. As already mentioned a young girl placed in foster care with younger children, thought “big enough” to become the “second mother in the family”, faced significant negative consequences for her health and well-being as a result.

Refugee children in Kyaka II, therefore, face multiple risks to their protection but cannot be conceptualised purely in terms of such vulnerability and risk in any

permanent and exclusive way. Whilst these risks must be recognised and addressed, they do not ultimately and inherently define refugee children, and children will often negotiate and change their position in relation to such risks over time and space. This more fluid conceptualisation of children in terms of vulnerability and risk is, it will be suggested, more productive in relation to refugee children's participation in the refugee protection process. What it means is that such procedures cannot concentrate solely on refugee children as vulnerable and in need of protection, spaces disassociated from children's participation, but there must also be room for children to be viewed with agency and competencies, as able to participate and share their views and concerns.

### **6.3 Silencing refugee children: "it's me to talk"**

Running alongside the conceptualisation of refugee children in terms of risk is the view of a child who, in the presence of adults, should not be heard. In part, this can be attributed to adult attitudes towards children from within the refugee community and is viewed as coming from 'culture'. However, it also derives from practitioners themselves. For some, this is a procedural or operational matter, a product of insufficient resources or time. For others, it is more fundamental, related to an organisational or institutional view of children. In either case, the evidence from this research suggests that, in relation to refugee children's participation in their protection, it is not an enabling conceptualisation of the child.

#### *6.3.1 Coming from 'culture'*

When asked to list the barriers to children's participation in Kyaka II, several practitioners engaged in a mapping workshop mentioned "community and parental attitudes" and "culture". Children's lack of participation, said one, was because of the "rigidity" of "parents who believe children shouldn't participate in any decision making". For another, it was because of the cultural tendencies that take children to be "non-participants" in decisions. A practitioner from Right to Play talked in detail in interview about the constraints of parental attitudes towards the child and the silencing of refugee children as a result:

"You know and for the children you also tie them in a number of ways, because you are the parents, you know: 'Don't do this! You are not supposed to talk with an adult'....even though they are trying to...maybe bring up an

opinion or something that they are not happy about, you go: '*You are a child! Please, you don't have to say anything!*'" [emphasis added]

Others also spoke about the impact of parental attitudes on children. A UNHCR protection worker recently arrived in Kyaka II said: "if their parents are there, they may not talk". She also spoke about the impact of other influential adults – RWC Chairmen and elders - in the community: "If their leaders are there sitting and listening and then they are shouting at them, you know: '...No, no, no, don't say this!' a child will not talk". Because of this influence, another protection practitioner from GIZ maintained that when they talked to children, they made "sure the Chairman is not around".

When asked in interview if 'culture' had an impact on refugee children's participation in protection in Kyaka II, the UNHCR Field Manager spoke about "certain villages" in the refugee settlement where children were "completely disregarded", the attitude being: "I'm talking - you better be quiet because...I'm an adult". Another interviewee from GIZ commented that, because of these attitudes, community venues "don't let the children come in there" and that, if they did, "they're going to chase them away."

For some, it was 'culture' operational at this local village level that was causing constraints on the participation of the child. For the UNHCR Field Manager, there were "different cultures" in Kyaka II, including "those who do not encourage their children to express". Children's participation, she said, "depends on the zone", with zones "which really participate a lot" - for example Swe Swe - and others, like Byabakora or Kaborogota, "who do not". For a member of staff from Windle Trust, one zone in particular presented cultural barriers to the participation of the child:

"Actually there is one culture in one zone that's called Kaborogota...I hear it is their culture that a child of 14 years...she was supposed to get married... And in most cases they don't speak out to teachers...because it is their culture..."

For other practitioners, however, the barriers presented to children's participation were due to national or regional 'culture'. For example, one UNHCR practitioner talked about her experiences of working with refugees from different countries and their attitudes towards the child:

“So the Somali community keeps quiet, and then other cultures like I’ll give an example of Congolese, they’re always talking to their neighbours, they’ll always look out and they’ll tell us and that’s when we come in...”

Other interviewees spoke about African ‘culture’ as a whole and attitudes towards children that caused constraints. A member of staff from the Norwegian Refugee Council said:

“I think children may fear because upon African settings children are not supposed to talk when elders are speaking you see...in African culture generally...where there are adults, *children do not speak*” [emphasis added].

Overall, in relation to children’s ability to talk and contribute, ‘culture’, said a practitioner from Right to Play, was “something big”:

“Some people, some cultures don’t take children’s opinions serious, and we have had issues where a child has come up and said: ‘See these children have a particular problem’ and the parents are like: ‘Yes. Children are supposed to be doing this’, you know. It is like they try to imply that ‘we are the adults and supposed to think for you’...so much as we are trying to bring it up to encourage participation, there are lots of cultural barriers.”

In terms of adult refugee attitudes and cultural norms, then, the message that comes across is that children are not supposed to talk: it is not appropriate or acceptable, it is not their place. Adults in the community are there to talk for and, if necessary, “think for” the refugee child. The indication from the practitioner above is that, as a result, important protection information relating to the child – an “opinion”, a “particular problem”, something that children “are not happy about” – may be lost.

Connected to this sense that children are not supposed to talk is a suggestion that children are not competent, have nothing to offer: as children, they cannot have anything of value to say. In relation to what she described as ‘African culture’, a protection officer from OPM explained:

“...it’s not until you’re an adult that you’re actually considered much; they don’t ask you for much things here: if it’s school-going, they’ll decide which schools you go to...so you know children are left...not to decide things on their own until they’re much older...”

Some refugee children in the settlement seemed to share this sense that children were not competent. In relation to his protection and that of others, a teenage boy from Bukere commented that a child “cannot know that he is suffering”, he “cannot have the knowledge of thinking”. An unaccompanied child in a workshop in Bujubuli

said that a child could not “himself solve his problem” and that children did not “have the capacity for ideas”. In a workshop for 11-16 year olds in Kakoni, another child said that children were “not having knowledge like adults”. In relation to protection interviews, one child under ten from Itambabiniga concluded that children are not able to provide information or make a contribution: “they start asking them many questions and yet they are children” and therefore, because they are children, they are unable to respond. Linked to this sense of children’s incompetence is the notion that children are dependent on adults: an unaccompanied child from Mukondo said that “only adults can provide for them” and that “only parents” can “solve the misunderstanding” between children. Members of a group of 11-16 year-olds living in the Reception Centre said children needed adults to “take care” of them, to “advise them”, to “guide them so they can’t get a problem”.

For other refugee children, however, it was not a lack of competence per se but more the conditions they were living in that impacted on their ability to talk and to share their protection concerns. A practitioner from Right to Play commented on how, despite their competence, children were prevented from making a contribution:

“Most times it's parents who participate and they will even hide the children. Other children have the correct information about their family, their background, where they've been. They know what they have gone through. But most cases parents will lie a lot. And even when they come for interviews, children are told to keep ‘mum’ ... ‘*Keep quiet, and it's me to talk, so that we are given a refugee status*’” [emphasis added].

Once again, the repercussion of children keeping quiet is that important protection information may be lost. In the example given, even if the ‘right’ protection story according to the parents is shared, the child might be having his/her own particular protection information to divulge or evidence of child specific persecution relevant to a refugee status claim. In addition, the child’s own views and current protection concerns are hidden and suppressed; they are not aired. Again, the practitioner from Right to Play explained:

“...they have concerns that they want to talk about ... but...that level is limited. Because parents suppress their ... impulse to talk: ‘When we go to the base camp, when you go to UNHCR, GIZ and Right to Play, whichever organisation it is, it's me to talk. *You are not supposed to talk*’. And yet children might be having more input and information than the parents” [emphasis added].



Amidst a refugee protection process which is not conceptualised by practitioners as a participatory 'space' for children, such a cultural conceptualisation and silencing of refugee children by their families and communities during protection interventions is serious indeed.

### 6.3.2 Practitioners, organisations and institutions

Whilst, for some, a conceptualisation of the child as neither seen nor heard comes from the refugee community and from 'culture', for others it comes from practitioners themselves, with children being ignored, left in the background or chased away. A mental health practitioner commented on some of the agency staff going out into the refugee community and their lack of attention to children's views and concerns:

“When they go out, they listen to adults and then they ignore these young ones, not knowing that these young ones also have their own complaints, their own problems which are affecting them.”

Indeed, a visiting doctor I met in the settlement guest house commented that, in relation to the Reception Centre, they “forget about the children there”. For another practitioner working for Right to Play, this was also evident, both in the Reception Centre - “they will collect adults, talk to them, but children will be left aside” - and out in the community as a whole: “children are left in the background and it's the adults that are being talked to”. This practitioner suggested that communication from humanitarian agencies about children was “to parents more than the children”, putting children in a position where they could “*come and sneak and listen* to what is being discussed about them” [emphasis added] but not be directly engaged on their own terms. Even when the communication from agencies was directly related to comments that children themselves had made, adults were still the ones who were focused on and enabled to talk:

“...we are telling them ‘look, you see, based on this we have decided that this activity would be done for the children’, but we are telling adults who did not even contribute! So even if the children were involved there at the beginning - they are the ones there, the source of the information - they are not the ones who are making the final decision. So eventually it's still the adult population, the leaders' representatives, who are making decisions for the population.”

For some, this neglect of children's views and concerns is procedural, due to a lack of capacity and time. The GIZ Manager said:

“We're always so busy taking care of the vulnerable ones that we don't even consider the children on their own would be a group of vulnerable people within the settlement.... children are rarely considered as a group to be consulted.”

A UNHCR Community Services officer talked about how, despite wanting to support children's participation, such resource limitations meant that it could be hard for children's voices to be heard:

“...a number of challenges, that may be from human resource, and in training, there will always be gaps... We find that sometimes you end up creating an environment that it's not very favourable for children to open up, or for children to easily access.... So somehow, at times they get left out of the actual decision-making or planning for themselves.”

For other practitioners, whilst listening to children's views and concerns was important, procedurally it was someone else's job. Some did not see themselves or their work in terms of relating to the child – it was not their particular area, role, department or function; children were being heard elsewhere. For example, whilst acknowledging the importance of children's participation, a Resettlement Officer also explained in interview that most of her communication was “with the parent, rarely do I come in with the child”. For her, she “may just talk to the child briefly just to capture some small information” or communicate with the child “to establish the relationship with the child and their caretaker” but overall she said: “I am not too much in the line of talking to the child”. This, she maintained, was the role of Community Services:

“...there is a sector, which will be dealing with the children that is Community Services. When children come, and we really see them around, usually if they come to me ...I send them to Community Services... *I'm not actively involved in children.*” [emphasis added]

Children in Kyaka II, as we have seen, however, do not conceptualise their participation in this bounded way. Most are not aware of such procedural limits, remits and roles, affecting who they can or cannot share their protection concerns with; children cannot necessarily choose to share information with a particular adult in a particular role at a particular time. Because of this, children need to be visible and vocal in all areas of the refugee protection process, listened to by many if not all

adults that they come into contact with, if their protection issues and concerns are to be heard. Refugee children's protection needs to be everyone's concern.

For other practitioners in Kyaka II, the barriers to refugee children's participation in protection are more fundamental, at an organisational or institutional level rather than procedural: children are not prioritised, not seen as important. As one OPM officer put it: children's issues "haven't been at the forefront" and "have long been ignored". Another practitioner from OPM elaborated on this in interview, outlining what she saw as the 'place' of children at a strategic level:

"Now it would be good to address issues to do with child participation, but then that goes back to the programming of refugee protection because, for one thing, I know: child protection in Uganda is not priority. We have refugee protection as a whole, and then there's the issue of women. Then, of course, you have the vulnerable groups, where you're classed as the PWDs [Persons with Disabilities] you're classed as the EVIs]. So the child protection thing is not so much on the agenda..."

A UNHCR practitioner in Kyaka II set out how he thought, in turn, this lack of priority given to children affected protection operations in 'the field':

"...you see in Kyaka, we even don't have a child protection person, so most times people are doing child protection as part of their additional tasks...So child protection, which is supposed to be paramount, ends up competing with activities, which are also viewed as priority."

For one Community Protection Worker, the whole approach to refugee protection in the settlement was seen as a result of "taking the children for granted" on a day-to-day level and he saw a "clearly identified need" for increased recognition for children:

**Interviewer:** "So are you saying then that you think that one of the main problems is the way that organisations here treat children?"

**Respondent:** "Yeah they don't treat them equally with the adults."

**Interviewer:** "Is that all organisations here?"

**Respondent:** "Not all, but some of them...they're minding about the adults mostly."

A practitioner from OPM outlined how, aware of their relative unimportance, children felt the need to approach organisations with an adult in order to be taken seriously or to be listened to at all:

“...usually when they approach an office, they will come with an adult...there is that common understanding that if you come with an adult you will be accepted and received and then attended to as opposed to when you are a child ...”

Whilst children being accompanied by an adult is not necessarily negative in itself – indeed UNHCR’s procedural safeguards for unaccompanied children include putting an adult ‘guardian’ in place – it is not effective for their protection if children feel that they cannot approach organisations on their own. In the absence of a trustworthy adult to accompany them and/or the need to make an independent refugee claim, children need to feel able and comfortable to address adults and organisations alone.

This view of the child in the refugee protection process - as hidden, ignored, forgotten, silenced, as put in the background or left behind - is one that is not conducive for children’s participation in their protection. The consequences are many including, as the UNHCR Field Manager put it, children not being “given the value they would need...not appreciated”, with a corresponding impact on children’s confidence and self-esteem. The evidence from this research indicates that refugee children are competent, have contributions to make and that it is adults’ conceptualisations of refugee children, affecting in turn their attitudes and approach, rather than children’s limited capabilities, that presents the main barrier to refugee children’s participation. As the GIZ Project Manager commented:

“Children are rarely considered as a group to be consulted... and yet, with 50% of the people of concern being children, it is a very important missing link...”

Based on the material from Kyaka II, some conceptual adjustment by practitioners and their institutions, feeding into protection procedures and interventions with refugee children ‘on the ground’, is therefore required.

#### **6.4 Narrator and informant**

As well as being ignored, silenced or hidden in a refugee protection context, children are also, paradoxically, considered as capable of narration and viewed as a source of information and ‘Truth’. In a refugee setting, eligibility for protection and assistance is dependent on a credible and ‘truthful’ narrative of persecution resulting in flight. Children are conceptualised by different adults in different ways in relation

to such 'story-telling' and in terms of the information they might 'hold'. Whilst there are limitations to children's participation within this view, children are conceptualised as having something important to say and this opens up a space to conceptualise refugee children as 'someone important' in other ways.

A practitioner from Windle Trust outlined what he perceived as the refugee child's narrative 'role':

“So the child will be able, depending on the age...to explain how they crossed, how they are separated ... a child of eight years, he can be able to tell you. Like I have a kid at my school, a Rwandan refugee child who came here with his sister...when you ask the child what happened, he is able to narrate the whole story...how they came and how his sister abandoned him...the child is able to narrate how they came.”

Whilst this is a more enabling view of children's participation than one that sees refugee children without competence and with nothing to contribute, it is also a restricted view, narrowly focused and with consequences for the child. It therefore requires further exploration.

The story of risk ('fear of persecution') and its substantiation are, as already mentioned, essential for refugee status to be secured. Children occupy a complex position in relation to this and, as a result, are conceptualised in different ways. In order to establish credibility or eligibility, children are called upon by both practitioners and adult refugees to situate themselves in relation to 'the Truth'.

Firstly, practitioners conducting refugee protection procedures, such as interviews for registration and RSD, are involved in establishing what is "true" or "credible" in terms of refugee histories and status claims and any "inconsistencies" that need to be addressed. For some, in the context of this uncertainty, children are conceptualised as holding accurate information, for example the UNHCR Resettlement Officer maintained that "a child will not lie because a child will actually try to tell you the truth". This was in opposition to some adult refugees who she thought might "just conduct stories for the sake of giving a status". For another practitioner from Windle Trust, children were viewed as having the "whole truth" – the refugee experience as related by the child was exactly what had happened. For one practitioner from OPM, children were positioned as "innocents" who could not lie:

“If you have a choice between believing an adult or a child, I would definitely go for the child, because a child, at that stage, doesn’t have the aptitude of lying, even when they have been coached at home ten times over. ‘So you’re going to be asked A,B,C,D: answer X,Y,Z’ - they will fall apart in front of your face because the innocence is written all over their faces.”

Secondly, some adult refugees negotiating the refugee protection process, conscious of the perception of children as ‘Truth’, were thought to put children under pressure to lie so that refugee status or other protection outcomes could be achieved. A newly arrived protection officer for UNHCR commented: “...sometimes the children are not telling you the truth... They have relatives and they are being used by these relatives to say this, so that they get resettled.” Similarly, a practitioner from Windle Trust talked about adult refugees whom he thought would “borrow children from their neighbours”, increasing their number of dependents to gain additional assistance and support. Children, he said, might also be forced by their parents to present themselves to protection agencies as being ‘unaccompanied’ or alone, again to increase the level of household assistance. The UNHCR Registration Officer commented on this practice:

“...when it comes to, for example, registration, they have this attitude of if the child registers alone, they are going to get more benefits because they will be treated like unaccompanied, because they know that these children are usually given special attention.”

Conversely, for some adult refugees, children are influenced by practitioners to lie, so that refugee status is not achieved. A Rwandese Refugee Community Protection Worker suggested to me that in relation to Rwandan refugees:

“...in the organisation, you see, they don’t treat the children accordingly, that’s all I can tell you, they don’t. Because they try to force the child to talk what is not inside him, so that he can fail, so that he can know not to get help...They don’t want someone to express, to express his own problems.”

Such conceptualisation of refugee children in relation to ‘Truth’ positions them precariously in relation to their protection. Firstly, suggesting children might present an alternative refugee history to that of their parents or caregivers might leave them silent, fearing to talk or, if they comply, retaliated against at home as a result. In a refuge context where, as we have seen earlier, children say that parents are “violating children’s rights by beating them seriously” and unaccompanied children exist in a tenuous position within foster care, we need to be extremely mindful of the

protection risks involved for children in pressuring them to tell the 'Truth'.

Practitioners need to tread a very careful path in terms of how they interact with and position the child in relation to the child's best interests when they are trying to determine what might be said to be 'true'. This comes through in a quotation from a practitioner from OPM:

“So if I have a choice, you know, I have a family before me and there is some inconsistency, I can always ask a child, it doesn't mean I'm abusing the child, no, I'm only trying to engage them to try and establish the truth in the absence of any documents, in the absence of any other thing that I could rely on.”

Secondly, the search for the 'Truth' about status can be focused on at the expense of imminent protection concerns relating to the child. The issue becomes the information that practitioners want to get from children - the 'true' story - rather than information sharing on protection as a whole. Also, the child is not given space to talk about what they want to talk about because of the parents' or caregivers' fear that the 'wrong' story might be told.

Such dilemmas for children around story-telling and the Truth are highlighted in the literature. For example, Boyden and De Berry (2004a:xxiii) note that children's own narratives can be reconstructed, represented, modified and repressed by the dominant narratives proposing “absolute truth” in terms of the history of conflict. Crawley (2010:164) notes the importance of the “credible narrative” to the asylum process and conferring refugee status but the difficulty for children providing a consistent narrative, given their partial knowledge of the circumstances from which they have fled and the conditions in the country of origin as well as their fear of safety in telling. Refugee children are thus precariously positioned.

Whilst children are here viewed as holding information - and important information - this view of the refugee child is restrictive. In terms of children's participation, it presents as an extractive relationship between the adult and the child. A member of staff from Windle Trust said “if I want information, I get my information from children.” It is the information that adults need to do their job in that context rather than which information the child wants or needs to disclose. This view therefore, as outlined, presents and creates its own additional protection risks for refugee children.

However, whilst there are risks for refugee children positioned as narrators and informants within the refugee protection process, this also provides an opening to explore children's contributions in other ways. If children are able to narrate a version of their family's protection history, what else are they able to say? The implication here is that children have more information to give and further contributions to make to their own protection and might speak on a range of issues and concerns if only enabled and allowed. We need to think here about a process that can be 'true' to the views and experiences of the child and which enables adults and practitioners to engage with children and their contributions in a different way. As in Chapters Four and Five, children are being 'boxed in' or enclosed (Hart, 2012) by this particular conceptualisation of the child – permitted to participate but in a particular and restricted way – and a more open, flexible and supported approach to their participation needs to be pursued.

### **6.5 Exploring children's importance**

An alternative conceptualisation of the refugee child is as "someone important", a view expressed by a GIZ protection officer and one that contrasts greatly with a child who is silenced and placed in the background or hidden away. The empirical material suggests several ways in which children may be viewed as important. Firstly, children are viewed as important because what they have to offer is something different and unique - something additional - to adults. Secondly, children are able to actively contribute to the protection of themselves and others. Thirdly, children are rights holders and decision-makers with intrinsic value and importance in their own right. Overall, children are important enough, in multiple ways, for the refugee protection process to be changed, adapted to their needs so that they can, as one GIZ practitioner put it, "tell their story in another form".

Practitioners in Kyaka II recognised and spoke in interview about the particular and unique contributions a child might make. For some, these contributions were to come. Children were important because they were the future generation who would return to their countries of origin; they thus required "special attention" as a result. One practitioner from Windle Trust reflected on the contributions of the current Rwandese President who, as a boy, had lived and started his primary education in a



Ugandan refugee settlement much like Kyaka II. He emphasised the need for education for refugee children in relation to their future roles:

“One way to look at the situation: when they come, they are the children – but they are the people who go back to the home country, hoping that stability has come; it is not the older ones. So if we are going to lay the foundation then....”

For others, however, children’s contributions were available ‘here and now’, not about what they would bring as adults but integral to their particular perspectives as a child. For a Protection Officer from GIZ, children were able to “look at something in their own perspective, in their own way as children” and able to talk about what a “fellow child” might be going through, to “say how they feel”. In her view, children were not seen as having less to offer because they are “not yet” adults, but something else to contribute: “the way that adults see things is different to the way children see things – they are at the centre of their own concerns”.

Children therefore have information to give about their own protection and the protection of other children, information that adults need but may not already hold. Children are not necessarily seen as having the ‘true’ version or the ‘whole truth’ but they have a version to offer and it is one that needs to be heard. The GIZ Protection Officer said:

*“We take a child as someone important and for us to be able to do activities or to make relevant activities, especially in line with children, we have to involve them because children don’t look at things the way that we look at them so we feel it is really necessary” [emphasis added].*

In this conceptualisation of the child, children are re-positioned “at the forefront”: their views and perspectives are needed because they are unique and additional, enabling the forms of protection that they and other children might need. Children are therefore not seen so much as being ‘protected from’ by adults but as engaged in their own protection. This comes through in particular in relation to children’s participation in protection in school or in their reporting of abuse. The GIZ Protection Officer said that children: “have very good ideas...children give us very amazing solutions to their protection issues in schools and come up with ideas that you never think about”. She viewed children as able to “bring out the issues children are facing” and “tell you how they want these problems or challenges to be solved”:

“Children are able to identify something that is wrong, that has been done against them ...and able to report whenever it happens”.

Similarly, for her colleague, a UNHCR Community Services practitioner, children could be seen as “having solutions to their own problems”, not needing “all their problems to be solved by direct intervention” but needing help “to explore the available resources within their reach”. Viewed as competent communicators, problem-solvers and with a range of resources and capabilities, children can thus be positioned differently in relation to their own protection and to the adults around them. They are able to guide and direct the agencies that are there to support them and their work. Again, from the GIZ Protection Officer in interview: “someone is able to say something about a friend and we come out... we trace that through the children...a child can tell you the problem of another child and you can follow-up”.

Despite the relative lack of children’s participation in the refugee protection process outlined in Chapter Five, some practitioners also viewed children as able to offer their views in this arena, their solutions and ideas. As a practitioner from Right to Play said:

“...there are children who will tell you: ‘Our neighbours, their mum was sick and she was taken to Australia. My mum is also sick. I think we are not living in a healthy way, we need to go’. A child will tell you the Reception Centre is leaking: ‘I think the solution we need ...’”

A Protection Officer from GIZ also added:

“We have the new arrivals, they also have their own experiences as children and they come up with a number of ideas based on what they are going through: ‘You see we are living here...maybe we don’t have balls...we are scared of the environment, people keep moving us around’ and they give you solutions: ‘Like for us to be found to be safe, we don’t want that person here out very late in the night ...’ They come up with solutions and we really consider those ideas...”

Indeed, for the UNHCR Community Services Manager in Kampala, it was very important for practitioners to move away from their background and open themselves up to children - the “fresh minds of humanity” - and their ideas for change. The refugee child, for her, could be “creative” and “innovative”, with the ability to come up with “new ways of doing things”: “so sometimes”, she said, “just listen from children and see how to move”.

Some refugee children also felt that children could contribute ideas for their own protection and the protection of other children. If children have problems, said one teenager from Bukere, they can tell their parents - but if they don't have parents, they can "tell their friends". Children were viewed as able to help each other - through sharing food, learning together, friendship and introductions to other children, giving advice and guidance, accompanying and directing, caring and sharing (tasks, materials, clothes, school equipment) and preventing further risks (bad company, films, drinking, smoking; keeping away from dangerous areas). For younger children living in the Reception Centre, other children could "help you carry water"; children could be "working together", they could "go together...eat together". A teenager living in the Reception Centre said older children could give younger children "good ideas of doing good things"; teach them and help them to learn. This is a different view from the one that says that refugee children cannot think, have ideas or knowledge, cannot solve the problems of another child.

Children, then, can be viewed as important because they have capacities, knowledge, capabilities, in other words they can contribute to their own protection and that of other children. They can also, however, be viewed as important simply because they are human beings who have rights. Whilst the realisation of children's rights is in practice multiply constrained, positioning children as rights-holders is, as already stated, an important aspiration in a context where children are often undervalued, under-recognised and ignored. Participation defined as a 'right' for children rather than an 'activity' can disassociate it from any particular space and therefore is more fluid and all-encompassing as a result. Children as rights-holders suggests a relationship with adults as duty-bearers, a "dialogic" perspective on participation and one that is ideally focused on recognition, validation and respect.

A GIZ protection worker said: "talk to them and tell them their rights – they make the decisions". This is a stronger view of children's participation: one that has entitlements and expectations on the part of the child. As the practitioner from Right to Play explained:

"So in protecting children we've let them know of their rights...let them know of what is entitled to them, both by organisations that are here, the Government of Uganda and UNHCR, even ourselves. So children...have been enlightened about what they should expect of themselves and others".

This view of children as rights-holders comes across from some practitioners – a GIZ Protection Officer said: “decision making’s one of their rights, so we encourage them to make their decisions” and she outlined a rights-based approach to working with refugee children:

“Relevant to the protection of children, we have a number of activities, for example that are designed to build the capacities of these children, to empower them, with like a child to be able to say what they feel they are not happy about without any fear. We have sensitisations that go on in the communities, in the schools, about child protection. We empower them with knowledge on their rights as children so that they are able to identify something that is wrong, that has been done against them for example and be able to report whenever it happens”.

Similarly, a pastor working for Windle Trust emphasised that children “shouldn’t keep quiet...it is your right and it is one protecting your life”. Some children also had this view of themselves as holders of rights. As shown in the section on risks above, children reported parents and others “violating their rights” and knew the importance of their rights being respected. One of the children in a community-based workshop in Itambabiniga said that organisations should be “helping them and respecting the rights of children”, able to “fulfil children’s rights” and another child said simply: “we want protection”.

Whilst children’s agency is more constrained than as presented in a rights-based approach, there are dividends of this approach for children, with children seen as empowered rather than seen as not competent, experiencing a sense of their importance and value rather than fear. A practitioner from OPM said:

“If there is a possibility that they can be engaged to give you information, to be part of a decision making, why not? Because our full participation in the process will be appreciated by everyone, even for the child it’s a boost for them: they say ‘wow I went through this, this and this and I was just asked a couple of questions, I’m feeling important because I am part of the decision making’. It helps a lot”.

The practitioner from Right to Play also emphasised the importance of participation for children’s empowerment and self-esteem:

“...children feel happy and free to be, and where with this happiness and this freedom they can feel protected and they can learn what is protection for them. They can really become active, active promoters through play, through activities, this is in general.”

However, the GIZ Manager felt that significant awareness-raising needed to take place with refugee children in order to view themselves as rights holders, entitled to participate in their own protection:

“There is nobody specifically representing the rights of children, plus the education on the children rights is extremely poor... So most of the children they have no idea ...what they can or what they can't or, you know, they just don't understand. They are just close in their families or they go to school there together but nobody really educates them on this is your right and this is what you can decide and this is what you...basically are entitled to.”

## **6.6 Conclusions**

Refugee children in Kyaka II are varied, complex and diverse. As one UNHCR Project Officer commented: children in the settlement have “different thinking, different attitudes, different choices” and are “at different stages” – you cannot speak about refugee children as one. There is no single, shared refugee condition for all children in Kyaka II.

As outlined in this chapter, refugee children's identities can be seen to be constructed differently - in diverse contexts for a range of reasons - by parents and caregivers, adults in the community, practitioners and by children themselves. Children are 'boxed in' or enclosed conceptually by different views of the child, all of which are partial and none of which reflect the full diversity of refugee children, their experiences and lives.

This boxing in of refugee children conceptually can be viewed similarly to the enclosure of their participation in space. Both are restrictive and limit the nature, scale and scope of children's participation and have consequences for their protection. Hart (2012), in his study of child protection in the OPT, notes both the circumscription of 'the child' and the spaces of child protection in context. For Hart (2012), such enclosures - conceptual and spatial – are driven institutionally and divorce a consideration of children and their protection from political structures and constraints. Similarly, the conceptualisations of children in Kyaka II do not make room for the articulation of children's views on such broader concerns.

There are, then, different interests and power dynamics behind the multiple conceptualisations of refugee children in Kyaka II. For example, where authority needs to be maintained, whether of the adult over the child or the practitioner over

the refugee, or where vulnerability is procedurally required, it may not be conducive to conceptualise the refugee child as someone who is “supposed to talk”. Similarly, when there are procedural limitations on practitioners in terms of workload, resources and time. Alternatively, when the contributions of the child can be used to an advantage – by an adult refugee for increased assistance or by a practitioner to extract more reliable information - a more vocal conceptualisation of a refugee child is required.

As pointed out by Hart and Tyrer (2006: 6), these “variations in notions of ‘childhood’ have immense bearing upon actual children’s lives”.. The combined conceptualisation of children as vulnerable and at risk as well as those who “do not talk” presents barriers to children’s participation in practice. The conceptualisation of children as narrators or informants is more productive but can limit children’s participation to adult agendas. Refugee children viewed as able to protect themselves and others suggests that children can and do have significant contributions to make and that their protection might be enhanced as a result. The conceptualisation of refugee children as rights holders indicates an entitlement to participation despite vulnerability, cultural and attitudinal constraints or risk. However, all of these views are in tension with one another in the refugee protection process. The nature of the refugee child is, as suggested previously by Denov (2010:2), a complex interplay of “the realities of victimisation, participation and resistance which are experienced and carried out by children in a shifting and dialectical fashion”. They are, at different times and in different ways, vulnerable, resilient; resourceful and at risk.

Is it possible, then, to conceptualise refugee children in a more productive way, one which reflects this complexity, avoids the creation of additional protection risks and enhances the potential of children’s participation in their protection? There is certainly a need for more flexibility – a view that can shift and incorporate elements of vulnerability and capability, competencies and risk. It may be possible to engage with refugee children from a range of perspectives within the refugee protection process, according to children’s changing circumstances and needs, but to maintain important protection safeguards and an underlying respect for their rights. There also needs to be the possibility that, through their participation, refugee children may well

come up with better suggestions and solutions to their protection concerns than ours.

As the GIZ Manager said:

“Maybe, before you leave, we could ask them what they really want for them because we like to really know. That would be very useful and also how well they would like us to pull up our socks. Then they’ll tell you all their problems, so maybe if you tell me, from there we will see how we can improve?”

In this context, refugee children’s ideas for change, addressing their concerns as outlined in Chapter Five, forms the basis of the chapter that follows.

## **Chapter Seven: Reconfiguring refugee children's participation in their protection**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that there are significant barriers to refugee children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II. Chapter Four provided a map of refugee children's participation which, it was argued, is restricted to certain designated spaces and, as a result, specific groups of children and particular areas of concern, revealing the refugee protection process as a substantial and critical 'gap'. Chapter Five outlined, in relation to children's participation in the refugee protection process, the many obstacles that 'get in the way'. These include both what appear as technical barriers - environments, methods and approaches not conducive or 'friendly' for refugee children - as well as conceptual barriers, for example restrictive conceptualisations of participation and participatory space. Chapter Six introduced multiple conceptualisations of refugee children in relation to their protection, most of which impose limitations on children's participatory potential and agency. All three chapters attempted to situate such barriers within the constraints, dynamics and micro politics of a refugee camp context, to show how they are related to different interests, institutions and the operation of power. Refugee children's participation has thus far been presented, in multiple ways, as 'boxed in' (Hart and Khatiwada, 2003), circumscribed and enclosed (Hart, 2012), with consequences for their protection.

This chapter aims to re-think refugee children's participation in the refugee protection process, based on the analysis presented thus far, in order to offer up some suggestions for change. It draws on some of the conceptual literature from Chapter Two and considers the nature and possibility of change to 'make room' for any reconfiguration proposed. The potential risks but also evidence of some 'ground level' support for increasing refugee children's participation in their own protection in Kyaka II is outlined. The remaining sections of the chapter then address some of the main barriers to children's participation in their protection as raised through the empirical research: environment, methods and attitudes and approach. Whilst these are technical barriers, they are also about conceptual and institutional change.



Drawing on the idea that refugee children are not just passive recipients of adult protection, but are able to contribute their own ideas and solutions to their protection concerns, much of the empirical material for this chapter comes from refugee children themselves. It includes information gathered during the workshops with children through ‘visioning’ sessions, drawing out their suggestions, as well as from the follow-up workshops as part of the return visit to Kyaka II, adding detail to the changes children most want to see. Children’s views and experiences are a valuable and productive starting point for any consideration of change.

## **7.2 ‘Making room’ for change**

From the outset, the aim of this research has not only been to map ‘what exists’ in terms of refugee children’s participation, but also to explore refugee children and practitioners’ ideas for change. The multiple aims for the research, including practice and policy-related outcomes and benefits for the research respondents themselves, require this more exploratory approach. Indeed, presented with a relative lack of refugee children’s participation in the refugee protection process and implications for children’s protection as a result, there is an obligation to consider how this situation might be improved.

As already discussed in Chapter Two, as well as throughout this thesis, there are limits to the focus of this research and the kind of change it might involve. The research is not directly questioning children’s confinement in refugee camps per se, leading to radical transformation at this scale. It is exploring and demanding change in the delivery of refugee protection procedures that refugee children come into contact with on a daily basis. As procedural change, it is therefore more about transformation within a camp setting, or across refugee camp settings, rather than the abolition of the refugee camp itself. Such change is important since it shapes refugee children’s experiences and impacts significantly on their protection and their lives. The research is also both aware of and makes connections to the wider critique of refugee camps, the dynamics involved and the refugee settlement as a political space.

There are theoretical and practical considerations involved in any discussion of change. At a conceptual level, the potential ‘openings’ for a reconfiguration of children’s participation need to be explored. More practically, promoting an increase in children’s participation can be a ‘risky business’ and requires careful consideration

of context and the power dynamics involved. There also needs to be significant support for children's participation 'on the ground'. These considerations are explored below.

In Chapter Two, some of the literature set out some useful perspectives for the reconceptualization of children's participation and agency in relation to space. For example, Kesby (2007) advocates for a reconfiguration of participation where there are no separate spaces of children's participation but where power and empowerment, in all spaces, are always intertwined. It is helpful to be able to think about the spatiality of children's participation in this more fluid way and to move away from the circumscription of participatory space.

Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) advocate for a 'dialogic' take on children's participation, focusing on the quality of adult: child interaction and the power dynamics involved. Because of the treatment of children amidst the refugee protection process as outlined in Chapter Five, the nature of children's experiences, this is also an essential area to consider in terms of avenues for change. An exploration of child friendly methods in relation to the refugee protection process is also an avenue for exploring children's contributions and giving value conceptually and practically to the child.

Of course, barriers are not just technical and conceptual in relation to refugee children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II, but also political, cultural and institutional – areas and actors that can be resistant to change. Whether and the extent to which these barriers can also be addressed through this research is discussed in part here and in the chapter that follows.

In practice, participation can be a 'risky business'. As outlined in Chapter Six, refugee children in Kyaka II can face multiple risks to their protection. The participation of these children, under certain circumstances, can also present a protection risk in itself. As has been shown, the contexts and culture(s) within which these children live are full of expectations and constraints. In addition, the refugee protection process within which children are engaged involves life-changing decisions for refugees' lives. In terms of their participation, children are therefore under pressure from the adults around them to 'get it right' – saying the 'wrong

thing' or telling a different story can have significant consequences for them and their families and might result in punishment or retaliation. Children are therefore in a very precarious position amidst such a setting and it is no wonder that, in relation to their participation, many of them feel full of fear.

Community Protection Workers with a responsibility for child protection in Kyaka II are well aware of the risks involved in children's participation, both for refugee children and for themselves. Given the expectations on some children – for example the early marriage of girls (contrary to Ugandan law) – they know the kind of punishment some children might receive if they choose to disclose. As one refugee Community Protection Worker explained: “children are mistreated in this settlement and in the communities: so you find they don't have way to experience, way to tell their problems”.

In their own role, working with agencies on child protection but also as part of the refugee community themselves, these refugee Community Protection Workers feel torn between encouraging children to air their protection concerns and not getting involved. The same refugee Community Protection Worker explained in relation to children's disclosures to him:

“...even if they tell me their problems, I have to go to tell the caretakers. There is no way me as [name removed] can go to report someone's child to the office.... because if I do so, they said that I'm going to cause the conflict between the children and the caretaker; between children and the parents, so you find it is difficult for me. I can report but...I have to keep my security.”

Refugee children and humanitarian practitioners in Kyaka II also spoke about the risks involved in children's participation. One of a group of secondary school boys involved in a workshop said children couldn't “say their ideas because children beat other children” or “they will tell the parents and you will get beaten”. A child in a large community workshop in Itambabiniga said “other parents are harsh to their children. That is why children fear to tell their problem”. A pastor working for Windle Trust said that some refugee children had expressed a similar sentiment to him:

“... if the protection issue is removing them from the family, they should fear... 'If I put my dad or my mum that they did something, they had beaten

me, then maybe the mum would send me out from the home, the father been beating me', so they just keep quiet.”

In certain contexts and under certain circumstances, then, refugee children's participation in their protection can be a risky business. It can present risks for children trying to protect themselves, for children protecting their peers and for adults in the refugee community supporting children's participation. In their research with children in situations of armed conflict, Hart and Tyrer (2006: 14) outline some of the challenges associated with children's participation: the disclosure of sensitive information, a perceived disrespect of adult authority, a lack of adult ability to express their opinions in such contexts causing a backlash against the child, the unequal power relations between children, all increasing the level of risk. It is important, therefore, to temper any view of children's unfettered participation, be mindful of the risks involved and always think about children's participation in context. Alongside advocating for children's participation, additional safeguards for children's protection might also need to be in place, some of which were considered in relation to the research process itself in Chapter Three.

Despite an awareness of the risks involved in refugee children's participation, however, some practitioners in Kyaka II emphasise the significance of children's participation, its strong connection with protection and its importance in the refugee protection process. Refugee children also showed that they wanted, and were willing, to participate in their own protection and implied that their participation should lead to their better protection, even if this did not sometimes happen in practice. For example, one UNHCR practitioner asserted that children's participation was “very, very important” for their protection because it could “iron out” the “issues that come”. Similarly, a GIZ practitioner said that children's participation would mean knowing “where to begin” in terms of their protection and would “really ensure” that the approach developed would better protect and “suit” children and their needs. “It is only through participation, a child's participation”, she said, “that you can know what will make them feel comfortable and secure”. Refugee children also made the link between their participation and their protection. As one child in an 11-16s workshop expressed it: “report to adult, so can do something”. An unaccompanied child in another workshop showed the relationship between participation and protection working well:

“He has drawn this office because it helps many people. When they are having problems, they normally go to GIZ to explain their problems to that lady and that woman is able to help them”.

Practitioners talked about the importance of children’s participation for their psychosocial protection in particular. For example, the GIZ Project Manager spoke about participation as a “healing process” for “traumatised” children:

“... if you talk to the person then you try to trigger where the trauma comes from and when the person starts talking or engaging in different things to distract the mind, that’s the way, how the healing process comes...”

Similarly, the UNHCR Field Manager commented:

“My view is that children should be involved, and more so if the child is traumatised. The best way to know the solution for that child is to involve that very person, that very child, before any solution, the best solution can be sought...”

Whilst child participation has an ambiguous position in relation to the discussion of mental health - with risks associated with disclosure or other forms of harm - for the organisation Terre des Hommes (2008), child participation can be an essential part of psychosocial protection:

“For many girls and boys the process of involvement (which must be undertaken in a supportive and understanding environment) can help children explore past experiences and regain confidence for the future. At its best; participation can be an important tool out of victimisation, passivity and silence.”

Whilst there are risks, then, associated with refugee children’s participation in their protection, the greater risk might be from a *lack* of participation, in turn generating additional protection concerns. The main barriers to refugee children’s participation in Kyaka II, and their potential reconfiguration, are now considered.

### **7.3 Creating a ‘child friendly space’?**

In Chapter Five, the refugee protection process was described as not a good place for children, not participatory or “child friendly” at all, with significant barriers to refugee children’s participation in their protection. This included the ‘spaces’ of the Reception Centre, registration, contact with “the office”, as well as interviews for RSD and BID. Interestingly, the opposite – a participatory and “child friendly”

space – was also described by both refugee children and adult interviewees, envisioned as something which might be ‘put in place’ in Kyaka II.

Whilst the notion of a purely participatory space for children, indeed of participatory and non participatory spaces at all, is simplistic in terms of the complexities of participation, space and power outlined in Chapter Two, it is nonetheless important to explore what might constitute a ‘child friendly space’ in a refugee protection context. On the one hand, it provides us with a sense of the kinds of environments thought conducive to refugee children’s participation in their own protection. This is important if, as we have seen, the refugee protection process is a ‘space’ thought of as much in need of change. On the other hand, it also shows us that although many conceptualise children’s participation in terms of separate and ‘boxed in’ spaces, others are able to envision a participatory ‘child friendly space’ as free of any particular location and, therefore, potentially, applicable to the refugee protection process as a whole. Starting with a fairly restrictive definition of a more participatory ‘child friendly space’, then, it is possible to think about how this might be redefined.

The notion of a ‘child friendly space’ or environment is often associated with children’s participation and viewed as an essential supporting or enabling component. Save the Children, for example, sets out nine basic requirements to enable it, as a rights based organisation, to implement Article 12 of the UNCRC in its work (Save the Save the Children, 2011:2). One of these nine requirements is that children’s participation should be supported within “child friendly environments” which, for Save the Children (2011) in practice means that “meeting places” and “locations” are appropriate, favourable and enabling for children and their needs.

In the humanitarian sector more broadly, including in refugee contexts, a ‘Child Friendly Space’ (CFS) has a more specific definition, also closely linked to the participation of children. First used as part of an emergency response to the crisis in Kosovo (2010:16), such ‘Child Friendly Spaces’ have been defined by UNICEF as follows:

“...places designed and operated in a participatory manner, where children affected by natural disasters or armed conflict can be provided with a safe environment, where integrated programming including play, recreation, education, health, and psychosocial support can be delivered and/or information about services/supports provided” (2010:9).

Often operating from tents or temporary structures (schools, vacant buildings, under a tree) and run by NGOs or governments, Child Friendly Spaces are thought to be safe spaces where children can play and socialise with their peers, engage in structured, supportive learning and activities and regain some form of ‘normal’ routine. They are also meant to be a participatory, protective space where children’s views and opinions can be heard (Save the Save the Children, 2011). Key principles for Child Friendly Spaces, wherever they are located, include providing a ‘stimulating and supportive’ environment, being ‘safe and secure’ and, most importantly here, employing a ‘participatory approach’ (UNICEF, 2010:10-11).

Figure 46 shows a photograph of a Child Friendly Space operating in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Uganda (supporting conflict-affected Congolese), demonstrating the kind of environments and activities involved. According to Huber (2013) , 73% of the settlement’s children attending these Child Friendly Spaces - engaging in arts, sports, education, free play and counselling - were reported as able to maintain a more ‘positive outlook on life’ amidst crisis as a result.



Figure 46: Congolese children playing in a Child Friendly Space, Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

Whilst many of the preconditions for establishing such Child Friendly Spaces are present in Kyaka II – for example many of the children arriving there are conflict-affected, facing multiple risks to their protection and well-being – Child Friendly Spaces, in a formal sense, do not exist. When asked what they understood by a ‘child friendly space’, however, several practitioners talked about this kind of enclosed, defined space for children’s participation and protection and the need for such spaces to be established in Kyaka II. A food distribution officer from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) commented:

“In my own view, a child friendly place, it could be a gazetted place but special for children....As in it could be enclosed, you could really see it is separated...in that place there can be...different types of games for children, there could be...adolescent counsellors...and maybe trainers. So in that kind of a setting children are free to access all the service: these ones will need counselling...these ones will need to play...So you would talk to these children, they would open up freely... tell you what they feel...”

In keeping with the formal definition of a Child Friendly Space, practitioners in Kyaka II talked about these defined spaces in terms of education, protection and play. A member of OPM’s protection team said there should be “a space where they can, you know, do some reading, where there’s some education”; the GIZ Programme Manager emphasised protection: “no source of violence” “with people that they trust”. The food distribution officer from NRC also emphasised this: “protected, maybe enclosed from any unnecessary intrusion, as anything can happen any time”. All three of these interviewees stressed the importance of play – a child friendly space is understood as one where there are “play facilities for the different age groups”, toys and drawings, “a space where there are materials for playing...because children normally just like to play”. These practitioners suggested that there was a need for spaces specifically for children: a “children’s centre”, “a special unit” or other dedicated participatory space. Such spaces were also mentioned by a member of staff from UNHCR Community Services: places where children can go, give their views and “they know ‘this is really for us’”:

“...there’s a need to identify child friendly spaces, a place where we believe children will freely access, and this is a place, which should not be near the office, it should be at the community level ...where children are able to come and interact with others, and also the stakeholders are able to go and meet children whenever there’s a need.”



For some practitioners, such children's centres needed to be distributed throughout the settlement – “every zone, every community has a child friendly area”. For others, one “big centre”, a “central place in the whole community” exclusively for children would be sufficient.

The response, then, from some practitioners to the lack of refugee children's participation in their protection, was the creation of additional participatory, child friendly spaces which, although having something to offer some children in a particular location, would still keep children's participation ‘boxed in’ and separate from the refugee protection process as a whole. This is an important point, returning us to the literature of Hart (2012) from Chapter Two and the spatial circumscription of both child participation and child protection, which Hart views as normalised practice within these fields. Whilst setting up ‘enclosures’ for children's participation is one possible ‘solution’ to a lack of participation in their protection, we have seen how other (discursive, political) exclusions and silences are involved and, indeed, other protection risks created by such circumscription of participatory space.

Other practitioners in Kyaka II, however, did not speak in the same terms about participatory or child friendly space, it was not so clearly spatially defined. For a staff member from GIZ it was “maybe an open space” as well as an “enclosed space”. For the UNHCR Community Services Manager based in Kampala, it did not have to be described “as a perimeter or as a place” but could be a “temporary situation” or an “event”. For this Manager, a child friendly space could be ‘anywhere a child may be free’ or comfortable to express themselves, “in school or in the community, a particular place or at home”. From her perspective, a child friendly space incorporated children's participation and protection but was freed up from any particular location:

“For me a child friendly space is a place where first of all children feel happy and free to be, and where, with this happiness and this freedom, they can feel protected and they can learn what is protection for them”.

This understanding of a child friendly space as being able to be ‘anywhere’ and everywhere is both significant and enabling in terms of refugee children's participation in the refugee protection process. It means that there is no one space

that is inherently participatory or needs to be assigned as such and that, in theory, the whole refugee protection process can be reconsidered in terms of a ‘stretched’ participatory space that is ‘friendly’ for children. The principles of a Child Friendly Space do not need, therefore, to be thought of in terms of a separate, bounded intervention but can be applied to the spaces of the refugee protection process itself. Indeed, although the geography of Child Friendly Spaces is often emphasised in the literature – the “physical qualities of the concept” – Child Friendly Spaces are also thought to be as much about the delivery of a rights-based programme, procedure or approach (UNICEF, 2010:09).

When discussing possible areas for change, refugee children and practitioners were able to think more specifically about the separate spaces of the refugee protection process (arrival and Reception Centre, registration and RSD) in terms of a Child Friendly Space, incorporating elements of education, protection, information and play. This provides a stark contrast to children’s experiences of the refugee protection process as outlined in Chapter Five. For example, reflecting on the arrival of refugee children in Kyaka II, one unaccompanied teenage girl suggested there could be “somewhere the children can play from” so that they could “forget the problems” they had “met” and she included this in her drawing (Figure 47).

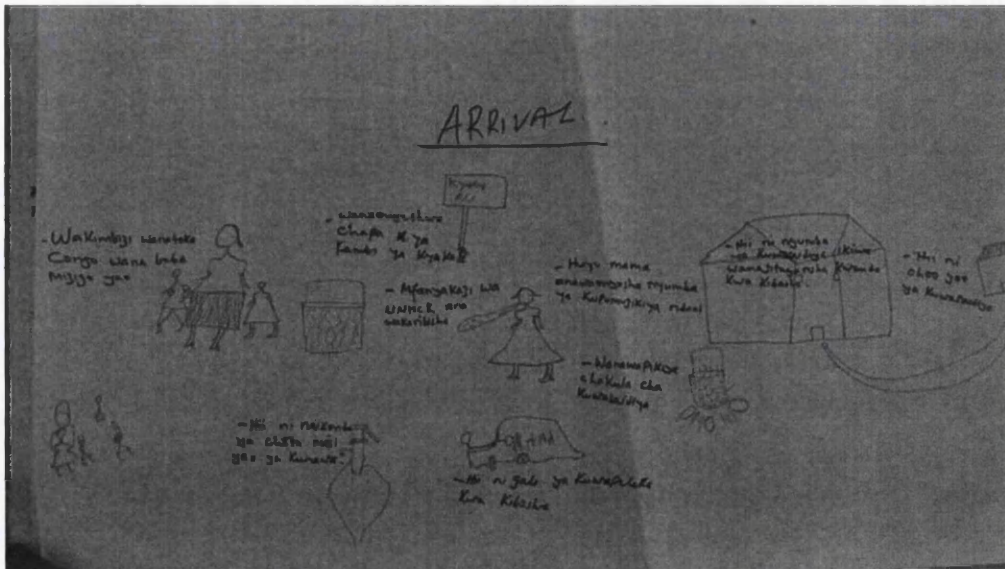


Figure 47: Somewhere to play from on arrival: drawing by unaccompanied teenage girl, Bukere.

Other children also mentioned the importance of play and activity on arrival. An unaccompanied ten year-old from Mukondo said there could be someone “visiting

them and giving them information, knowledge, ideas” and who could “promote friendship through conversation”, activities and education. A group of unaccompanied children voting in a follow-up workshop on the most important changes for ‘arrival’, prioritised ‘help on arrival’ including the opportunity for play (Figure 48).

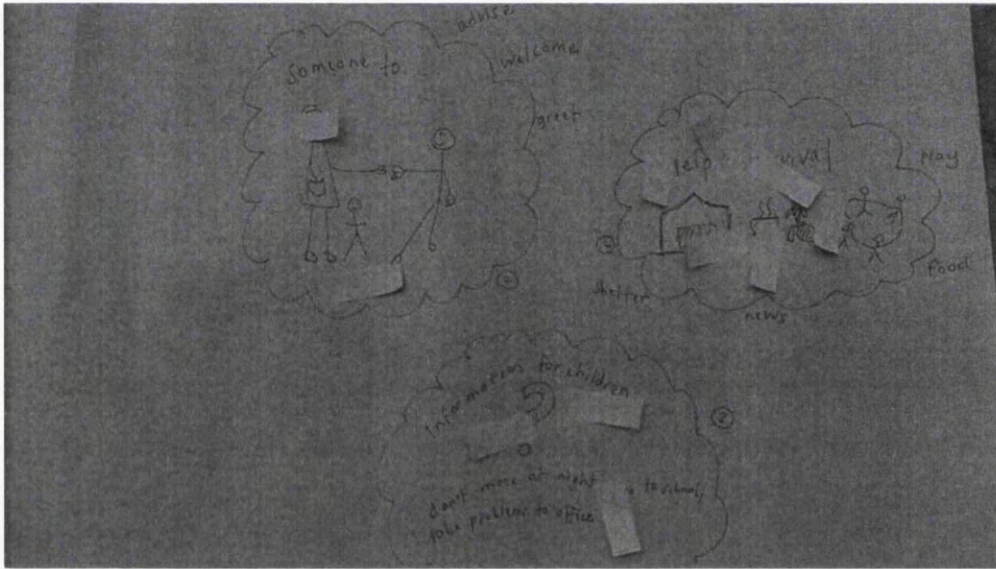


Figure 48: Prioritising 'help on arrival' including the importance of 'play': unaccompanied children workshop, Bukere.

Children described changes for the Reception Centre in similar terms. One secondary school pupil suggested that children could enjoy themselves through play in Reception, with organisations “providing them with equipment and games”. Indeed, many children of different ages produced drawings showing change in the Reception Centre in terms of play (Figures 49 and 50). The same secondary school pupil also suggested that children could be linked up to opportunities for education from the Reception Centre, provided with books “so not bored and think about their late life”. Children’s drawings of a “child friendly Reception Centre” from a workshop group in Buliti clearly showed how education and learning were important for them (Figures 51 and 52).

Another pupil from the same secondary school suggested information could be provided “just for children” in the Reception Centre. A “poster can help children”, he said, by telling them how they “can get assistance”, “stay in the Reception Centre, how life can be there” for them.

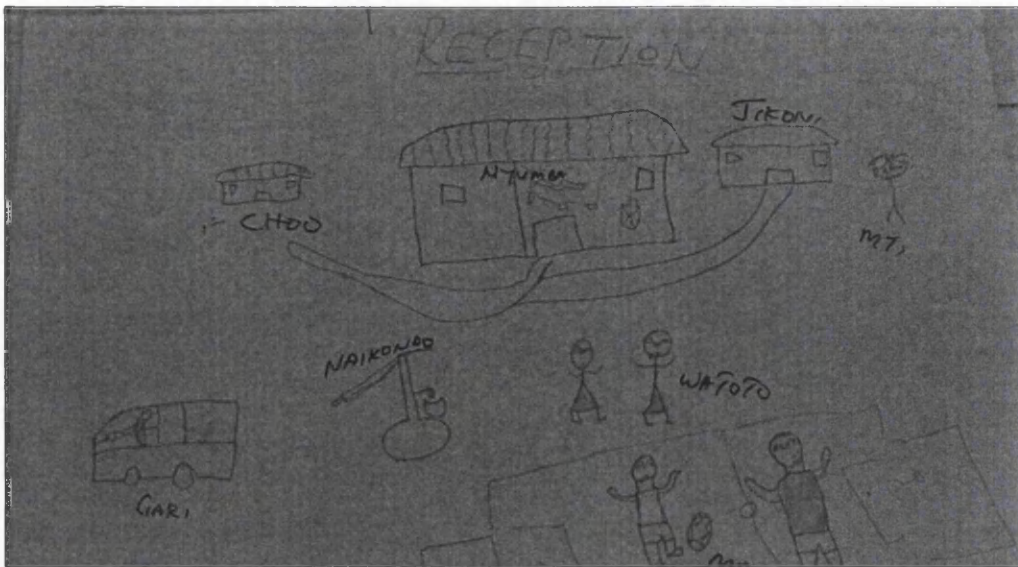


Figure 49: A child friendly Reception Centre and the importance of play: 11 – 16 workshop, Reception Centre, Swe Swe.

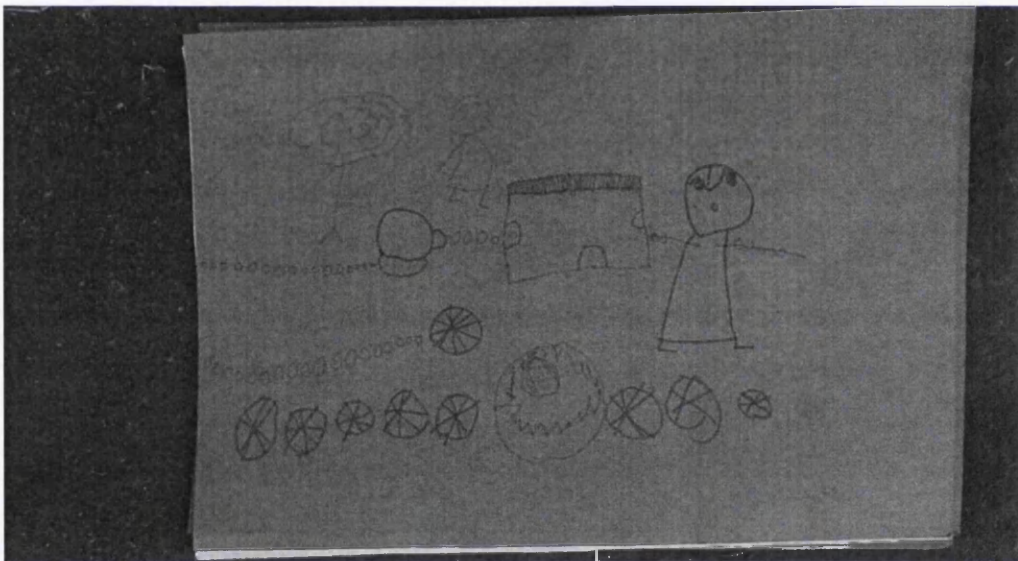


Figure 50: A child friendly Reception Centre and the importance of play (footballs in foreground): 0-10 workshop, Reception Centre, Swe Swe.

Several workshop groups developed posters of the kinds of information they felt refugee children in Kyaka II should receive and know. Overall, for many workshop groups, the environment of the Reception Centre needed to change significantly for it to be both appropriate and safe for refugee children. A group of children living in the Reception Centre prioritised their ‘living environment’ as an area for change and many children’s drawings focused on a better designed and equipped Reception Centre for children (Figure 53). One group also produced a list of what a child friendly Reception Centre would look like to them:

“A good place, where children can feel happy and adults to guide them so they can't get a problem. Fellow children like them who would be the same age. Games like balls and materials on a pitch: goals, volleyball and netball. Games help children forget their bad experiences and memories. Older children give younger ones good ideas of doing good things. Games and activities can help them.”

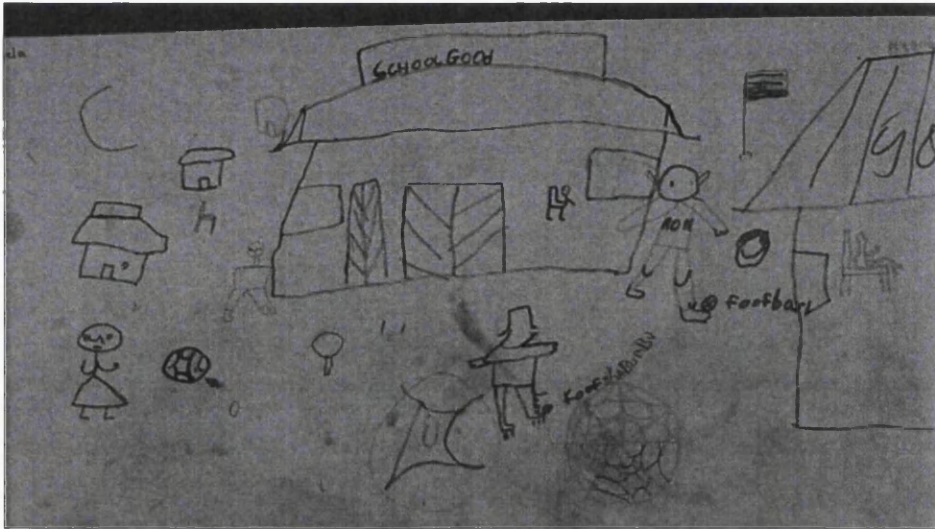


Figure 51: 'School good': a child friendly Reception Centre close to school, 6-10 workshop, Buliti.



Figure 52: School, home and football: a child friendly Reception Centre, 6-10 workshop, Buliti.

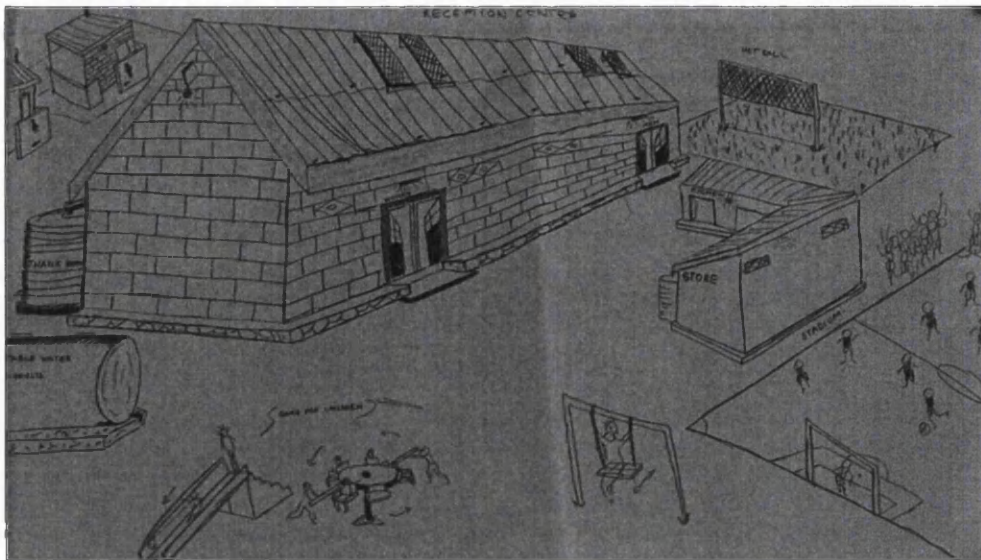


Figure 53: Older teenager's drawing of a child friendly Reception Centre, 11-16 workshop, Bukere.

For registration, two unaccompanied children from two different workshop groups suggested that, rather than lining up at “the office”, children’s experience could be different. A nine year-old girl said “maybe there is someone who could play with children”, who explains “what the camera is for” and the “finger printing”. A ten year-old boy suggested children could play while waiting, be given porridge because “sometimes they come early in the morning” and “they are hungry”. Children’s drawings (Figures 54 and 55) show this more active and supported registration experience for children.

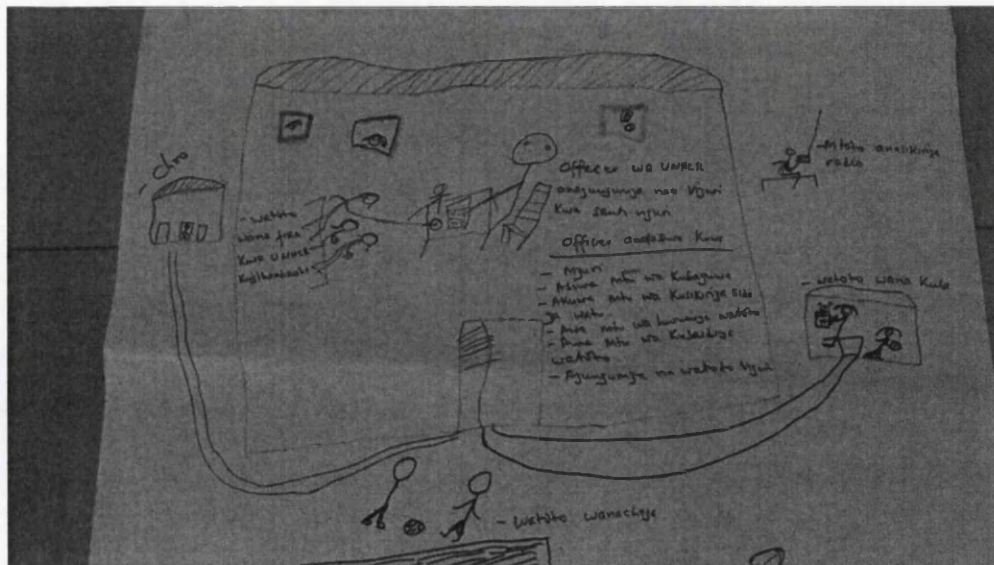


Figure 54: Children playing and listening to the radio while waiting for registration.

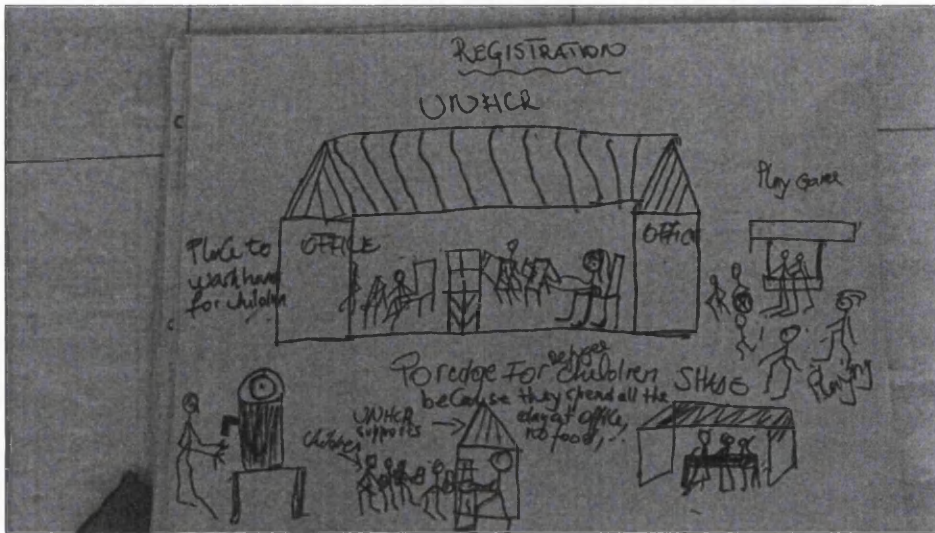


Figure 55: Children playing and eating porridge while waiting for registration.

In relation to RSD interviews, one teenager suggested that the interviewer from the REC could give children more “time to talk”, ask them in “languages that they know” and treat their concerns with urgency. “They listen us”, she said, and “help us in hurry”. She added that the interviewer could be “approachable” and give children time for “drawing and play”. Indeed, whilst observing the RSD interviews with the REC in Kyaka II, I was aware of the amount of time children spent waiting around and the missed opportunity for gaining information and engaging them in play. On one of the interview days, I took out paper and pens, facilitated activities with children and involved them in drawing and discussion while they waited (Figure 56).

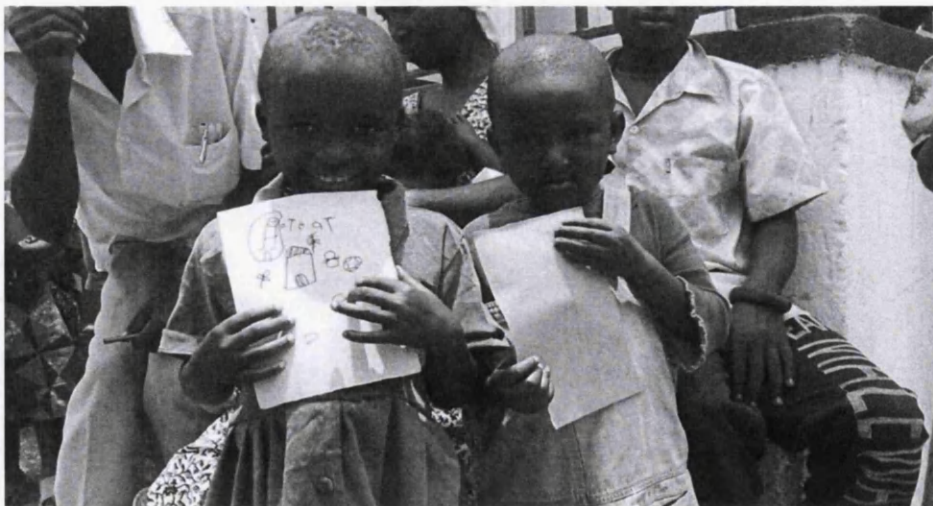


Figure 56: Two of the many children waiting for RSD interviews - and their drawings.

Like refugee children, practitioners were able to think about child friendly alternatives and areas for change within the refugee protection process. An officer from GIZ suggested a children's desk on arrival "to meet the children, to talk to them, find out how they have been living and how they would like to live". A member of staff from Windle Trust thought that in the Reception Centre "there should be more facilities and more play materials for the children and people to talk to these children to give them some kind of information". A practitioner from OPM reflected on registration and RSD and how they might "improve on the way they are asking the children", coming with "child related materials so children can tell their story in another form". This practitioner went on to say:

"If I had a long-term strategy where children are given priority... I would have a children's play area before registration. Child friendly interview rooms would put children at their ease as their mind set is different. I would separate out different age groups - younger children from adolescents - and girls and boys. This would all help registration and RSD."

Indeed, one practitioner stated in interview that, in terms of the refugee protection process, "*the whole system* should actually change to be more child friendly" [emphasis added]. Her colleague commented in a practitioners' workshop that, from arrival to resettlement, she was beginning "to appreciate the importance of having a child-focused approach".

The notion of a child friendly, participatory space is not necessarily, then, connected or restricted to any particular location. It can theoretically be applied to the refugee protection process as a whole. There are also multiple suggestions here - from both refugee children and practitioners - on how this might begin to be practically done. Although many of these suggestions are 'technical' changes, they also require a conceptual shift in how children's participation is seen, a reconfiguration of refugee children's participation in relation to space.

Whilst freeing up refugee children's participation from particular spaces is practically and conceptually enabling, there are, of course, other interests and dynamics involved in the confinement of children's participation to particular spaces and concerns. Rather than suggesting, then, that the refugee protection process can be completely and permanently participatory for children, the indication is that certain resources, strategies and materials can be deliberately put in place that, even



if only temporarily (for example, play whilst waiting for RSD, food for children at registration) can help to enable the participation of children in their protection. Amidst the complexities of space and power involved in children's participation, this might constitute Kesby's (2007) participation as 'performance' or White and Choudhury's (in Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010) notion of how children's agency might be 'built'. At the same time, a wider consideration of institutional and other interests operational in Kyaka II and in the refugee protection process more widely require consideration for change at a wider or more structural level.

#### **7.4 Fear...and how to 'come closer'**

Many of the suggestions for making space more participatory or child friendly in Kyaka II are associated with particular relationships between the adult and the child. Several practitioners in Kyaka II talked about child friendly spaces in these terms. One practitioner from Right to Play said: "child friendly space? It begins with the caretakers" - their morals, how they relate to children, their understanding of children's rights, "even the words" that they use. Similarly for the pastor from Windle Trust, a child friendly place was "the relationship between the child and the child's provider": "how you can create that relationship" in order to "avoid them fearing you" and "how you can keep close to the child". Rather than spaces or relationships based on fear - like some of those described by children in Chapter Five - a child friendly space was a relationship within which children were able to feel more "free". This was outlined by the UNHCR Field Manager for Kyaka II:

"I would imagine it should start with the relationship between the agency staff and the children. The children should feel free to come and report to me, for example if they are being abused for example at home, or within the community...they should feel free to speak to anybody, any staff who is capable of providing assistance."

A child friendly space here is not so much used in terms of a physical space with a visible perimeter, then, but a space of interaction between adult and child.

Children's relationships with adults within the refugee protection process, whether and how these might be changed, therefore, needs to be explored in more detail.

Refugee children's accounts of their interaction with adults within the refugee protection process, as well as many adults' attitudes towards children in the settlement as a whole, are, it has been demonstrated, not conducive to refugee

children's participation. Children's experiences of being ignored, chased away, silenced or side-lined are not commensurate with Graham and Fitzgerald's (2010) notion of a respectful and validating participatory process between an adult and a child. Fear, as we have already seen, presents a significant barrier to refugee children's participation in their protection. They fear the spaces of the refugee protection process, approaching the offices and the adults working within them.

For some in Kyaka II, one solution to this is for refugee children and adults to 'come closer' in physical space, with practitioners reaching out to or moving closer towards the 'spaces of children'. For one practitioner, the barrier of fear could be addressed by adults visiting children out in the community, in places where they feel more comfortable, rather than bringing them to 'the office' or other "invited space":

"They find it easy just to talk to us when they feel comfortable. So when we are not trying to grasp them from the community and bring them all the way to the office just to talk to them, but we do it where they really are comfy, then I think that works."

For her colleague, an outreach approach could help to build relationships with children: "the only way they can realise we are ok is mostly when we are in the community". Away from "the office", it could provide a freer environment, more conducive for children's participation: being able to "give them time" and "showing we are willing to talk to them irrespective of what they want to tell". For some, just being in children's everyday environments was in itself enough: "even if you are just doing fieldwork, they will approach you' and 'when you go out to them, they can talk."

For children, it was also important for officers to come physically closer to them and to the spaces where they lived (Figure 57). One of a group of 6-10 year-olds in a workshop suggested that they be visited in their community, both as a practical way of hearing and addressing their concerns but also as an alternative to visiting the spaces that they feared. The group's views were interpreted by a Community Protection Worker:

"They said, according to their ideas, it's better the organisations come in the communities... But if it is to go to Bujubuli [the office], he can go even one person but not all of them can go... if the offices come to them, they hold a

meeting with them; they can address all their problems which they have. But to go there, they fear.”

A secondary school pupil also emphasised the importance of this approach for older children: having “agents” placed “in the zones so they can help”, visiting children and asking them their problems. Officers, she stressed, must “look for children’s problems” since “every day someone is finding a problem”. They should then “give information to the main office person”, “tell the person in charge”: “If twice, thrice, a hundred times they go into the field [the officers], they go until they get what they [the children] want. Don’t write. It’s better to go.”

Reflecting on the community-based workshops undertaken with children as part of the research, refugee Community Protection Workers emphasised the importance of outreach for children’s participation in their protection. What was needed they suggested were “people who go out specifically to talk to these children”, who in “most locations” do “various visits”, or an organisation “knowing what’s taking place, what children are really facing” there “on the ground.” For one adult refugee interviewed, this “taking the office to the children” was something that did not happen nearly enough but had potential dividends for both the adults and children involved:

“Now... the time you have spent here, have you seen any officer which has gone out into the communities to meet the children? Have you seen it, apart from you? It’s not there. They just stay in their offices, they say whoever will come to report...but that is not responsible. The responsible is to go to the communities, to meet the children. When you meet that child and you discuss, you interact with the children, they know you. After knowing you then they feel interested, even they can explain the problem. You see I have seen you...the child was running out behind you...Now if it was not for the language, he could tell you many things...”

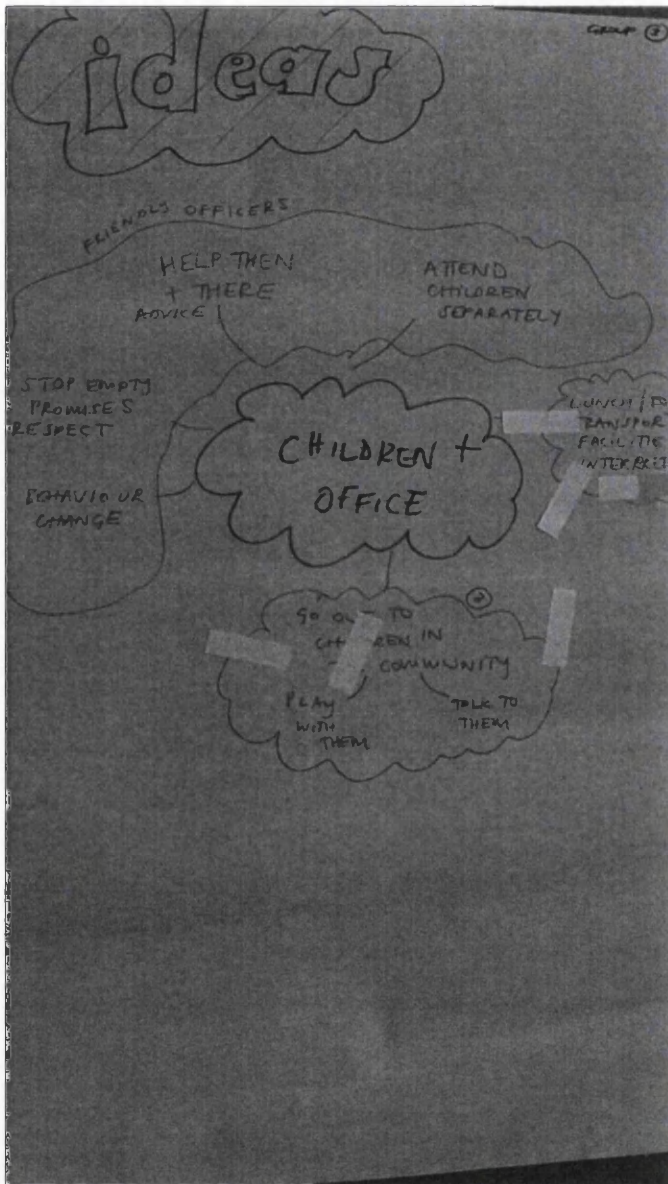


Figure 57: Adults need to "go out to children in the community".

This “coming closer” to children in terms of physical space deserves some consideration. Whilst some aspects of the refugee protection process might be tied to a particular location, best delivered from “the office”, others might be approached in a more flexible way. One UNHCR officer spoke about a roving process of registration, with practitioners going out into the community to register refugees. Similarly, some of the BID interviews observed were conducted in a range of more “comfortable” locations, including schools, community centres and the child’s home. Whilst the RSD interviews in Kyaka II were conducted ‘en masse’ at one central location, such interviews could be relocated to more familiar territory (school, youth centre, health clinic), particularly for unaccompanied and separated children applying

for refugee status alone. Finally, even if refugee protection procedures cannot be delivered out in the community per se, incorporating an element of outreach into the refugee protection process as a whole would have dividends in itself. Practitioners increasingly meeting with children on territory more familiar to them could help to build better relationships, address children's sense of fear and provide a basis for their participation in procedures conducted elsewhere. For White and Choudhury (2007), in their exploration of children's participation and construction of agency in Bangladesh, children were able to draw on their own resources and make strategic alliances to shift the sites of their interaction with adults from agencies' offices (and, therefore, adult comfort zones) to where children felt better able to engage, out on the streets. For Shier (2010:29), interaction in such spaces can serve as a base for empowering, supporting and legitimising children's participation before children have to enter once more into an "invited" participatory space, what Shier labels the "lion's den".

It is important to acknowledge, however, that since children's fear is not just about the spaces of refugee protection but of the adults working within them, this "coming closer" needs to be not just in physical terms. Rather than moving more often to spaces where children feel 'at home', there also needs to be a shift in terms of how adults relate to refugee children. This was recognised by practitioners in Kyaka II, for example a GIZ Protection Officer commented: "The relationship with children matters a lot... Approach matters a lot and how you respond...create a good environment for children and they easily open up." The "good environment" mentioned here is not so much a designated physical space with particular characteristics, but a positive space of interaction between adult and child.

A mental health practitioner in Kyaka II talked about his physical movement towards children - "outreaches" and "going from zone to zone" - but also described his approach in terms of reducing the gap between adults and children:

"You will find that I first keep on trying to talk to this person, *I bring this person closer to me*, any problem, this person comes to me, and then from there I begin..." [emphasis added].

The way that this practitioner describes his work, it is about 'movement' towards children's issues and concerns rather than just getting close to them in physical

space. He emphasises opening up a dialogue about children's protection issues more broadly, asking the question: "what *other* problems do you face?" For this practitioner, what is needed is not just going out physically to meet with children but adults who are able to employ a particularly child-sensitive approach:

"I would specifically employ someone who understands children's language, because you will find that most those who are around, when they go out, they listen to adults and then they ignore these young ones, not knowing that these young ones also have their own complaints, their own problems which are affecting them."

The importance of approach for "coming closer" to the child is echoed by other interviewees from Kyaka II. A Community Services Officer from UNHCR maintained: "Children are very sensitive: children will choose to close up or open up depending on the way in which we approach them." Similarly, the UNHCR Community Services Manager from Kampala pointed out: "I can speak with you, interview you, but I can do so in many different ways. And in the way that I will speak with you will also affect the information that I will take."

In order to "come closer" in this way, an alternative type of interaction between adult and child in the refugee protection process is therefore required. An unaccompanied teenage boy from Bukere said some adults in "the office" needed "to change the behaviour", to have a different kind of attitude and approach: "If I worked in the office? Would do it different... using polite sound of voice, even the child can easily forget his problem and explain what has brought that child to you." Children spent time in their workshops discussing and 'mapping' the kind of adults and adult attitudes they would like to see in place (Figures 58, 59 and 60).

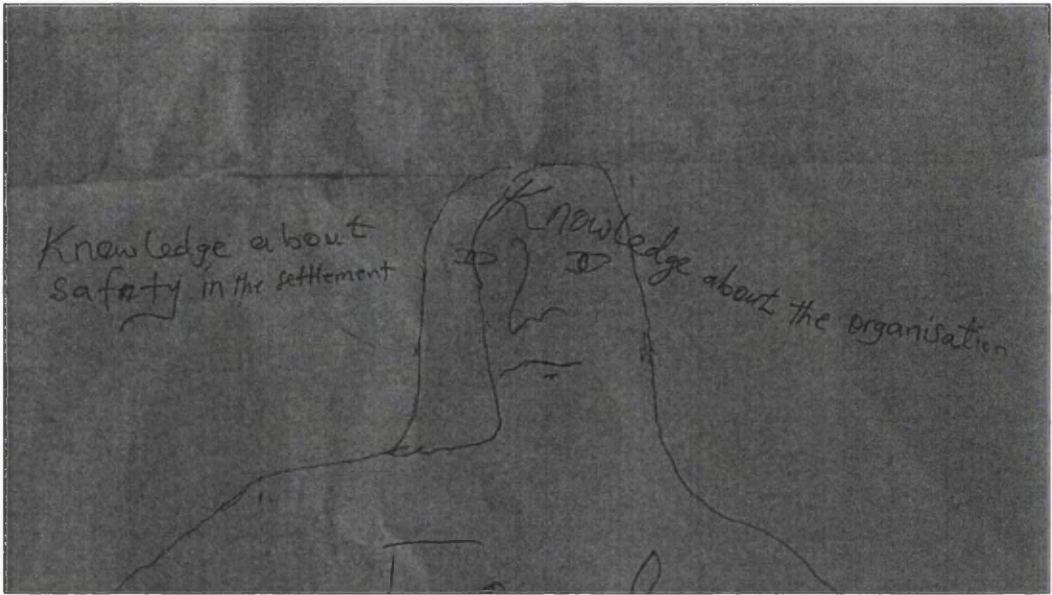


Figure 58: Mapping the desired qualities in adults: knowledge held.



Figure 59: Mapping the desired qualities around a practitioner.

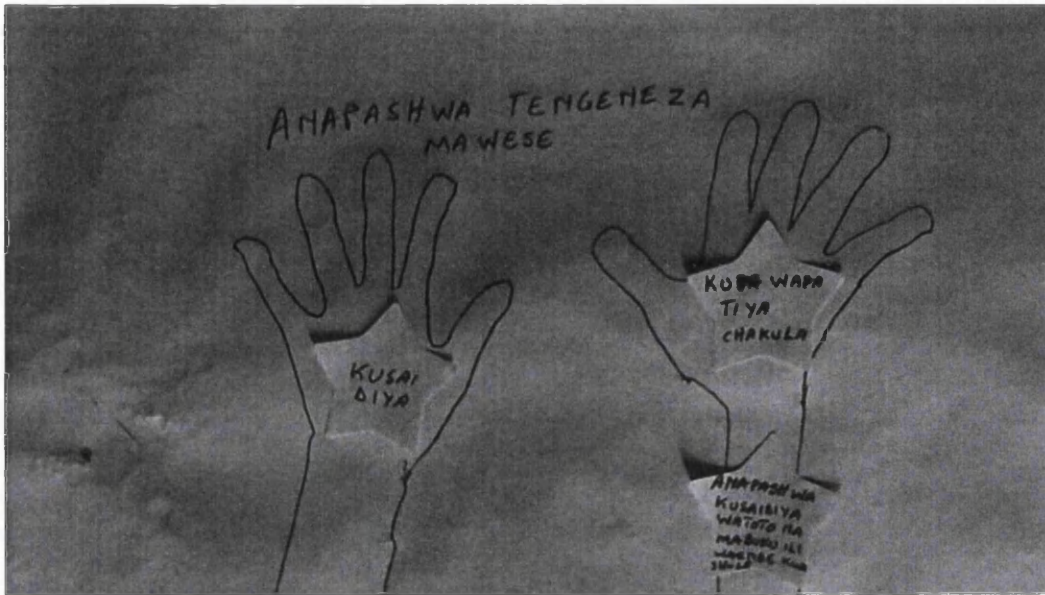


Figure 60: Mapping the desired qualities in adults: hands to help and skills.

A member of a group of older children from the Reception Centre described the kind of adult he would like to see there in place:

“Someone who is humble, helpful to children, shows them respect. Good manners. Someone who can look after children: he has to have good ideas, not harsh. Should not be a bad person: when children are upset, somebody who can help them.”

For younger unaccompanied children, the approach needed was for adults to be immediately kind and welcoming. An eight year-old said she wanted an interviewer who had a “shiny” or “good face” rather than being “angry or annoyed.” Her older friend elaborated:

“An interviewer should be good, approachable, welcome the child from their homeland and greet the child first before talking to them or questioning them. Should not be someone who can chase people from the office. Someone who knows your language. Someone who hears your parents and what they are saying.”

Similarly, a group of unaccompanied children from Bukere voted in a follow-up workshop on areas for change in terms of RSD interviews and prioritised adults who were “friendly”, “approachable” and “kind” (Figure 61).



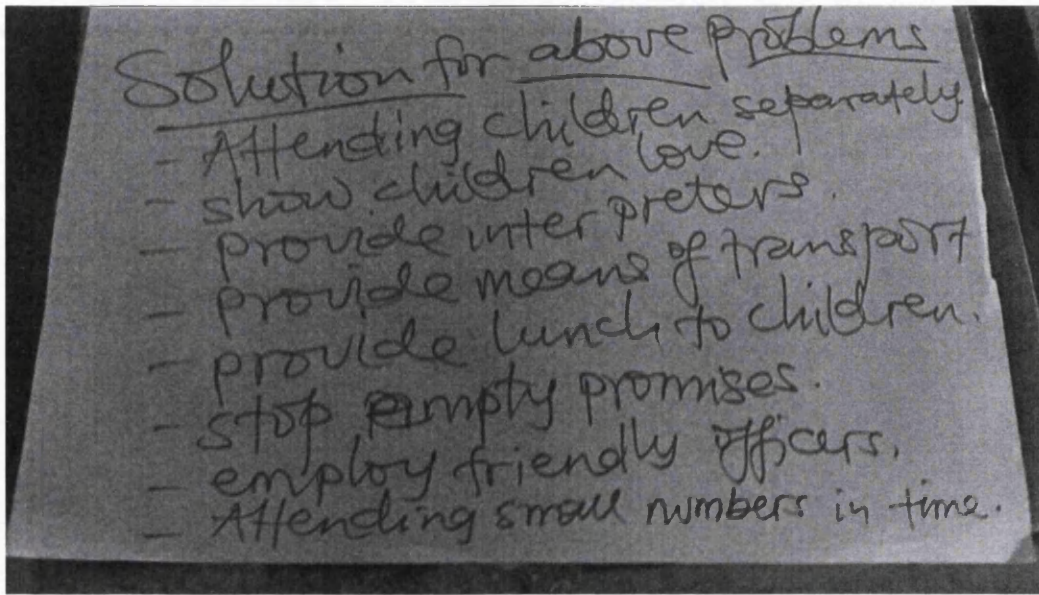


Figure 61: Children want adults who are 'friendly', approachable and kind.

The Resettlement Officer for UNHCR in Kyaka II also outlined the importance of the initial approach in interviews with children:

“It is very, very important because a child, the first point to capture a child’s attention is from when the child enters the door. Once the child enters the door and finds a mean face... you know what I mean? Scared. So once a child enters, you’re like: ‘Hi! How are you doing?’ I’ve already captured the child from square zero. From just there, the child comes in, we sit and talk and laugh: ‘How is school?’”

In the same way that we can explore what constitutes a child friendly space for children, then, we can address the spaces in the refugee protection process where children “fear to go”. As with child friendly spaces the issue is not so much the places per se but the relationship between children and the adults within them. A process of going physically closer to children - going out to their communities and day-to-day spaces - is one approach that might help to allay children’s fears and build relationships that can enhance children’s participation in their protection. A secondary process of ‘coming closer’ to children in terms of interaction - taking a different attitude and approach, based on recognition and respect - can also be applied with dividends to the refugee protection process as a whole.

Whilst the inter-relations of adults and children in Kyaka II, as has already been discussed, are in part product of broader structures and forces - culture, context, being situated in a refugee camp space and the politics involved - there has to be

room for some transformation at this level. Whilst it is recognised that change needs to happen in other spaces and at other scales, and this is discussed further in Chapter Eight, the micro level of adult: child interactions and approaches that involve ‘coming closer’ to the child can be a valid place to start.

### **7.5 Methods - and the importance of play**

The way that refugee children are encouraged and supported to participate is important for the relationship between their participation and protection, and whether that participation ‘heals’ or harms. As the UNHCR Community Services Manager in Kampala explained:

“I think the most important is the way we do it... we need to equip ourselves with the capacity to let them open up in the way that could be beneficial for them....Of course, if you do it in a way that is aggressive, or is not sensitive or is not respectful...you harm instead of help....I feel...that we are like doctors, but the medicine are our skills to speak with the people. So if you speak in the wrong way, you give the wrong medicine. If we speak in the right way, we give the right medicine and can heal and cure...”

As already argued, the approach taken by adults towards refugee children’s participation is of particular significance and an important area for change. However, to “speak” in the “right way” with children, as in the quotation above, is not just about attitudes and approach but also about the methods that are employed. Whilst this is an argument for technical or methodological, it is also conceptual. Adopting more child-oriented methods and techniques are part of valuing ‘the child’, a conceptualisation of children with something valuable to contribute and share.

The use of creative and child -focused methods to promote and enable children’s participation was discussed in Chapter Three. A view of refugee children as simply “sitting around”, waiting for their “latent” participation to be “activated” using such methods is, of course, inappropriate. Steffen (2010) notes, for example, that many children are already engaged and drawing on a range of resources, capacities and capabilities to participate in their own protection day-to-day. However, for refugee children to address the multiple barriers that they face and to be able to participate more fully in the refugee protection process, organisations need to work with children in a different way. Indeed, for Hart and Khatiwada (2003:5), there are “special constraints” on children’s participation in measures that are there to assist

them and children need adults and organisations to “adopt specific skills, methods and ethical considerations”, in other words, to do things differently.

A number of practitioners in Kyaka II advocate for different methods to be used to facilitate refugee children’s participation in their protection and to enhance the ‘place’ of children’s participation in the refugee protection process. As the UNHCR Registration Officer commented:

“... it depends on the...methodology. It's very important to get child friendly methodologies of interacting with them. And would do a lot...with rehabilitating them, those who have undergone traumatic experiences...the language should be simple, and then...the interaction should be conducted in a relaxed manner....And if possible there should be like...child friendly, attractive things like...drawings, paintings to make the children feel more relaxed.”

Another UNHCR practitioner confirmed this viewpoint. Children’s participation in their protection needed to be not just through direct, more formal methods but also through activities, games and play:

“... for me, the approach we use is what matters because if you don’t talk to them, you are not going to find the issues. You are not going to find a solution for them. So I think we need to look at an approach...something that would not be seen as if you are trying to talk to the children too much or you're discussing with them issues. I think we need to be quite creative enough when we go out to talk to the children. And sometimes that would just be like a discussion, like a play...I think talking to the children could be through activities. And a lot can come out of that.”

In the quotation above, ‘play’ is not just describing a recreational activity for children but is viewed as a means - or method - to communicate sensitively and effectively with children about their protection concerns. This perspective was reinforced by a UNHCR practitioner who also viewed play as an important component of being able to interact with a child:

“Because some kids do not talk: *but they can talk with action* if they look at something. For example you may have some balls around...papers...anything and you see a child is attracted to that...it brings up their...opinions and their thoughts.” [emphasis added]

A practitioner from Right to Play commented that “play is so important: *it's the only way you can talk to a child*” [emphasis added]. She continued: “A child’s attention

span doesn't go for one hour for you to talk to them and them to listen. Play something and ask them what they want out of it, and then they will tell you."

Picking up on a theme from the section above, one Community Protection Worker talked about how Right to Play was able, through activities and play, to enable children to 'come closer' to adults in a number of ways:

"Right to Play is really playing a big part and is really about children: children are really enjoying. Children like jokes, like play, they like games; they like to be free with someone really, you know. Children like someone who is open to him or to her... So Right to Play is really try to bring them close, closer to... mature people, to adults, to officers..."

Beyond advocating for more creative, play-based methods in general, practitioners also reflected on how these might be applied to the refugee protection process. One practitioner talked about how, in a previous post, she had always had a mat and some play items, "tools" for protection interviews, so that "the child is observed in play" and "as the child is playing...we capture information out of the child." Another practitioner, from GIZ, also talked about the role and importance of play in an interview setting:

"...it should have play items or materials, so for example... before talking to them they can have some simple games to play...to just prepare them to open up and by the way, as they are talking, before they even begin to...discuss, in their play...some of them are already discussing certain issues."

Play was also discussed in relation to the Reception Centre. One Community Protection Worker suggested "a place where you can put materials using for playing, like balls... where they say children can play from" and then, using these, "you can just approach them". When children are playing, he explained, "you meet them there", "it is maybe where you can get a time to talk to them" and, "after games...children may be direct, and saying there are problems". For this Community Worker, children needed to "talk at playing" because that was where "they trust you": "maybe they get a friendship with you then also you can get information, because they are not fearing you". After a visit to the Reception Centre early on in the research and running activity-based workshops with the children living there, I noted in my research diary "the importance of play" in these children's lives.

As someone with experience in creative, participatory methods with children, I was asked to explore a more play-based approach for children in the refugee protection process in practice. Before outlining what this entailed, it is important to reflect on such a request in relation to my “positionality” in the field. Whilst, on the one hand, my role as researcher was to record what existed in terms of refugee children’s participation in their protection in Kyaka II - observing, questioning and exploring rather than being fully and actively engaged - on the other hand, I was viewed by some of those working in Kyaka II as a fellow practitioner, a child participation ‘expert’ and a resource that could be used. As such, they wanted to see how I might do things differently in practice, what information might be acquired or skills shared as a result. Indeed, this stepping into a practitioner role might be justified on a number of accounts. As already discussed in Chapter One, this research has multiple aims, including an improvement in practice. There is therefore already a deliberate combination of both academic and practitioner positions within the researcher role. Applying some of the learning from the research to practice in the field provided an opportunity to explore, with both practitioners and children, whether doing things differently might work. Indeed, it might be argued that there is an ethical imperative for practically working towards change for the better. For this reason, but also with a view to ‘giving something back’ to the practitioners and organisations as well as the refugee children who had contributed to the research, it felt important to offer up some practical suggestions for change.

In practice, the more play-based approach took several forms. Firstly, in consultation with practitioners, a play resource kit was established for the Reception Centre and individual kits were allocated to Community Protection Workers then trained on different games and activities that they could use (Figures 62 and 63).



Figure 62: Play resource kit in a box for the Reception Centre.



Figure 63: Play resource kit contents.

The play resource kits included drawing materials, for example chalk (large boards were also purchased, painted with blackboard paint and set up in the Reception Centre for children to repeatedly use), pens, crayons and paper; packs of rubber balls, bean bags and hoops for games as well as plastic sets for ‘egg’-and-spoon or ‘sack’ races which could be used again and again. Each kit also included a large, multi-coloured parachute with which multiple games - involving movement, balance, team tasks and challenges - could be played with children’s groups of varying size. As the ‘property’ of GIZ, the play kits were formally signed over to the Community Protection Workers to store and maintain and make accessible to refugee children.

All of these resources had already been piloted and reviewed with children in context as part of the participatory workshops conducted for the research.

Over and above the provision of a play resource kit for the Reception Centre, additional activities were also organised in situ based around an element of play. On one occasion, children of all ages living in the Reception Centre were engaged in designing and painting two large banners to 'decorate' their temporary 'home' (Figures 64, 65 and 66).



Figure 64: Children get involved in painting a banner for the Reception Centre, Swe Swe.



Figure 65: Some of the children in front of their banner, Reception Centre, Swe Swe.



Figure 66: The banner fixed to the side of the Reception Centre tent, Swe Swe.

Picture-based educational posters (letters of the alphabet, numbers, maps of the DRC and of Uganda) - requested by refugee children - were purchased and fixed to the inside of the Reception Centre 'tent', for older children and adults to use informally to 'educate' younger children. The aim was to contribute to a more engaging and comfortable reception space for children.

Whilst not a play-based activity per se – but based on activities with refugee children from previous workshop sessions – a signpost was developed for the Reception Centre, using children's drawings on the refugee protection process to inform and orient other newly arrived children living in Kyaka II. Step by step, children's pictures show "what happens in Kyaka II" from their own perspective and based on what they feel other children need to know. The signpost was also produced as a poster and these displayed in locations across the settlement as a whole (Figures 67, 68 and 69).





Figure 67: Child friendly poster: "What happens in Kyaka II".



Figure 68: Children stand in front of the poster outside the Reception Centre.

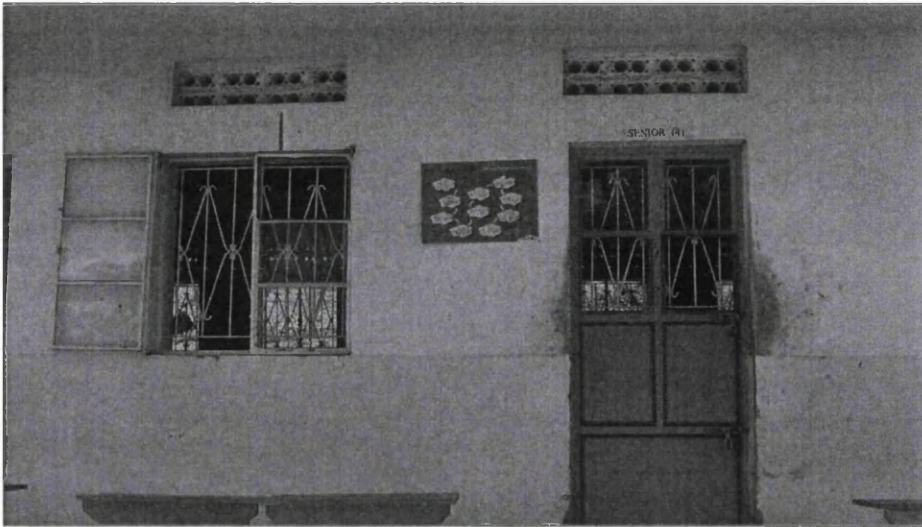


Figure 69: The poster on a wall outside a classroom, Bujubuli Secondary School.

Secondly, a child-focused interview room was created for use by UNHCR. The walls were decorated with blackboard paint, posters and drawings by children of all ages were displayed around the room and some basic play materials and resources were provided for use in interviews with children (Figures 70 and 71). Conscious of the amount of time children spent waiting for interviews, which can be a missed opportunity in terms of engaging with children and hearing their views and concerns, a play-based session was also trialled with children sitting with their families awaiting RSD interviews with the REC. Children of all ages were engaged in a range of games and activities, sat together for a group discussion and produced individual drawings during their wait.

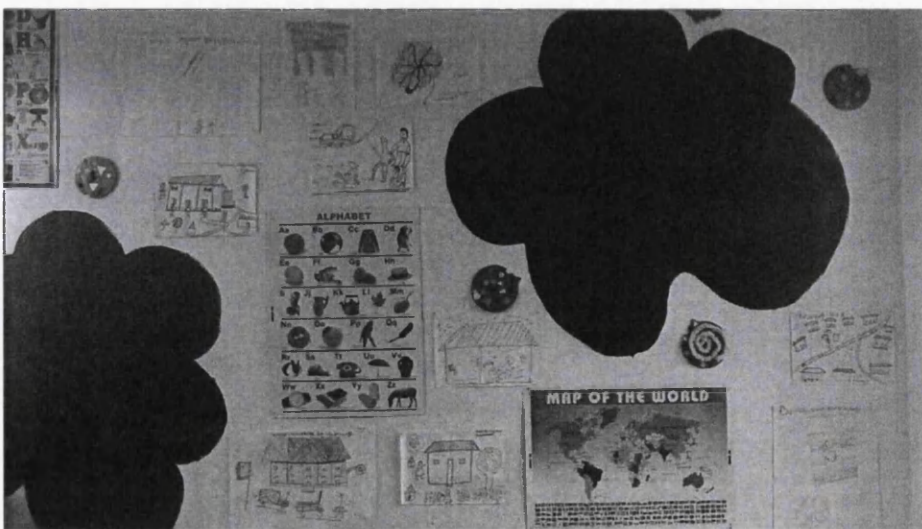


Figure 70: Creating a more child friendly interview room.

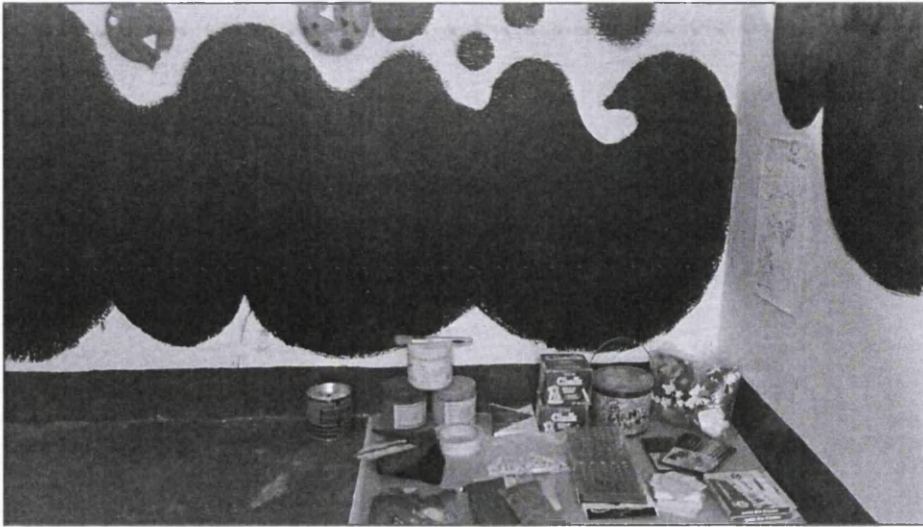


Figure 71: Creative resources in a more child friendly interview room.

Thirdly, I was also asked to assist individual children struggling in protection interviews by taking a more creative and play-based approach. There are three examples of this, all with unaccompanied boys under the age of ten. One boy was participating in an interview for refugee status with the REC and the other two boys were participating in BID interviews. Children's predominantly negative experiences of participation in these protection interviews, as outlined in Chapter Five, need to be borne in mind.

In two of the three cases, the boys had not responded at all to formal interview methods and an alternative approach was needed. In the third case, it was suggested that a more play-based alternative to the traditional BID form could be trialled. Entries from my research diary describe intervention with one of the children during the BID interview, including how preparations were made for the interview with the child and the nature of the interaction itself:

"X came into office and asked if I could help. She was interviewing a young boy and could not get info needed from him - could I try? What I did: cleared desk, put my chair next to his on same side of desk and translator next to me on other side. Got coloured paper, pens, sticky faces, 'bingo' sheet, 'blobby men' etc. as resources to use..."

"Asked his name and age and told him mine. Wrote my name and asked him to write his - could not write well / spell. Drew picture of me and asked him to draw picture of himself. Asked what activities he liked to do on 'bingo' sheet. Drew my sister and asked him to draw his sisters / brothers; asked each name and ages (Figure 72). Asked where they were - Rwanda.

Communicated: not to be afraid, what I wanted to do and why; is he ok to draw? ‘Journey mapping’ – asked him to draw house in Rwanda and Nakivale, then joined with road and road to Kygegwa and Kyaka II. Asked him to describe how he got from Rwanda to Nakivale - when, with whom, how, how he was feeling – used smiley faces to show moods...” (Figure 73)



Figure 72: Child draws himself, brothers and sister in a BID interview.

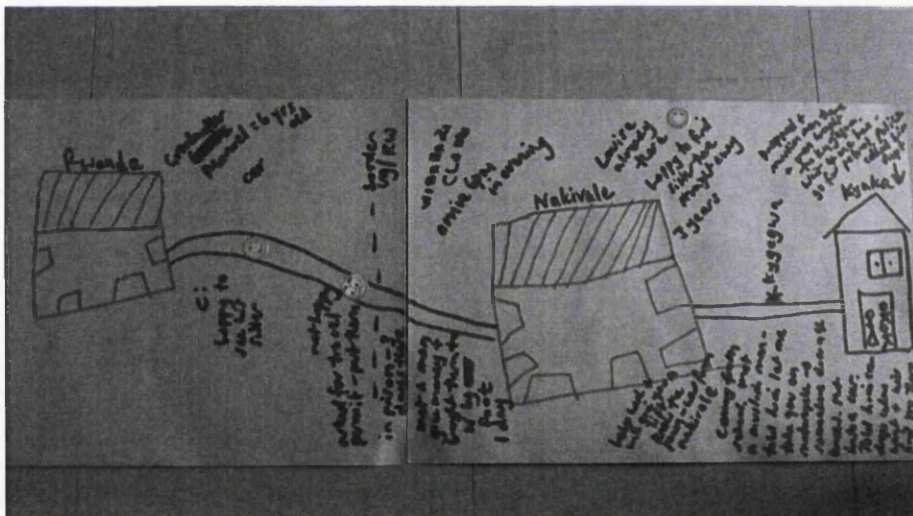


Figure 73: Journey mapping through drawing a BID interview.

This description contains a number of important elements of a more creative, play-based and child-sensitive approach. The child and the child’s needs are considered from the beginning: the layout of the room, where people are seated and the resources available. Interactive games like ‘bingo’ are used to get to know the child and drawing is used as a tool to map out the child’s support networks and journey as a refugee rather than the bare question-and-answer of a more formal interviewing style. Encouragement and reassurance are provided throughout and activities are

jointly done to create a more comfortable environment, with the interviewer engaged in drawing as well as the child. Through this approach, protection information on the child, not initially able to be gathered through a more formal interview, was recorded and revealed. For example, from the child's drawing and the discussion, it became possible to learn the circumstances, nature and time of his flight from Rwanda, how he had been 'taken' from living with his grandmother and siblings in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, transported by a man with a motorbike who had befriended him and how, discovered by the police in Kyegwa, he had been brought to Kyaka II. In turn, this informed UNHCR and partners of the protection interventions he might specifically require. For the boy himself, the approach was a more comfortable experience. He seemed less distressed and more able to share or disclose other information and did so increasingly over time to me whilst living in the Protection Centre as a result.

A similar approach was used with the boy struggling in the RSD interview, with drawing introduced to map his journey to Kyaka II. His uncle, with whom the boy had been reunited on arrival in the settlement, commented on how the boy was not able to participate when questioned directly but could communicate through these other means:

“...drawing ...with pictures, actually it helped him. It brings the mind to explain what happened. But ask verbally, he couldn't... he was just bending the head, he couldn't talk... but to draw that picture, it helped him to explain more... Because you know the pictures brought the whole story...”

This boy – unaccompanied and only seven years old – cried and said very little when he was interviewed more formally but responded when drawing was introduced as a more informal joint activity, set aside from the main interview space. Through his drawing, the boy was able to show whether it was day or night when he fled, who was “passing by” his house and where his siblings, parents and grandparents were at the time and the nature of his journey – by foot, car or bus, with other people or alone and what he experienced along the way (Figure 74). A UNHCR practitioner commented to me how she also found drawing a “very useful” tool for interviews with children, although, of course, it depended on how this was done.

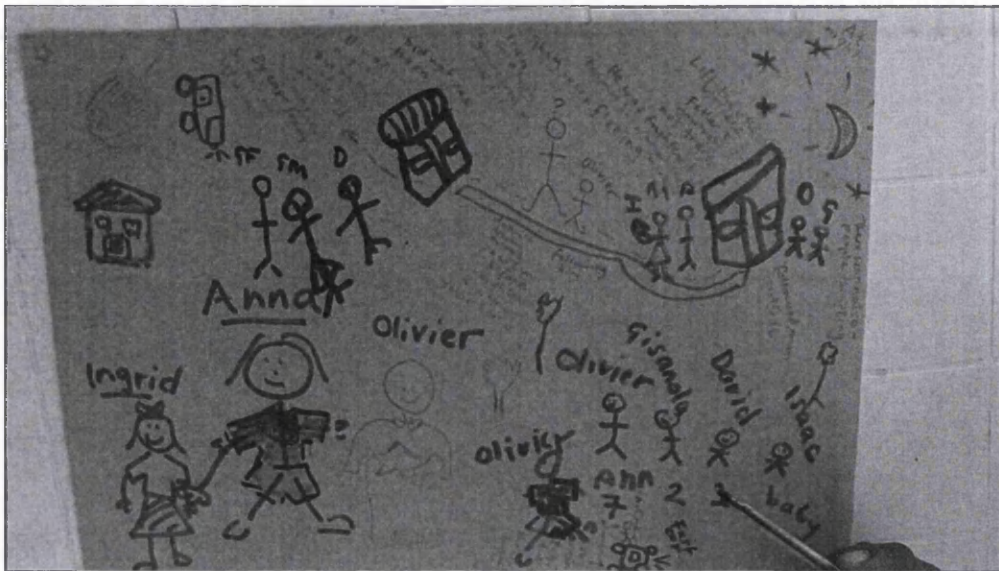


Figure 74: Journey mapping through drawing in another BID interview.

Finally, in the other BID interview, activities and games were substituted for different sections of the BID form in an attempt to gather the required protection information – for example, the child’s well-being, circumstances and condition of care - but in a more child-sensitive way. The form itself was set aside and the child engaged in drawing, mapping and voting games to reveal his daily routines, relationship with his carers, his journey to Kyaka II and his feelings about himself and his life. Drawing pictures of himself and the people around him, the boy was encouraged to draw lines between individuals to ‘map’ his closest relationships, where he was most cared for or, in turn, where he was involved in the care of others (Figure 75). A ‘day in the life of...’ activity mapped out his day from waking up in the morning to going to bed at night, allocating time to eating, school, working in the home or garden, caring for siblings, providing a picture of his routine but also well-being (Figure 76). A ‘mood chart’ used sticky faces with a range of expressions to show his feelings about different aspects of his life, different activities and times of day, different relationships and encounters. The material gained was not only more in quantity than could have been achieved from a more formal interview with this child but also different in kind. In other words, some of the information provided through drawings may not have been shared by the child in any other way.

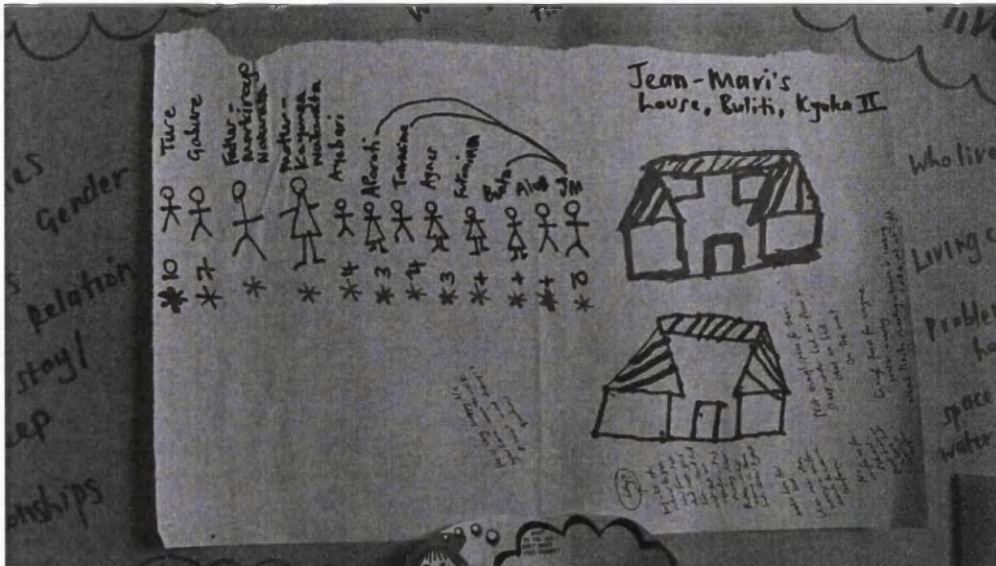


Figure 75: Drawing relationships to others in the household.

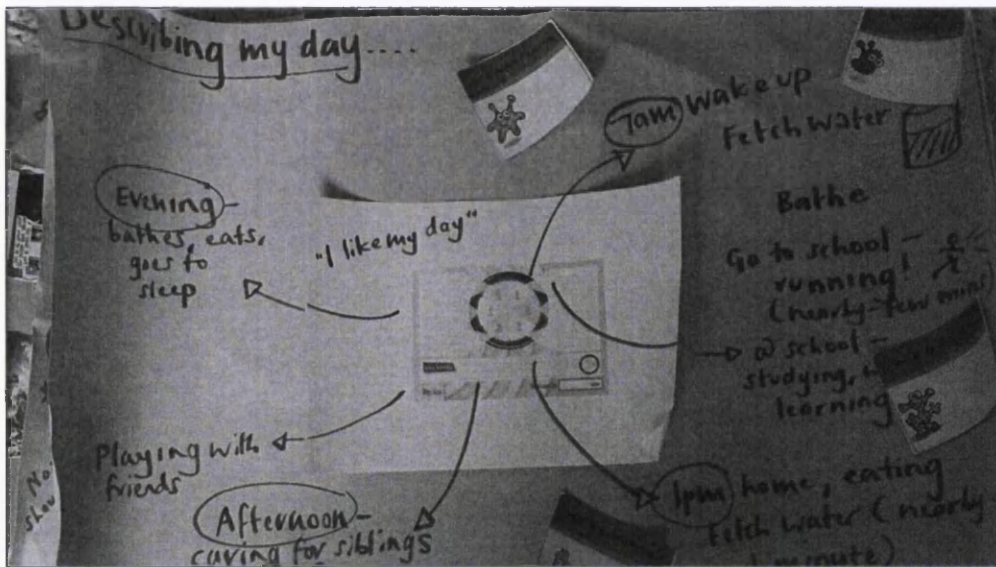


Figure 76: Mapping out a typical day.

As noted by Larsson and Lamb (in Crawley, 2010:162) children's "informativeness" increases "when interviewers conduct developmentally appropriate interviews with children". For Merriman and Guerin (2006:49), the use of drawing in particular as an appropriate method for children can provide "rich information" on their circumstances and "the opportunity for children to express themselves and their views as well as for positive interactions between children and practitioners". Liden and Rusten (2007) emphasise the need for more competent communication with refugee children in protection interviews as well as training in more child-sensitive interview techniques for the practitioners concerned.

In Kyaka II, play is not only seen as important as a method for engaging with refugee children and helping them to open up about their protection concerns but also as having protective properties in itself. Returning to the discussion on child participation and psychosocial support, some practitioners emphasised how play could help children to feel better about themselves, their histories and environment.

One practitioner said in interview:

“...a child becomes active ...when it starts engaging with other children, playing with other children, and after the trauma they have gone through with their parents they need those spaces.”

Other practitioners commented on the ‘healing’ properties of children’s participation through play:

“...and then playgrounds should be put up for these children: as they play with others, that anger inside them is then released, the anger of running up and down because of war, not having something to eat. As they play and laugh around, you see children who are happy...”

“...children to play and sing, that would be something? They entertain us and make us laugh. As they entertain us and make us laugh, they’re also releasing whatever it is they’re holding inside.”

Children’s play was viewed as a tool for helping children to deal with experiences, emotions and distress as well as helping them to progress and move forward in their lives:

“I have not moved around the whole settlement, but I think the children need more recreational kind of activities... to keep them lively.... Because the more they sit there, then they think that that’s the end of the world, yet they can do better things; better, better, better things for their future.”

Refugee children in Kyaka II frequently made the connection between play and their sense of well-being: feeling happy, feeling ok. Drawings of refugee children living in the settlement showed an association between happiness and play: a group of secondary school girls’ drawing included an annotation “children are playing after having better life in Kyaka”. One of the secondary school boys’ drawings showed “children are playing football and they are happy”. Children also showed the importance of their communication through play and how it might help them to protect themselves and others. A teenager from a group of 11-16s living in Bukere said: “when they are playing, they learn to know each other”; “when they are playing, they can help each other”.



Play, then, has an important place in relation to child participation and protection for both refugee children and practitioners in Kyaka II. It can be a tool for opening up effective communication with children about their protection concerns as well as have protective or 'healing' properties in itself. It is something that might be applied to or inform different stages of the refugee protection process to increase children's participation in their protection. However, whilst children may be comfortable with activity and play in practice, adults and organisations are not necessarily so. The UNHCR Community Services Manager in Kampala outlined to me her concerns about practitioners who were not able to understand or use alternative methods with children - for example in BID interviews - and the importance of these staff members managing to "equip" themselves with the "capacity" to work in a more child friendly way:

"But what I notice is that not all the staff are able to use it properly, so... in terms of analysis of UNHCR I can see that you have people that are naturally skilled or people that have started and they have developed their skills but, I find, also a natural base to have an easy discussion with children, put them at ease. And some others, even if they studied, did specific courses on child protection, they have difficulties. And I have for example colleagues that came back and say, you know, the child, I was thinking that it was not the best solution to draw because it was too traumatised...I can see also that was a difficulty to liaise with the child because of course it's challenging when you have a child in front of you that doesn't speak or suddenly starts to cry because he's very traumatised."

The issue for this Manager was not that staff did not have the "intention" to make children part of the process but more a "weakness...on the methodology". UNHCR, she said, sometimes lacked "innovative and creative" ways to "relate with children" different to those used with adults and so might use "the same techniques with adults or refugee leaders", a "traditional way to do things" which could also be a "weakness". It was important, she said, for practitioners to not "block" themselves with "the fear to not do it properly" and to try to find ways to enable children to open up. It was also important to reconceptualise play as an important participatory and protective tool, as a method, and to give value to children's play (and again, by association, to children themselves) in a professional humanitarian context:

"...to be able to equip the humanitarian worker in different sectors...all the workers that are involved with children to be able to have the skills of playing in a professional way, in an effective way. Because I can see that often playing is considered as... something that as a humanitarian worker you don't

do... I mean, you can play in your free time with children in the camp but you don't consider in an innovative way, as an official way to deal with children...really use alternative methodologies, alternative tools to promote child protection”.

## 7.6 Conclusions

This chapter has explored how refugee children's participation in their protection might be reconfigured; how the barriers to participation and its 'boxed in' status might be addressed. It has done this firstly by looking at the environment for children's participation in the refugee protection process. Whilst certain environments or spaces can be made more conducive to children's participation or more child friendly, this is not a quality of those spaces per se. Beyond conceptualising participation as circumscribed in space, therefore, it is more enabling and appropriate to think about children's participation as a process or continuum, a set of principles that can be widely applied, 'stretched' across refugee protection as a whole. Indeed, both refugee children and practitioners are able to envisage a participatory refugee protection process rather than children's participation as one-off space. In addition to thinking how the environment at different stages of the refugee protection process can practically be made more 'friendly' and comfortable for children, it is also necessary, then, to reconceptualise refugee children's participation in terms of space.

Secondly, this chapter has explored the nature of the relationship or 'dialogic space' between adults and children within the refugee protection process and considered how this might be improved. Children's participation is neither intrinsically beneficial nor destructive for their protection but has the potential to either 'heal' or harm. The indication is that children's participation can be important for their protection in a range of ways but there are still tensions, difficulties and risks involved. A mismanaged process of refugee children's participation in their protection – for example, a lack of certain skills, sensitivity to children's needs or awareness of cultural expectations and constraints on the child – can present further protection risks for refugee children. This can be particularly the case when we consider the psychosocial protection of the child. Alternatively, a creative and sensitive child friendly process can draw out important protection information from the child and use approaches that can have protective properties in themselves.

Finally, this chapter has considered the methods used with refugee children amidst the refugee protection process and how these might be technically changed. Such change is also conceptual, however, since it involves giving value to children and to their methods of communication, for example through the use of play. Indeed, children's play is underused as part of the refugee protection process and can provide an important link between refugee children's participation and their protection. It is evident from this research that play provides a means by which children can engage, open up and disclose as well as help to contribute to the protection of themselves and others. It provides an alternative entry point to a number of otherwise adult-focused and formal protection procedures and can prove beneficial for both refugee protection outcomes and for the well-being of the child. In this sense, it is, as the quotation introducing this thesis suggests, adults, and not children, who need to be 'capacitated' in order for the participation / protection relationship to be productive in a refugee protection context. As the UNHCR Community Services Manager in Kampala points out, however, in practice this is not so easy to achieve:

"Of course in the paper, in the theory, this is very well written and it's very well described: you have to include children, you have to make children part of your process. But Rome was not built in a day in the sense that it's a process that takes time, particularly for UNHCR staff to readapt ourselves to have a real children friendly way to do, because also to work with children you have to have specific skills or specific approach that makes children really part of it."

In the same way that the mapping of refugee children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II must be related to context, to the politics and power dynamics of refugees confined in camps, so too must any reconfiguration be contextualised. There are interests at play that affect the environments of refugee protection (e.g. the nature of refugee camps themselves), the attitudes and approach of practitioners who work in them (e.g. tensions with host communities, lack of time and resources) and the methods used (e.g. cultural under-valuing of the child) which are more than technical in nature, expressions of wider forces at work. Effecting change is not, then, as simple as setting out different environments, methods and approaches for the refugee protection process and expecting this to work. However, whilst such changes do not address constraints operational at all levels, it is possible, based on the views of refugee children themselves, for some aspects of transforming the refugee protection process in practice, at least in the context of Kyaka II, to begin.

## **Chapter eight: Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This thesis began with an observation on humanitarian practice, as articulated by a refugee child in a refugee camp context. Refugee children, this child suggests, feel incapacitated in such settings and struggle to express their protection concerns to the organisations in place to support them. Protection interventions are not necessarily, as a result, meeting refugee children's specific needs, a matter of utmost importance for these children's lives.

This observation on refugee children, their protection and participation was further developed and problematized in Chapter One. The significant and multiple protection risks facing refugee children were set out. Refugee children's legal entitlement to, and need for, international protection, as well as protection from violence, exploitation and abuse, was also outlined. The refugee protection process was articulated - with its core constituent procedures of reception, registration and Refugee Status Determination – and this process was given due 'weight' in relation to refugee children's lives.

Refugee children's ability to express their views and concerns, it was suggested in Chapter One, is important for their effective protection. However, despite a raft of UNHCR policy and practice-related documents on children's protection and participation, refugee children's specific needs and concerns, it appears, are not sufficiently incorporated into such 'core' protection work. UNHCR and partners might, it was proposed further facilitate refugee children's participation to better meet their protection needs. With children under 18 representing almost 50% of the refugee population world-wide, such a proposition demands attention and gives rise to this research.

Participation and protection were not just set out in Chapter One as operational matters but also as intellectual areas of concern. The concept of child participation was 'opened up', positioned in relation to notions of 'power', 'space' and the conceptualisation of 'the child' as well as situated in the refugee camp as political space. The indication given was that there are much more than technical considerations involved in any exploration of refugee children's participation, although child-friendly techniques and methods do have their place. Various

conceptual tensions, complexities and challenges were set out to be navigated and addressed. It was suggested that conceptual, as well as practical solutions must be identified to the problems presented by the research. The main research aims for the thesis were set out in Chapter One, bringing such practical and intellectual considerations together. The thesis is concerned with ‘mapping’ refugee children’s participation in their protection in practice, in particular in the refugee protection process but also with how participation and protection are conceptualised and understood. The research explores how refugee children are viewed in relation to their participation and protection and the practical implications of such conceptualisations of ‘the refugee child’. The research also considers what alternatives might need to be put in place, involving an exploration of both practical and conceptual areas for change. Informed by a significant body of academic literature and set within the case study context of Kyaka II Refugee Settlement in Uganda, such aims are addressed by engaging directly with refugee children and humanitarian practitioners in ‘the field’. From the outset, the intention, , has not been to undertake a purely academic exercise but to conduct an applied, policy and practice relevant piece of research, of significance for refugee children and their lives.

## **8.2 Key findings**

The empirical evidence collected and presented in this thesis can be summarised in relation to these research aims. In Chapter Four, practitioners’ preliminary ‘mapping’ of refugee children’s participation in their protection in Kyaka II, produced some enabling activities (for example, play-based sessions and workshops) in different arenas (school, church, wider community) considered participatory for refugee children. Specific structures (for example, children’s clubs) and adult roles (for example, Community Protection Workers) were also identified as providing some support. Such purposeful and pro-active attempts to facilitate children’s participation in multiple ways are encouraging and demonstrate some of what might ‘work’ in context, although there are limitations other than technical involved

Although refugee children and their experiences are, of course, both complex and diverse, Chapter Four indicated that many children in Kyaka II face significant barriers to their participation in practice. In multiple ways, these children appear

“boxed in” (Hart and Khatiwada, 2003), prevented from giving voice safely and effectively to their protection views and concerns. In part, this is due to differentials of awareness, access and opportunity – the varying ability of different groups of children to engage with adults about their protection concerns. Feedback from children in Kyaka II showed a significant contrast with the participation ‘map’ presented by practitioners, with many children unaware of the organisations, participatory structures and activities in place. Many younger children, for example, are mostly only aware of the adult support (from parents, guardians, Community elders) existing closer to home. Girls are limited by a range of factors related to cultural expectations and gender roles, with caring responsibilities and household duties, as well as, in some cases, a sense of shame often keeping them from talking to adults about their protection concerns. Children not in school are isolated from and have no access to the participatory structures - children’s clubs and committees - attached to such institutions. Unaccompanied and separated children, in the absence of their primary care giver or even any relatives, can be at a disadvantage without such family support. Children engaged with in Kyaka II also had a different conceptualisation of their participation to that of adults, one that was not tied to particular structures, spaces and times.

Refugee children’s agency in Kyaka II is also, however, constrained by how children’s participation is conceptualised and understood. Groups of children are excluded because of how child participation is constructed in context. Refugee children’s participation can be portrayed, for example, as an intermittent activity rather than as an on-going right. Viewed as an ‘event’, children’s participation thus becomes something that occasionally ‘takes place’, is either done or not done, rather than a continuous process which is mainstreamed as part of their protection. As such, children’s participation appears as a ‘lottery’, dependent on being present at the right time and in the right place.

This conceptualisation of children’s participation lends itself to a restricted and circumscribed map of participation in practice. Indeed, refugee children’s participation in Kyaka II is associated with certain designated spaces - for example, children’s clubs in schools - rather than a right claimed across space. This constrains which protection matters are open for children’s participation, which subjects can be

discussed and which children can be involved. Some children can, for example, be engaged in reporting protection incidents through school-based mechanisms but not necessarily in decisions made elsewhere, as part of refugee protection procedures which are critical for their international protection. In addition, those children excluded from the participatory clubs and committees established in schools are left with limited alternative avenues through which to share their protection concerns. According to Lansdown, “children need to tell their stories to those with the authority to take appropriate action” (2001:7). However, these children, prevented from disclosing their ‘everyday’ protection issues through participatory structures in their communities or at school, may not be given sufficient space, opportunity or encouragement to do so amidst the refugee protection process. This is extremely important, since contact with agencies during key points in this process may be such children’s *only* point of communication with those who can help to address their protection concerns.

In the context of Kyaka II, such a restricted configuration of refugee children’s participation in their protection – conceptually, spatially, discursively – might also be attributed to the politics of the refugee settlement and the dynamics involved. Chapter Four suggests that asymmetrical power relations between adults and children as well as between (Ugandan national) practitioners and refugees may contribute to keeping refugee children’s participation in this form. It is the appropriate ‘place’ for children and for refugees.

Mindful of such challenges and the critical importance of the refugee protection process, Chapter Five ‘mapped’ refugee children’s participation in its core constituent procedures: arrival and reception, and protection interviews for registration, Refugee Status Determination and Best Interests Determination. The empirical evidence suggests that these procedures are not operationalised in a manner conducive to refugee children’s participation, with environments, approaches and methods inappropriate to children’s needs. Refugee children face significant hardships and protection risks on arrival at Kyaka II and whilst living in the Reception Centre, a catalogue of challenges relating to their health, sense of security and well-being. Amidst such hardships, many refugee children feel disoriented, unsupported and uninformed and at a loss in terms of “someone to tell”, Protection

interviews for registration, RSD and BID involve significant additional challenges to refugee children's participation, including physical hardships (distance travelled, hunger and delays), the manner in which the interviews are conducted (style of questioning, language used, treatment of and attitude towards children) and the interview environment as a whole (distractions, disturbances, discomfort for children). Beyond such procedural points of contact, more day-to-day engagement with 'the office' around protection concerns presents specific barriers for refugee children, including distance, fear, misinformation, as well as how they are responded to and received.

Through the empirical material set out in Chapter Five, significant obstacles to refugee children's participation in the refugee protection process are revealed. Whilst children face particular protection risks and have particular experiences and vulnerabilities, all of which require procedural sensitivity, creativity and care, 'standard' procedures can be adult-oriented, present barriers to children and to identifying and meeting their specific protection concerns. As a result, children may have difficulty in accessing and navigating such protection procedures, articulating their claim to refugee status or communicating effectively about their broader protection needs. This can result in silence, distress, confusion or even additional harm or risks to refugee children, as well as inadequate protection responses and important child protection information becoming 'lost'.

Whilst such barriers to refugee children's participation in the refugee protection process appear broadly practical, they are also conceptual in nature. The definition of participation as activity or event, as set out in Chapter Four, precludes participation as on-going right held by children throughout the refugee protection process. Similarly, the association of children's participation with particular, designated spaces means that there must also be areas where child participation is not allowed. Indeed, the interests and dynamics operational in the settlement are such that children's views and concerns are often not considered appropriate or welcome where the operation of humanitarian agencies and government bodies and their procedural authority is concerned. This 'boxes in' refugee children's participation and separates it from the spaces of refugee protection. Such divides further fuel children's fear of such spaces and of the adults working within them. Combined,



these conceptual barriers also point to a more fundamental restriction on refugee children's participation in the refugee protection process, how refugee children themselves, their capabilities and contributions, are seen.

Chapter Six sets out the different conceptualisations of 'the refugee child' within the refugee protection process, which, although varied, rarely make room for meaningful participation on the part of the child. Firstly, there is a conceptualisation of refugee children in terms of risk, for example risks associated with 'flight' and living conditions as a refugee but also with being a child, or a particular 'category' of child (for example, unaccompanied and separated children and girls). This view of the refugee child solely in terms of risk and vulnerability, in need of protection from others, does not recognise children's competencies or capabilities and is not conducive for their participation in their own protection. Secondly, there is a conceptualisation of children as silent and in the background, and who, in the presence of adults, should not be heard. This positioning of the child as hidden, silenced, forgotten and ignored is similarly far from enabling for refugee children's participation. Thirdly, refugee children are conceptualised as narrators or informants in the refugee protection process, as a source of information and providers of 'the Truth'. Whilst this view makes room for some degree of participation on the part of refugee children, it is a contribution that is restricted by adults, narrowly focused and with consequences for the child. For example, children may risk retaliation from their families if they present the 'wrong' information amidst a refugee claim or may be prevented from sharing their own protection issues and concerns. With all three of these conceptualisations, different dynamics (for example, cultural, institutional) are in operation and different interests involved in constructing 'the child' in a particular way. However, such multiple conceptualisations, considered together, present a more fluid view of 'the refugee child', with nuances that can be further developed and explored. For example, whilst it is important to acknowledge the risks faced by refugee children, this does not mean that all refugee children are at risk everywhere all of the time. Vulnerability is relational, a shifting state not a permanent characteristic of the refugee child. Similarly, if refugee children have the capacity to narrate and inform as part of the refugee protection process, then there are many other contributions that they are able to make. As children, they have unique and valuable perspectives to offer on both their own protection and on the protection

of other children. Recognising such complexity, a more flexible conceptualisation of the refugee child amidst the refugee protection process is proposed, one combining vulnerability and capability, competency and risk. Such a conceptualisation also makes room for refugee children to propose the changes they want to see.

The empirical material presented in Chapters Four through Six indicates that there is indeed a 'problem' with refugee children's participation in their protection in Kyaka II. How refugee children's participation is practised, conceptualised and understood, particularly amidst the refugee protection process, is not conducive for their effective protection as children or as refugees. How refugee children themselves are conceptualised in relation to their protection is not enabling for their meaningful participation and there are significant areas that are in need of change. Whilst 'space' may have been made in policy terms by UNHCR for refugee children as active and capable participants in their own protection, 'on the ground', refugee children are marginalised from the decision-making process, with refugee protection procedures overly orientated towards adults and their needs. In a context where children are often the majority of the refugee population, there is no place for a refugee protection process that cannot make children's protection needs a matter of core concern. There is an urgent need for a more participatory, child-focused refugee protection process in practice. As outlined in Chapter Seven, this needs to be able to take account of both the practical and conceptual barriers to refugee children's participation in their protection. It needs to involve more child friendly environments, approaches and methods, a reconceptualization of participatory space, as well as operationalising a more nuanced and enabling conceptualisation of the refugee child. It also needs to be cognizant of the politics of children's participation in a refugee camp context and what is possible in terms of change.

In spite of the challenges involved, , this thesis maintains that an increase in refugee children's participation in their protection in the protracted, complex setting of the refugee camp is not only possible, but necessary. It is important for the respect, recognition and valorisation that results from children taking a more active role in identifying and addressing their protection concerns. It also appears beneficial for refugee children's effective protection, with additional protection risks created when there is a lack of children's participation. Refugee children, as we have seen, are

able to offer up creative ideas and solutions to meet both their own and other children's protection needs. Such ideas and possible solutions need to be taken seriously and explored.

### **8.3 Multiple agendas, reviewed**

Multiple agendas were set out for this research in Chapter One. The research intended to make an academic contribution, to be policy-relevant and to improve practice and to benefit research participants, in particular refugee children, themselves. Refugee children's participation in their protection was a matter of more than intellectual concern.

It is important, therefore, in this concluding chapter, to reflect on the progress achieved in each of these areas and the extent to which the research achieved what it set out to do. Section 8.3.1 therefore returns to and reflects on the academic literature and debates set out in Chapter Two and considers the empirical, conceptual and methodological contributions made by the research. It explores the 'added value' of the research in academic terms, the implications of the research findings for theorising and academic debate. Section 8.3.2 examines the policy relevance of the research in a refugee protection context and Section 8.3.3 considers the implications of the research for practitioners and for practice 'in the field'. Finally, Section 8.3.4 reflects on the impact of the research on, and the benefits for, the research respondents themselves.

Of course, the researcher is not working towards such aims in a vacuum but is connected up to a range of institutions and agendas. These might well constrain the findings of the research and/or limit their articulation to certain audiences in certain ways. The position of the practitioner-researcher, supported by organisations such as UNHCR, is, of its nature - albeit unintentionally - compromised to some extent. Throughout the thesis as a whole and in the policy and practice sections below, there has therefore been an attempt to address this concern in a number of ways. Whilst, as a practitioner as well as a researcher, I remain in part 'within the tent' of the leading players in policy and practice in relation to refugee children's protection – and this will, inevitably affect what I have to say - I have endeavoured to step back as much as possible, to be true to the findings from the empirical research and to make room for critique.

I attempt to address my positionality, my close association with child protection organisations, in several ways and these are evident in the policy and practice recommendations below. Firstly, the research, whilst focusing on refugee protection procedures *within* a refugee camp setting, has not remained purely in ‘technical’ mode but has contextualised refugee children’s participation and protection amongst the political and institutional constraints involved. Secondly, the research findings step outside of the frame of suggesting purely methodological modifications are required, a ‘tweaking’ of refugee protection procedures for children, and are critical of, for example, the attitudes and behaviour of humanitarian practitioners and the way that some may conceptualise and treat both children and refugees. Thirdly, although not the main focus of the research, there has been reference throughout to the refugee camp as political space, the political actors and forces involved so that humanitarian agencies and actors are increasingly part of, rather than set apart from, the ‘problem’ of refugee children’s lack of participation. Fourthly, I have attempted to connect such critiques up to other scales, for example child protection discourse and practice at a global level. There are therefore some difficult questions that I am able to ask, even if there are also those which, on the basis of this research, may not on this occasion be explored.

### *8.3.1 Academic contributions from the research*

In Chapters One and Two, it was suggested that there has been limited empirical research on the experiences of refugee children and on the systems in place to protect them, despite children representing a significant proportion of the refugee population world-wide. Authors such as Evans and Mayer (2012) and Newman (2004; 2005), for example, have called for increased empirical studies in a range of adverse contexts on global protection interventions and children’s experiences of them. In terms of the constituent procedures of the refugee protection ‘process’ in particular, children are not often enough engaged in research that reflects on the appropriateness of these procedures to their needs. Through ‘tracking’ the views and experiences of refugee children of a range of ages and circumstances through the different ‘stages’ of the refugee protection process, this research further opens up this area for exploration and contributes an additional ‘body’ of rich empirical material to this field.

Indeed, children's reported experiences of their participation in the refugee protection process in Kyaka II, the evidence shows, is contrary to UNHCR's global child protection policy, at odds with what is rhetorically intended and creates additional child protection risks. Asking refugee children about their particular experiences of the refugee protection process, rather than making the assumption that 'core' protection procedures are appropriate to their needs is therefore essential: it is something that we need to know. Such empirical material adds to the arguments by authors such as Newman (2004; 2005) and Evans and Mayer (2012) that global protection interventions are not necessarily meeting or can be contrary to children's specific needs. It reinforces the importance of exploring children's experiences in context and using this to reflect on the protection practices that often too routinely take place. Further exploration of children's experiences of their participation in the refugee protection process, in refugee settings other than Kyaka II, are encouraged as a result.

Researching refugee children's views and experiences on their participation in protection in Kyaka II is not only important empirically but also conceptually. It can make a contribution to a range of theoretical debates. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter Two, a multi-conceptual framework has been purposefully maintained for this research, in order to maximise any such contributions, open up avenues for further exploration. Using the findings from this research, then, it is possible to return to and comment upon the key conceptual issues and debates set out at the end of Chapter Two.

In Chapter Two, it was suggested that a 'technical' conceptualisation of children's participation – one that views child participation in terms of methods, processes and techniques – whilst limited, has a value. Through this research, a technical perspective on children's participation has contributed to an understanding of what does not 'work' in the refugee protection process, for example the methodological barriers that do not allow children to engage. It has also contributed to thinking through practically how these barriers might be addressed. Part – although certainly not all – of the challenge of children's participation, then, is about adults doing things differently methodologically and, based on this research, it is argued that this aspect to the conceptualisation of children's participation should be retained.

From the evidence presented from Kyaka II, however, it is clear that a conceptualisation of children's participation solely in technical terms is inadequate: by purely using this theoretical approach, much would be missed. Drawing on the literature by Hart (2012) and White and Choudhury (2007;2010), for example, and by viewing participation as tied up with the operation of power, some of the politics of children's participation in one refugee setting have been able to be explored. This literature has facilitated a critique of the discourses of participation presented in situ and revealed some of the physical and discursive "comfort zones" (White and Choudhury, 2007: 547) of institutions in relation to children's participation. From research in Kyaka II, some of the interests and motivations of adult refugees, humanitarian practitioners and government officials interacting with children in relation to their protection and participation have been explored. The research provides a context-specific example of how such power relations affect children, their participation in their protection and their lives. It invites us to look again and in more detail, across a range of refugee contexts, at the operation of power in relation to children's participation in the refugee protection process.

Outlining such power dynamics as operational in Kyaka II reinforces a conceptualisation of children's participation as political, not just a technical matter of concern. A focus on children's participation as contested and power-laden, as an ongoing struggle between the adult and the child, is, this thesis contends, closer to refugee children's reported experiences of participation in their protection and focuses our attention on the aspects most in need of change.

Whilst there can be discussion on the conceptualisation of power in relation to children's participation in Kyaka II in the abstract, the consequences of such power dynamics for children in context are very 'real'. The research has tried to engage with participation and power in a way which reflects the conceptual complexity but also addresses these 'real-world' experiences of children and provides openings for change. A more flexible or fluid view of power, as taken by Kesby (2007) or Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) rather than, for example, Cooke and Kothari (2001), has meant that the research has been able to explore both barriers and opportunities. For example, adults who are open to and supportive of children's participation in context and refugee childrens' potential for increasing their participation in their

protection amidst constraints. Attention to this, it is maintained, is important, more enabling in terms of visualising practical change, alongside the recognition of the broader structures and operation of power. Power, it is here maintained, has to be conceptualised in relation to children's participation in a way that we can 'get hold of', can utilise to benefit children, to effect change.

In fact, through the research, the concept of space has provided a productive way of approaching children's participation conceptually in relation to power. Exploring how children's participation is 'mapped' in space in context provides a 'way in' to some of the interests and tensions involved. It can also provide a more tangible starting point from which to consider areas for change.

Notions of enclosure (Hart, 2012) scale (Ansell, 2009) and dialogic space (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010) have proved useful as critical 'tools' for more detailed reflection on children's participation, power and space. The critique of the enclosure of children's participation and protection – for example, through children's clubs or committees - is powerfully endorsed by this research. Ansell's (2009) politics of scale has also been productive – used in this research to show how the participation of children at one level of their protection is divorced from decision-making at another. The concept of 'dialogic' space (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010) has kept children's participation connected to the nature and quality of interaction between adults and children. Whilst, on its own, a dialogic conceptualisation of children's participation is insufficient – it neglects the broader power structures and politics and the physical enclosure of participatory space – it has value in how it connects up to refugee children's own perspectives on their participation in the case study context and how it can enable us to reflect on micro level change.

The research also adds value conceptually to the spatiality of both children's participation and child protection. In Kyaka II, in a refugee protection context, refugee protection appears as a process or line (from 'problem' to 'durable solution'), a continuous 'corridor' through which all refugees 'move', whereas other areas of child protection (protection from abuse, exploitation, neglect and violence) and children's participation are more confined and 'boxed in' (Hart and Khatiwada, 2003; Ansell, 2009). This conceptual and spatial disjuncture has repercussions for refugee children's effective participation in their protection. The spatial construction

of child protection and participation in other refugee protection contexts would be a productive avenue for further exploration.

In terms of the relationship between children's participation and their protection, the research provides support for participation conceptualised as a 'paradigm for protection' (Newman, 2004:6). Powerful case studies from the empirical material show how protection risks can be created if children are not able to participate and share their views and concerns. Children's reported experiences of the refugee protection process show how adults, without effectively engaging with children, misunderstand their specific protection needs, deliver protection procedures in a way that is not 'friendly' for children. The research also shows how children's participation can be interconnected with their protection in some spaces – for example child protection and children's clubs in schools – but 'divorced' from it in other spaces, for example the refugee protection process. This shifting relationship between children's participation and their protection and whose interests it serves deserves additional attention.

The debate around refugee children's participation and protection is also a debate around the conceptualisation of the refugee child. As such, the research also makes a conceptual contribution to academic discussion on 'childhood'. As Dona (2006:22) points out:

“Understanding the lives of children living in difficult circumstances arising from conflict or migration has the potential to inform discussions on childhood in general.... Research is a significant means by which such knowledge is achieved.”

For Dona (2006:23), whilst there has been some increased interest in the views and opinions of children affected by migration, this has tended to be approached conceptually through “dichotomous concepts” such as “vulnerability” and “resilience”, which, in turn, have been “essentialised” in relation to the refugee child. The empirical material from this research, demonstrating varied conceptualisations of children – both vulnerable and resilient - amidst the refugee protection process, reinforces a more nuanced and complex view of the refugee child. It adds 'weight' to the argument for a more careful, contextual and relational perspective on 'vulnerability' (Clark, 2007; Steffen, 2010; Lowicki, 2002), considered important for refugee children's agency, protection and lives.



This more complex view of the refugee child has also informed, and been reinforced by, the process of the research. The use of a participatory methodology with refugee children as research respondents requires a more enabling, and less essentially 'vulnerable', view of the child. Refugee children's ability, including those of a very young age, to engage with and significantly contribute to the participatory workshops delivered in Kyaka II supports the argument that we should not over-protect children from their participation in research. There is merit in the argument for 'moving beyond' a more restrictive notion of 'do no harm' (Pittaway et al., 2007) in relation to research with refugees.

Finally, participatory research undertaken with refugee children can also inform academic debate over the best approach – methodologically and ethically – for accessing (refugee) children's worlds. It has already been argued in Chapter Three, with evidence drawn from the empirical research that participatory methods might be the best available option that we have in these terms. Refugee children in Kyaka II not only fed back that they had enjoyed such methods in practice but that, because of the approach taken, they had felt more comfortable and able to share their protection views and concerns. Whilst there were, of course, challenges and constraints involved in conducting participatory research in practice with children in the settlement, these were mostly addressed and resolved. Refugee children and practitioners in Kyaka II also indicated that the methods used had had some impact on adult-child relations, at least in situ and at the time of the research. Children were talking more openly, interacting more easily with adults and feeling less fear. Such methods appear ethically superior when compared with these children's experiences of the more adult-focused approaches used as part of the refugee protection process.

### *8.3.2 'Following the 'capillaries' to where policy is made*

Chapter One discussed the practical, as well as the academic, relevance of the research, i.e. how the investigation of children's participation in the refugee protection process in Kyaka II might 'speak' to policy and practice elsewhere. For Jacobsen and Landau (2003:186), the knowledge generated by refugee research must improve refugee protection and influence organisations like the UN, rather than simply 'satisfy' the interests of academic peers. Dona (2007:210) suggests that any research on forced migration and refugees is, in fact, inherently 'partisan', i.e.

orientated towards social change for the displaced and with some form of policy or practice relevant aim. As such, for Dona (2007:210):

“...studying the experiences, causes and consequences of displacement is done with the implicit or explicit intent to influence the development of better policies and programmes on the part of governments, non-governmental and inter-governmental agencies and refugee community organisations.”

As outlined in Chapter One, in order to achieve any policy-related impact, it is important to “follow the capillaries” away from the research with refugee children and to connect up to the spaces and “events” where policies and policy decisions are made (Ansell, 2009:204). Newman (2004: 13) emphasises the importance of evidence on children’s views and experiences of protection interventions reaching “top organisational levels where they will have the potential to influence policy-makers and programme design”. In the case of this research, this has meant connecting up with UNHCR international operations in Geneva as well as the Global Child Protection Working Group, a multi-agency body mandated to co-ordinate humanitarian child protection response at the global level, to share the research findings and refugee children’s experiences and views.

The ways in which this research has been connected with UNHCR policy was in part set out in Chapter One. Prior to undertaking this research, I worked freelance for UNHCR and, in particular, the Senior Adviser for Children, delivering participatory protection workshops with refugee children. Refugee children’s views were to inform an emerging UNHCR *Framework for the Protection of Children* (2012), an organisation-wide policy directive on child protection. As part of this work, I became aware of some of the many challenges to refugee children’s participation in their protection. As the consultations progressed, refugee children’s increased participation emerged as one of the main policy goals to be set out in the *Framework*. At this point, discussions with the Senior Adviser for Children began on how refugee children’s participation in their protection might be further explored through doctoral research.

Championed by the Senior Adviser for Children, UNHCR’s *Framework for the Protection of Children* was published in the middle of 2012. During most of the field research period in Kyaka II, then, this policy document was still evolving and, in 2012, it was yet to have its actions piloted in-country programmes or its principles

significantly embedded into the Commission's 'core' protection work. Although 'released' in written form, the *Framework* was, then, still in its early stages of 'roll out' and application and presented an opportunity to feed into and inform the implementation of policy through practice as a result of the research. For UNHCR, the research was of interest as an empirical application and further articulation of the *Framework's* participation in protection goal.

This research collaboration was formalised and resourced through the HIF and UNHCR. Both provided funding through Small Grants to meet the costs of the research (and mitigate its demands on practitioners) in 'the field'. The UNHCR Senior Adviser for Children was engaged, alongside other NGO and academic partners, in a Steering Group for the research. This involved regular updates in the form of e-briefings and blogs as well as online webinars to review progress. After the empirical research was conducted in Kyaka II, underspend on the grants enabled the presentation of interim findings and recommendations to senior UNHCR officials in Geneva, including organisational leads on registration, BID and RSD. These officials were interested in practical examples of refugee children's participation in their respective refugee protection procedures as well as some of the broader challenges involved. As a requirement of the UNHCR Small Grant, the interim findings were also disseminated through a paper written for UNHCR's *New Issues in Refugee Research* (Skeels, 2012), an internal publication circulated organisation-wide. Through such multiple points of connection, it was possible to maintain a dialogue with UNHCR on its policy objectives for children, to inform an evolving policy message about the importance of refugee children's participation in their protection through this piece of research.

Indeed, some of the findings of the research reinforce the *Framework* (UNHCR, 2012) and its policy directives on the protection of refugee children. Participation as integral to refugee children's protection, the importance of child-friendly methods and a more nuanced and enabling view of the child, set out in the *Framework* (UNHCR, 2012), are all endorsed by this research. There is therefore some shared conceptual ground between the two. The empirical findings from Kyaka II provide substance and detail to these directives, using the views of children and practitioners from one particular refugee context to endorse what should be 'in place'.

For example, the conceptualisation of the refugee child in UNHCR's *Framework for the Protection of Children* (2012) is one that reflects this more nuanced view, a child that faces risks but is also resourceful, in need of protection but also able to contribute to the protection of others and themselves. The empirical research from Kyaka II, demonstrating multiple conceptualisations of refugee children as well as children's complex, diverse and particular experiences and needs as well as their capabilities in relation to their protection, supports and endorses this more dynamic conceptualisation of the refugee child amidst policy.

However, whilst the findings of the research endorse some of UNHCR's child protection policy directives, they also highlight a significant disjuncture between policy and practice, based on the experiences of refugee children in Kyaka II. This raises questions about the implementation of UNHCR policy and how policy and practice might interrelate. The research has shown how, despite the rhetoric, practitioners in Kyaka II have their discursive and physical "comfort zones" (White and Choudhury, 2007: 547) in relation to children's participation, divide space up into where children can and cannot articulate their views in relation to different areas of their protection, are not using child friendly methods, do not always 'hold' an enabling view of the child or treat them with dignity and respect. The research also shows the conditions in context within which practitioners are operational, the constraints and dynamics of a refugee camp context in Uganda. This suggests that practitioners – both UNHCR and other partners – are not always able, ready or, in some cases, willing to promote the kind of participation on the ground that is endorsed at policy level.

There is learning, then, from the research in relation to how UNHCR child protection policy is positioned and framed. Policy directives need to recognise the role that institutional practices, culture and values play. They also need to be much more mindful of the dynamics operational in context. Concrete examples and articulations of refugee children's participation in their protection, such as the research from Kyaka II, need to feed back to, inform and influence policy. Indeed, as already mentioned, there is substantial literature on how more context-based studies are required to inform how protection policy objectives and interventions are articulated at the global level. Whilst UNHCR's roll-out of the *Framework* (UNHCR, 2012)

incorporates an action plan of country-specific pilots, such feed back needs to be invited and come from a wider network of contributors. UNHCR and partner staff, other practitioners, academics and consultants, for example, might provide wider reflections on how policy is interpreted and implemented 'in the field'. Policy directives need to be more open and iterative, informed on an on-going basis and amended, grounded in practice, as a result.

Finally, research from Kyaka II reveals conceptual as well as institutional barriers to children's participation, for example how children's participation is conceptualised in relation to space. This conceptualisation has been shown to have significant repercussions for children's protection but is something that is not given sufficient attention or problematized within UNHCR child protection policy. There is an assumption that children can engage without boundaries in their protection whereas in practice this is much more circumscribed and enclosed. There is support from the research for looking more critically at children's conceptualisation of participation in terms of space and exploring how to write this into policy – and implement it in practice - to effect change.

UNHCR is not, of course, the only organisation influencing policy or delivering programming on the protection of refugee children world-wide. UNHCR works in partnership with a range of different organisations in multiple ways. At the global level, UNHCR is a member of the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG), a multi-agency international forum mandated to lead on the co-ordination of child protection in humanitarian settings. The global CPWG is hosted and co-ordinated by UNICEF from Geneva and brings together NGOs, UN agencies, academics and others under the shared objective of ensuring more predictable, accountable and effective child protection responses in emergencies. Membership includes, among many others, UNHCR, Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Such organisations, working together under the CPWG, have an important advocacy role at an international level and a strong combined 'voice' where policy decisions are made.

One of the key pieces of work co-ordinated by the global CPWG over recent years is the development of *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*. Within the *Minimum Standards*, child participation is set out as a right as

well as humanitarian principle to mainstream. Children's participation is therefore an integral component to the work streams supported by the CPWG. This shared area of interest, as well as support from Steering Group members, created the opportunity to present interim research findings to the CPWG annual conference in Geneva, using underspend from within the grants. A workshop was delivered to child protection representatives from over 30 agencies at the event. Getting the research on the 'radar' of such organisations and obtaining their 'buy in' to a more participatory refugee protection process for children is important. These organisations not only work in strategic partnership with UNHCR but can also be UNHCR's child protection implementing partners in the field. They therefore need to be aware of and involved in any dialogue about child protection policy, practice and practical areas for change.

Whilst sharing the learning from the research with the international CPWG within the framework of the *Minimum Standards* can be productive, it is also important to look more broadly, and in some ways critically, at global child protection policy, informed by the findings from the research. For example, Hart and Lo Forte (2013) problematize child protection as a field of humanitarian effort with its standards, toolkits, guidelines and training focused on the definition of child protection as prevention and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children. Drawing on the case study of the OPT, they critique the current state of child protection efforts and suggest that some rethinking is needed in the field. Included in such rethinking is a critique of the *Minimum Standards* which, they maintain, need to more specifically set out how legal instruments might be invoked in practice to improve the protection of children and challenge chronic child protection concerns.

The *Minimum Standards* stated aim is to make child protection response in emergencies more effective and accountable through setting out common principles, improving quality and accountability and best practice to date. They are guided by a number of principles and approaches which would be endorsed based on the experience of this research. For example, the *Standards* emphasise the importance of avoiding additional harm to children due to the actions of child protection practitioners, as well as strengthening the resilience of children in addition to responding to their vulnerability. The additional protection risks created by a lack of

participatory approach to refugee children's protection in Kyaka II, refugee children's capacity to engage with the research and to contribute solutions and ideas would support such principles in practice. Whilst the *Standards* (2012) themselves are thought to have top-line global application, the importance of context is also emphasised, the priorities and amendments that might be required in situ and based on children's experiences and views. From the experience of the research in Kyaka II, such a contextualised approach would also be endorsed.

There are other aspects of the *Minimum Standards* (2012), however, that the experience and findings of this research might be used to critique. Some conceptual limitations that might impact on child protection practice as a whole. For example, in setting out how children are resilient as well as vulnerable, the document maintains that children are "naturally active participants in their families and communities" (2012:31). This might be perceived as limiting children's participation in their protection to these more local or micro realms. Secondly, the document's statement on child participation and its relevance to humanitarian action, whilst enabling in many ways, needs some critique.

In relation to the principle of participation under the CRC, the *Minimum Standards* (UNHCR, 2012) state the following:

"Humanitarian workers must ensure that girls and boys are given space and time to meaningfully participate at all possible stages of emergency preparedness and response. Boys and girls of different ages and abilities, and with different perspectives, should be supported to express their views in safety, and these views should be regarded with respect and taken seriously. Humanitarian workers must be aware of their own values, beliefs and assumptions about childhood, the role of the child and the family, and avoid imposing these on children. They should enable developmentally appropriate ways of child participation, share power with children in decision-making, and be sensitive to how children's participation can, when done poorly, upset children's social roles and power relations." (2012:15)

This definition is enabling in certain ways, reinforced by the findings of the research. For example, it attempts to link children's participation with the operation of power and also 'writes in' the practitioner, his/her views and attitudes and behaviour. This includes reference to how the actions of practitioners in relation to children's participation can cause further protection risks and do additional harm. The statement emphasises the importance of the treatment of children with respect and

also how space and time must be available – at all stages of a continuum of protection - for children’s participation.

The idea of adults simply ‘sharing power’ with children amidst participation is, however, limited conceptually – it is not that straightforward. The *Minimum Standards* (2012) need to be situated amidst the complex contexts within which children’s participation in their protection takes place, take note of the cultures and practices of institutions and other actors, the constraints in context and wider causes of concern. Similarly, more thought might be given to the conceptualisation of participation amidst space in the *Minimum Standards* (2012) – how child protection policy, practitioners and practice ‘give space’ to children. Indeed, a section in the document is dedicated to Child Friendly Spaces, as circumscribed spaces of protection and participation, supported by the community and involving education, recreation and play. Based on this research, a much wider reflection on the spaces of children’s participation would be more productive, the ‘application’ of children’s participation to other spaces of protection to avoid endorsing a circumscribed notion of participatory space. For Hart (2012:477) Child Friendly Spaces are “a notion invoked by many humanitarian organisations”, indicative of the “widespread acceptance of a spatialised approach in the global child protection field”. This is something, based on the findings from the research in Kyaka II that we need to question rather than reinforce (2012:482).

### 8.3.3 ‘Alternative practices in everyday spaces’

Chapter One made reference not only to a policy-related aim but also to a significant gap in practice. Whilst connecting up to policy at a strategic level is an important driver for change, there also need to be “alternative practices” in the “everyday spaces” (Kesby, 2007) of refugee children’s protection for their experiences of participation to improve. It is important, therefore, to reflect on the implications for programming and practice based on the findings of the research. Such a discussion involves how the research might call into question practice in relation to refugee children’s participation in their protection and the assumptions beneath. It is also important to set out efforts to feed the learning from the research into practice at a range of levels to date.

Some suggestions for practice can be drawn from the research in Kyaka II. Firstly,



some practical 'components' of a more participatory or child friendly approach to the refugee protection process, based on the findings of the research and addressing the barriers outlined in Chapter Five, can be outlined:

- The physical environment within which the protection procedure is conducted: being aware that some environments are more intimidating and uncomfortable for children and, as a result, the importance of considering issues such as accessibility, safety (real and perceived), privacy and confidentiality, formality / authority, as well as seating layout, equipment and resources used.
- The attitudes and approach of adults conducting / supporting the protection procedure: understanding that certain behavioural approaches make it easier for children to feel comfortable and to engage. Those who are 'newly arrived' in particular will require an attitude that is welcoming, encouraging, reassuring and attentive to their immediate needs. Overall, treating children with respect, dignity and care; being friendly and pleasant; taking time for explanation and providing time for children to respond are all important for building trust and effective communication with children.
- The methods used to engage children in the protection procedure: recognising that, whilst some older children and adolescents might be able to engage with a more adult-focused approach, other children will need alternative methods to enable them to share their protection history and concerns. Drawing, role play, games, story-telling can all be useful communication tools in interview with younger children, a shared and more informal activity between the interviewer and the child.

Secondly, such practical components can enable us to then re-think the refugee protection process in more participatory and child-friendly terms:

- A more child friendly point of entry to the refugee protection process: a welcoming environment on arrival, providing children with age-appropriate information, support and meeting their immediate needs. A beginning to the refugee protection process which best engages with children and maximises their participation from the start.

- Rethinking the Reception Centre in terms of child friendly space: conditions that are safe, secure and conducive for children and their needs including time, space and resources for learning and play. Information targeted specifically at children about the refugee protection process to guide them through protection procedures to come.
- Child friendly interviews for registration, RSD and BID: using child-focused, age-appropriate interview techniques and methods, child friendly interpreters, environments and approach. Making 'room' for children's own protection concerns (as well as those of the principal applicant) in household interviews for registration and RSD.
- Play as a professional protection tool: recognising the importance of play for many children throughout the refugee protection process, its impact in terms of their well-being and psychosocial protection. Also play as an appropriate 'vehicle' for some children to share protection information, their views and concerns.
- 'Taking the office out to the child': being aware that the barriers children face approaching and accessing 'the office' - and being referred from office to office - can be immense, particularly for younger children. Taking the office to the child - increasing community outreach sessions / meetings / activities just for children - can enhance learning about their protection concerns and the support that they need.

These suggestions for practice have their basis empirically but also conceptually in the research. They are about practical, technical and methodological changes but are also changes in the way that children's participation, space and refugee children are perceived. As such, they challenge the existing way that refugee children's participation in their protection in context is framed. For example, the 'components' of a more child-friendly refugee protection process capture the sense of refugee children as having their own unique and specific concerns and vulnerabilities and the importance of a care and sensitivity in approach. They also emphasise the contributions that children can make to their protection and the information and ideas that they have to give. The methods suggested for engaging with refugee children reflect the diversity and complexity of children – one method will not suit all. Dignity and respect, as well as patience, trust and understanding are set out in place

of a dismissive approach: value is given to the child and what she/he has to say. The components also comment on the nature of participatory space, suggesting that a more continuous child friendly environment might be created and that a space of positive adult-child interaction is essential for children's participation in their protection.

In relation to the suggestions for the different stages of the refugee protection process, paying attention to children on arrival or practitioners physically moving to where children live are physical expressions of valuing the child. The prioritisation and professionalisation of play values children by proxy. There is also, once more, a re-conceptualisation of participatory space, away from distinct children's clubs external to the refugee protection process towards participation as integral to refugee protection procedures themselves.

To set out such suggestions for practice does not mean a claim to broad application or to originality. The scalability of such findings and their wider relevance to other refugee contexts cannot be assumed. Refugee protection settings can vary widely and there are examples of where humanitarian agencies and governments are already engaged in initiatives working towards a more child friendly refugee protection process. UNHCR and Save the Children's collaboration on the *Separated Children in Europe Programme* (SCEP) incorporates such participatory practice, for example. However, it is possible to outline and share the learning from one case study and, as a result, reflect on practice in other settings and contexts, in particular where a gap has been identified. Like Hart (2012:474), I hope to make a "modest contribution" from research in a single setting, with the hope that this might be useful for further examination in other settings and contexts.

Indeed, on return from conducting research in Kyaka II, I was approached by UNHCR in London to share any findings from the case study context on more participatory refugee protection procedures for children. UNHCR had just completed an audit on family asylum procedures in the UK and found them insufficiently participatory for children. Children being considered for derivative status as part of family asylum claims were not, the audit had concluded, being provided with adequate opportunity to participate and provide evidence during the asylum process. UNHCR were thus considering how the delivery of such procedures

might be amended, made in practice more 'child friendly'. Some of the learning from Kyaka II was therefore able to be shared and in part applied.

There are other implications for practice from the research. The gap between current practice in Kyaka II and the more participatory refugee protection process as set out above suggests that there needs to be much more consultation with children *about* as well as during the protection interventions they receive. Practitioners therefore increasingly need to include themselves, their working practice and their organisations 'within the frame' of children's participation, leading to a more reflexive and accountable practice as a result. Indeed, refugee children are rarely in practice asked to reflect on their experiences of procedures 'in situ' (How was that BID / RSD / registration interview for you?). Children are also not encouraged to review procedural gaps as part of protection assessments, but rather protection risks existing 'out there' in the community. Their participation is divorced from any consideration of practice, practitioners and protection agencies as a result.

Indeed, Harrell-Bond (2002) notes that there is a tendency for humanitarian organisations to exclude themselves, their institutions and operations from such reflection, to be less accountable to the children they serve than to the donors who provide them with support. There may well be reasons for this, connected to the political dynamics and constructed identities in context outlined in previous chapters: how (Ugandan) practitioners position themselves in relation to children and to refugees. Such positioning and the treatment that refugee children receive as a result need to be challenged. A more critical 'mapping' or assessment by practitioners of how they perceive their roles in relation to children and their participation and the different ways they articulate this, including in space, would be an important activity to undertake. Connecting this up to the demographics of displacement, the sheer numbers of refugees who are children and the implications for practice would help to reinforce the need for change.

At the individual level, several practitioners in Kyaka II commented that their working practice had benefited from their participation in the research. The Community Protection Workers involved in the children's workshops felt that their understanding of refugee children's issues in the settlement had increased, for example one commented: "I heard a lot from children when they had just arrived in

camp, and the challenges they face.” Another Community Protection Worker felt that he had learned more effective methods for working with refugee children:

“I have gained the way I can talk to the children...steps I can follow to get the information. Now I have skill and knowledge how I can plan and help my community to know the problems and views from children.”

Ugandan staff members working in Kyaka II also feel that their practice has improved. One practitioner said that her involvement in the research had been an “eye opener” for her and changed her perspective and attitude towards children. She said that it had helped her in practice: “knowing how to work with children and learning what children think of us and improving on our learning methods”. Another practitioner said that she had seen an impact from the research on the practice of others:

“I have seen change in partners and the way they approach children...at least two members of staff. Saw during the verification exercise... talked to the children separately from the adults: a very positive thing and due to [your] feedback to staff and as a result of the research.”

Such feedback at this level is an important validation of the research. It suggests that it has been ‘of use’ to people working on the protection of refugee children ‘in the field’ and that, for these individuals at least, practice involving refugee children might improve. The indication is also that, rather than just ‘extracting’ information from people working in Kyaka II, the research has made some form of contribution.

Feedback was also obtained on the research from groups of practitioners in the settlement. Prior to the end of the field research in Kyaka II, a session was held with key representatives from the organisations working on refugee children’s protection in the settlement, in order to reflect together on any interim findings and to draw up some field level commitments to change. “Can we”, said one practitioner in this session, “agree on what can be done immediately?” The group’s discussion on areas for change began with the structures and people already ‘on the ground’. For example, based on an idea from one of the children’s workshops, practitioners considered how members of the existing children’s clubs and committees, based in schools, could be trained and engaged as young ‘ambassadors’ to support newly-arrived children. Such ‘ambassadors’ could be supported to visit refugee children in the Reception Centre, befriend them, involve them in games and activities, talk to

them about their issues and concerns, providing an important level of peer support. These children's concerns could then be fed back through the existing reporting mechanisms in the settlement. There was also discussion on how, between them, practitioners could make themselves more visible and available to children on arrival and in the Reception Centre, increasing visits, having certain designated and recognised roles. In an attempt to address children being side-lined during information and consultations sessions held in the Reception Centre, practitioners agreed to work more collaboratively to deliver more child-focused sessions at the Reception Centre.

During the session, a number of other immediate actions emerged that practitioners felt that they could take. The play resource kits, used by the Community Protection Workers during the research, had been signed over to organisations in Kyaka II and could be used in multiple ways. Practitioners considered running play-based sessions with children waiting for interviews or as a means for engaging younger children out in the community. One kit would be placed permanently at the Reception Centre for children living there, and practitioners and other children visiting, to use. In interviews, practitioners suggested that they could be clearer about the procedures, for example, in registration, explaining to children about the finger printing equipment. Finally, reflecting on the particular barriers to younger children's participation, it was suggested that a forthcoming week-long participatory protection assessment, to be conducted in communities across the settlement, could include children aged 5-10 years. The raw data collected on children's protection concerns as part of the research was also compiled and shared with this assessment team.

Groups of practitioners were also engaged in reflecting on the research at UNHCR and OPM offices in Kampala. These country offices have significant influence over their colleagues and their protection practice in the refugee settlements and must be involved in any proposals for change. Presentations to these two groups of practitioners involved setting out some of the ideas for a more child friendly approach, for example, the activities that might be used in a BID interview or to engage children further at reception stage. Formative discussions with these groups included whether a more participatory approach to protection with refugee children

might take more time, involve more staff or draw on more resources than the existing methods and approach.

During the field research period, information was also posted online to update humanitarian practitioners and organisations more broadly about the research. This included photographs, short videos, a blog on progress, challenges and results achieved as well as short papers on a participatory approach to research and refugee protection. After the empirical research was conducted in Kyaka II, steps were also made to support such wider dissemination. A practitioners' webinar was organised through UNHCR, to communicate the interim findings to, and field any questions from, UNHCR staff globally in 'the field'. This was an opportunity to again reflect on the practical application of the research. Secondly, an online webinar with the Steering Group was convened, for discussion with key stakeholders about next steps and the implications of the research. As a result of this, both Save the Children and UNHCR were able to suggest potential avenues for further discussion of and taking forward the findings of the research. Calls were set up with Save the Children Child Protection lead representatives (Save the Children USA, Save the Children Sweden, Save the Children Norway and Save the Children UK) to reflect on their work in partnership with UNHCR and consider the application of the research. Further communication also took place with UNHCR to discuss the development of a practice guide on more participatory refugee protection procedures for children, based on the research findings.

Of course, it is one thing to set out in writing what needs to change in practice and another matter for such change to practically take place. Practitioners, as previously mentioned, pointed out some of the challenges associated with such change. A member of staff from OPM in Kampala said: "it is all about resources – we are incapacitated in so many ways". The importance of training and improved skills for practitioners to work effectively with refugee children was also raised. Similarly, practitioners attending a presentation on the research delivered at UNHCR's London office highlighted the difficulty of working in a participatory manner with children when faced with an overwhelming number of refugees in need.

Whilst practitioners in Kyaka II were able to commit to some changes as a result of the research and, as outlined in Chapter Seven, some practical changes were

implemented as part of the research, such concerns from practitioners are important to address. Practical guidance on a more child-focused refugee protection process needs to be accompanied by a broader policy and conceptual 'push' based on the UNHCR *Framework for the Protection of Children*, with children positioned as important and 'central' to the UNHCR protection mandate and appropriately prioritised in resource terms. Whilst it is not necessary to be a child protection expert to engage in an appropriate manner with refugee children, training and support for practitioners needing improved skills or confidence to work in a more participatory and creative way with children needs to be in place. Finally, although time, capacity and resources are very real concerns, a more participatory refugee protection process for children means doing core protection work differently, not necessarily additional pieces of work. The indication from this research is that working with refugee children in a more participatory manner might be more effective, efficient and produce better protection outcomes as a result.

#### 8.3.4 *'Reciprocal benefits' for refugee children*

Reflecting on the impact and benefits of children's participation, Shier (2010:35) proclaims:

"I'm less interested in an end goal and more interested in what the young people gain in terms of their personal development during the process of their involvement. I'm probably a minority voice on this".

Whilst the policy and practice-related "end goal" of this research remains important, and impacts upon refugee children indirectly, it is, as Shier suggests, also essential to reflect on children's direct experiences and what they have gained personally and immediately from the research.

Hart and Tyrer (2006:15), considering the impact of children's participation, suggest that it can increase "children's visibility in society and in their community", improve children's skills and enhance their relationships with adults. In relation to refugee children's participation in the research in Kyaka II, there is some empirical evidence that this can indeed be the case. For example, one Community Protection Worker said that the research, in terms of the refugee community, was "kind of waking them up to pay attention to children and to back them up for a better future". He went on to say:



“Now children are known in the community as those who are having problems...after the workshop we did and children was telling them what they have learned - now they are concerned...now they know children also should be given time to talk.”

Another Community Protection Worker commented that: “It brings in the community a mark that some people are thinking about children's lives, maybe they are not alone?” He said that, as a result of the research:

“Children could go back and they could teach their fellow children what they learned and different games and mostly communities could know that children have their rights and they have some organisations which could care for them and listen to their views.”

The overall indication was that refugee children, their needs and contributions, were being highlighted by the research.

In their workshops, refugee children mentioned that they had gained a range of benefits from their participation in the research, including the development of new skills. For example, one unaccompanied boy said that the research had given him “experience and training”, had taught him “many things” including games and “co-operation with others” and that he wanted the opportunity to meet up again. A group of secondary school girls listed what they had learned: “how GIZ can care for people”, “UNHCR’s role – how young people are cared for by UNHCR”; “how a young child can talk to adults” and “through drawing pictures of the office they have understood, learned the procedures” involved. In ethical terms, the fact that children engaged in the research felt that they had acquired information and skills that directly benefited their own protection and negotiation of the refugee protection process in context - as well as contributing their ideas to the research - is of great importance.

There was also an indication from both children and practitioners that refugee children’s participation in the research process had the potential to improve how practitioners related to, and worked with, refugee children in Kyaka II. One Community Protection Worker commented that, through the research:

“Refugee children really gained something very important, because sometimes they feel like they are ignored, but with this project they were recognised and knew how they should be treated.”

In the workshop environment, children seemed to feel more able to ask questions of and request responses from adults; to access information pertinent to them and to their lives. Rather than having adults speak for them, children seemed to feel more empowered to talk about their protection concerns to adults, to talk about their problems 'as a child'. Overall, reflecting on the dividends of the workshops for refugee children, one Community Protection Worker fed back:

“They got benefits like they met together from different zones, played new games, shared, took sodas together and snacks, got certificates... They learned about new arrivals, how children face challenges in different steps of registration and they gave all that thought to drawing pictures, play... and they were themselves.”

That refugee children were thought able to be 'themselves' and to benefit in such ways from the research process provides some form of ethical validation for the research.

Any consideration of the benefits for refugee children should not, of course, end with the conclusion of a piece of empirical research, but should also be part of its dissemination. Alderson and Morrow (2004:125) suggest that ethics in research tends to focus on the data collection, rather than the reporting, stage but that “children may gain or lose from reporting”, which may have an impact on policy, opinion and practice, have unintended impacts, or have little or no impact at all. Similarly, Hart and Tyrer (2006:25) discuss the implications of sharing any piece of research for the children involved, as well as the potential repercussions for their protection. Close attention must be paid, they suggest, to the “framing” and representation of children in the research, to minimise any ‘harm’ that might be done. On the one hand, for Alderson and Morrow (2004:43-44), this can be about concealing the identity of the child and other details when reporting on children as research participants: “Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity given to research participants must be honoured, unless there are clear and overriding reasons to do otherwise”. However, it can also be about a responsible - contextual, nuanced, flexible, relational, both vulnerable and capable - portrayal of the refugee child. Alderson and Morrow (2004:16) highlight the fact that, once again, the tension between the participation of refugee children and their protection is “at the heart of the debate”, here over the dissemination of research findings.

The discussion earlier in this chapter on the research in policy and practice terms is therefore important ethically in relation to impact on the refugee child. It is also important to be mindful of the application of the research findings on a longer-term basis. Alderson and Morrow (2004:15) question whether the researcher has an on-going “ethical duty” to make research findings well-known and acted upon, but also list the multiple barriers – funders stop publication, people dismiss reports, research is misapplied, mass media oversimplifies findings – that can get in the way. It is important, therefore, to strive to be mindful of any influence further dissemination of the research might – or might not - have on the protection of refugee children ‘in the field’.

For Hart and Tyrer (2006), it is also important ethically to pay attention to the accessibility of any research findings to children: for children to be made aware of the results of their participation in the research. Pittaway et al. (2007:305-6) have written about the anger expressed by adult refugees over sharing their personal stories and having their photographs taken as part of multiple research initiatives, with no feedback at all in return. To avoid a “breach of trust” between researcher and research respondent and an “exploitation of researcher privilege”, some on-going contact: a report, a letter, debriefing session or other feedback mechanisms, they maintain, needs to be in place. In relation to refugee children in particular, Alderson and Morrow (2004) add that it is important during the research process to be honest about limitations: to not promise a return visit or further, follow-up contact if none of this has already been, or is able to be, secured.

Hay (in Clifford and Valentine, 2003:50) stresses the importance of continued critical reflexivity on the part of the researcher, an “ongoing self-conscious scrutiny of the self as researcher, and of the research process” and this is important in relation to the above. Whilst there has been a strong commitment to feedback to all stakeholders, including refugee children, and to ongoing dissemination of information (through reports, blogs, word of mouth, presentations, workshops, posters) throughout the research, the final results – as concluded in this thesis – remain to be shared. Alongside any academic publication of the research, therefore, appropriate summary documents for both practitioners and refugee children need to

be drafted and disseminated to ensure that feedback is returned to those involved in the research in Kyaka II.

### **8.5 Changes to come?**

Conducting research on refugee children's participation in their protection in a refugee settlement is a challenge. As noted in this chapter, there are many limitations to such research, not least the complex positioning of the researcher in relation to the humanitarian organisations operational in context and the many constraints involved. There is also the fact that Kyaka II Refugee Settlement is one refugee camp in one country amidst mass international displacement and encampment. It cannot claim to have wider or global application.

However, for Jenks (2000:62), whilst "there is no completely adequate theory at hand to grasp...the lived experience of children", "there is much to be gained by trying to make sense of particular case studies". This research has been one such attempt and, as outlined in this chapter, has enabled some modest contributions to be made. From an academic perspective, it has added a body of rich empirical material on children's experiences and views, providing further evidence of a 'problem' in refugee children's participation in their protection, one which needs to be further explored. It has also made a conceptual contribution, applying theory on the spatiality of children's participation and child protection as a theoretical 'way in' to participation and power in a refugee protection context. At a policy level, the research findings have reinforced some UNHCR child protection policy directives but also highlighted some areas for conceptual change. In terms of practice, some suggestions have also been made which are both practical and conceptual in nature. There are also some reflections on the findings in relation to child protection practice at a global level. How the research has, in the context of Kyaka II, and might more widely benefit refugee children has been explored.

Change, commented one practitioner during the field work in Kyaka II, "may begin with a single person and go everywhere". With increasing numbers of refugee children globally in need of international protection, and facing barriers to their effective participation, this is an encouraging point to reflect on at the conclusion of this research. Whilst conducting a piece of research that has policy relevance and practical application is complex and challenging, it is hoped possible, through a

relatively small piece of applied research and at a small scale, to foster further exploration and enquiry and to achieve some impact or change.

## Appendices

### Appendix A - Adult Consent Form

#### Refugee Children's Participation in Protection in Refugee Camps in Uganda

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Role / Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time in camp: \_\_\_\_\_

- I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Information Sheet, which was sent/given to me with this form.
- I understand what my role will be in this research and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice or consequence.
- I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
- I consent to notes being taken and the interview being digitally recorded based on my contribution for research purposes.
- I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time before or during the research process.
- I have been provided with a copy of this form and an Information Sheet.

**Data Protection:** I agree to CMPR, Swansea University processing personal data that I have supplied. I agree to the processing of that data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me, for example the PhD thesis, academic and practitioner papers / articles and field products such as good practice guides.

Name of Participant:

Print:

Signed:

Date:

Name of Researcher:

Print:

Signed:

Date:

**Please return to Anna Skeels in person, based at GIZ office in Kyaka II camp in Uganda or at commencement of interview / workshop or scan a completed copy and email to [annaskeelsie40@gmail.com](mailto:annaskeelsie40@gmail.com).**

## **Appendix B - Practitioner Information Sheet (Interviews and Workshops)**

### **Refugee children's participation in their own protection**

You are being invited to participate in a research study on refugee children's participation in their protection in the camp(s), either through a one-to-one interview or attending a participatory workshop. The research is being run by a PhD student called Anna Skeels who is based at the Centre for Migration Policy Research (CMPR) at Swansea University in the UK. Anna also previously worked for Save the Children, has worked in a freelance capacity for UNHCR and is being hosted by UNHCR and GIZ. The research is being funded by a UNHCR Small Grant and by a HIF Small Grant as part of a consortia application from CMPR, Save the Children and UNHCR.

Before you decide whether to take part (you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to), it is important to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information sheet carefully and feel free to ask if you would like more information or if there is anything that is not clear.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

#### **What is the purpose of the research?**

Refugee children are severely discriminated against, face multiple risks and are in need of effective humanitarian protection. There is often a link made between effective child protection and children's participation. There is also a lot of debate about whether children's participation is possible or achievable in an emergency context. This research study is interested in to what extent children are already participating in their own protection in emergencies – in this case, in your refugee camp(s) - and with what results. Through talking to practitioners and refugee children, it aims to explore the link between children's participation and their protection and, in relation to this, to explore what, if anything, humanitarian organisations could do differently to make refugee children better protected.

#### **What does the research involve?**

The researcher is undertaking a three-month period of research in Uganda involving interviews with humanitarian practitioners, participatory workshops with groups of refugee children, observation of protection processes and interviews, and working more intensively with fewer children's groups to develop their ideas on participation in protection in the camp(s).

### **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

You have been invited for interview or to take part in a participatory workshop because:

- You work in the camp(s).
- You work for GIZ, UNHCR or an organisation which has a protection remit or an impact on children's protection in the camp(s).
- Your role enables you to have some awareness of or contact with children's participation or child protection.
- You have views, experience, opinions or ideas on children's participation in their own protection.

### **Do I have to take part?**

No, you do not. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can decide to withdraw at any time with no explanation and without any consequences.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

On receipt of a completed consent form from you indicating that you are happy to take part in the study, the Researcher will contact you by email or telephone to arrange an interview with you or you will be contacted by your agency with a date and time for you to take part in an interactive workshop with the Researcher and your colleagues.

The interview will be informal with questions about what you and your agency currently do to support children's participation in protection and what you think could be done to improve this. It is anticipated that the interview will take maximum of an hour. The Researcher will record the interview using detailed notes and, if acceptable, a digital recorder.

The workshop will be about half a day in length and with a group of your colleagues and will involve participatory activities to map out children's participation in their protection in the camp(s), what you agency is currently doing and what could be done differently. Information will be recorded by you as part of the activity as well as notes taken by the Researcher who will facilitate the session.

### **What are the risks and benefits?**

There are no risks in taking part. The workshop and interview length has been kept to a minimum to avoid obstructing your substantive work in the camp(s). It is hoped that the study will be of interest to you but there are no expenses or payments to participants for taking part.



**Will my information be kept confidential?**

All information collected from the study will be kept strictly confidential and you will not be able to be identified from anything which is written about the study. The only circumstances in which we would share information would be if we felt that you were at risk of harming yourself or someone else or at risk of harm from others.

**What will happen with the results of the study?**

The interviews and workshop data will be transcribed and the data will be stored on a computer for analysis. It will be password protected and not accessible for anyone other than the Researcher and her Supervisor. The data gathered will be used to write the PhD thesis or any other related products e.g. academic and practitioner papers, good practice guides or summary reports. The thesis and other documents will not include your name or any other information that might identify you.

**Who can I contact if I have further questions?**

You can email the Researcher or contact her via GIZ office in Kyaka II, the host organisation, with any concerns using the contact details listed below.

**Anna Skeels** Email: [annaskeelsie40@gmail.com](mailto:annaskeelsie40@gmail.com)

## Appendix C - Consent Form for Parents/Caregivers

Dear caregivers,

A researcher from the UK called Anna Skeels is working with GIZ in Kyaka II. She wants to find out how refugee protection programmes can work best for children. To do this she wants to talk to groups of children in the settlement and hear their ideas.

Anna will be in Kyaka between March and June. She will be running workshops with groups of children aged 6-10 years and 11-16 years. Each workshop will last 2-3 hours. At the workshops, the children will play games, do group activities, make drawings or puppets and talk about their lives in Kyaka II.

During the workshops, Anna will record what the children say but not mention any names. The information will be written up in a report for Anna's university, GIZ, UNHCR and other organisations. Information will also be produced for the children involved.

Anna would also like to take photographs and make short films of some of the children to record the workshops and children's ideas. These will also be shared with other organisations and some will be placed online.

We hope that you will allow your child to attend a workshop. If you would like your child to participate, please sign the form below.

I .....  
(name) give permission for my child

.....  
(name, girl/boy, age) to participate in a workshop.

I consent to my child being photographed or filmed Yes / No (please circle)

Signed ..... Date .....

## **Appendix D - Older Children's Information Sheet**

### **You are invited to a workshop**

You have been invited to come to a workshop for 11-16 year olds. The workshop is to find out your views about keeping refugee children safe in camps. It will be run by a student from the UK called Anna with GIZ staff.

### **What will we do?**

The workshop will last 3 hours and will involve:

- Enjoyable games
- Group activities
- Being creative
- Sharing ideas
- Working together

There will be snacks and lunch for you.

### **Do I have to go?**

No, you don't! It is your choice. You can come or not come and you can leave the workshop at any time.

### **Will it be safe?**

The workshop will be held in a safe place. There will be adults there to support you and to talk to.

### **Will you tell others what I say?**

The information from the workshop will be used but no-one will be able to identify you or what you said. This information will only be shared if we think you or someone else is in danger.

### **What happens after?**

We will thank you for coming and you will get a certificate for joining in the workshop.

Workshops will take place with other 11-16 year olds and younger children in the camp. All of your ideas will be written up and could help organisations to make refugee children safer.

**Thank you for reading this.**

**Any questions, contact Anna Skeels through the GIZ office....**

**Appendix E - Older Children's Invitation**

**INVITATION! You are invited to a workshop for 11-16 year olds. We will play some games, do group activities and drawings and talk about children's lives in Kyaka II. The workshop will be run by a student called Anna with GIZ and will last 2-3 hours. You do not have to come but, if you would like to, we look forward to seeing you**

**on.....at.....**

## **Appendix F - Interview Guide: Semi-Structured Interviews**

### **Rationale:**

The research questions for the thesis include finding out about what NGO's – in particular GIZ and UNHCR - are currently doing, thinking and feeling about children's participation in their own protection in the camp(s).

### **Interview Guide:**

The interviews can be divided into 7 sections: Introduction, Basic Details, 3 Research Questions sections, Agency Specific and Conclusion. It will last a maximum of 1 hour.

#### **Introduction**

- Introduce myself, background and credibility
- Introduce the research, its purpose, relevance and the research timeline
- Explain interview purpose and focus
- Ask participant to introduce themselves
- Ensure participant understands their role and that they consent to the interview and collect in their consent form
- Explain how will record, store (data protection) and use (confidentiality, anonymity) the data collected in the interview
- Thank participants for agreeing to be involved

#### **Basic Details**

Name, organisation, job title / role, length of time working in camp / for organisation, phone / email contact details

#### **What are agencies currently doing to support refugee children's participation in their own protection?**

What protection remit does your organisation have? How and in what ways does it relate to children?

How does your organisation define and refer to child participation? Where does it do this? (PROMPT: key documents, staff training, guidance, mission statement, operational standards)

What does your organisation do in practice to support children's participation as part of its protection response? What do you personally do in your specific role? With what results?

What specific mechanisms or processes has your organisation put in place to support or encourage children's participation in protection? (PROMPT: children's clubs, training for staff on child participation, child friendly interviewing techniques, child friendly environments, children's feedback mechanisms)? With what results?

**What is the relationship between refugee children's participation and protection in this context?**

What are your views on child participation in emergencies? (PROMPT: possible, not possible, desirable, essential, too difficult)

What is your understanding of child participation in a refugee camp context? (PROMPT: as above)

To what degree or level do you think children are participating in their own protection in the camp (TOOL: Refer to Hart's ladder of participation)? What are the reasons for this?

How would you describe the quality or standard of the child participation process in the camp (TOOL: Participation Standards)? What are the reasons for this?

In which areas, spaces or aspects of protection do you feel children are most / least able to participate in the camp? Why? (PROMPT: community protection, individual protection, international protection; different spaces/areas of camp; different protection processes – group-based and one-to-one).

What is your understanding of a 'child friendly space'?

What is the impact of culture and community on children's participation in their own protection in the camp? Who is most / least resistant to child participation in the camp context?

What do you think is the impact of children's vulnerability on their ability to participate in their own protection in the camp?

Do you think there is a link between children's participation and protection? If so, how are they connected? (PROMPT: participation enables / improves protection; participation increases vulnerability; over-protection decreases participation).

**How can agencies best support refugee children's participation in their own protection and what, if anything, needs to change?**

What are the gaps and needs you have identified and what, if anything, do you feel needs to change in terms of children's participation in their own protection?

What, if anything, do you think humanitarian agencies need to do differently?

What do you think would be truly innovative in this field?

Over 50% of camp inhabitants are children. What would be your understanding of a 'child friendly' refugee camp?

What do you think would be useful for me to read, do, observe; who do you think I should meet, talk to, interview...?

## **Agency Specific**

Additional questions that have arisen from: discussions with other practitioners, desk-based research, observation about that particular agency and its work.

## **Conclusion and Feedback**

Thank participant for their time and involvement

Explain what will happen next with the data and any plans for further fieldwork, follow-up and feedback

Leave any useful information and contact details of researcher, host organisation and supervisor

### Draft Children’s Participatory Workshop – Child Participation in Protection

Time	Topic	Outline of session – Older Children (11-16)	Younger children (6-10) – shorter session / more breaks	Resources needed	Recording
Total 2-3 hours depending on age of group	Introductions and learning names.	<p>This session enables the researcher and the children to get to know each other’s names and a bit about each other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher welcomes children, introduces herself and where she is from.</li> <li>• <b>Name game with ball</b> – stand in a circle and pass the ball to someone and say your own name. Next time, pass the ball and say their name. Next time pass it faster!</li> <li>• Collect in consent forms and children’s basic details from support workers.</li> </ul>	<p>As with older children’s session – use balls / bean bags to learn names and as warm-up to session.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small soft balls / bean bags</li> <li>• Camera</li> <li>• Consent forms</li> </ul>	Children’s names and details on consent forms.
<b>Game or energizer</b>	<p>Explain the research and workshop. Check consent. Ground rules.</p>	<p>This session enables children and the researcher to discuss the workshop and what it is for and get a shared understanding. It checks informed consent and that the children are there by choice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher explains research in clear, simple terms about the research including visual data</li> </ul>	<p>Use symbols/pictures/props as well as words to explain the research and provide key information for children so they understand what is involved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symbols / pictures for younger children</li> <li>• Camera</li> </ul>	Notes recorded of process and discussion.



		<p>and how what they say will be recorded, stored and used. Checks children understand and know can opt out at any point.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain link with GIZ and UNHCR.</li> <li>• Researcher asks children to say what they think needs to be in place to make the workshop work and for them to feel safe in it - children draw images on a square and put up around the room.</li> <li>• Researcher points out that children do not have to talk about anything they feel uncomfortable about and if they have any concerns about their safety or complaints / disclosure, who to go to. Any other key safety / child protection points.</li> </ul>			
<p>Child participation in protection – Agree / Disagree.</p>		<p>This session provides a quick snapshot of children's views and experiences of participation in their own protection. Set of statements and points to stand by – <b>agree</b>, <b>disagree</b>, don't know – and discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Children can talk to adults about their concerns or when they feel unsafe.</i></li> <li>• <i>Adults want to hear from children about their safety in the camp.</i></li> <li>• <i>Children know where to go and who to talk to if they feel unsafe.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Younger children find this too hard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree, disagree, don't know signs on floor (tick, cross, question mark)</li> <li>• Statements</li> <li>• Camera</li> </ul>	<p>Record how many children stand at each card for each statement and notes on discussion.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Children have good ideas about how they can make themselves and other children safer.</i></li> <li>• <i>There are opportunities for children to share good ideas about keeping themselves and others safe.</i></li> <li>• <i>Some children find it harder to feel safe or to talk about their concerns than others.</i></li> <li>• <i>When children talk to adults about making them safe, they see something happening as a result.</i></li> </ul>			
<p><b>Game or energizer</b></p> <p><b>Participation in protection - Mapping</b></p>	<p>This session enables children to begin reflecting on their own experience of participation in protection - the areas where they have most say, what makes this easier for them and the kind of people who support this. They need to build a picture for children in general rather than focus on own protection history.</p> <p><b>Posters</b> – older children produce poster in small groups / pairs to communicate to other children about getting heard and being safe in the camp and the problems faced. Choose a particular scene or space e.g arrival and registration, one-to-one interview with NGO worker etc.</p>	<p><b>Puppets</b> – younger children can make, decorate and name puppets. Puppets used to act out / talk through a scene or space from camp where children can or cannot get their voices heard or feel safe. Can choose a particular setting or event and introduce an adult NGO puppet if helps.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flip chart for posters or drawings</li> <li>• Coloured pens and crayons</li> <li>• Envelopes and decoration for puppet making - glue</li> <li>• Camera</li> </ul>	<p>Record discussion with puppets and explanations of posters and match up to posters / puppets (number them). Digitally record where possible.</p>	

<b>Game or energizer</b>			<p>This session is to get the children to think about the barriers to their participation in their own protection and their ideas for how this could improve / be different.</p> <p>Can discuss posters in different light or re-do for how could be better for children.</p> <p>OR could map out ideas as 'helping hands' or 'footprints' on long piece of paper towards a better protection process.</p>	<p>Can chat with puppets about how could be better for children and act out differently. Or could map out ideas on helping hands as older group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blocks of paper</li> <li>• Coloured pens</li> <li>• Pens and paper</li> <li>• Camera</li> </ul>	<p>Keep notes on solutions / ideas and any new drawings or footprints / hand prints.</p>
<b>Game or energizer</b>			<p>Presentation to children by adults for their hard work and achievement.</p> <p>Named certificates.</p> <p>Evaluation game.</p> <p>'Graffiti wall' for children to record their views and thoughts on the research.</p> <p>Researcher explains what happens next, will be done with the information and reaffirms that won't be identified and confidentiality.</p> <p>Plans for member checking of material written. Child friendly feedback docs / report?</p>	<p>Certificates for younger ones.</p> <p>Evaluation game.</p> <p>Graffiti wall?</p> <p>Revisit symbols used earlier. Show 'journey' and what will happen next.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Printed certificates</li> <li>• Camera</li> <li>• Small rewards?</li> </ul>	<p>Record eval comments from children about workshop.</p> <p>Keep graffiti wall doc.</p>
	<b>Certificates and review / evaluation</b>					
	<b>Thank you and follow-up</b>					

## **Appendix H – Interpreter Terms of Reference & Guidelines**

### **Refugee Children’s Participation in Protection**

#### **SUPPORT WORKER POST**

**Position:** Research Project Support Worker

**Role:** To support the Researcher to deliver participatory workshops with refugee children in Kyaka II.

**Duration:** 7<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> March including trial period.

#### **Main Duties:**

##### **To work with the GIZ Community Workers to:**

- Raise awareness of the workshops with children and their parents /care givers in the community.
- Recruit children (aged 6-10 and 11-16) to attend the workshops and provide them with the information they need to attend.
- Gain consent from parents / care givers and make sure children want to attend.

##### **To work with the Researcher to:**

- Help organise resources, venues and refreshments for the workshops.
- Encourage and support children to participate safely in the workshops.
- Help to record information from the workshops.
- Review the workshops and how they might improve.

##### **To support the Researcher by:**

- Providing child friendly, confidential interpretation during the workshops and translation of written materials.
- Providing information on culture, community and context in Kyaka II.

##### **The Support Worker needs to be:**

- Experienced in and enjoy working with children.
- Fluent in English.
- Fluent in languages spoken by refugee children in the workshops.
- Able to communicate and translate in a child friendly manner.
- Reliable, organised and punctual.
- Willing to participate and engage in the activities and workshops.
- Work well with others / in a small team.
- Able to keep information confidential.

**The Support Worker will be provided with:**

- A refugee incentive worker payment.
- Information on the research project.
- Training on keeping children safe.
- Practice based training on child participation and running participatory activities with children.
- Feedback and the opportunity to give feedback.
- Certificate and letter of achievement.

**Refugee Children's Participation in Protection**

**SUPPORT WORKER**

**Explain project and nature of workshops and this role.**

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

1. What has interested you in this post?
2. What experience have you had of working/interacting with children 6-10 and 11-16 years? Give an example.
3. What skills, knowledge or qualities do you have that you think are important for working with children?
4. What do you think is important to make our workshops a success?
5. What things are important to consider to keep children we are working with safe?
6. How would you support a child in the workshop who is upset or has a problem?
7. Have you had any experience of translating (verbal and written) or interpreting? How might this be different when children are involved?
8. What do you think is important for working well with others / in a small team with goals and deadlines to achieve?
9. Recording?
10. Questions for me?

## Refugee Children's Participation in Protection

### Guidelines for Translators and Interpreters

These guidelines are for Research Support Workers when acting as translators or interpreters for the research project In Kyaka II.

#### Purpose

You have been requested to translate or interpret for the Researcher during workshops with children in Kyaka II. This will involve translating from French (or other languages used in the settlement) to English and from English to French (or other languages) in the workshops. It may also involve translating some of the written material produced by the children during the workshops.

**Translating for under 16-year olds is a particularly important and challenging task, as they need to be given the space to speak out. Your role and work is crucial to the successful participation of children during workshops and in decisions that affect their lives.**

#### Training

You will be briefed before your first translation or interpretation on these guidelines to ensure that the following guidelines are understood and that you work in a way that is sensitive to the needs of all research participants.

#### Procedures

##### **1. Translation**

Discuss an agreed procedure for translating before beginning, i.e. approximately how many sentences to translate at a time, or how you will indicate to each other that the system is not working, etc.

Translate truly and faithfully what is said, without adding, omitting or changing anything. In exceptional circumstances you can summarise, if it has been requested and agreed by both parties. Taking brief notes may help with the accuracy of translation.

If you don't understand what someone has said, be open and ask for clarification before you start translating.

Never enter into the discussion, give advice, or express opinions or reactions to any of the children. Always allow children to answer for themselves.

Only intervene:

- To ask for clarification
- To point out that someone may not have understood something
- To alert parties to a possible missed cultural meaning

- To ask for translation process to be accommodated (i.e. to slow down, to speak up, to leave time to translate etc). This can be done through signs (i.e. lifting a hand when you need to translate).

Do not pass judgement on the situation or views of any child. This is not your role as a translator.

## **2. Interpretation**

During interpretation, you are required to make sense of what the child is saying from their mother tongue to English for the sake of the others that are involved in the workshop with you. You are required to get to the meaning of what they are saying and then describe what has been said to the others participating in the workshop.

You are required to respond to questions made by the researcher and if she requests you to do so, you may be required to translate her questions to the child in response to what they have said / you have interpreted. If asked to translate during interpretation you will need to change your technique to that described above.

During interpretation, you should still describe key aspects of a person's story, concern or complaint so that the others you are interviewing with can fully understand the situation and make appropriate analysis of it to aid in response planning.

### **Specific procedures related to translating with people under 16 years old**

- Avoid the use of colloquialisms, "buzz words" and unfamiliar acronyms wherever possible to ensure the full involvement of children in discussions. Equally, do not oversimplify or "talk down" to the child.
- Encourage children to say when they do not understand a discussion or question. Inform interviewer if the participant does not understand what is being said. Do not take on the role of giving explanations.
- Remember that when speaking in front of people, the child relies on your help to communicate with others.
- Immediately inform the interviewer if the child needs any special attention.

### **Ethical and Professional Issues**

- Respect confidentiality at all times and do not seek to take advantage of any information disclosed during the discussions.
- Do not promise or give any form of reward to the participants, and do not accept any reward other than from your employer.
- Do not show any doubt or judgement about what the child is saying.

I agree to abide by these guidelines whilst working as a translator / interpreter for the research project.

Name..... Signed..... Date.....

## Glossary

**Best Interests Assessment (BIA):** An assessment made by UNHCR staff taking action with regard to individual children, except when a BID procedure is required, designed to ensure that such action gives a primary consideration to the child's best interests.

**Best Interests Determination (BID):** A formal UNHCR process with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine the child's best interests for particularly important decisions affecting the child.

**Camp:** A temporary settlement built to receive refugees.

**Children:** Every human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

**Derivative status:** A form of refugee status that can be applied for by family members / dependents of a recognised refugee in accordance with their right to family unity.

**Durable solution:** A more permanent resolution for refugees through voluntary repatriation, local reintegration or resettlement to a third country.

**Guardian:** Appropriate adult appointed for unaccompanied and separated children to ensure that they are properly represented, their views expressed, and decisions taken in line with their best interests.

**Non refoulement:** The principle under Article 33 of the Refugee Convention that states that refugees cannot be forced to return to a country where they are at risk of persecution.

**Participation:** The right of the child, who is capable of forming his or her own views, to express those views freely in all matters affecting them.

**Persons of concern:** All people whose protection and assistance needs are of interest to UNHCR.

**Principal Applicant:** A person who 'leads' the application for refugee status in a family / household (see derivative status).

**Protection:** Protection of children both from violence, exploitation and abuse as well as the procedures working towards durable solutions, protecting children *as refugees*.

**Protracted:** A context within which refugees have lived in exile for more than five years and where they still have no immediate prospect of finding a durable solution.

**Reception:** A variety of procedures established by a host country to receive refugees into its society, with physical protection and humanitarian assistance at the core.

**Refugee:** Any person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to



such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.

**Refugee Status Determination (RSD):** A protection procedure whose purpose is to determine whether asylum seekers fall within the criteria for international refugee protection.

**Registration:** The process of recording, verifying and updating information in order to document persons of concern.

**Separated Children:** Children who are separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.

**Unaccompanied Children (also called unaccompanied minors):** Children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.

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