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## The Ripple Effects When a Refugee Camp Becomes a University Town: University Teacher Education in Dadaab, Kenya

Lorrie Miller

*University of British Columbia*, [lorrie.miller@ubc.ca](mailto:lorrie.miller@ubc.ca)

Abdi O. Aden

*York University*, [abdi93@my.yorku.ca](mailto:abdi93@my.yorku.ca)

Jama A. Mohamed


Zainab B. Hussein

[zainabbishar@gmail.com](mailto:zainabbishar@gmail.com)

Abulogn O. Okello

*York University*, [oabulony@gmail.com](mailto:oabulony@gmail.com)

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# The Ripple Effects When a Refugee Camp Becomes a University Town: University Teacher Education in Dadaab, Kenya

*Lorrie Miller*

*Abdi Omar Aden*

*Jama Ahmed Mohamed*

*Zainab Bisbar Hussein*

*Abulogn Ojulu Okello*

*University of British Columbia*



Figure 1. The compound in Dadaab, Miller, 2017.

*The red parched earth gives way as our driver expertly navigates the road through Dadaab town. Deliberate bumps in the road along with tires and spike strips planted by army to slow a charging vehicle, which we're not. The fact that Kenya has left-sided driving – gives me the feeling that we are perpetually heading into oncoming vehicles. ... the clapboard and corrugated metal buildings are a patchwork of rusted repurposed roofing material, a desperate quilt. Groups of people sit at each building, children, and women in long bright coloured and dark scarves and robes. Shredded plastic tangle in wire fencing, plastic bottles and debris litter the roadsides amid ash from recent garbage burns. Goats and donkeys wander the road nosing through these piles. The acrid scent of burnt plastic mingles with dust, an ochre iron clay, a warm terracotta colours indicate nothing hospitable in the soil. The trees around our UNHCR oasis were all planted 25 years ago when the first camps settle in and the NGOs established somewhat permanency. These pampered trees that shade us in the heat of day, yet the soil between them remains barren without a single volunteer weed between them.*

*Inside my cinderblock residence within the UN compound, a friendly blue stencilled sign spray-painted on the heavy steel bathroom door reads: "In case of an attack, close the door and lock yourself in." Tomorrow I will meet the students I have supported throughout their studies over the past two and three years. I have reviewed and assessed their files, followed up with them via email, and coordinated their supplemental work all the while referring to their student numbers, names, and official photos from their student identification. So here amid many similar names and heavy accents, it is their faces that I recognize, and their stories of why they need to write supplementary exams, submit additional work, the hardships that set them apart from one another.*

(Miller, fieldnotes, 2017)

Nothing can quite prepare one for an initial visit to the area. The notes above are from my first and only sojourn to Dadaab. And though I (Miller) am intimately familiar with the university programs we at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in partnership with Moi University, Kenya offered there, the graduates of these programs are the experts on the impact of these programs. My fieldnotes reflect my experience as a visitor to the Dadaab, Kenya, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) compound and its security, fencing, water, and Wi-Fi. Though invested in this project, let us remember that for the entire project, aside from this one visit, I supported the students and instructors from the comfort of my office in Vancouver, where I was safe, warm, and secure. By all standards, I am an outsider in the opening scene of this paper. But this is not the reality of the students who worked as teachers and learned as university students living in refuge. To understand the effects of such university education, the voices of those most impacted, the students themselves, must be at the forefront.

University programs began in 2013 in this site of refuge and the ripple effects on individuals and their communities are still being felt and

gradually being understood. Four graduates from the Secondary Teacher Education Diploma Program in Dadaab agreed to collaborate with me on this article so that the impact of their education and the programs they are in could be shared with a greater audience. The work that they continue to engage in is inspirational. These authors share first-person accounts of their stories and the impact they have both felt, and have had on others. They are teachers, counsellors, graduate students, mentors, community leaders, and change-makers. This paper takes a first-person and a narrative approach, despite being co-authored. This is done intentionally to bring forward the lived-experience of those involved. We are not distancing ourselves from, nor objectifying the subject of this paper, as it is our lived experiences and reflections, which we connect to related academic literature.

In order to understand the significance of the impacts we describe, one needs to first know the context of the site of learning, the historic context for offering such programs, key considerations for such projects, and also to meet the primary players in this collaborative multi-institutional endeavour. We also raise some key questions around hegemony when

working in sensitive zones. With this overview, the narratives of my co-authors illustrate lasting impacts, and raise additional questions as we look to the future.



*Figure 2.* On the road to the BHER campus in Dadaab.



*Figure 3.* The road sign for the BHER campus in Dadaab.



*Figure 4.* The BHER campus in Dadaab

## Context.

The town of Dadaab, Kenya is well known as the site of the world's largest protracted refugee camp continuously inhabited since January 1991. People from Somalia, in particular southern Somalia that borders Kenya, sought refuge in Kenya during the upheaval at that time in Somalia. Since then people from other areas, including Ethiopia, have also come to the region seeking refuge. In 2017, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), only 2% of youth ages 14-17 were enrolled in school, and of them, only one third of those enrolled were girls. There were and still are not enough qualified teachers to teach the 98% of youth who should be in school. At the peak of population in the area, there were about half a million people living in Dadaab. Today, some of the camps have closed, according to United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) Kenya, and the camps' population at the end of May 2019 was 211,701.

To respond to the educational needs of those living in Dadaab (both members of the host community along with those living in refuge), two Canadian universities, UBC and York, and two Kenyan universities, Kenyatta and Moi Universities, formed a consortium and collaborated to deliver teacher education programs which would lead graduates to meet Kenyan standards for teacher certification and to qualify into a selected set of University degree programs. The consortium, Borderless Higher Education (BHER) (2018) was funded by the Global Affairs Canada (GAC). This project lasted from 2009 until 2018. Though the

funding for this project is now concluded, the need remains, and some of the universities continue to support students on far reduced budgets.

### **Considerations of trust when working within sensitive zones.**

This project brought together consortium partners and emerged from a need identified within the refugee camps themselves. The history within the region of funded *training* projects was that they came in briefly, offered a little, and then departed, which left the residents of the camps suspect of this ambitious project. It took a little time at the beginning of the project for trust to develop between the students and the BHER consortium. This was not to be a *training* workshop, but credited and conferred university credentials. It was critical to program planners that Kenyan universities were the home institutions for admitted students in each of the programs offered. In the secondary teacher education diploma program, students were first admitted to Moi, and then to UBC as visiting students. These credits, at both institutions, came at no financial cost to the students. At UBC, the Board of Governors approved use of tuition waivers for these students. Each institution handled its own process for offering the courses, but with the same no-cost result for the students.

### **Who are the practitioners?**

Instructors and teaching assistants and administrators from UBC, held doctorates in their respective fields, or were doctoral candidates and students. Though we recognize non-binary genders as well, this group all identified as women and men, and there was a

balanced representation of both. Though many of the Canadian instructors come from white settler heritage, not all did. One of the UBC leads, Dr. Nashon, is Kenyan by birth, and retains close ties to Kenya. Other instructors were from different parts of Canada, Northern Europe, as well as other African countries. The Moi instructors were from various regions of Kenya, and although the academic language in Kenya is English, instructors spoke a variety of first and additional languages. The colonial history in the area cannot go unacknowledged as it is ever present, with English being the official academic language for primary schooling as well as in higher education; yet, English is not the primary language spoken at home. Swahili is the main spoken language in Kenya, but there are 68 languages overall spoken in Kenya. In the Dadaab region, various dialects of Somali are most commonly spoken.

My role at UBC was to coordinate the operational aspects of this program, collaborate with the other institutions, support our instructors in Canada and in Dadaab, and support students throughout their studies. In this capacity, I was able to see most aspects of project delivery, as well as student and instructor challenges and successes. When working in this context, one must take into consideration the lived-experiences of those at its heart. Many students in our program had spent much of their lives in Dadaab living as refugees, some as Somali nationals, and others from Ethiopia and other countries, and yet another quarter were from the host community of Dadaab. Collectively, all of their narratives speak to resilience, determination, and hope. Their stories

inform our practices, policies, and call for further study and action.

### **Questions of hegemony, power, colonialism, privilege.**

Whose curriculum? Who has access to technology, and does having technology constitute actual access? These are critical questions at any time, but are vital in this context. It should be noted that gender equity was woven throughout the curricula of all the programs as a requirement of the funding agency (GAC). However, this need was also perceived as a need by the program participants.

A social justice lens was used in the construction of the courses, with inclusion of the work of Paulo Freire in the Principles of Teaching course (Meyer et al., 2018). Students interviewed later on frequently cited this work as having influence on their practice. This was not the only text used, but the context was fully considered when instructors selected course materials and created new resources specifically for this context (Johannes & Dobson's instructor report 2017). In the year UBC instructor Dr. E. Jordan returned to Dadaab to instruct the course Teaching Special Needs, she brought "fold-scopes" for her previous year's biology teachers so that each could have a full class set of these field-hardy tools and know how to construct and use them. This went beyond the expectations of the program and is an example of academic humanitarianism.

During this project, researchers from UBC conducted research in Dadaab about this program (Meyer et al., 2018) and worked closely with students; publications are forthcoming on their

research. Discussions of program adaptations, in particular around online delivery methods have also been reported (Boškić et al., 2018). Yet it is still early days post-project; program analysis and research findings are preliminary, and additional research questions are still surfacing as initial data analysis continues amongst various projects.

### **Ripple effect.**

To date, 105 students took some or all of the UBC/ Moi diploma program, with a graduation of 85 secondary teachers (a graduation rate of nearly 82%). Initially there were 149 students who were accepted into the program, but 44 of them did not complete any course. Though some may have simply taken a different program, it is unknown why they did not engage in the program. Students provided a variety of reasons for starting but not finishing, including: changing programs, health reasons, moving to Somalia, resettling elsewhere in Kenya, or abroad. However, those who did graduate have gone on to interesting and impactful work.

Graduates from this program are presently working as teachers, or in related fields. Some have begun their graduate work with York while living in Dadaab, some are teaching in the field in Kenya or Somalia, and others have started their own schools in Somalia where children had no formal schooling at all, led professional development training for teachers in Dadaab refugee camps, become school counsellors, and improved education for girls which has impacted cultural understanding and attitudes. Co-authors for this paper are Abdi Omar Aden, Jama Ahmed

Mohamed, Zainab Bishar Hussein, and Abulogn Ojulu Okello. Their narratives follow and illustrate the variety of experiences which bring people to sites of refuge, the impacts of this on their education, and the impact of university education on those in refuge.

### **Abdi Omar Aden.**

My name is Abdi Omar Aden, a graduate student from York University through the BHER project. I hailed from a pastoralist family lived Somali-Kenyan border before the civil war in Somalia. At a tender age, I commenced my studies in elementary level, joined high school and successfully excelled in the Kenyan national exam (these exams are typically referred to as KCSE). I served as an untrained teacher in Dadaab Refugee camp and struggled in the classroom to teach students. While teaching, I also studied, like my peers, here, I received a BHER scholarship opportunity and applied to study the Diploma in Teacher Education from Moi University in collaboration with the University of British Colombia (UBC). After successful completion of this diploma, I got the opportunity to continue my studies from York University, and so enrolled in the B.A. in Educational Studies. Despite challenges, I have successfully finished my bachelor degree, and luckily, I am among the few who qualified for York's Master's program. I am currently in my first year.

Much of the past four years have been an educational journey in which online learning was meaningful. I found that it relates to the real world with concrete examples, and provides critical thinking towards the field of social science and means of assessments that

reflect the online learning process (Shaffer and Resnick, 1999). The course of study after my diploma, Educational Studies, was very essential and resourceful to my professional development since I served as a girl-child education instructor in my community. I was very delighted to study my professional field and further my skills and knowledge in order to achieve my aspirations of transforming my society into a valuable society. For instance, I was challenged to run and manage a girl-child education project before I joined this program, but afterwards, I improved the quality and efficiency of the project while using the knowledge gained from my experience within BHER.

Today, I am able to work independently and fulfill all course requirements in my graduate program.

Looking back to my diploma and undergraduate degree, these programs were very important to me and to my community since it help me to gain valuable skills that are vital for my aspirations. For instance, with the help of my colleagues, I have successfully delivered in-service training to the teachers, learners and parents in Dadaab refugee camps.



*Figure 5.* Abdi Omar Aden leading in-service training.

Before the BHER project, I knew little about professional development and workshop facilitation, specifically, the techniques of researching, designing and delivering a workshop. However, through my university education, I gained skills, knowledge, and experience of researching in order to provide professional development. I have been handling two important topics which entail how to identify and enhance solutions for gender inequalities and community participation in school activities, more specifically parental involvement in school management as an active stakeholder.

I have successfully convinced workshop participants the importance of reducing and discouraging all forms of exclusion based on race and religious stereotypes and the need to promote equal participation for learning activities and representation. I also encouraged and trained fellow teachers in Dadaab camps to practice full engaged multicultural pedagogy that enhances inclusion for all learners and give optimum considerations for democratic learning that respect cultural differences and learner interests. I believe that the BHER program provided me high quality academic knowledge and professional programs that responded my interest and gave me optimum opportunity to create changes and influence educational policies in the world. My aim is to eliminate all forms of exclusion and marginalization in access to quality education in marginalized areas such as refugee camps and internal displaced camps (IDPs). My diploma and degree programs changed my former perspectives of the banking model of teaching into more engaged pedagogy

that allows learners to engage and participate lesson activities instead of being passive listeners. I have employed engaged pedagogy and promoted learners' participation and performance. For instance, I had an important role in promoting girls' education in Dagahaley primary schools while providing remedial sessions during weekends. This enhanced high enrollment in secondary schools compared to the past where there was gender disparity in secondary schools.

Finally, as an individual, my university education helped me to unlock many locked doors that are essential for my career aspirations. I am a member of newly established African Research group from Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at UNSW Sydney. This is group of early-career scholars from interdisciplinary community researching African refugee law, policy and practice. It is my hope that I will be a voice for refugee policies and practices. In addition to that, currently I am working for the United Nation in Somalia participating state building process and humanitarian work. However, I have a keen interest to develop and participate policies that promote sustainable quality education for the marginalized communities, refugees, IDPs and have free access for lifelong learning opportunities.

### **Jama Ahmed Mohamed.**

In Kudhaa town, in Jubbaland state of Somalia, one program graduate, and co-author, Jama Mohamed, (with both a secondary diploma and a bachelor of community health education) started a school, with the engagement of the local community. As of December 2018, 642



children (298 girls and 344 boys) attended the primary school. The school has eight teachers, all men but the school board consists of three men and women who offer oversight. There are other students who have opened schools, hired their colleagues, become community leaders and are assisting with the rebuilding of Somalia, and /or improving the education of those still living in refuge, or in the local community. Jama's first-person narrative follows.



Figure 6. Kudhaa Town school and Jama Ahmed Mohamed.



Figure 7. Kudhaa Town – Kudhaa School celebration in 2018.

I fled from Somalia as a young child in 1991, but currently the context I come from is Dadaab camps, specifically Hagadera. Now, at about 35 years old, I have been teaching a group of dedicated students who lived in Dadaab, Kenya refugee camps at elementary, primary and secondary levels for ten years. During that very period of teaching, I was an untrained teacher. When I finish my program with BHER (diploma in teacher education), I become a skilled and experience teacher. I have also implemented a new education program in my home land Somalia, Kudhaa Town, where I am currently writing from. I started a school for my homeland community's local children, where today there are 850 students ages 7-17 attend daily, and where just over half are orphaned. The school has no assistance and care except Somali diaspora who are the key players in the care of the school. Those Somalis living in diaspora normally send the salary of the teachers and orphan fees, where by other students contributes \$5.00 USD per month for each child while orphans don't pay school fees. I have registered the school with the federal government of Jubbaland, but have not yet received from them any care or assistance. The community leaders and those in diasporas are the bread winners of Kudhaa school therefore the school needs humanitarian assistance from national and international humanitarian agencies. I welcome well-wisher who want to assistance our situation.

After graduating with my Diploma in Teacher Education Secondary, and I went on to complete my Community Health Education Degree (CHED) from Moi University. My initial diploma from Moi

and UBC was very important to my future because it was a foundation towards my academic career to CHED, and it is my own personal road towards a more fruitful life. With this academic foundation, I have been able to grow and gain new knowledge that has allowed me to meaningfully adapt to the situation in Kudhaa Town, Somalia and go onto establish the school so my community could benefit from a quality education.



*Figure 8.* Kudhaa School celebration in 2018.

Education is very important in the sense that in today's society; there is not much success without education. Education allows me to grow and learn intellectually. It gives me the ability to enhance my perception of changing Kudhaa youth community to a real-life sense of I see it now.

### **Zainab Bishar Hussein.**



*Figure 9.* Zainab Bishar Hussein with students.

I am so happy and proud to share the good work my education sponsors provided me. I'm also happy because I got total support from my family members (my mum, dad, siblings, uncle, aunt and not forgetting my lovely husband). Importantly, I am appreciative to my facilitators from UBC, Moi and Kenyatta universities imparted knowledge to my brain. I also thank our leader in the BHER Learning Center Mr. Misoy, Esther and Khalif. If it were not for these three individuals, I don't think I could have made to were I'm today. They were so helpful in all matters which I cannot express in words.

I am a 27-years-old Kenyan woman from a Somali community who currently lives in Wajir Refugee Camp in the Dadaab area. I am married with two children, a boy and a girl who are seven years and three years respectively. I began my studies at the BHER Learning Centre in 2014 as part of the Humanities cohort, as an English and Literature student in teacher education with Moi and UBC.

In the year 2014 I begun with In-Step course where by we were taught English for academic purposes. Then, in 2015 I began a diploma in education from Moi university and UBC whereby we were taught content and methodology. I graduated in April 2017 with a diploma in arts (English and Literature). Then, in September of the same year, I joined Kenyatta University to continue my studies in their Bachelor of Education program. At this time, I am in Fafi (Hagadaara Refugee camp in the same area) where I work as a school counselor, though my family are still in Wajir. I was hired by Windle International Kenya

immediately after I started my degree program.

When I reflect on my teaching prior to this program, I know it was poor since I had not been taught any teaching methodology and my earning was very little. I am so grateful now because I'm a fully trained teacher with a university education. As I entered university, I had goals and ambitions for my future. My goal was work hard and do to my best, since I believe that with prayer and hard-work, success will come. My ambition was to use this opportunity to pursue a degree and then to seek opportunities to continue with a masters and then later on look for a Ph.D. My hope is to uplift my hopeless siblings that I left behind and ensure they can see the light. The other hope is to be a mentor to the girls that are in my village and to show them that education is all about hardworking, and *whatever a man does, a woman can also do*.

My diploma was of great help because is what employs me now, what will employ me tomorrow, and even for ever as I am waiting for other upgrading opportunities. I believe that the degree I am pursuing now with Kenyatta University, which I plan to finish this year, will be even a plus for me since degree holders are very few in our community, especially for a girl holding a degree. I hope to be granted the opportunity to pursue a graduate degree, just like my colleagues from York University who are now ahead of us.

My education has a positive impact on not only to me as a person and my family, but to the entire community. Currently as a school counselor, I have been able to motivate several learners, especially girls and tell them a life history

on what I saw and what I underwent. This has not only improved performance, but also retention among girl students.

My family in general are living a happy life since I was recruited as a teacher and school counsellor, as I have eased a lot of the financial burden from them by paying school fees, basic family needs, and also reduce the financial burden which I was before. My education has a positive impact to my own community, the Wajir people, because northeastern residents are marginalized and illiteracy level is very high therefore, opportunity of addressing such deficits are very important to me, hence it is a plus to my people. The impact of my education to my own colleagues is also good, as we sit down together, discuss our problems, and come up with amicable solutions. I'm also a role model to some of these colleagues who are still single since they put more effort into their studies. They used to say, *if Zainab, who is a mother, can perform is still in school, what makes us fail or drop?* Hence, I am a mentor to them, and I am ready to share with my colleagues whenever they have difficulties.

### Abulogn Ojulu Okello.



Figure 10. Abulogn Ojulu Okello.

I was born in Gambella, specifically in Abobo district, Southwestern part of Ethiopia. This is the area where I grew up and started my learning process from primary to the secondary level of education. Here in this place, I learned the things that I needed to know about life from my mother and father. My educational background was just as normal and fun like any other kids but I had a strong passion for learning since my childhood. I remember one time when I climbed on a nearby tree that had fallen behind the school compound to listen the sound of students reciting Amharic and Dha-Anywaa alphabets letters since I could not join because my age did not allow me to be in school. My dream and hope for my motherland never went well and did not enjoy the nature of my home. This happened after the dooms of black cloud were made to fall on my people and that unwillingly forced me to leave my beloved home because we were indiscriminately killed on December 13th, 2003.

In 2004, I left my country to seek protection in a foreign country after the genocide that was sponsored by the former Ethiopia regime. Before this incident, I was learning teaching program in Gambella teacher training college, and I did not complete the studies, since I came to Kenya running for my life. The journey never went easy; many days of barefooting with too much tiredness and nothing to eat, I managed to cross Sudan to Kenya border on 15th March 2004 enter to Kenya through Lokichoggio border. The registration process was done at Nairobi UNHCR office and I was put on the bus to Dadaab, IFO camp. Upon my arrival to my new home in Dadaab, my priority was to resume my

studies, but the education system was totally different from what I had known.

The Kenya education curriculum was very challenging. I could not easily adapt to the system, and this forced me to start secondary school again here in Kenya, so I approached Windle International Kenya (WIK, an organization in charge of secondary education in Kenya). It took them one week for them to organize for me to take an entrance test so that they can offer me an admission to *form three* (equivalent to grade 11). After completing high school, I applied for a job with CARE Kenya for the position of para-counselor. I was selected as a successful candidate to start a job with CARE. While working as a para-counselor, they gave me a scholarship to study counseling psychology. I completed my studies within one year, and then began looking for other scholarship opportunities. It was after many trials and attempts when a good Samaritan offered me a chance to start my studies at the York University.

Getting to York University was not a simple task, it took me some years. I started preparing myself from In-STEP program where I learned selected course like English language and computer to prepare us for university courses. After that, I was admitted to Moi/UBC University to the Diploma in Education Secondary with a specialization in English and literature. Following the two years of that program, I was admitted for the Bachelor of Education Studies at York University, Canada. There have been, and there will continue to be, many opportunities to learn more ways of improving my skills as a result of my time in BHER Learning Center.

The first time I started teaching at friend primary school (before any formal

teacher education) I went through a lot of challenges. I never thought that I would improve my teaching skills. My teaching experience was so bad that even delivering the content was the hardest part, but because we don't have enough qualified or trained teachers in the camp, we commit ourselves to teach. I never thought I would attempt to teach, but one of my friends who was trained with teaching skills saw my desperation and start encouraging me every day until I got the strength to face my career with full concentration. My teaching started to improve after I completed a teaching course which taught me many technique tips and rules that I was unaware even existed, and would still be unaware had it not been a part of my experience learning at the University. Because of this, I realized I still had a lot to learn despite of what I thought; this allowed me to improve my skills more as I continued to attend school and it also gave me more confidence in my teaching ability and my learning capacity as a student. As a result, I know one day this valuable experience will help me to develop my career.

My strong desire for higher education is driven by personal interest and aspirations that began during my time in high school. When I completed my undergraduate studies, I established an adult school in Ifo Refugee Camp, Dadaab, Kenya, for adult women who never had the chance to attend primary school in Ethiopia and Somalia. As I attended school and I witnessed the struggles of illiteracy in the adults, I felt an obligation to come up with a solution that would help eradicate illiteracy. From this point, I became thirsty for higher education after realizing the need of my community and their welfare. I feel that education is a

human right, thus these underrepresented groups, like older women, must have access to education. It is my dream and vision to help the community around me overcome illiteracy, improve educational standards, and their livelihoods through education. I believe that quality education would be an optimal tool to help educate my people so that they are able to make informed decisions about their own and their family's lives.

Reflections on my early days in elementary and secondary school: Gambella is one of the Ethiopia regions considered to be less developed. In terms of schools, Gambella district had never the opportunity to have more schools to support people who are living far away from the town. Not to deny the fact that those who were brought up or move to town had the privileged to attend school in the nearby. For me, I grew up in Abobo district in the village of Kiir and later moved to another area called Baadpool with my family. Unlucky enough, I started my primary level of education at an older age, not more than twelve years when I was in class three. The school was far from where I lived. The distance was about 15 kilometers, more or less. Compared with my age, *footing* such a long distance required a lot of attention, but with my brothers and friends, being able to foot with them to the school was good, yet, sometime my feet could refuse to walk and force my brother to take an unintentional rest under a thorny shade tree.

My mother or dad would wake me up every morning around 3:30 or 4:00 am to go to school. There were times when I would even forget to wash my face because was either annoyed or

unwilling to being pushed to go to school. At a normal time, I was supposed to reach the school at around 8:00 am, and the classes commenced at around 8:30 am. Depending on our arrival we would have been able to attend the morning school assembly, or if the assembly had finished before our arrival sometimes we would be met with a very cruel teacher who never considered the distance we travelled each day.

Our village did not have a road, but instead the villagers used a narrow pathway that connects all the villages and has one pathway that takes us to school. Such pathway wasn't easy to pass along because there were wild animals that are not friendly with humans; such as snakes, leopards and hyenas along the way; moreover, when the weather was not friendly, at times like in the fall and winter, the cold weather became harsh, and we never had clothes for such unfriendly climates. What we did, though, was to carry a matchbox to burn the dry grass along the way to help us warm ourselves. This was a great experience, not long ago; it was 1993 when I was in class three. Life was not like walking in the park.

My lengthy trips to school had a great effect on my classes or sometime disorganized my concentration in class. I arrive at school sweaty, stressed and exhausted both physically and psychologically, which compromised my performance. Again, I would leave school at 12:30 pm to go back to my village (Badipool) which took 3-4 hours to reach home at around 4:00 pm. Sometimes I needed to review my books and do homework to pass the examinations. It was really challenging. It's never been easy for me to reach this

stage in my studies, and I never thought I would have this opportunity to studies at a university, let alone at a graduate level.

Though students today are accessing schools using school buses and private cars, with these developments in my home country, especially where I attended school, there are still students who trek long distances to school daily. The number of teachers in the school could not be more than five, with no desk, and we all sat on the floor. The hardest part for us in going to school was how to prepare and carry breakfast. We did not eat our breakfast, not because we do not have it, but the types of breakfast we had was "boiled maize" which cannot be chewed easily before you are fully prepared for it. We would typically eat it at around 7:00 am when everyone is fully conscious and awake.

The school building was made from trees, covered with bamboo leaves. I remember our school had three buildings with two classroom each, and in the middle was the assembly ground with the Ethiopia flag waving in the center. It was a great experience, though with many uncertainties.

As I reflect on my learning experiences, I believe that my higher education has improved my life in many ways. It has provided me with the necessary tools to enhance my teaching and learning skills, it has taught me valuable knowledge about this diverse world and people and concepts in general. My education will eventually enable me to, hopefully, become more successful in life and has stressed to me the importance of thinking critically and asking questions in many situations. All these aspects of university have also made me a better and more rounded

person. It would have not been easier for me to achieve what I have if I lived in some other country, especially third-world ones. These experiences are truly irreplaceable, and I would not compare them with anything. I believe in the proverb that says *Opportunity comes once and will never repeat it*. Today I am happy to have such an education that gives me the opportunity to help my community. Lastly, my prayer is that the refugee youth who don't currently have opportunities for higher learning would also be given the chance to study.

### **The effects described by my co-authors are substantial.**

So, what happens when a site of refuge becomes a university town? As it turns out, a great many things happen. Some of the results include building schools and programs and by doing so creating hope for the future. Graduates initiated new programs including adult education courses designed to combat illiteracy amongst women who'd not had the opportunity to study before. These teachers also helped to provide professional development for their peer teachers, and fostered greater awareness amongst the parents in their community of inclusion and support for tolerance and acceptance of difference. There is now greater retention of girls in schools. Graduates have become mentors, role-models, community leaders, and builders. These graduates are inspirations through their work and their stories; they not only impact those with whom they work with directly, but those of us across the globe as we are inspired by their resilience, determination, and hope.

### **Implications for further investigation.**

Much of teacher education research that has focused on initial teacher preparation has identified challenges within in rural communities' recruitment, staffing, and retention (Gallo & Beckman, 2016; McDermott & Allen, 2015; Mukeredzi, 2016; Saigal, 2012). Although there is some research on primary education in refugee or emergency contexts, little research exists on teacher education specifically in refugee contexts. In 2009, UNESCO called for the reporting and analyzing of practitioners' work in fragile or sensitive zones, so that institutional memories are not lost. This paper, in part, responds to this call. Given that university education is virtually unheard of within the context of refuge towns, this calls for additional study. I am hopeful that the graduate students residing there now will take up this call.

### **Lessons learned.**

It is always emotional work when your clients, students, or parents of your students are from marginalized populations, whether they are living in refuge, in a fragile zone, or in a secure zone, but having come from a place of turmoil. One's pedagogy, when working with such a population, must take emotions into account as supported by Anwaruddin (2017). A *professional* approach to teaching in challenging contexts, does not necessarily mean a distant, or heartless approach; on the contrary, but drawing from Critical Emotion Studies (CES) Anwaruddin, tells educators to resist oversimplification, or homogenization of one's complex lived situation. Projects such as BHER call for a

pedagogy that is wholistic and responsive. The narratives of co-authors in this paper attest to the responsiveness of a *heartful* project. I consider a potentially reparative curriculum as part of a pedagogical approach. Reparative curricula are those inherently linked to empathy and emotion, where the learner is challenged to feel as others in the world. There is *difficult knowledge*, especially in a context like Dadaab, and this must be made clear. Pitt and Britzman (2003) tell us that traces difficult knowledge emerges when curricular representations of traumas are encountered in pedagogy. What happens when such knowledge is evident and with one's lived experience, but never acknowledged, that this difficult knowledge, is resisted, or repressed? We are not 'fixing' the 'other', on the contrary, critical transnational curriculum that is attentive to the needs of migrants, refugees and marginalized populations.

### **Implications for teacher education research.**

We need to continue to study the impacts of tertiary programs for those in challenging contexts, whether that be in a refugee camp, internally displaced, or resettled. It is also evident that the need for such programs continues as the number of those displaced increases worldwide. Over 68.5 million people are presently displaced. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi (in Edwards 2018) reminds us that: "No one becomes a refugee by choice; but the rest of us can have a choice about how we help."

We also learned that although the majority of the time Canadian education partners provided instruction and

coordination at a distance, it was the face-to-face and on-going support that led to deep ties and lasting outcomes. Many of the student teachers were working as "untrained" primary teachers while studying to become secondary teachers. Their key motivator to return to study was their desire to improve the quality of their own teaching practice. In several instances, Somali teachers returned to Somalia from Dadaab in order to pursue teaching positions beyond the refugee camp context.

Academic humanitarianism was not what I had set out to do, yet, like others, I have been changed by my time with these remarkable teacher education students. My experience is echoed by Marangu Njogu (2018), the Executive Director of Windle Trust Kenya who, at the BHER 2018 annual partnership meeting said this about the program: "Working with refugee students was electrifying and created an emotional bond. Slowly, the professors started soliciting resources to support the students, and the universities desire to raise funds to keep this project going within their faculties or externally." We hope other teacher educators will join us in this effort to learn more about the challenges and best practices of supporting teachers in refugee contexts and for populations on the move, and to provide the professional development sought by teachers in those contexts.

**Lorrie Miller, PhD.** Program Coordinator-Teacher Education and Lecturer; The University of British Columbia. In her work, she is committed to social justice, teacher education for all, and pedagogies for a better world. She can be reached at [lorrie.miller@ubc.ca](mailto:lorrie.miller@ubc.ca).



**Abdi Omar Aden**, Graduate student, (M.Ed., Language, Culture and Pedagogy), York University, Canada in Dadaab. A former education instructor for girls in Dadaab, Kenya, he is currently a humanitarian aid worker for the United Nations in Somalia. In his work, he is committed to developing and practicing policies which promote sustainable education and free access to lifelong opportunities for marginalized communities. He can be reached at [abdi93@my.yorku.ca](mailto:abdi93@my.yorku.ca).

**Jama Ahmed Mohamed** holds a bachelor of community health education and is a founder of the Kudhaa School in Kudhaa Town in the state of Jubbaland of Somalia.

**Zainab Bishar Hussein** is from the Host community and the 27 year old mother of two children. She can be reached at [zainabbishar@gmail.com](mailto:zainabbishar@gmail.com).

**Abulogn Ojulu Okello**, Graduate student at York University, Canada in Dadaab, BHER. He currently works as an IFO refugee staff team leader for FilmAid International, Dadaab: <https://www.filmaid.org/kenya>. He is a committed volunteer who represents refugees' voices and their true stories in social media to change the single-story narrative. He can be reached at [oabulony@gmail.com](mailto:oabulony@gmail.com).

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## Links

- Borderless Higher Education for Refugees  
<https://www.bher.org/>
- Rebuilding Hope/Rescue Charitable Organization  
<http://rcosomalia.com/ourprojects/help-girls-to-get-education/>
- UNHCR/the UN Refugee Agency, Kenya  
<https://www.unhcr.org/ke/dadaab-refugee-complex>
- University of British Columbia/Dadaab Secondary Teacher Education: Programs and Project  
<http://dadaab.educ.ubc.ca/>
- University of British Columbia/Diploma in Secondary Education  
<http://blogs.ubc.ca/dadaab/>
- University of British Columbia/Living, Learning, and Teaching in Dadaab  
<https://ltd.educ.ubc.ca/>
- University of British Columbia/UBC News  
<https://news.ubc.ca/2013/04/04/teacher-ed-comes-to-the-worlds-largest-refugee-camp/>