

Building Futures through Refugee Education

Aspirations, Navigation, and (Non)-citizenship

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Abstract

This study explores how Somali secondary school and graduate-level youth in Kenya's Dadaab camps attempt to build their futures through education, despite challenges posed by their non-citizen status. Using ethnographic data, the study specifically analyses the educational journeys, aspirations, and experiences of these refugee youth, shedding light on the everyday practices and dynamic strategies they employ to pursue their goals and manage obstacles. The study demonstrates how secondary school youth actively pursue educational aspirations, which they believe can enable them to exit the camps and potentially overcome their non-citizen status – through routes such as the resettlement-based scholarships for post-secondary education in Canada. Anchoring in their hopes in education, these students leverage various social resources, networks, and strategies to cope with challenges facing their education and aspirations, while simultaneously reflecting on various pathways to navigate post-graduation crossroads.

Graduate-level youth, faced with limited opportunities, often adjust their aspirations to align with the available options to move forward, such as scholarships or incentive- (as opposed to wage-) paying jobs in the camps. More and more graduate youth opt to return to Somalia in seek of better employment opportunities, despite the potential security risks. The study also underscores the intergenerational solidarity and support system that emerge as academically successful refugee youth establish and manage nationally accredited schools, significantly contributing to students' performance in national exams and the quality of education overall. By examining refugee youths' enterprise of future-building through education within the context of long-term camps – characterised by perpetual precarity and uncertainty due to inhabitants' exclusion from citizenship rights, freedoms, and advantages – this study provides theoretical insights into the complex and dynamic interplay among aspirations, navigational strategies, and non-citizenship status.

Keywords: Future-building, Aspirations, Navigation, and (Non)-citizenship, Refugee Education, Camp

Aden, Hassan. “Hope against the odds: Understanding the aspirations of refugee youth in the Dadaab camps for resettlement-based overseas scholarships” (Accepted for publication in the *Journal on Education in Emergencies*)

Aden, Hassan. “Working towards educational goals and negotiating hurdles: *The navigational strategies of refugee youth*” (Under review at the *Journal of Anthropology & Education Quarterly*)

Aden, Hassan “Improving education quality and students' performances through nationally accredited refugee-led schools” (Under review at the *Journal of Eastern African Studies*)

Aden Hassan, Edle Abdirahman and Horst Cindy “From refugees to citizens? How refugee youth in the Dadaab camps of Kenya use education to challenge their status as non-citizens” (In special issue: under review at the *Journal of Refugee Studies*)