

AN ACTION-RESEARCH PROGRAM CONDUCTED BY MCGILL'S *Centre for Developing-Area Studies*
AND THE *Women's Centre of Montreal* IN COLLABORATION WITH THEIR PARTNERS

MAY 2002 - Number 4

Gender

and Human Security Issues

Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

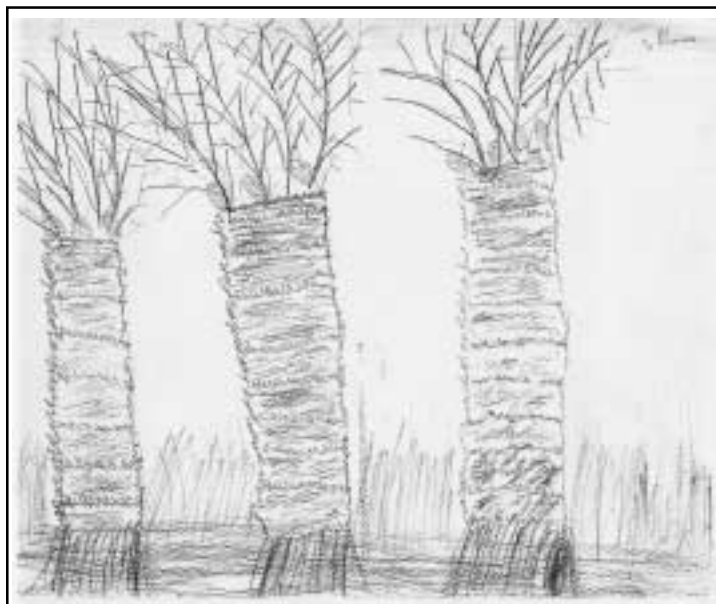
page 1	Editorial Note
page 2	Research Team
page 3	New Self-Help Group at the WCM Refugee Women and Girls: A Selective, Annotated Bibliography
page 4	Development and Security in Africa
page 5	Helping Burundian Refugee Women to Work for Peace
page 6	New Research Projects

T H E R E F U G E E S

This issue of the *Gender and Human Security Issues (GHSI)* newsletter focuses mainly on the lives of women refugees here and abroad whose reality is often left unheard.

Whether they are participating in self-help groups in Montreal or organizing projects in refugee camps in Tanzania to sensitize their communities to the necessity of non-violent conflict resolution, refugee women have diverse itineraries with common denominators.

This issue is entirely illustrated with the art of African refugee women. The collage entitled "Mandala" on page three depicts the spirit of collaboration and tolerance on which the projects mentioned above are founded.



Palms. Drawing by an African Refugee Woman (Source: Women's Centre of Montreal, Québec, Canada, 2001)

This issue also introduces two new projects in the GHSI program which will bring greater understanding of refugee women's realities while consolidating and deepening the program's field of research. One project strengthens our

collaboration with our community partner on the African continent. The second focuses on refugee women from the South Asian sub-continent and develops a new collaboration with a Montreal based community organization which works with this population on a daily basis.

With regards to reference tools, a new annotated bibliography sheds a much anticipated and pertinent light on the lives of refugee girls and women. Such a reference tool helps to offer an appropriate response to the needs of these particular groups.

Finally, by reading this issue, you will have the opportunity to know more about an action program proposed to our political decision makers aimed at bringing concerted action by Canada and the other G-8

members toward the eradication of poverty and the implementation of human security in Africa.

Johanne Bélisle, s.w., Co-director

P A R T N E R S

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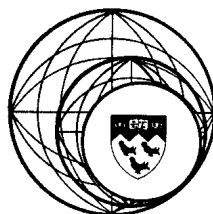
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The Centre for Developing-Area Studies (CDAS), McGill University, founded in 1963, is an interdisciplinary institution facilitating and conducting research on development issues primarily with a social science perspective related to developing areas.

www.mcgill.ca/cdas

New
Gender and Human Security Issues
(GHSI) Program Projects

(for more information, see page 6)



The mission of the Women's Centre of Montreal (WCM) is to provide services to help women help themselves. To accomplish its mission, the Centre offers educational and vocational training, information, counselling and referral services. This non-profit organization communicates women's concerns to the public and acts as a catalyst for change regarding women's issues.

www.centredesfemmesdemtl.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE GENDER AND HUMAN SECURITY ISSUES PROGRAM:

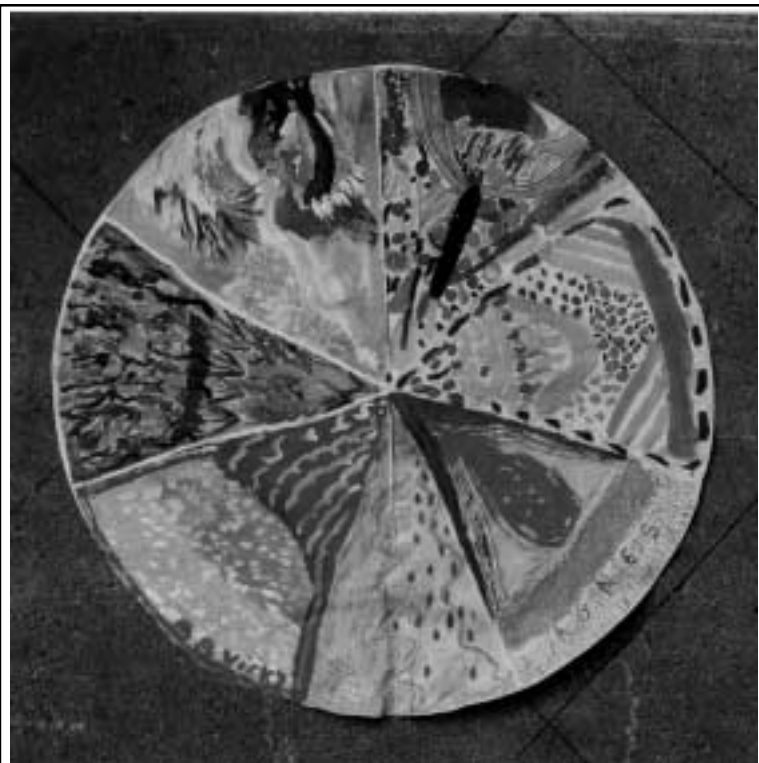
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The Gender and Human Security Issues Newsletter is produced twice a year.

New Self-help Group at the Women's Centre of Montreal

As part of the project *Women and Orchestrated Violence: a Model of Intervention*, the Women's Centre of Montréal is starting a new support group for African women from English-speaking countries. During three months, this support group will bring together women from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, and Somalia, who are applying or who have been accepted as refugees in Canada. In response to recommendations from participants in the two former groups, the group facilitators intend to offer these women psychological support as well as practical information that could be helpful in their adaptation to a new society.

Furthermore, students of the *Université de Montréal* have shown interest in the work conducted at the Women's Centre of Montréal. Maria Camila Chica, co-facilitator of these support groups, made a presentation to them in a Social Work seminar at the Masters level on November 28, 2001. On this occasion, Maria Camila Chica presented the group intervention model developed at the Women's Centre of Montréal for refugee women who have survived trauma associated with orchestrated violence in their countries of origin. ♦



Mandala. Collective realization by African refugee women participating in self-help group sessions at the Women's Centre of Montreal (Québec, Canada) in 2001.

CDAS DISCUSSION PAPER GHSI Program Series

Refugee Women and Girls: A Selective, Annotated Bibliography, Claudia Mitchell (professor), Stephanie Garrow and Jackie Kirk, (Ph.D candidates), Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University.

This annotated bibliography, recently completed as part of the Gender and Human Security Issues (GHSI) Program, sets out to map a selection of topics and issues relevant to working with refugee girls and women, particularly those who have been re-located from conflict zones.

It has been developed with several audiences in mind, such as those who are working on the front-lines: in shelters, women's centres and community organizations, in classrooms and schools, and in activist organizations. In addition, however, the themes and issues are organized in such a way to make the bibliography useful to those working in academic and donor/development settings who need to keep abreast not only of the particular topics and projects, but also of ways of thinking about and organizing their work.

The bibliography is divided into 5 sections:

- 1) **Creating a Context:** this section includes a variety of works which help to create understanding of globalization, militarization, international conflict and transnational migration, and awareness of how these forces may shape experiences for women and children.
- 2) **Relevant Readings and Research Studies on Refugee Women and Children:** this section includes references to a number of research studies and reports which investigate and theorize various aspects of refugee experience, with particular relation to issues for women and children. Particularly dominant in this section is the research carried out by mental health professionals and practitioners working in hospitals, clinics, and other settings, with refugee women and children experiencing post-migration traumas.
- 3) **Working with Refugee Girls:** this sections includes a selection of resources which may be of particular interest to those planning and implementing different interventions with refugee girls in schools, centres, clubs or other settings.

(continued on page 4)

Development and Security in Africa: for a Real Partnership

Myriam Gervais, Research Associate at CDAS

Address given on 31 January 2002, to the House of Common's Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, Canada. (Excerpts)

For a firm and long term engagement:

For many G-8 members, the 1990s were marked by aid exhaustion when it came to African countries. Compared to their total aid contribution, the amount of aid granted to Africa by industrialized countries steadily declined from 1991 to 1999. Now, despite a manifest disinterest in the African continent, donor countries cannot ignore the human consequences of inter-state conflicts in this geographic area.

Under pressure from public opinion, donor countries allotted sizeable resources for emergency aid to respond to the immediate needs of refugees and other affected populations.

(continued from page 3)

4) Alternative Texts for Working with Refugee Girls: this sections includes suggestions of a range of novels, stories, autobiographies and films, which may provide alternative starting points for working with refugee women and girls.

5) Web-sites and Internet Resources: this section includes listings of some of the websites of organizations which may be of interest to refugee girls and women, and/or those working with them.

As the authors note, relationships, and the violence that may exist within and/or around them, emerge from the literature studied as significant and overarching themes that are relevant for women and girls in life 'over-there' and in life 'over-here' and constitute

Paradoxically, this humanitarian aid proved to be very costly and it exerted a lot of pressure on the budgets reserved for development programs. In the sole case of Rwanda, between 1994 and 1998, Canada gave close to 75 million dollars in humanitarian aid.

Therefore it is in Canada's interest, along with the other members of the G-8 countries, to reduce the primary sources of political and economic crisis that threaten the security of African populations. It is also in these countries' interest to apply concrete reforms and actions in such a way that they significantly reduce poverty and assure human security in Africa.

connections between the two.

Understanding girlhood as a particular site of agency/passivity, compliance/resistance and a transitory period between childhood and womanhood, the bibliography crosses an apparent boundary that separates issues for refugee children from issues for refugee and immigrant women, and separates ways of working with children, and ways of working with women. It therefore provides much food for thought, for practitioners as well as academics, and paves the way for a number of new initiatives.

As a working document, intended to stimulate the reader, it is inevitably partial, and the authors would welcome suggestions for further relevant entries. ♦



The Sheep. Drawing by an African Refugee Woman (Source:WCM, Québec, Canada, 2001).

Elements for a program of action:

A firm commitment on the part of the political decision-makers of G-8 countries should manifest itself by:

- Seeking consensus through consultation of parliaments and societies in order to favour important and sustained efforts with regard to African countries;
- Adopting mechanisms to accelerate the payment of aid;
- Promoting coherent, concrete policies to reduce poverty (...);
- Supporting the current decentralization process occurring in many African countries (local elections, imputability of the elected officials, responsibility in the administration of public funds);
- Supporting the reinforcement of popular democratic organizations (elected decision-making bodies, member services, empowerment of women); (...)
- Recognizing the existence (and competence) of non-state actors as channels for distributing financial resources;

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-Supporting those income-generating activities which are initiated by popular organizations and communities.

Conclusion:

Achieving sustainable development in Africa necessitates the reduction of socio-economic iniquities and a secure environment for all individuals. To reach these objectives, the implementation of a real partnership with African countries, including not only institutions but also the citizens, appears as an essential prerequisite.

Past experiences have shown that the financing of infrastructures and the strengthening of public administration are not enough; an in depth dialogue must take place between all actors, including the population from rural areas, so that help will be mainly directed toward the satisfaction of the majority of the population's needs. ♦

Helping Burundian Refugee Women to Work for Peace

By Karen Barnes * M.A. candidate, Political Science

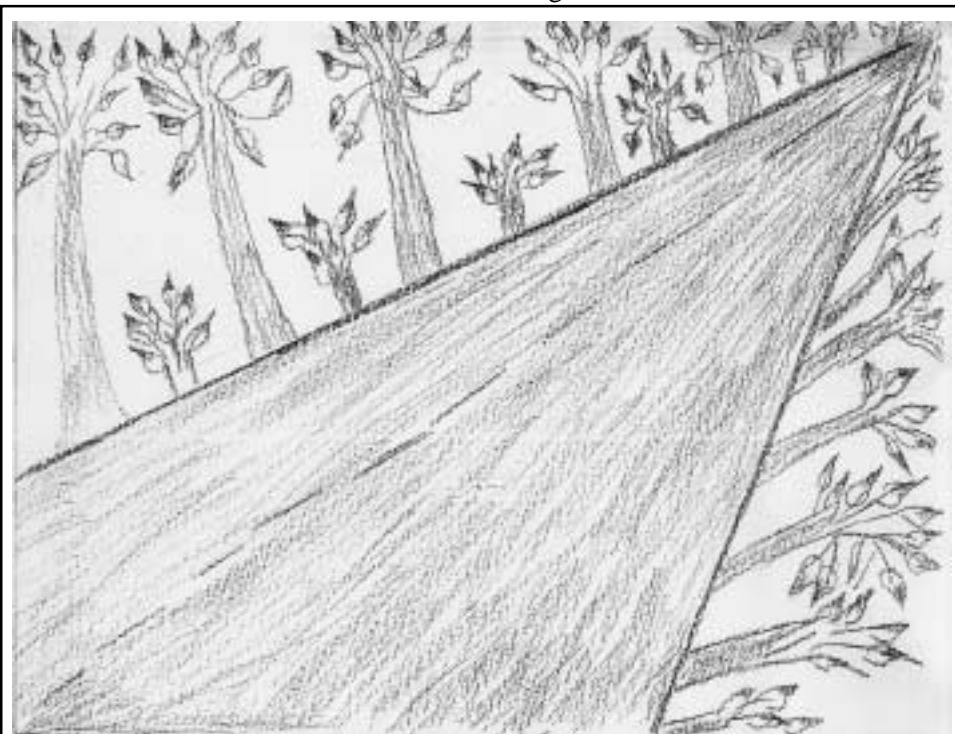
While working in the Refugee Women and Gender Equality Unit at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) headquarters in Geneva, I was sent on a field mission to assess the peace initiatives of Burundian refugee women. I discovered that before the nascent women's peace movements in the camps in Western Tanzania can take root and gain broad support, the basic daily protection and assistance needs of refugee women must be addressed.

Refugees from Burundi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have been fleeing to Western Tanzania to escape conflict in their countries for decades. The caseload of refugees in Tanzania now numbers over 500,000. While on mission, I was based at the UNHCR sub-office in Kasulu Town near the border with Burundi. This sub-office works with four camps: Muyovosi and Mtabila for Burundian refugees, and Nyarugusu and Lugufu for Congolese refugees.

Each of these camps houses between 30,000 and 50,000 displaced people. Over a period of three weeks, I met with and interviewed UNHCR staff, NGO staff, men and women refugee leaders, youth groups, women's groups, food distribution committees, school teachers and guardians, and other refugees living in Muyovosi and Mtabila camps.

I was seeking to answer the following: Which cultural and socioeconomic factors play a role in determining the ability and likelihood of refugee women to participate in peace initiatives? What level of logistical, creative, personnel and financial support is offered by UNHCR to support these initiatives? How do refugee women perceive their participation in peace initiatives and their empowerment in a broader context? What are the main constraints to the effectiveness of these initiatives?

In general, frameworks for conflict resolution and peacebuilding have not taken the potential contribution of women into account. Women are systematically excluded from political and community structures solely on the basis of their gender. Burundian refugee women, with the support of UNHCR, are beginning to mobilize for peace within their communities, and the purpose of my mission was to determine the impact and success of these initiatives.



The Road. Drawing by an African Refugee Woman (Source: WCM, Québec, Canada, 2001).

(continued on page 6)

NEW RESEARCH PROJECTS

Women Refugees from South Asia: Uncovering the Exploitation Trail / Dr. Shree Mulay

Each year, several hundred women come as asylum seekers to Canada from the South Asian sub-continent. Often “lured” to Canada by agents or so-called consultants, they are abandoned by the agents and they are left to fend for themselves with no resources. Many of the women are not necessarily political refugees, or facing gender discrimination in their home country. Rather they have to be regarded as economic refugees and part of the large number of women who are trafficked each year from the South Asian sub-continent. There is a need to understand the magnitude of the problem and reasons why women are prepared to take great personal risks when they seek asylum status in Canada; the South Asian Women’s Community Centre (SAWCC) sees only a fraction of such refugee claimants. There is a need to understand the situation of these women and to provide assistance to them. In collaboration with the SAWCC, the research project will uncover the process and undertake to provide information that will help community workers assist asylum seekers.

Training Workshop on Documentation of Peace Building Initiatives / Ms. Maude Mugisha, The Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI)

The Training Workshop on Documentation of Peace Building Initiatives will bring to Kampala, Uganda, participants from the following six countries: Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan. These countries have experienced conflict and peace building programs are underway. The overall goal of the Training Workshop is to develop the participants’ capacity to establish a documentation system that will enable them to capture their own experiences, as well as the lessons from their work in peace building initiatives and projects. *The Training Workshop on Documentation of Peace Building Initiatives* will consist of a series of activities aiming to: 1) enable participants to share their work experience in their respective country and to learn from one another; 2) impart skills relating to documentation; and 3) develop guidelines for documentation. EASSI will coordinate this event that will be held in June 2002.

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Mtabila and Muyovosi camps have begun a peace group called ‘Urama’ that was created in February 2001 by fourteen women elected from the two camps. The premise of Urama is that peace begins in the home, and if women can cultivate peace within their families, it will eventually spread to neighbours throughout streets and blocks, and eventually to the whole community. Through training, seminars, awareness-raising, and teaching by example, the URAMA members are working to promote a spirit of mutual tolerance amongst the two camp populations.

They have already succeeded in diffusing a number of domestic and community conflicts, and are enhancing the empowerment of Burundian women

refugees by helping other women to realize their capabilities and possibilities. However, the lack of training, material and financial resources, and the vast array of problems facing refugee women over which they have no control (i.e. sexual and gender based violence), are limiting the ability of URAMA to have a marked and durable impact on the population.

The case of Urama demonstrates that it is important to consider not only the need for women’s peace initiatives to be launched and supported, but also how other issues and activities can play a key role in determining the ability of women to participate in peace building within their families, communities and society in an effective, sustainable way. Many women were unable to participate in, or

take advantage of the benefits of these activities, due to cultural attitudes and lack of awareness, the lack of education and training, violence and security issues, and their traditional responsibilities.

Also, adequate resources must be devoted to the promotion of peace initiatives led by women. If the issue of women’s participation in peace building and other activities is addressed with a cross-sectoral approach, then the results are likely to be much more positive, because human security, sustainable livelihoods, women’s participation, and a peaceful society are all factors that reinforce each other. ♦

* K. Barnes worked for the GHSI Program as a research assistant in 2001.