

Interview with

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UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council

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IICBA: Could you please tell us a bit about yourself?

Luanda Musafiri Emmanuella are my names. I am a female refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo. I founded TUMAINI for Refugee Women, a refugee women-led and community-based organization in the Nakivale Refugee settlement in Uganda. I am also one of the three refugee youth representatives in Uganda under UNHCR's Global Youth Advisory Council. My aim is to empower women, young girls, and youth to achieve their full potential and encourage their active involvement to become valuable members of their communities. In all of what I do, I try to integrate the fight against sexual gender-based violence, as well as economic empowerment and self-reliance, gender and social inclusion, and rights and justice.

My vision is to see a world in which refugee women, children, and youth are safe, healthy, self-reliant, and have their human rights respected and protected. For almost 6 years, I have been working alongside women and girls, equipping them with knowledge and skills for them to thrive socially and economically in the Nakivale refugee settlement. I truly believe that women and girls have the power to lift and make a change in their families and entire communities.

IICBA: Could you describe living conditions in the Nakivale refugee settlement?

Nakivale has a very large refugee population and is still receiving newly arrived refugees. The monthly food rations and cash that refugees used to receive from the World Food Programme

Background: This series of interviews was prepared for Africa Youth Day celebrated on November 1 each year. Youth are defined by the African Union as the population from 15 to 35 years of age. The African Union Commission through the Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate (WGYP) is commemorating African Youth Day 2023 through month-long activities under the theme "1 Million Next Level is Knocking: Youth-led Movement that Transcends Borders." The theme is a call to all youth development stakeholders, member states, and partners to mobilize, implement and support the 1 Million Next Level Initiative through creating and accelerating opportunities for youth in the 4Es + H (Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Engagement + Health and wellbeing). The youth featured in this series of interviews are exemplary in their work in service to others in the areas covered by 4Es+H.



was their means of survival. But prioritization has led some refugees not to receive rations anymore, so it is becoming harder for them to feed their families. Women and girls are significantly vulnerable and consequently adopting negative coping mechanisms, such as survival sex. They are also subject to abuses such as early and forced marriage, and sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation. Some Boys are now much more involved in drug abuse due to lack of education and job opportunities. Unemployment and poverty, particularly linked with the growing frustration men are experiencing, cases of gender-based violence, and sexual exploitation have increased, especially as men find themselves being unable to provide for their families.

IICBA: What are some of the initiatives you took to improve life in in the settlement?

I founded TUMAINI for Refugee Women to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse in Nakivale by helping to ensure access to critical services for refugee women and young girls, such as life skills trainings and work opportunities to build a better community. I realized that the risk of sexual exploitation was very high for women and girls because they were dependent on aid and could not provide for themselves and their families. Therefore, I started a tailoring and handcraft program to empower them with skills so that they become self-reliant and make their





them and build a comfortable and safe learning space lab with eleven desktop computers, three laptops, and a forty-inch flat screens where the youths learn computer literacy and other skills.

IICBA: Why did you take those initiatives, what motivated you?

I started those initiatives because I realized the hardship and pain that women, girls, and youth were going through in Nakivale. I believed that women are also powerful agents for social and economic change and a source of hope for reducing risks and vulnerability and for promoting resilience in their families and communities. Youth are the future generation and leaders, so I decided to take an initiative to empower these women, girls, and youth to unleash their potentials.

IICBA: What were some of the obstacles you encountered and how did you overcome them?

One of the obstacles I encountered was to convince other women to join me in my initiative since it was not easy as a refugee to assist fellow refugees. I decided to sit with refugee women and young girls from different communities in the settlement to ask them what changes they needed in their communities and what their contributions to these changes could be. Then, I managed to take some of them into joining me on my journey to improve the lives of refugee.

IICBA: What could authorities and various organizations do to improve opportunities for youth in the settlement?

Authorities and organizations should increase their efforts in fight unemployment. The unemployment rate for refugee youth is even greater than for other groups. They are uninformed about the job market and the local economy. We need to support youth led initiatives and give them opportunities, and we need to involve them in decision-making that affects them.

own decisions about their finances, their lives, and their future. I also created for them a saving and loans groups to provide access to cash assistance opportunities and to help them safely earn a living. This, in turn, increased their self-reliance and resilience. Since 2018, I have been advocating for refugee youth and women who face legal and human rights violations in my community. I try to hold community members, organizations, and the government accountable to their obligations to promote youth and respect women and girls' rights, so they can find safety, access justice, and rebuild their lives.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, I realized that girls were being exposed to new risks – including early and forced marriages, violence, and early pregnancies and sexual exploitation. They also had limited or no access to education because schools were closed. I came up with a youth counselling program on mental health where I would engage with youth individually with full respect to standard operating procedures for mental health and their safety in mind. In 2021, after I noted that most of the youth in my community were lacking skills and credentials, I managed to get a free eLearning space for





IICBA: Looking back, is there something you would do differently?

Yes, I would stop thinking that I cannot, that I am unable to achieve and change lives of my fellow refugees, as I used to think back in 2016.

IICBA: Finally, could you please share a personal anecdote about yourself?

In 2012 I fled my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, together with my family to go to Uganda. My goal in life is to see women and girls thriving economically and socially. In 2016, I started volunteering with different organizations in Nakivale as an interpreter and community worker. In due course, I noticed that women and girls in my community were facing an under-addressed problem. They were also adopting negative coping mechanisms, as I mentioned earlier. This is why I founded TUMAINI for Refugee Women. What I hope is that my story can inspire many other youths to take their destiny in their own hands and help others.

IICBA: You were recommended for this interview by Rotarians. Did you benefit from support from Rotary for your initiatives? How useful was this support? What else do you need?

Yes I did. I received some capacity building training from Rotary which has increased effectiveness of my organization. I am still in need of technical support and materials and equipment like sewing machines for our tailoring class and laptops for our computer lab to increase on our impact in the settlement.

IICBA: What advice do you have for other youth in the settlement, and more generally in Africa?

African youth should take their responsibilities, identify problems in their own communities, and design solutions for them. Our communities should no longer see us as troublemakers, but rather as change makers and valuable members of our communities.



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