

Context, Challenges, Constraints and Strategies of Non-Profit Organisations in Responding to the Needs of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Cape Town, South Africa

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Abstract—While South Africa has been the chosen host country for over 1.2 million asylum seekers/refugees it has at the same time, been struggling to address the needs of its own people who are still trapped in poverty with little prospects of employment. This limited exploratory, qualitative study was undertaken in Cape Town with a purposive sample of 21 key personnel from various NPOs providing a service to asylum seekers/refugees. Individual in-depth face to face interviews were carried out and the main findings were: Some of the officials at the Department of Home Affairs, health personnel, landlords, school principals, employers, bank officials and police officers were prejudicial in their practices towards asylum seekers/refugees. The major constraints experienced by NPOs in this study were linked to a lack of funding and minimal government support, strained relationship with the Department of Home Affairs and difficulties in accessing refugees. And finally, the strategies adopted by these NPOs included networking with other service providers, engaging in advocacy, raising community awareness and liaising with government. Thus, more focused intervention strategies are needed to build social cohesion, address prejudices which fuels xenophobic attacks and raise awareness/educate various sectors about refugee rights. Given this burgeoning global problem, social work education and training should include curriculum content on migrant issues. Furthermore, larger studies using mixed methodology approaches would yield more nuanced data and provide for more strategic interventions.

Keywords—Refugees and asylum seekers, non-profit organisations, refugee challenges, constraints of service delivery.

I. THE PROBLEM CONTEXT

THE situation of the host country and its history needs to be understood when trying to address the challenges asylum seekers/refugees face. At the end of 2015, 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced [1]. This same report indicated that developing regions hosted 86% [13.9 million] of the world's refugees under UNHCR's mandate. Those who relocated to developing countries faced major obstacles to their livelihoods and security for various reasons [1]-[3].

The number of people fleeing their homes due to conflicts and natural disasters on the African continent has now reached more than 13 million [3], [4]. South Africa has an estimated total population of refugees and asylum seekers of 1,217,708 [3] making it a large recipient of displaced people [6], [7].

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Most of these refugees and asylum seekers are from Zimbabwe as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Burundi, Ethiopia and Rwanda [5]. Chapter 5, Section 27(b), of [8] guarantees that a refugee should have:

“legal protection, which includes the rights set out in Chapter 2 of the Constitution and the right to remain in the Republic in accordance with the provision of this Act.”

'Asylum' means that all individuals whose lives and freedoms are at risk in their home country should be entitled to leave and seek protection in another state [2]. South Africa's [8], defines an asylum seeker as *“a person who is seeking recognition as a refugee in the Republic”*.

This study will be conducted in the Western Cape, which is one of nine provinces in South Africa. The Western Cape, despite being an economically thriving tourist hub, has also got a high crime rate and a history of xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals.

A. Apartheid and Post-Apartheid Migration Policies

Whilst racial segregation dates back to the Union of South in 1910 [9], institutionalised, legislated racism is attributed to the National Party which came into power in 1948. The Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, classified people into four racial groups [White, Black, Coloured and Indian] with the aim of controlling and preventing the non-white majority from having equal political and socio-economic rights [9]. Thus, Black South Africans under the Immigration Act of 1913, did not have freedom of movement within their own country and were not defined as citizens [10]. Legislated immigration measures favoured white migrants and black labour migrants from bordering countries [5]. The 'Apartheid Government's last 'Act', i.e. The Aliens Control Act No. 96 of 1991, was deemed unconstitutional and ineffective for migration management [11], [12], and furthermore fueled prejudices towards foreigners [10].

In 1991, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees established an office in the country, mainly to assist with the return of South Africans exiles [13], [14]. Refugees and asylum seekers only gained particular attention from civil society during the country's transition to democracy in 1994 when a large influx of migrants settled in South Africa [12], [15].

In 1997, the African National Congress drafted the

Immigration Act No. 13 of 2002, which was further amended in 2004 [11], [12]. Non-profit organisations [NPOs] actively lobbied during the amendment process to ensure that the Act complied with principles of human rights, particularly addressing xenophobia [10].

Given the present levels of inequality, unemployment and poverty the South African government is under pressure to address the unmet needs its own peoples rather than focus on the concerns of an increasing influx of foreign nationals [16].

B. Legislative Framework for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in South Africa

South Africa's Constitution with its Bill of Rights is widely recognised as one of the most progressive constitutions in the world [30].

Reference [8] regulates the entry of asylum seekers and refugees into South Africa. Section 34 specifies the obligations of refugees to comply with the laws of the Republic. Section 22 stipulates the circumstances under which an individual qualifies for an asylum seeker permit and Section 24 explains the process of determination of refugee status and provision of legal documentation once status is granted [14]. Despite these clear guidelines, the administration and processing of refugee determination procedures are grossly inefficient as is the finalisation of status [11], [12]. Given the increasing numbers of people entering the country it is noted that the government's focus [similar to most other refugee host countries] was more on measures of *containment and deportation* rather than *protection and rights* [14].

Officially implemented in 2003, the Immigration Act, No. 13 of 2002 was amended by section 47 (a) of Act No. 19 of 2004. This Act regulates admission of individuals entering the Republic, determines the kinds of permits available and substituted 'alien' with 'foreigner' as a strategy to reduce prejudice [10]. Despite these laws which protects refugees and asylum seekers rights, the reality 'on the ground' is very different.

II. METHODOLOGY

This is a limited pilot study that focused on NPOs that render services to asylum seekers and refugees in the Western Cape, South Africa. An exploratory, qualitative study was carried out on a purposive sample of twenty – one respondents. In depth interviews were conducted with key personnel at various NPOs in the Western Cape. A variation of thematic analysis was used to analyse the findings and the data were compared and contrasted with other studies carried out in the refugee sector. Conceptually the study was grounded in a *human rights framework* taking into account Amartya Sen's [17] capabilities approach.

III. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The following sections discusses the main findings as conveyed by key NPO personnel who have been working in the refugee/asylum seeker sector for many years. Based on respondents' estimations, about 6,000 refugees are

beneficiaries of the services provided by NPOs in the Western Cape, South Africa.

A. Perceptions about South Africa's Socio-Economic and Political Context

The findings indicated that the reasons for choosing South Africa was largely due to its perceived socio-economic and political situation. At the same time the lack of progress made in addressing the needs of South Africa's poor meant that there was a competition for scarce resources. Thus the problems of refugees and asylum seekers could also easily be manipulated for political reasons.

- *Motives for Settling in South Africa*

Respondents offered various compelling reasons for South Africa being a destination of choice [5], [6].

"There are so many reasons; political, social even sexual orientation...[I]n some countries based on your sexual orientation your life is in danger" [R5: Org C].

"Again remember these people from those countries they used to help South Africans before apartheid so when your house was burning I came with water to stop the fire in your house now your house is fine, today is my turn, my house is burning obviously I will run to you for shelter and help... I knew about the history of South Africa" [R4: Org C].

"It is one of the strongest economies in Southern Africa" [R16: Org I].

"... Now the fact that South Africa does not have camps..." [R6: Org E].

- *Competition for Scarce Resources*

Respondents felt that contending with socio-economic and political challenges as well as an influx of refugees placed the country under extra strain with locals resisting the integration of refugees and asylum seekers into their communities:

"We have been facing our own problems as South Africans and as people always say, South Africa is not an open society, we were deprived of a number of opportunities at the time and now when we had the green light to be able to have our own futures and our childrens, the borders were opened. The socio-economic problems that we have now, they started way back and they have not been resolved, thus you find it very difficult to integrate the refugees into the communities. Why? Because that gap has not been breached" [Respondent [R] 8: Organisation [Org] D].

The South African government is unable to address the service demands of its own people let alone fulfilling its legal obligations towards its refugee population [9], [15], [18]. Furthermore, processes for resettlement and protection were not adequately put in place to deal with the growing numbers [9], [18]. According to [16], some 'locals' believe that their livelihoods are threatened by the presence of these foreign nationals whilst others believe that they could be more of a 'benefit' than a 'burden' [19]. The following response captured the sentiments of all the other respondents:

“We are to our fault the most unequal country in the world, with the highest unemployment ratio particularly affecting young people and so the expectations for delivery is extremely high... and so the competition for already scarce resources increase” [R19: Org L].

- *Political Manipulation*

Some respondents suggested that leading political figures have given mixed messages about refugees:

“I think the situation would be very different if South Africa’s leadership was clear in explaining to South Africans on a multitude of platforms that refugees are not taking South Africans’ jobs. That is so easily spread and perpetuated. We have been sending out mixed messages basically, in some ways we have let people in officially and yet in some ways we have said ‘you are not welcome’ and that is problematic” [R18: Org K].

Reference [2] ascertains that government officials have at times manipulated the refugee issue for their own political ends and may have contributed to violent outbursts.

“Almost every single week people are attacked, sometimes even killed, they have a business that they open early and close late, sometimes because they cannot access bank accounts they keep money in their premises when they go to buy stock it is very obvious that they are doing it so it is very easy to track them and attack them.” [R7: Org D].

B. Major Challenges Faced by Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Respondents cited Government’s lack of monitoring the implementation of policies; difficulties in accessing documentation, sluggish administration practices together with perceived corruption at the Department of Home Affairs, the closure of the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office and new procedures for permit renewals, deportation threats, psychological trauma, poor access to basic social services, employment and housing constraints as well the attitudes of the South African Police Services as being some of the major challenges faced. Most of these challenges have been confirmed by other studies that captured the viewpoints of refugees. Importantly, [20] pointed out that refugees and asylum seekers do not only face the same challenges as disadvantaged locals but also find themselves competing for scarce resources.

- *Lack of Monitoring and Implementation Capacity*

All respondents felt that although progressive policies were in place government has done very little to build capacity for monitoring and implementation. References [14], [15] view migration as a political issue that needs to be comprehensively dealt with.

“Lots of legislation are in place but it is all on paper, implementation is another story because the issue also is to combat corruption” [R16: Org I].

Government does not appear to take social cohesion seriously and refugees need to be consulted about integration:

“There needs to be a comprehensive strategy on integrating the refugees in the country, where all departments understand their roles because what we are seeing right now is that Home Affairs has been the lead department” [R2: Org B].

Respondents suggested that local government representatives are out of touch with what is really happening [22].

Whilst respondents indicated that refugees are mostly being seen as ‘job takers’ they believed that refugees benefitted the economy through job creation [12], [21].

“Largely refugees are seen as people who just come and take resources, wealth but they can contribute also to the development of the country” [R15: Org H].

- *Maladministration and Perceived Corruption at the Department of Home Affairs [DHA]*

Accessing Home Affairs and approving a status appears to be a major challenge for these applicants:

“The main obstacle is accessing Home Affairs, there are only three refugee reception offices in the country that accept new applications and getting into those offices is a struggle..., it’s either corrupt or the officials just refuse to help, they just don’t provide the service. I think that it’s a strategy even to deter people” [R1: Org A].

“We have people who have been Section 22 holders for even ten years and above which basically means that the department is looking at your application but is not approving it” [R7: Org D].

The difficulties that refugees and asylum seekers’ face in obtaining legal status is a violation of their basic human rights [11], [22]. Without a legal status they cannot access benefits [12], despite provisions made in [8].

Chapter 5, Section 27 of [8], clearly states that a refugee:

- Is entitled to having a formal written recognition of his/her refugee status in the accepted prescribed form;
- May make an application for an immigration permit according to the Aliens Control Act, 1991, if he/she resided for a continuous period of five years from the date on which he or she was granted asylum and if the Standing Committee certifies that he or she will remain a refugee indefinitely;
- Should be able to access an identity document referred to in section 30;
- Should be able to access a South African travel document upon application as indicated in section 31;

It is widely accepted that the process for obtaining refugee status needs to be accelerated [18], [23] and that the present number of refugee reception offices is inadequate.

- *Malpractices among Employers and Bank Officials*

Respondents also raised concerns about potential employers, bank officials and even government officials’ ignorance or lack of acknowledgment about the rights attached to refugees and asylum seekers’ documentation:

“It is when I go and speak to some businesses that they say ‘oh but we didn’t know’. Even though the document clearly states that they have got the right to work and study. That right is abused or not given because of people’s ignorance” [R7: Org D].

“One major issue is the failure to recognise asylum seekers and refugee documentation...service industry... whether it’s banking or whether it’s even various departments of the government” [R11: Org F].

Reference [12] indicates that delays in accessing documentation may lead to further exclusion and in some instances actually promote exploitation. One respondent indicated:

“Young men would come here and try to find work with people who have been here for longer as a shop assistant, but then the owner of the business would refuse to pay them. You know, so you work, but the owner would say ‘I am not going to pay you because I am giving you food and a place to sleep’. That exploitation exists” [R7: Org D].

Respondents agree that community education is needed to inform South Africans about refugee rights and that exploitation by employers should be actively challenged through lobbying and advocacy [16].

- *Refugee Reception Office Accessibility and the Threat of Deportation*

Supported by other NPOs in the sector, the Scalabrini Centre lobbied for the re-opening of the Refugee Reception Office in Cape Town (instead of relocating a facility closer to the border in Limpopo). According to the country’s Home Affairs, refugees and asylum seekers have to travel to ports of entry where they first claimed asylum in order to renew their documents [24].

“We have a woman who has four kids, she was shot, she is disabled, she cannot get a grant because she does not have refugee status and we cannot assist her with that because Home Affairs rejected her, she cannot even get the support grant for her kids. Her permit expired and she has been told to go to Pretoria to renew it. Now, where is she going to get money to go there?” [R13: Org I].

Government’s strategy to restrict the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers [5], [22] at the borders are being resisted by refugee organisations. One of the reasons for Government’s clampdown is linked to the increasing number of ‘illegals’ in the country.

“Many foreigners who are coming to South Africa do not come as refugees but they use the pretext of being a refugee or asylum seeker to get proper documentation which allows them to work and study in the country” [R9: Org G].

Respondents are however concerned for those genuine asylum seekers whose applications are not being approved for various reasons.

“The law says that within six months they should determine the results of applications but we have found

out that some people have remained asylum seekers for more than ten years... five, six years until today then you see applications being rejected. Then this appeal process, some people have been on appeal for five years still waiting for the result and sometimes there is a misplacement of documents” [R13: Org G].

The DHA seem unable to process the applications within the expected timeframes [11]. Further DHA resources need to be deployed to increase administrative efficiency.

Respondents explained that refugees and asylum seekers often face the high risk of deportation while travelling to renew their documents:

“They run the risk of getting deported and then those that fled persecution cannot be taken back to a country where they face persecution or death but does the country care? The country does not care” [R6: Org E].

Respondents highlighted the unfair nature of the deportation process, which was largely attributed to the DHA’s delayed processing practices [25].

- *Need for Psychosocial Support*

Some asylum seekers have experienced trauma several times not only in their home country but also in the process of travelling to a host country. Many would return to their homes if they could [26].

“...Refugees and asylum seekers come from very degrading situations, some of them flee wars, persecution, violation of rights by the government and their fellow citizens, so they do need counselling because we know that when some of them try to access the Republic, whether or not they do that legally is another question, their rights are further violated in the process; we heard stories of rape at the borders from some of them” [R10: Org E].

A respondent explained how they designed a programme to address this need for mental health support:

“What we found and that is what guided the design of a programme we run, is that there was a real lack of psychosocial mental health type of support” [R18: Org K].

NPOs servicing refugees in need of trauma counselling have referred them to the various trauma services which are already established. However, accessing such services may be problematic for several reasons including language difficulties and discrimination.

- *Lack of Access to Basic Social Services/Prejudices*

Ignorance about refugees and asylum seekers’ rights and the prevalence of xenophobia are major factors hindering access to basic social needs [12], [27]. Refugees struggle with accessing healthcare and finding schools for their children:

“A lot of Somalis that I interviewed have had very bad experiences especially women when they go to deliver their babies because apparently staff members tell them ‘you are coming to South Africa to give birth, you give birth every year, you have too many children’. The medical staff usually sees it as ‘you are coming here to

fill our country and take advantage of us and the facilities'. There is a lot of stigma, abuse, lots of abuse" [R7: Org D]

"When you go to look for a place, let's say a primary school, they would tell you 'the school is full' but if a South African walks in just after you they get the place" [R15: Org H]

Thus, despite having a legal status refugees are still being excluded [12] and this in part, is largely due to prejudices against foreign nationals.

- *Accommodation and Discrimination*

Respondents indicated that refugees often find themselves in overcrowded situations due to their lack of documentation and security issues.

"There is a huge challenge with accommodation especially for many refugees who do not have documents, they cannot get a lease agreement form from the landlord so they have to squat with someone else" [R13: Org I].

Though refugee organisations are aware of the detrimental effects of such housing conditions they do not have the resources to intervene effectively.

"No one is really dedicated to look into the issue of housing for refugees because it is very expensive and I don't think that any NPO would manage [R7: Org D].

- *South African Police [Dis]Service?*

Respondents reported that violence and/or lack of protection of refugees and asylum seekers' rights have dissuaded many from seeking legal protection and justice.

"People with concerns are unable to open cases... they are afraid to open a case because perpetrators... [threaten] 'if you are going to open a case against me I am going to kill you or any of your family member' or they know that they will be undermined by the police" [R8: Org D].

Respondents accused the police of ignoring xenophobic violence and of illegal detention.

"During the recent xenophobic attacks in Soweto, the police was just walking by, passing a shop that was being looted. There is a picture of that, which went viral. South Africans were looting an Ethiopian shop, three policemen passed by and they did not even pay attention to it they kept on walking" [R15: Org H].

"We have quite a lot of cases of people being arrested without documentation and you know there is a 48 hour period that you can hold someone before they must be charged within that 48 hours or released and that just gets disregarded where all the time people are just kept in cells..." [R18: Org K].

- *The Language Barrier*

The language barrier is another factor which contributes to various kinds of abuse. Refugee victims of domestic violence struggle to report these incidences due to language difficulties.

"We have a lot of cases like that where the female experiences sexual gender based violence from her partner; it is very difficult because there is a language

barrier, they want to report it but they struggle with English, which is why they are soft targets for the males" [R17: Org B].

A common claim is that the safety and protection of refugees and asylum seekers are not taken seriously by the law enforcement agencies [18]. This may be also due to perceived criminality within the refugee population.

"There seems to be this perceived link between criminality and migrants which is not really based on any evidence" [R1: Org A].

Interestingly, [27] suggests that refugees and asylum seekers are more often victims rather than perpetrators of crime. Some NPOs in the sector have been trying to assist refugees and asylum seekers in building relationships with local police stations in their area and have provided policemen with education about refugee rights.

C. Refugees and Asylum Seekers Coping Mechanisms

Despite the many challenges that refugees and asylum seekers face they have shown much resilience and have used kinship connections; social networks and other 'survival strategies' such as learning the language of the locals to help with their integration.

- *Resilience*

A number of respondents used the terms 'resourceful' and 'resilient' to describe refugees and asylum seekers' ability to cope:

"People are remarkably resilient and resourceful and that is very humbling to see, because it is easy to forget but it is not easy to leave your home country regardless of why you are leaving. No one really wants to leave the place where their loved ones and families are and then people do survive, sort of against all odds and so many refugees and migrants have got horrendous stories of how they managed to survive". [R18: Org K].

- *Kinship Relationships & Networking*

Strong kinship relationships and solidarity exists among refugees and asylum seekers.

"Very few people actually chance to come all the way here without knowing someone, they usually have a friend of a friend or a cousin. So they would come to that person who would assist them, telling them where to go, some would say 'you can work for me'" [R7: Org D].

"Many of them stay together because it is easier to be surrounded by people who speak your language and have a sense of community" [R6: Org D].

- *Overcoming the Language Barrier*

Opportunities to gain employment is linked to language ability and integration into the local communities is also dependent on being able to speak the language of the locals.

"One of the other coping mechanisms that refugees use is language, little bit of Afrikaans or Xhosa so that there is a little more acceptance when dealing with South Africans" [R21: Org L].

D. NPOs' Constraints in Providing Services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Many of the challenges faced by refugees point to some of the services that refugee NPOs should be providing but are unable to do so. The NPO constraints include funding and staff shortages; lack of government support; uneasy relationship with Home Affairs as well as difficulties in accessing refugees and asylum seekers.

- *Funding and Staff Shortages*

All respondents saw the lack of adequate funding as a major constraint.

"We are quite constrained funding wise because we are not eligible for funds from the South African government because our employees and our beneficiaries although they are Black, very Black mostly are not Black in the South African definition. They don't count as Black by BEE [Black Economic Empowerment]" [R18: Org K].

Many organisations have tried to set up satellite offices in other provinces of the country but are financially constrained.

"We have an office in Port Elizabeth which is still running as a satellite office but we are financially constrained. Those refugees in the Eastern Cape... we are the first organization to provide there and the response that we got there is so huge, we cannot meet the demand" [R2: Org B].

Staff shortages are also problematic and some NPOs are using volunteer staff:

"This organisation is largely run by young people but most of the people here are interns, volunteers or peer educators who are also not necessarily paid" [R15: Org H].

Due to a funding crisis, organisations have had to operate more strategically given their limited resources [23]. Policies need to change with regards to government funding of refugee organisations who could play a meaningful role in facilitating social cohesion; diminishing conflict and promoting the human security of all in South Africa.

- *Lack of Government Support*

Government regulations with regards to the management of refugees and asylum seekers have also placed a strain on NPOs in the sector:

"The main block is the structural failure of the asylum system in general, structural failure of the Refugee Appeal Board, Standing Committee and just the refugee status determination process. There is not enough resources put into it and there is not enough will to make it work basically" [R1: Org A].

"Migration is not only a problem of NPOs it is a national problem, of the government. So our capacity can only be effective if we also have the local government, municipalities coming in. Up to date it is mostly civil society working alone" [R15: Org H].

It seems that government has been rather short-sighted and not taken a long term view of the refugee situation. The fact

that refugees could play a role in economic development is overlooked [12].

- *Uneasy Relationship with DHA*

Respondents felt that a more collaborative relationship with Home Affairs, could facilitate their service delivery to refugees [18].

"Now they have changed their rules, you are not allowed to come inside but what we do is we say 'we are coming to your office with our client, do you mind if we spend some time there'. Now you cannot come with any paper, camera, nothing so you monitor with your eyes. Home Affairs in Pretoria for example, no NPOs are allowed. At least here when you go with a client you get an understanding of what takes place" [R16: Org I].

It is understandable that some tension will exist between NPOs lobbying on behalf of this sector and the DHA. However, these tensions are 'necessary' if transparency, accountability and the protection of refugee rights are to be ensured.

- *Accessing Refugees and Asylum Seekers*

Fear, distrust and lack of organisation within the refugee/asylum seeker communities keep many of them on the periphery:

"We try by all means to involve refugees and asylum seekers but we find that there is a resistance on their sides to partake in our workshops" [R10: Org E].

There may well be issues of fear compounded by their lack of documentation, which may be exposed if they lodge any complaints. All these factors could explain why refugees do not use these services. It also confirms the need for these NPOs to disseminate information about their services more strategically [23].

E. Strategies Adopted by NPOs to Assist Refugees/Asylum Seekers

NPOs network and collaborate on key issues that affect their sector. These NPOs advocate on behalf of refugees who have problems with their documents and where refugee rights are being ignored. Other strategies include raising community awareness; disseminating information about NPOs services and liaising with government.

- *Networking and Collaboration*

Given the small number of NPOs working in this sector, networking and collaboration are important as these NPOs need to share their resources and expertise:

"We have a good relationship with other organisations in the sector, we meet on a two monthly basis, with some we meet more and we work in collaboration for more specific things" [R1: Org A].

Such collaboration facilitates a better service delivery for refugees and asylum seekers and gives them wider and more diverse access to services.

- *Advocacy – challenges to Refugee Status and Refugee Rights*

NPOs play a crucial role advocating on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers:

“We basically assist with documentation, appeals in case of rejections, advice and rights awareness workshops involving foreign nationals and South Africans as well as government officials. Then we also do policy reform through submissions to Parliament and relevant Portfolio Committee to lobby and motivate for favourable policies to be enforced and enacted” [R9: Org E]

Issues of corruption and the backlog at DHA limit the capacity of these NPOs to assist their clients effectively [18]. Some NPOs strategically involve the media to raise awareness about abuse and to encourage victims to seek justice:

“Recently we had a parent whose kid was shouted at by the teacher saying really harsh words that were insulting because the kid was a foreign national... even the media are now waiting because they are going to court and the case is being taken further. So that is some of the advocacy work that we do” (R15: Org H)

Thus, NPOs advocate for asylum seekers and refugees through assisting with legal cases and lobbying authorities [10].

- *Mobilising Community Awareness, Building Cohesion and Disseminating Information*

Respondents from various NGOs spoke about mobilising community awareness by targeting the youth:

“The whole strategy behind our peer education programme is to change behaviours and mind-sets of young South Africans” [R15: Org H].

“We need to go where the refugees reside and recondition the mind-set of host communities so that they can be welcoming towards refugees and asylum seekers” [R10: Org E].

Given the widespread ignorance about refugees in general, NPOs also see the need to build social cohesion in communities:

“We run campaigns in the townships where we try to promote peaceful coexistence between South Africans, refugees and asylum seekers, where we try to promote social tolerance and we at all cost try to spread an anti-xenophobic and peace building message in our communities. We equip people, South Africans, refugees and asylum seekers with skills of negotiation, mediation and conflict management skills so that these conflicts such as the ones I mentioned previously, can be resolved more peacefully without using violence...” [R10: Org E].

Some of these community initiatives highlight the potential of focusing on the youth to transform relations between local communities and refugees and asylum seekers [28], [29]. These social cohesion programmes aim at building solidarity in communities by addressing the concerns of both locals and refugees/asylum seekers [14].

- *Liaison with Government – Memorandum of Understanding*

Whilst mindful of their advocacy role, some respondents also saw the need to establish cooperative relationships with government to enhance their service delivery capacity:

“Recently we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Pan African Parliament on promoting the aspect of cultural exchange. This is a way of improving our capacity as well, when you have the backup of the Pan African Parliament, policymakers are more collaborative” [R15: Org H].

IV. CONCLUSION

Whilst the DHA have made some improvements in processing documents [31], a much more ethical approach to asylum seekers and refugees is needed by the South African government in order to overcome the problem of xenophobia [32]. Consideration should be given to intervention strategies that address all facets of social exclusion [33]. Education and training of officials dealing with the asylum seekers and refugees as well as education of the broader public and other key institutions should be a priority if refugee rights are to be taken seriously. Social work education and training should include curriculum content to address the needs of migrant populations. More extensive researches adopting mixed methodologies would provide both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ data. A national cost/benefit quantitative study would go a long way in putting to rest pure speculation about the ‘strain’ or ‘gain’ that refugees have on the economy. Such data could provide the impetus for improved policies and intervention strategies. At the same time, there is an urgent need to address the country’s current state of inequality, corruption and poverty so that all may enjoy a basic standard of living including refugees. NPOs as part of civil society can play a role in building social cohesion and addressing misplaced xenophobic sentiments. In the interests of human security for all, the South African government needs to rethink its funding policy towards these NPOs and provide unambiguous directives about its commitments to asylum seekers and refugees. Globally, governments should commit themselves to these burgeoning humanitarian crises in ways that respect the dignity and rights of all refugees.

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