

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2023

# Supporting migrants and refugees in Somalia and Kenya



Participants learn sewing skills to earn sustainable income. Photo: AFSC/Somalia

## LETTER FROM THE COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVE:

Peacebuilding is a difficult process. It can test the patience, perseverance, and resilience of our staff, partners, and the communities we serve. But today, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) remains as committed as ever for the long term to building a just, sustainable peace in Somalia. Every day, we work to help young people and other community members mend the broken fabric of society—to create a future where all people can live in harmony and dignity.

As peacebuilders, we help build bridges and foster understanding, compassion, and interactions that bring us closer to that future. We don't do this work alone. We are thankful to have the support of partners like Misereor that have walked with us over the years—supporting youth, refugees, host communities, and internally displaced people (IDP) in Somalia and in the Dadaab refugee complex in northern Kenya.

In this newsletter, we reflect on our ongoing journey and highlight some of the people who have participated in our project. Their stories of resilience are examples of the difference we can make by promoting peacebuilding, trauma healing, migration, and advocacy.

We are grateful for your continued support. Asante Sana, waad mahadsantahay – thank you!

*Yours in peace,*



Zaina Kisongo

**AFSC COUNTRY DIRECTOR, SOMALIA AND SOUTH SUDAN**



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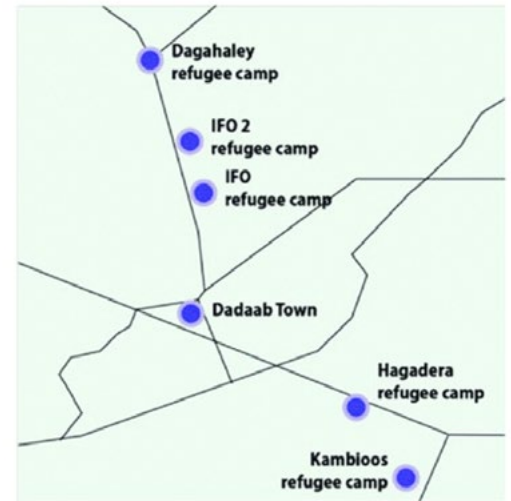
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The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression. Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light within each person, we nurture the seeds of change and the respect for human life to fundamentally transform our societies and institutions.

## PROJECT SITES



Image credit: Research Gate



## AFSC'S IMPACT IN SOMALIA AND NORTHERN KENYA

For several decades, AFSC has worked with young people in Kismayo, Somalia, and Dadaab refugee camps in northern Kenya in building lasting peace. This has been made possible by partnering with Misereor, civil society organizations, and communities to promote peace and to support groups that are often marginalized.

From October 2021 to March 2023:

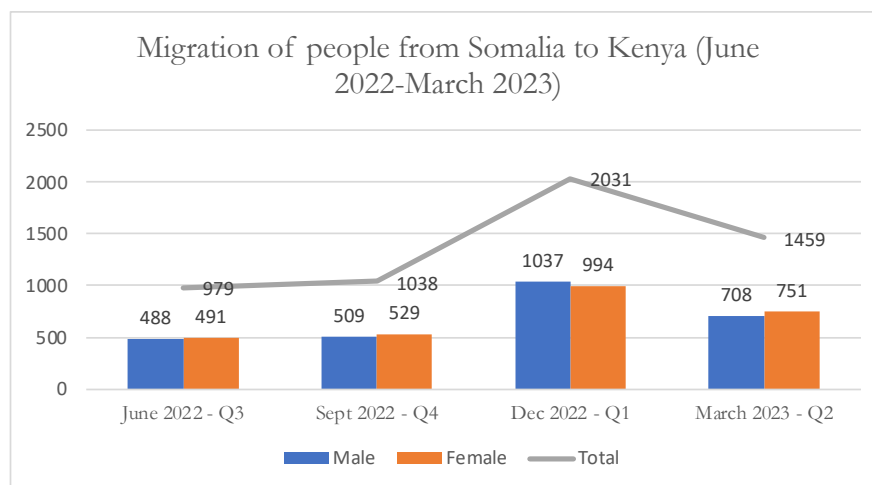
- **1,163 people took part in peacebuilding efforts** through the project. That included conflict resolution training for youth as well as dialogue sessions among community members, including elders and religious leaders. In addition, 217 youth were trained in vocational skills, which help them earn a sustainable income to support themselves and their families.
- **1,233 youth participated in trauma healing and reconciliation programs** in Kismayo and Dadaab. These programs also provide support to refugees, returnees, internally displaced people, and host communities. Participants take part in one-on-one counseling sessions, group therapy, trauma healing youth activities, and debriefing sessions for staff and community volunteers.
- **118 youth leaders were trained in raising awareness and advocacy** for the rights of refugees and migrants.



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We have worked to **protect the rights of refugees and asylum seekers** during their migration journey. Through our partner, we have monitored cross-border migration, which helps us understand why people move and what their needs are during their journey. We inform them of their rights and responsibilities as they cross the border from Somalia to Kenya. Sometimes migrants face arrest for not having government permission to be in Kenya or for leaving designated areas for refugees. In such cases, we offer pro-bono legal representation and refer other cases for legal support.



Lastly, we continue to **promote the importance of COVID-19 prevention**. We have distributed personal preventive equipment to more than 330 community members at the two project sites. In addition, our local partners continue to share messages that promote peace and protect public health through local radio stations, which reach a range of audiences through their use of local dialects.



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## STORIES FROM OUR PARTICIPANTS

### PEACEBUILDING

## Young leaders find their path to serving others

During a project activity in Kismayo, we met a group of young people who were eager to join our peacebuilding initiatives.

These eight youth—three females and five males—were representative of the different communities we work with, including returnees, IDPs, refugees, and host communities.

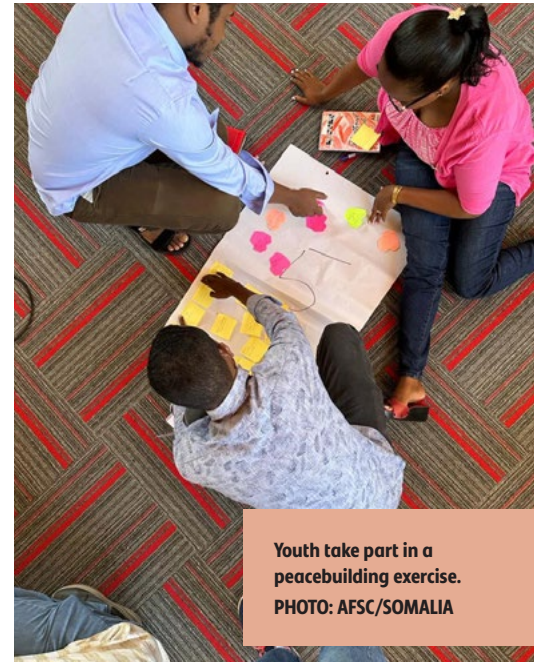
They became known as **the Kismayo Eight**.

We worked with these youth to mobilize other young people to join in peacebuilding dialogues. In our forums, the team talked about their challenges as well as dreams and visions for a more just, peaceful future. To their fellow participants, it sometimes seemed they dreamed too big.

But over the next two years of working with AFSC and partners, these youth took on leadership roles within their networks and in their respective communities. The Kismayo Eight gained the attention and earned the respect of their peers as well as their elders. This was unusual in communities where youth often face stereotypes and don't often have opportunities to serve as leaders.

The Kismayo Eight went on to represent their peers in different spaces such as government-led youth forums and religious forums. This allowed them to put pressure on state and non-state actors, contribute to policies related to youth, as well as advocate for their rights.

Today, the Kismayo Eight continue to mentor youth participants in our project and now serve as government representatives for their communities. In 2019, five were elected in the state election, with one of them serving as a minister while four are general directors in different government departments. In 2022, the remaining three were appointed in the general elections as members of Parliament. In their different capacities, they continue to champion the rights and well-being of young people, including offering scholarship opportunities, employment referrals, and support for groups that promote advocacy among youth.



Youth take part in a peacebuilding exercise.  
PHOTO: AFSC/SOMALIA

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## My journey from Somalia and back

*Anisoa Ahmed, 19, shared her story about leaving her home in Somalia for Dadaab—and then returning to her home country several years later. Back in Somalia, she faced challenges in trying to adjust to her new life. But with support from AFSC and partners, she learned skills to help her earn income to support her family and find stability.*

In 2011, my village in Gedo region of Somalia was faced with a devastating drought, which led to us fleeing to Kambios refugees camp in Dadaab Refugee Complex. All our animals succumbed to the drought; some of our relatives, friends, and neighbours lost their lives. My family was faced with the tough choice of either staying and hoping that the drought will pass away or moving to Kenya to save my seven surviving family members.

Our decision was to save our family and in that, we embarked on the journey. This journey was the hardest we've ever taken. The scorching sun was unbearable, but we could not stop. As if that wasn't enough, we were faced with security challenges as well as arrests because of lack of proper documentation for the group I was traveling with. We opted for unsanctioned routes to get us to Dadaab.

[When we finally reached Dadaab, we] settled into our new home. We were relieved and hopeful. For six years, we made do with the temporary shelter and provisions that were accorded to us, but we kept on hoping that one day we would return home. This dream was later to be fulfilled when the Kenya government announced voluntary repatriation of Somalia refugees in 2016, and we decided to take the opportunity to return home.

In 2017, we took an alternative journey to Kismayo. We were welcomed by the Jubaland administration. We felt at home, though this was short-lived before the realities of being “a returnee” dawned on us. We were provided with shelter but not any other provisions as we had become accustomed to at the Dadaab refugee camp. The treatment we received from my own people was different—and almost hostile—as they kept on referring to us as “returnees” almost to insinuate that we weren't welcomed. This dampened our spirits, but we had to find means to meet our food and medical needs.

With no skills, I was only able to do menial jobs for families living near us, but this was never guaranteed as one would be lucky to get people in need of services. In one of the homes where I was working as a maid, I heard of a vocational center in our village that was providing skills training at no fee. I enrolled and after six months, I graduated with skills in tailoring. I was further supported with a start-up kit to set up my business. Today, I can get at least one to two dollars a day from my business, which goes a long way in supporting my family.

Most importantly, I feel safe and happy because I do not have to take this journey across borders again.

“The treatment we received from my own people was different—and almost hostile—as they kept on referring to us as “returnees” almost to insinuate that we weren't welcomed.

This dampened our spirits, but we had to find means to meet our food and medical needs.”

—ANISOA AHMED



Project participant Anisoa Ahmed  
PHOTO: AFSC/SOMALIA



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## Helping migrant youth find healing and support

**Terry\*** is a counselor who provides support to youth participants in our project. Recently, she received a phone call from a past participant. Here is her recollection of that call.

The phone rings. “Hallo, Madam Terry\*. My name is Mohamed\*. I don’t know if you remember me.”

Terry responds, “Hallo to you, too. Am not sure I do. Kindly remind me where we met.”

Terry flashed back to her meeting Mohamed in 2021. Mohamed was a refugee living in Dadaab refugee complex. He and his younger brother, Assad\*, had sought refuge at Dadaab and were living in Ifo camp, one of AFSC’s project sites. The brothers had trekked with organized groups for long distances, day and night, to reach the complex. Their parents couldn’t make the journey and remained in Somalia, hoping their sons would have a better life and opportunities at the camp.

This act of separation, though selfless on the part of the parents, left unimaginable pain in the hearts of Mohamed and Assad. Throughout the journey, they were in tears, wishing that their families would have accompanied them as they saw other families traveling together. They wondered why their parents chose them to take the journey alone.

Nevertheless, the boys were determined to pursue a better life. They took advantage of every opportunity within the camps. They also joined youth networks, which made them more open to receiving support.

Whether taking part in counseling sessions or group activities, Mohamed was often quiet, reserved, and mostly preoccupied. He was so quiet that it became a concern to the counselor who was working with him—Terry. Terry went out of her way to make home visits so she could go for walks with Mohammed and Assad. During those walks, the boys shared that the family separation had taken a great toll on them. That led Terry to uniquely tailor the kind of support the brothers were receiving from the program, helping them to heal from the underlying trauma so they could adjust to their new lives.

When Mohammed called Terry on this recent day, she responded: “Yes, now I do remember you. How have you been? So glad to hear from you.”

Mohamed said: “Am well, and glad that we get to talk. The reason for my calling is I wanted to share with you that my brother and I are currently living in Canada. And I want you to know that you made this possible.”

Terry replied, “I am super happy for both of you, but how did I make this possible?”

Mohamed said, “Because you never gave up on us, thank you, and may Allah bless you.”



Refugees take part in a group therapy/counseling session.  
PHOTO: AFSC/SOMALIA

*Thank you for supporting our work with migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people in Somalia and Kenya!*



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