

STORIES OF CHANGE

# How young Somali youth are building peace and resilience in Kismayo and Dadaab



Youth learn henna skills in Kismayo. Photo: Juba Foundation/Kismayo



**American  
Friends  
Service  
Committee**

**AFSC.ORG/SOMALIA**

## **ABOUT AFSC**

AFSC works for a just, peaceful, and sustainable world free of violence, inequality, and oppression. We join with people and partners worldwide to meet urgent community needs, challenge injustice, and build peace.

## **ABOUT THE MISEREOR PROJECT**

With support from Misereor, AFSC works with partners in the South-Central Somalia region, Kismayo, and Dadaab refugee camps in North Eastern Kenya. The project primarily focuses on youth community peace initiatives, improving livelihoods, advancing self and community healing, and advocating for the rights of migrants.

The project also works with secondary groups such as community leaders. These include women's groups, clan elders, camp community protection committees, community peace committees, and religious leaders who will build the capacities of youth in conflict resolution.

## **PROJECT GOAL**

**MIGRANTS IN KISMAYO AND DADAAB REFUGEE CAMPS ARE THRIVING AND THE YOUTH ARE EMPOWERED TO COLLABORATE IN PROMOTING PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES.**



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AFSC Somalia staff  
and partners.  
Photo: AFSC/Somalia



## 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 2024:

- **1,447 people took part in peacebuilding efforts.** That included conflict resolution trainings for youth as well as dialogue sessions among community members, including religious leaders.
- **336 youth were trained in vocational skills,** which helped them earn a sustainable income to support themselves and their families.
- **1,976 youth participated in trauma healing and reconciliation programs** in Kismayo and Dadaab. These programs also provide support to refugees, returnees, internally displaced people, and the host community. Participants take part in one-on-one counseling sessions, group therapy, trauma healing, youth activities, and debriefing sessions for staff and community volunteers.
- **400 youths were actively involved in advocacy for the rights of refugees and migrants.** The project works to protect the rights of refugees and asylum seekers during their migration journey. Through our partner, we have monitored cross-border movement, which helps us understand why people move and what their needs are during their journey.



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Here are stories of four young people who have taken part in the Misereor project and how it changed their lives for the better.



A training in tailoring at the Kismayo Juba Foundation Vocational Training Centre. Photo: Juba Foundation/Kismayo

“At the centre, we provide opportunities for learners to exhibit their skills and abilities to invited potential employers”

—STAFF MEMBER AT THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE

## SEWING SUCCESS

# Fatima’s story

Fatima’s journey in the world of tailoring began at the Kismayo Juba Foundation Vocational Training Centre. The center trains young people in tailoring, carpentry, electrician skills, and salon skills, and convenes the youth and elders from neighboring villages for intergenerational dialogues and community peace forums. The training that Fatima received equipped her with valuable skills in sewing and business. She and her peers also received startup kits to share and build cohesion among students from different clans.

Through careful saving and resourcefulness, Fatima eventually acquired her own tailoring machine. That was key to helping her open her own tailoring shop.

Fatima also knew she needed to promote her services. She turned her shop into a vibrant display of her unique creations. Word-of-mouth marketing played a significant role as passersby would stop, captivated by the unique designs.

Fatima also embraced the power of social media, leveraging online platforms to showcase her innovative designs to a wider audience. It wasn’t long before Fatima became a trusted name in the Kismayo tailoring scene. Soon, she was earning close to \$4 a day—enough to put food on the table and take care of her family’s needs. She knew that her unique designs and her strong marketing plan would continue to help her cultivate a thriving business.

Fatima’s story is a testament to the power of resilience—a lifeline in a conflict-prone zone where opportunities for women are scarce. Her story is one to inspire other young women to pick up a needle and thread and to forge their own path to success, one stitch at a time.

*\*Pseudonyms are used for confidentiality.*



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## HEALING FROM TRAUMA

# Majok's story

Majok, a young South Sudanese refugee residing in Dadaab, Kenya, exemplified the challenges faced by many people who have been displaced. Years of violence in South Sudan followed by a difficult journey to Kenya left him with trauma that affected his everyday life. Despite participating in various trainings from different humanitarian agencies, Majok struggled to adjust to his new reality.

Majok's emotional distress manifested in social withdrawal. He turned to destructive coping mechanisms such as drugs and substance abuse in the camp.

His turning point arrived through the Misereor project and collaboration between AFSC and RCK. Majok took part in peacebuilding and psychosocial initiatives and became actively engaged in peace forums alongside his peers. These sessions provided him with a safe space to express his experiences and emotional challenges for the first time.

He also received dedicated support from a community-based counsellor at Ifo camp in Dadaab through a series of counselling sessions. Through earlier training from another agency, Majok had a barber kit to cut hair. With support from the Department of Refugee Services (DRS) he secured permission to open a barber shop in Dadaab. His clientele included fellow refugees and asylum seekers, host community members, and even aid workers.

Majok's barber shop became a hub for positive interaction in the community—and a testament to his personal transformation. His story underscores the importance of addressing the underlying psychological impact of displacement. Today, Majok is a pillar of his community. He aspires to expand his barbershop to include a salon for ladies and sell beauty products.

Majok's journey demonstrates the transformative power of trauma healing and psychosocial support in helping refugees foster resilience and build peace and self-sufficiency.

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Participants learn electrician skills during a training in Kismayo. *Photo: Juba Foundation/Kismayo*

“Psychosocial and peacebuilding events enables the youths to meet and socialize with others, allowing them to be active thereby minimizing mental discomfort and the urge to abuse substances”

—STAFF MEMBER IN DADAAB



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Youth take part in a trust-building exercise.  
Photo: Juba Foundation/ Kismayo

## BUILDING RESILIENCE

# Nyadeng's story

The majority of refugees in Dadaab hope for resettlement in a third country. However, the process is slow, complex, and uncertain—often taking years.

Nyadeng is one of many refugees who face this struggle. She arrived in Dadaab after her family fled conflict in South Sudan. As the years in Dadaab went by, she grew frustrated and began to despair as she saw families who arrived after her secure opportunities for resettlement.

During one of the focus group discussions, Nyadeng shared her personal struggles with participants, including the trauma she faced before reaching Dadaab. Her courageous act of sharing opened the door for her to receive much-needed psychosocial support from community-based counsellors.

But Nyadeng would soon face more challenges. She received news that her application to resettle in the United States was finally approved. She sold her household items as the prospects of a new life instilled hope. However, after reaching Nairobi for her onward journey, she was detained at the airport due to a bureaucratic error. The documents mistakenly indicated that her family had opted for voluntary repatriation to Somalia, a country with which Nyadeng had no connection.

Devastated, Nyadeng was returned to Dadaab, having sold everything in anticipation of leaving. The future, once filled with hope and promises, now felt broken, and depression threatened to engulf her once more. Fortunately, the support system, including the community-based counsellors, were still there. They intervened once more, offering crucial support to navigate this new setback.

In a recent meeting with Nyadeng, she exhibited a sense of resilience. The psychosocial support had helped her accept the situation. Now, she was focused on rebuilding her life in Dadaab as she worked to rectify her resettlement situation. Her story emphasizes the critical role of mental health support in helping refugees confront the challenges they face.

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# Aisha's story

Aisha is a young refugee from Somalia who resided at the Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya. Her experiences illustrate the multiple challenges faced by refugee youth as well as the transformative power of trauma healing and other support programs.

At Dadaab, refugee youth face a lack of employment opportunities in the camp. Restrictions on their movement, which is linked to their refugee status, exacerbate this issue.

One such example is Aisha. Her academic achievements earned her a coveted placement at one of the national schools in Nairobi (465 kilometres away). However, her refugee status required her to make regular journeys back to the camp during school breaks, hindering her ability to network and access opportunities outside of Dadaab.

Despite these limitations, Aisha excelled in her studies, demonstrating a strong commitment to education. This dedication culminated in her acceptance to a public university in Kenya. However, throughout her university years, her refugee status again presented a barrier to employment. Additionally, semester breaks mandated travel back to the camp, limiting her ability to participate in internships or job searches alongside her peers.

Undeterred by these obstacles, Aisha actively engaged in community activities within the camp, focusing on helping teenage girls. She was trained in trauma healing and psychosocial support. This training equipped her with valuable skills to better assist fellow refugees who may have experienced psychological hardship.

Although she enjoyed supporting her community in Dadaab, Aisha still yearned to apply her education outside of the refugee camp. She decided to voluntarily repatriate to Kismayo, Somalia. This strategic decision allowed her to use the education she had gained in Kenya in her home country.

Aisha's academic credentials and the trauma healing training she received at the Dadaab camp, courtesy of the Misereor program, proved invaluable. Upon returning to Somalia, she was recruited by a local nongovernmental organization working with internally displaced persons. Today, Aisha thrives as a teacher and counsellor, directly impacting the lives of others within her community.

Aisha's journey exemplifies the transformative power of education and support programs for refugee youth. Despite limitations imposed by her refugee status, Aisha's dedication and the skills she acquired allowed her to become a leader and positive force within her community. Her story serves as an inspiration for both refugee youth facing similar challenges and the organizations working to support them.



A sewing training for youth participants.  
Photo: Juba Foundation/ Kismayo

“We as youths in the camp pursue education even up to the national universities, but immediately we graduate we are supposed to return to the camp. It is very difficult for one to look for employment while at the camp and this makes us miss out on many opportunities.”

—YOUTH PARTICIPANT IN DADAAB

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To learn more about AFSC's Somalia Program, visit

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