

**SURVIVAL OF THE INVISIBLE: ECONOMIC SECURITY OF AFRICAN URBAN  
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN BANGKOK**

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บทคัดย่อและแฟ้มข้อมูลฉบับเต็มของวิทยานิพนธ์ตั้งแต่ปีการศึกษา 2554 ที่ให้บริการในคลังปัญญาจุฬาฯ (CUIR)  
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การอยู่รอดของผู้ที่ถูกลืม: ความมั่นคงทางด้านเศรษฐกิจของผู้อพยพในเมืองและผู้พลัดถิ่นชาว  
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วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต  
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ในแอฟริกา วิกฤตผู้ลี้ภัยยังคงน่ากังวลอย่างมากตามที่เราเห็นได้ในหลายประเทศ วิกฤตบังคับให้คนหลายล้านคนต้องหนีไปยังประเทศต่าง ๆ ทั่วโลก ประเทศไทยไม่ได้เป็นภาคี 1951 อนุสัญญาผู้ลี้ภัยหรือโพรโทคอล 1967 พวกเขาจึงไม่รับรู้ถึงสถานะของผู้ลี้ภัย หมายความว่า ผู้ลี้ภัยในประเทศต้องพยายามดำรงชีวิตอยู่อย่างยากลำบาก โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งกรณีของผู้ที่อาศัยอยู่นอกค่ายผู้ลี้ภัย ด้วยเหตุนี้ งานศึกษาชิ้นนี้จึงพยายามทำความเข้าใจสถานการณ์ทางเศรษฐกิจของผู้ลี้ภัยและผู้ขอลี้ภัยในเมืองที่เป็นชาวแอฟริกันและระดับการเข้าถึงความปลอดภัยเศรษฐกิจ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในเรื่องการสร้างรายได้ การศึกษานี้ให้ความสนใจไปที่กลยุทธ์การปรับตัวที่ผู้ลี้ภัยและผู้ขอลี้ภัยในเมืองเหล่านี้เป็นผู้ใช้ และดูว่ามีระบบการสนับสนุนทางการเงินในรูปแบบใด ๆ อยู่หรือไม่

งานชิ้นนี้เป็นการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพ ซึ่งเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์ผู้ให้ข้อมูลที่มีความสำคัญและใช้การสังเกต รวมไปถึงการใช้หลักฐานรองด้วย งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้เก็บข้อมูลจากตัวอย่างผู้มีส่วนร่วม 18 คน เป็นผู้ลี้ภัยและผู้ขอลี้ภัยชาวแอฟริกันจำนวน 15 คน และเจ้าหน้าที่จากองค์กรที่ไม่ใช่รัฐบาลที่ทำงานกับผู้ลี้ภัยอีกจำนวน 3 คน ผลการวิจัยของการศึกษาดังกล่าวในปัจจุบันพบว่า ผู้ลี้ภัยในเมืองส่วนใหญ่ไม่มีงานทำ แต่บางคนก็ทำงานในภาคส่วนไม่เป็นทางการ ผู้ที่ไม่มีงานทำมีกลยุทธ์การปรับตัวต่าง ๆ เช่น การอยู่ร่วมกันเป็นกลุ่มเพื่อหารค่าใช้จ่าย การพึ่งพาเงินจากองค์กร การกุศล เครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์ จากการสนับสนุนทางการเงินดังกล่าวพวกเขาใช้เงินไปกับการให้ยืมอย่างไม่เป็นทางการ ฟังองค์กรที่ไม่ใช่รัฐบาล งบประมาณจาก UNHCR การสนับสนุนจากท้องถิ่น และเครือข่ายทางศาสนาต่าง ๆ

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In Africa the refugee crisis is still a great concern as witnessed in several countries. The crises force millions of people to flee to countries all over the world. Thailand is a not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol so they do not recognize refugees' status. This means that refugees in the country have a hard time trying to sustain their livelihood especially for those living outside the refugee camps. That is why this study seeks to understand the economic situation of African urban refugees and asylum seekers and what extent they can access economic security especially income generation. This study also looks at the adaptive strategies that these urban refugees and asylum seekers use and if there are any forms of financial support systems available.

This is a qualitative study with data collection based on key informants' interview and observation as well as the use of secondary data. The research involved a sample of eighteen participants, 15 African urban refugees and asylum seekers and three officials from Non-Government Organizations that deal with refugees. The findings of the study on the current economic situation are most of the urban refugees had no form of employment but a few worked in the informal sector. Those without jobs have adaptive strategies such as living in groups to share costs, relied on allowance organization, charity, and social networks. Under financial support; they practiced informal lending, relied on NGOs, the UNHCR allowances, local support and religious networks.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>AAT</b>	Asylum Access Thailand
<b>ARC</b>	American Refugee Committee
<b>BRC</b>	Bangkok Refugee Center
<b>IDC</b>	Immigration Detention Center
<b>JRS</b>	Jesuit Refugee Services
<b>MOI</b>	Ministry of Interior
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>RSD</b>	Refugee Status Determination
<b>TBC</b>	the Border Consortium
<b>UDHR</b>	the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 Introduction

Africa as a continent has suffered from civil wars as early as the 20th century. Unfortunately these wars didn't end there and spilled over into the 21st century. These wars have been witnessed in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo in the central part of the continent to Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda and Eritrea in the eastern part of Africa. These wars have forced millions of people to flee from their home countries due to the fear of persecution. However, these wars are not the only reason that has forced people from their homes.

Another major reason that has necessitated the migration of people from Africa is the severe environmental factors such as drought and famine. This becomes a major challenge for the communities that rely on farming and animal herding as a means of livelihood. These migrants may decide to migrate to neighboring countries, for example those from Somalia may move to Kenya. However with the refugee crisis getting worse by the day, the neighboring host countries are not as welcoming as they were. The neighboring countries can no longer sustain more refugees in fear for their economic security as a country. The next step for these displaced people is to migrate to another continent with hopes for a better life.

An example of a country that most refugees consider as a safe haven is Thailand, for various reasons. First of all it is the lenient visa requirements of Thailand that allows refugees to enter Thailand as tourist. Unlike the previous population of Vietnamese refugees that had to enter the country through boats in the past, current refugees enter Thailand through the international airports as tourists. The second reason is that there is the presence of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in the city of Bangkok making the accessibility of refugees to applying for a refugee status easier. However, not everything about Thailand is favorable to refugees.

Since Thailand is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, they therefore do not recognize refugees' status. This means that refugees have limited resources that don't allow them to meet their basic needs such as food and

housing. For those with families, they need to access to education as well as healthcare. For anyone in a foreign country with little to no resources, financial anxiety will be an issue. They therefore need to find ways to earn income to sustain themselves and their families. But then again, refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand do not have the right to work and this poses a great challenge.

Most refugees sort for illegal work or rely on assistance from humanitarian aid such as that offered by the UNHCR. When these asylum seekers and refugees decide to work illegally, they become vulnerable to being exploited by the employers. They work too many hours with very little pay with some even working in dangerous conditions. With the refugee crisis rising on the global scale, donors have to prioritize and direct their funds to the places that need the assistance the most. With more severe cases of refugees in Syria and other countries, the assistance that ends up being directed towards Thailand are less. This means that the available financial assistance for the refugees in Thailand is also diminishing.

Refugees and asylum seekers however do not give up; they find different ways to cope with these challenges. They may depend on the assistance offered by the NGOs. This assistance was initially in the form of getting access to healthcare, education, employment and training but then extends to legal assistance once these asylum seekers are arrested. This is still not enough because the number of refugees and asylum seekers is growing by the day and so most asylum seekers need to find their own adaptive strategies to the challenges they face. With Thailand not being the safe haven asylum seekers expect, it has not stopped them from still rushing into the country.

The study of urban refugees has been extensive with more research done on the different challenges that they face in the urban context. Most of the attention has however been placed on issues such as the access to education for the refugee children. In turn, less attention is put on issues such as employment, because with the clear law that refugees should not seek employment, it is assumed to be the end of it. Still, these urban refugees and asylum seekers find solutions to this problem of not being able to seek employment and that should be explored. Further research has been conducted in analyzing the response of the international community as well as the state in trying to assist the refugees. Yet not as much attention is given to the

strategies that asylum seekers and refugees adopt by themselves in addressing the challenges they face.

This first chapter is the introductory chapter for this thesis. The first chapter begins with the background on the issue of urban refugees and asylum seekers followed by the problem statement which will explain the phenomena between urban refugees and employment. Then there is the research questions and objectives which are what the researcher intends to find out. These questions guide the researcher in understanding the main phenomena of the study. The methodology part in this chapter will explain how the researcher carried out the research and the tools used in collecting data. This will be followed by the scope, the knowledge gap, significance, limitations and finally the ethical issues of the research.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Thailand has not ratified the 1951 refugee convention and therefore does not recognize the status of refugees. However, the Thai government affirms that it practices the humanitarian conditions as stated in the convention. This can be witnessed by how the Thai government has allowed refugees from Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to seek refuge on the Thai-Myanmar border. However with Thailand not being a party to the convention it means that refugees are not offered any legal status and so they are considered illegal immigrants. This is even worse for the urban refugees that do not live in the camps. They are vulnerable to exploitation and arrest by the police.

The rights of urban refugees and asylum seekers are almost not recognized in Thailand. Therefore with the probability of arrest being high this limits their freedom of movement as well as work among other rights. Without the ability to practice these rights, the lives of these urban refugees and asylum seekers become extremely difficult. Between the constant fear of arrest and the lack of a legal status, surviving in a foreign country seems nearly impossible. But then we still have more refugees opting for the urban setting and this makes one to question their lives, their choices and the factors affecting them.

In most instances, urban refugees are people seeking to survive in the urban areas. They are usually also trying not to be as visible to the authorities. These refugees are usually faced with several problems in trying to survive day by day. They are at the

risk of getting arrested, detained, harassed, deported, sexually abused and also face gender-based violence (Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, 2013). They also face the challenges of accessing some opportunities and services such as housing, education, employment and healthcare. This makes their lives difficult because everyone needs these services to live on.

The attitude of the host country is an important factor in determining just how accessible human security and its dimensions will be to the refugees. The different policies may or may not be in favor of the refugees in achieving for example economic security. An example is how the host country views the refugees, if to them they are a helpless group that seeks refuge and assistance, the host country will be more accommodating and supportive. But if the host country views them as an economic burden, then the access of the refugees to human security and its dimensions will be limited. This attitude will also determine how efficient the different actions by several actors in assisting the refugees are.

Therefore I believe that it is important to understand how accessible economic security is for urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok. This will mean looking into the different problems they endure in order to be economically stable and to sustain their lives as well as those of their families. I will go further to understand how they adapt to these problems and if there are any grassroots financial support within the refugee's communities

The UNHCR plans to help 3400 vulnerable people of concern in the urban areas of Thailand through cash-based intervention before the end of 2017 (UNHCR, 2016). This means that there is still a large number that needs to find adaptive strategies in dealing with the economic challenges they face as urban refugees and asylum seekers. Although the UNHCR is doing its best in trying to offer support to all people of concern, various reasons such as lack of funding are still limiting their assistance. So, it is interesting to look into what does this vulnerable community of African urban refugees and asylum seekers do on its part to combat such challenges.

In Thailand, most of the research done on the urban refugees and asylum seekers mostly focuses on the Pakistani refugees. This is because the five main countries of origin for asylum seekers and refugees in Thailand are Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Somalia, China and Vietnam (UNHCR, 2016). However there are other urban refugees and



asylum seekers especially from the continent of Africa that are overlooked. Although there are no definite statistics on African urban refugees and asylum seekers, they are present in Bangkok and they face more challenges compared to those from other countries. This is the reason this research will be inclusive of more than just the Somali. It will involve the Somali and Sudan urban refugees and asylum seekers.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This research will aim to answer the following main questions:

1. What is the current economic situation of African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok?

The sub questions under this question that this research will aim to answer are;

- a) What are the economic adaptive strategies that African urban refugees and asylum seekers use while residing in Bangkok?
  - b) What are the different types of financial support systems such as microfinance within the African urban refugee and asylum seeker community in Bangkok?
2. To what extent is access to economic security possible to African urban refugees and asylum seekers and what are the factors that inhibit their access to economic security?

### **1.4 Objective of the study**

The objectives of this research will be;

1. To understand the current economic situation of African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok
2. To identify the economic adaptive strategies that African urban refugees and asylum seekers use while residing in Bangkok
3. To determine the different types of financial support systems within the African Urban Refugee and asylum seeker community in Bangkok
4. To explore the accessibility of economic security and the factors that inhibits the access to income generation by African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok

### **1.5 Scope of the Research**

African urban refugees and asylum seekers are spread all over the city of Thailand. The main focus of this research will however be in the urban areas of Bangkok,

Thailand. The specific research sites will be identified with help from the NGOs that work closely with urban refugees in Bangkok. Also it's important to note that I understand that there are various categories under economic security. But for this study I will only focus on income generation under economic security.

### **1.6 Research Methodology**

This research was based in the city of Bangkok in Thailand. This is because Bangkok is considered to be home to a large number of urban refugees that come from Vietnam, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Sri Lanka. The fieldwork was conducted in a period of seven weeks from the month of May to June 2017. The research used a qualitative approach which aimed at exploring the African urban refugees and asylum seekers, their economic situation and their access to employment in Bangkok. A qualitative study was chosen because it allows the inquiry process of understanding human problems through reporting detailed views of participants in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007). Semi structures in-depth interviews and observations were the two methods of data collection employed for this research. Regarding the African refugees, the research had planned to balance out the number from Somalia as well as Sudan but instead could access more Somali refugees and asylum seekers. This can be attributed to the fact that the Somali asylum seekers and refugees have a strong sense of family and therefore they live as a community.

#### **1.6.1 Criteria of the Case Study Selection and Sampling Techniques**

This research concentrated on African urban refugees and asylum seekers that were from Somalia and Sudan. The criteria for selecting the sample was that the participants were from these two countries except the three officials of Non-Government Organizations that deal with refugees who were Thai. The research involved a total of 18 participants that involved 13 Somali and two Sudanese urban refugees and asylum seekers as well as three officials of Non-Government Organizations namely Asylum Access Thailand (AAT), Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) and the income generating group of refugee women known as Chamaliin. Initially the researched was planning on also involving officials from the Ministry of Interior and related government officials but was not able due to confidentiality issues. The African urban refugees and asylum seekers were of the age between 18 to 35 years

old, from different clans, social background (single or married) and female and male genders.

### **1.6.2 Secondary Data**

Secondary documents were used in this research. This was conducted in the libraries as well as documents from the internet with relevant information regarding urban refugees and asylum seekers and how they achieve economic security. There was also the reviewing of documents from international organizations that are involved with refugees such as UNHCR as well as UNDP. Finally there was also the use of Primary documents such as reviews of the minutes from meetings.

### **1.6.3 Primary Data**

#### ***1.6.3.1 Key Informants Interview***

This research involved 18 semi structured in-depth interviews with the sample. This allowed for flexibility that gave room for clarifying questions. The objective of conducting these interviews was to access the knowledge and the views these refugees have on the problems they have in trying to achieve economic security and their adaptive strategies. The interviews were conducted in English with the help of an interpreter because most of the participants only spoke Somali and Arabic. During the research I realized that even though some of the participants could communicate in English, they felt more comfortable and were able to express themselves deeply by speaking in Arabic and Somali. These in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in areas where the participants felt relaxed. Ten of the interviews were conducted at the Asylum Access Thailand (AAT) offices in their specifically set up rooms for interviews, five participants were interviewed in their homes, two interviews were at a coffee shop and one participant was interviewed at his office. After the initial interviews at the Asylum Access Thailand office I was able to visit the Somali community in Rama 9. The Sudan family that was also a part of this research lived in the Nana area of Bangkok.

#### ***1.6.3.2 Observation***

This data collection tool was used by attending meetings and workshops set up by AAT as well as joining the Muslim participants for *iftar* which is the meal Muslims have for breaking their fast in the holy month of *Ramadhan*. Through the home visits,

I was able to observe a typical day in the life of an urban refugee in Bangkok as well as witness some of their income generating activities. This tool wanted to understand these urban refugees as they go by with their lives without making it formal where there is a sit down and questions asked.

#### **1.6.4 Interview Data Analysis**

For the research, some of the data was recorded for those participants that offered their consent as well as note taking during the interviews. The data collected was analyzed after every visit so as not to forget any details. The data was transcribed and there was the use of a descriptive analysis. This was to draw analysis, conclusion and recommendations from the collected information and also to answer the research questions. In the analysis, I sectioned the information into several sections after observing some recurring themes from the participants.

#### **1.6.5 Privacy**

There were careful measures taken to ensure the privacy of the African urban refugees and asylum seekers that were part of this research. This was important to me because I had witnessed how cautious they were about being identified and so I had to protect their identities. The anonymity of the participants was protected by using pseudonyms and I made sure to explain it to each one of them that their real names will not be used in the thesis. In mentioning details about where they lived, they were comfortable with me mentioning the places but I didn't go into further details such as mentioning the neighborhoods and exact street names.

#### **1.6.6 My Role as a Researcher**

My role as a researcher involved four main stages namely: building connections, recruiting participants, performing the interviews and leaving the setting.

##### ***1.6.6.1 Building connections***

This research began with approaching the Non-governmental organization (NGO) which is Asylum Access Thailand (AAT). I was invited to attend a couple of meetings for the Bangkok Refugee Youth Club (BRYC). This gave me the opportunity to meet some refugees and asylum seekers from different places such as Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Cambodia. The workshops I attended were on matters regarding education and how they could access it. I was also able to be a volunteer member of

the BRYC for the period of my stay in Thailand. I was also allowed to attend English classes that were offered to Somali ladies on a weekly basis at AAT.

#### ***1.6.6.2 Recruiting participants***

The participants for this research were contacted and selected when I was doing voluntary work for an NGO in Bangkok. Since I was able to participate in different workshops and activities planned by the NGO, I was able to approach the participants. These participants were approached from an English class that was offered at the NGO for Somali asylum seekers. Through the initial meeting at the organization, I was able to meet more participants through home visits with the assistance of the initial participants. As mentioned earlier, it was easier to get access to the Somali refugees and asylum seekers because they have a tight knit sense of community that I was able to witness on the home visits I had. The Sudan family on the other hand was only introduced to me by one of the Somali refugee women whom were friends with the Sudan mother from that family.

#### ***1.6.6.3 Executing the interviews***

When I approached my participants, I made it clear that I wanted to involve them in my research and explained to them what my research was about and the purpose of the research. After that, I gave them the option to decide whether they wanted to be a part of the research and when they were willing to be a part, the process of the research was explained to them. It was also through taking part in the workshops and attending events that I was able to gain their trust and established a good relationship with most of the Somali asylum seekers and refugees. This was useful for the in-depth interviews as the participants felt more comfortable to share their stories with me. All participants for this interview were informed that their participation in this research was voluntary and they had the right to leave whenever they were not comfortable. I used the interpreter to ensure that they were aware of what exactly they were consenting to.

#### ***1.6.6.4 Finishing the research***

Even with the interviews done, and all the data required for this research has been collected, I am still volunteering for the Bangkok Refugee Youth Club for the period I will be in Bangkok. It is significant to still offer any assistance you can even when

you are done with collecting data. One should not just leave and make the participants feel like they were just used to get information.

### **1.7 Limitation of the Research**

There are several limitations to this thesis. The first limitation was in trying to find the African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok. Considering that urban refugees are considered illegal immigrant that means they will not be willing to offer their information. And once I had identified the African urban refugees and asylum seekers, the next challenge was on how to build trust. They needed to trust me and feel comfortable enough before they were able to open up to me and my research. Initially they were afraid that I might expose their information and I had to explain intensively on what my research was about and how their privacy is a priority for me.

Another limitation is the language barrier. As this research has decided to involve several ethnicities of Africa, this means that they all speak different languages. Most of the participants from Somalia only spoke Somali while the participants from Sudan spoke Arabic. I therefore had to use an interpreter for the interviews. This will bring about the possibility of the issue of misinterpretation because I am not completely certain of what the interpreter understood from my questions and what they conveyed to the sample. For that reason, I tried to keep the questions as simple as possible and even offer further clarification for the interpreter.

Also there was the limitation of getting correct and dependable statistics regarding the total number of African urban refugees and asylum seekers in the country as well as in Bangkok. This again can be attributed to the fact that urban refugees in Thailand would rather remain unidentified. I had to work with the information that was available through the NGOs that deal with the issues of refugees. Moreover there was a limitation of the sample chosen, however small the target group is the findings are not representative of the issues and experiences of all African refugees in Bangkok.

Lastly there is the limitation of time. The available time to conduct this research was quite restrictive as the fieldwork will only be done for a period of one month. The analysis and documentation of the research was done in one month. This was very difficult as I had to work around the schedules of the participants and had to schedule interviews according to their availability while I only had a few weeks for the fieldwork.

### **1.8 Significance of the Research**

This research seeks to understand the economic situation of African urban refugees in Bangkok. With this information, it intended to add to the knowledge on urban refugees and economic security. With the increasing refugee crisis, it is important to contribute to the knowledge of factors affecting the urban refugees in the host countries. This is an update on the existing knowledge of refugees and economic security. This information may later be used in refining policies.

This study also sorts to make the voices of the helpless to be heard. For some of these urban refugees, they may want to be registered and be recognized as people of concern in the country but due to various circumstances can't. This study therefore provides a platform for them to be heard and their struggles be understood and hopefully be addressed in the near future. The ability to give a voice to a group that is hardly mentioned is one of the biggest drives for this research.

This research also seeks to fill in the research gap by discovering how urban refugees in Bangkok achieve economic security. This involved looking into the different ways that they generate income for themselves despite the fact that working is illegal for them. Also with this research it sorts to involve more than just the Somali community that most researchers focus on as refugees from Africa. It involved urban refugees and asylum seekers from both Sudan and Somalia.

This study examines the current economic situation of two of the most vulnerable urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok. The outcome of this study should contribute to any available information on African urban refugees and asylum seekers and also spark an interest in other to also do more research on this group. African urban refugees and asylum seekers face more challenges than those from other countries and so they need more attention to make those problems known so that they can be addressed.

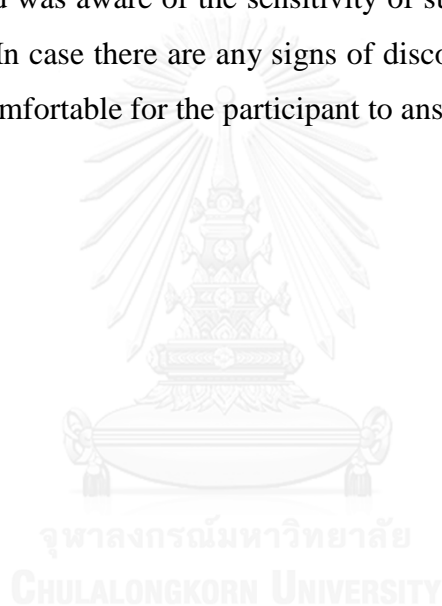
### **1.9 Ethical Issues**

The safety of these participants is one of the ethical issues that were considered. The meetings with the participants were in areas that they felt comfortable and safe with. With certain topics such as the restrictions to their income generation, the issue of

arrest and harassment may come up. This required sensitivity as it is a threat to their security to discuss such matters and so their safety was highly considered.

Since the urban refugees are a vulnerable group that would rather not be identified, their confidentiality was assured. I explained what the research is about and what is needed of them. They then had the option to decide on whether they wanted to participate in this research. Their full names were not used and therefore any reporting was on the use of pseudonym.

Lastly, most of these refugees fled their home countries due to conflicts. Therefore asking them about this traumatizing time of their lives was very difficult. I took that into consideration and was aware of the sensitivity of such questions and slowly ease into these questions. In case there are any signs of discomfort, the topic was changed to something more comfortable for the participant to answer.





## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Understanding Urban Refugees

##### 2.1.1 The 1951 Refugee Convention and South East Asia

The refugee convention of 1951 represents the main principle of refugee protection. According to the definition of refugees as per the convention is that, these are people fleeing their homes from persecution on the following basis; political opinion, their nationality, religion, race and belonging to a specific social group. This convention provides an actual common framework effective for states' cooperation in sharing the responsibility of refugees. This meant that states had the option to affirm their commitment in protecting the rights of refugees in their countries. The refugee convention creates a more formal established system for the protection of those who have survived war on an international level.

The refugee convention has been widely accepted as there are 144 countries that are signatories. However the failure in the international refugee system is responsible for the Refugee Convention failing to handle the bigger issue of asylum. There has been criticism on the capacity of the convention as it had been considered to be incapable of allowing equal attention to both the sovereignty and the issue of migration itself (Edwards, 2005). It is considered more of reconciliation between the state authoritative hand on controlling the issue of migration and any humanitarian concern. The inability of the UNHCR to oversee single refugees under the refugee law and the absence of any measures of complaints is yet another criticism that is attributed to the refugee convention.

The convention highlights the causes for seeking protection abroad unlike how the other instruments concentrated on the categorizing of groups according to where they came from. This convention has the following three principles; non-refoulement, non-discrimination, and non-penalization. The principle of non-discrimination means that refugees should not be discriminated according to their sex, religion, origin, disability or any other feature (UNHCR, 2010). While the principle of non-penalization means

that refugees cannot be penalized for entering and seeking asylum in the country even when they break the domestic immigration laws of that host country. This is mostly important as most countries that lack strict immigration laws get more asylum seekers and so violating the country's immigration laws. Lastly the principle of non-refoulement means that the refugees are not to be sent back to areas that threaten their life or freedom (UNHCR, 2010).

The decision on how to determine the status of a refugee is more of a political matter. There are discrepancies in the different states on how to understand the Refugee Convention. Some states have involved the UNHCR in determining the status of the refugees while other states have decided on letting the UNHCR to just observe and oversee the process. Another inadequacy observed is in the fact that most of the Asian states have not signed the convention (Feith, 1988). And for those that have signed, there is not much that can be done to make sure they abide by the convention.

The 1967 Protocol was applied by the UNHCR so as to provide a wide inclusiveness of the refugee system. This document was able to eliminate the limitations that were in the 1951 convention in terms of geographical and temporal limitations. This made it more universal in how it could be applied. This 1967 Protocol acknowledged that the legal protection could be offered by countries without the issue of geographical limitation. This consequently involved both the developing and the developed countries. With most colonial powers leaving developing countries and these countries gaining independence together with the increase of refugee cases, the Protocol was a necessary step.

Unlike the Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa which is a legal regional instrument governing refugee protection in Africa by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), South East Asia lacks such an instrument. Even with the high number of refugees and asylum seekers in South East Asia, there still seems to be little interest in the region to address this refugee problem. Yet, the people that are qualified as refugees according to the definition of the 1951 Convention are to be under the protection of the UNHCR irrespective of whether the country that is hosting them recognizes them as refugees or not. Such refugees are also known as 'mandate refugees' (UNHCR 1992).

Although the 1951 Refugee has some shortcomings, it still establishes principles and standards in regards to what is expected from the international community in dealing with refugees. One thing that is clear is the definition of refugees that is still widely accepted by most countries in the world. With the help of this convention, there is a more standard discussion on the matter of refugees. This importance can be recognized as it is used by the UNHCR which is one of the most distinguished international organizations that deals with refugees (Feith, 1988).

<b>South-East Asian Countries</b>	<b>Refugees/ Asylum Seekers/ Stateless Persons / Persons of Concern (<i>total population of concern</i>)</b>	<b>Party to the 1951 Refugee Geneva Convention</b>
<b>Brunei</b>	20,524	No
<b>Cambodia</b>	301	Yes
<b>Indonesia</b>	13,548	No
<b>Laos</b>	0	No
<b>Malaysia</b>	246,270	No
<b>Myanmar</b>	1,414,357	No
<b>The Philippines</b>	325,707	Yes
<b>Singapore</b>	1	No
<b>Thailand</b>	560,832	No
<b>Timor-Leste</b>	6	Yes
<b>Vietnam</b>	11,000	No

*Table 1: Details on the total population of concern in South-East Asian countries and which are party to the 1951 refugee convention as per the UNHCR report on global Trends (2015)*

### 2.1.2 Asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs

In understanding the urban refugee issues, it is important to first look at the distinction between the groups of displaced people especially from a legal point of view. Looking

at the categories that are set up by the UNHCR we can see that the displaced people are divided into three categories which are asylum seekers, refugees and the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). And although most of the time people use refugees and asylum seekers interchangeably, these two terms have a difference. Asylum seekers are people who applied to attain the refugee status usually through the process of Refugee Status Determination (RSD) but have not yet been evaluated (UNHCR, 2010). While the difference between IDPs and refugees being that IDPs do not cross an international border meaning that they are evacuated from their homes but still within the boundaries of their own country.

### **2.1.3 General rules and conditions of Urban Refugees**

According to the (UNHCR, 2009), almost half of the refugees' population of the world lives in cities instead of camps. This is due to several reasons such as expecting to find employment, ease of movement, less restrictions and the supposed ease of repatriation in case they decide to. These refugees are from different places all over the world such Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Pakistan among many more. An example of the cities that these refugees decide to flee to comprise of Nairobi in Kenya, Bangkok in Thailand, Cairo in Egypt and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia among others. Therefore in understanding the dynamics of urban refugees, one need to look into their access to different services such as employment, housing and the exploitation they face in trying to access them.

The urban refugee population is usually made up of a variety of people, from families to single men and women seeking asylum. The ways in which these urban refugees enter a country varies too. Some of them enter the host country illegally meaning they lack the proper documentation. Some do enter the right way, for example using a tourist visa through the international airports. They however became illegal immigrants because their visas may expire and they cannot keep up with the requirements. Once they are illegal immigrants, they become vulnerable and face many challenges in the host country due to their nature (Briant & Kennedy, 2004).

In regards to their illegal status, the conditions of most urban asylum seekers are unsteady and risky. Looking at the economic conditions, most countries do not allow formal employment for refugees. This pushes the urban refugees to informal forms of employment. Here the conditions are not favorable as they are expected to work for

long hours, with low wages. Some of these urban refugees are educated and qualify for better jobs but instead end up not using their skills or their knowledge. The types of informal employment are such as working in construction, domestic work, prostitution and selling food by the road (Jacobsen, Ayoub, & Johnson, 2014).

On top of that, these urban asylum seekers are defenseless to abuses within the workplace. This is because they have nowhere to report these abuses such as sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment due to their nature. Moreover they face abuses on the outside too from the police and the public as they are threatened to be arrested, detained or deported to their home country. This is the same case even for some of the urban refugees that have completed their refugee status determination (RSD) process. The host country may still treat them as illegal immigrants and impose restrictions on their movement, their access to employment (Palmgren, 2014).

Looking at their social conditions, most urban asylum seekers have the problem of gaining access to services as health care and education. Access to proper formal education is a problem for various reasons such as the costs, not having the legal status and discrimination. However most host countries in the world offer only primary education as it is viewed as a universal right. An example is Egypt back in 1995 allowed rights to education even for urban refugees, but once there was the attempted assassination of their president, that took a toll on the urban refugees' rights in Egypt (Katarzyna, 2006). For the rest of the countries that don't offer primary education to urban refugees, what is usually available is language classes, vocational training and teaching of a few subjects that are usually unpredictable (Briant & Kennedy, 2004).

Looking at the availability of health care in the urban areas, this can be viewed as one of the pull factors for urban refugees towards the urban setting. As for health care, most urban refugees have access to primary health care. However there have been cases where refugees were denied services to quality health care for example in Malaysia. This was due to the language and discrimination (Alexander, 2008). And just as with access to education, there are several reasons that limit this access such as the cost, discrimination, language barrier, security risk and the general lack of legal status. Among the many health challenges that are common with urban refugees are

such as infectious diseases, not being properly immunized and psychological disorders (Palmgren, 2014).

Not much research is done on the analyzing urban refugees in relation to finance. Urban refugees face a lot of challenges in seeking to obtain financial services. For refugees that are not recognized by a host country or are living illegally in a country, they cannot access financial services or even open bank accounts. The lack of access to financial services in turn greatly affects their entrepreneurial determinations. Most of these urban refugees want to start businesses and so need loans which are not available to them. Also they lack proper forms of saving the money that they may be currently having, therefore being vulnerable to being robbed and extorted. It has also been witnessed that with the lack of access to credit for refugees, that has prevented them from trying to find any form of self-employment (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003).

#### **2.1.4 Refugees from Africa**

For most of the refugee problems in Africa, they are brought about by human behavior in one way or another. These vary in nature from human rights violations to conflicts. The rest are usually due to natural disasters such as drought and famine. These people are therefore forced to migrate as they seek to obtain basic needs such as shelter, food, water and education (UNHCR, 2009). The scale of the refugee crisis in African countries is a massive one and positively there are still other African countries that receive refugees despite their appalling economic as well as social conditions. An example is Ghana that has hosted thousands of people over time with its limited resources, facilities and accommodation. Unfortunately the economies of these hosting countries then weakens and leads to problems in different sectors (Kandoh, 2012).

From the period of 1950 – 1960, the case of refugees in Africa stemmed from being most of the African countries being colonized. These countries in Africa were under foreign control at that time. From the 1960s moving on, most African countries had attained independence but this did not reduce the number of refugee cases in the continent. They even grew bigger due to the civil wars within the continent. Another reason was the increase in environmental difficulties such as drought and famine (Schultheis, 1989). Countries that attained independence earlier such as Ghana encouraged other countries that were still colonized to resist. This resulted to a

reaction by the colonial powers against this resistance that led to more war and a generation of even more refugee cases (Kandoh, 2012).

One significant point to note is that, although the number of refugees from Africa has decreased over time, this doesn't mean that the number of internally displaced people is decreasing as well. It actually means the opposite because the number of internally displaced people is increasing due to the security problems in Africa. There are a high number of asylum cases that have been recognized in Africa displaying that African countries are welcoming to refugees. However this support hasn't been consistent, with several countries shutting out refugees at some point. An example is when the government of Kenya decided to close down the borders from the Somali refugees because of national security threats to the country of Kenya (Cremildo, 2014).

#### **2.1.5 Urban Refugees in other countries**

There are countries that allow urban refugees to have the status of legal immigrants. This allows the urban refugees to work although this is not the case with most host countries even though there are clear rights by the UN Convention and Protocol (UNHCR, 2010). An example is the country of Kenya where the borders are permeable due to its policy that allows the movement of refugees around the country. This saw the arrival of refugees from Uganda in the 70s before more from the neighboring countries. Currently there are thousands of refugees in the urban city of Nairobi which is the capital city of Kenya (Campbell, Crisp, & Kiragu, 2011).

Another example is the case of Sudanese refugees in Cairo. They are issued with refugee cards and asylum seeking cards making them legal immigrants. These urban refugees are still not eligible to get citizenship in the country. This is because in Egypt, citizenship is only through descent. This brings the uncertainty of whether these asylum seekers will be granted the legal protection by the UN Convention and Protocol or treated as the locals. However in reality, refugees are not treated equally to the locals in Egypt (Jacobsen et al., 2014).

According to research done in urban areas of cities like Kampala and Nairobi, urban refugees have lower chances of accessing microfinance services such as credit services and loans compared to the citizens of those countries. Refugees are mostly seen as a threat to the economic development of the country as well as a threat to the

security of a nation (Bhattacharya, 2009). As explained earlier in this chapter, denying urban refugees and asylum seekers to financial services is a major setback.

In the Asian-pacific region, the refugee population is on the higher side with almost 3.5million refugees. It is ironic since it is also the region with most states not being parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Most of the refugees in these parts are from Afghanistan and Myanmar (UNHCR, 2011).

### **2.1.6 Factors that Forced the Migration**

In understanding the current situation of African urban refugees and asylum seekers, it is important to briefly look at the factors that forced these refugees to flee their home countries. The reason that these three countries are chosen is because they make up the highest number of African urban refugees in Bangkok. Therefore the next section will give an insight into the various reasons that led to migration from Somalia, Sudan and The Democratic Republic of Congo.

#### **SOMALIA**

Starting with Somalia, it is a country on the horn of Africa with a population of almost nine million. It has been under civil war for the past decade that has displaced hundreds of thousands and killed millions. Somalia was seized by colonial powers in the mid-1800s. After the opening of the Suez Canal, the colonial powers became more concerned about the region and it was divided into three territories. The first colonial power to arrive was the British in 1887 and they conquered Northern Somalia and declared it as British Somaliland. Next was the French that arrived on the western coast which is currently Djibouti and declared it French Somaliland. Finally Italy came and took over the eastern and southern parts of Somalia and declared it Italian Somaliland (Lewis, 1996) .

With the downfall of the government of Somalia in 1991 came the humanitarian crisis. A large population of asylum seekers fled the country and all these refugees are spread in various parts of the world. Civil wars however are not the only reason that the Somali population is forced to migrate; others are such as drought and famine, lack of proper law and tough economic conditions. As of 2015, there were 1.3 million internally displaced Somalis. Out of that number, 1.1 million had fled to neighboring countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia as refugees (Campbell et al., 2011).



After the Second World War in 1948, some of the parts that were under the British power were transferred and became part of Ethiopia. Some of the parts in the northern border became under the control of Kenya (Lewis, 1996). Then in 1960, the territories under the British and the Italian powers gained independence and combined to become Somalia. The Northeast region that was under the French power became independent and formed the independent state of Djibouti in 1977.

### **SUDAN**

Sudan is an African country in the northeast part with an estimated population of 30million, and just as Somalia, it has been under civil wars for at least two decades that has seen the displacement of almost 5 million people and another 3 million people have been killed from these wars. The major reason behind these wars is the divide in the country between the northern part and the southern part. The people in the south consider themselves Africans, are of a darker complexion and most of them are Christians while those from the north consider themselves to be Arabs, are lighter in their complexion and most of them are Muslims (Abusharaf, 2002).

The war due to the difference in religion and ethnicity has claimed millions of lives and even though South Sudan became independent in 2011, there are still south Sudanese refugees. These refugees flee to neighboring countries such as Kenya and live in the refugee camp known as Kakuma camp that is located in the Northern part of Kenya. Others have fled to refugees camps in Ethiopia and even with some deciding to become urban refugees in the capital city of Egypt, Cairo (Turner & Fozdar, 2010).

While under the British rule, the northern Sudanese were protected by their colonial power and so they had access to education that encouraged some form of modernization. While those from the south had no contact with the outside world and they preferred this because of their painful history with slavery. This led to a rift between the two regions as they had differences in their clothing and the idea of modernization. The southern Sudanese were doubtful on the intentions of those from the north and they believed that the northern Sudanese wanted to force their Arab ways and religion on them. This added to the reasons that caused the civil war between the two regions (Johnson., 2011).

Around the 1970s, Sudan was under a huge debt from foreign investors. The country had focused most of its investment in the agricultural industry that had failed and so the exports reduced too. As this was happening, the southern part of Sudan had its own problems with oil and water resources as well as political problems. This brought about mistrust between the two parts (Johnson., 2011) . The situation got worse when there was a famine and dry spells. Since both of the regions had separate activities with one being the farmers and the other being the herders, this brought about more conflicts. One side wanted little available land for harvesting while the other wanted it to graze. This competition fueled more to the civil wars (Johnson., 2011).

### **The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

Congo was colonized by King Leopold II of Belgium who took the country as his own personal state. He took advantage of the massive availability of natural resources, used the people as labor for his home country and enforced a tax system. However due to the exploitation, the Belgian state took over Congo from the king. Even so, the poor people and the workers felt exploited and so there were revolts that led to elections. The elections however brought about a crisis once the elected leader was removed from power by the western governments who were protecting their own interests in the country (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). A coup d'état led by Mobutu Sese-Seko saw him take over the country for the next 32 years.

Since 1996, this country has fought with eight countries and a reported 4 million people died. As a result of these wars, people have been displaced; there has been destruction of assets and infrastructure. There are still fights that are reported to be still happening in the country and cases of soldiers terrorizing and raping the citizens. That is why the people of DRC are forced to migrate to neighboring countries such as Kenya and even come as far as Thailand.

## **2.2 The context of the study**

### **2.2.1 National laws of Thailand**

Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol and even lacks domestic laws on asylum. However, Thailand has been allowing refugees to enter the country on humanitarian grounds for over 40 years. The country operates on the Immigration Act of 1979 that views refugees and asylum seekers as illegal

immigrants and they are therefore to be arrested, detained and deported. In the beginning, most of the refugees were from Indochina but now we have a variety of refugees from several countries flocking into Thailand. In practicality, there is still a large population of refugees that is spread along the nine camps between Thailand and Myanmar. There are also some that live in the urban city of Bangkok away from the camps.

The Ministry of Interior is the one that has taken the responsibility of refugee issues and the temporary shelters while taking into consideration the policy of the National Security Council. The Ministry of Interior defined the status of people fleeing from Myanmar as 'displaced persons fleeing conflict'. Since the situation has improved in Myanmar, Thailand plans to send the people back to Myanmar but Thailand has no intention of solving the overall global refugee crisis. The country is working towards the safe and voluntary return of the Myanmar refugees while also trying to find a durable solution for the ones currently in Thailand. However Thailand is not looking into accepting any more refugees (The Border Consortium, 2016). This is in consideration of the laws of the country that do not recognize the refugee status and therefore just for humanitarian reasons, it will assist the Myanmar refugees. The UNHCR has updated the draft operational procedures that will enable the safe and voluntary return of refugees to Myanmar.

### **2.2.2 Cross border refugees from Myanmar**

Myanmar that is a neighboring country to Thailand has been a victim to conflicts between ethnic minorities and the military rule. This conflict has been the reason that millions of people were forced to flee the country and become refugees or internally displaced persons. That is why some of the Myanmar refugees entered Thailand and that led to the first refugee settlement was set up in 1984 in Tak province. Despite Thailand not being a signatory in the 1951 Refugee Convention, it agreed to let the Karen to temporarily settle as long as the humanitarian agencies and international NGOs would provide support. By the end of 2016, the refugee population in the nine camps on the Thai-Myanmar border was 98,754 (The Border Consortium, 2016). According to the TBC database, there has been a drop in the number of refugees to 5,049 because some have returned to Myanmar.

In 2005, UNHCR started the resettlement program where more than 80,000 refugees from Myanmar were settled in other countries such as Australia, United States, Norway, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Canada, Sweden, Ireland, New Zealand and Finland (UNHCR, 2006). And now in 2017, the UNHCR are facilitating the repatriation program where Myanmar refugees are supported in going back to their home country but only for those that are willing. The three ministries responsible for refugee issues are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior and the National Security Council (UNHCR, 2016).

As for the case of the Rohingya, Thailand considers them as a group that has been trafficked into the territories of the state of Thailand through illegal ways. Unfortunately for the Rohingya, there is limited space for the UNHCR to implement its mandate. Since they lack proper documentation, they are vulnerable to arrest where they suffer long periods of unwarranted imprisonment. Since the Rohingya cannot enter Myanmar without proper documents and the other neighboring countries do not want to accept them or do not know where to send them, they usually end up in indefinite detention.

### **2.2.3 Urban refugees in Thailand**

In Thailand, urban refugees are mostly from Laos, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia, Palestine, Iran, Somalia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 refugee convention or the 1967 protocol, urban refugees are at a risk of being arrested and detained. They also lack the right to employment and it's even worse for the African urban refugees and asylum seekers compared to those from Asian countries.

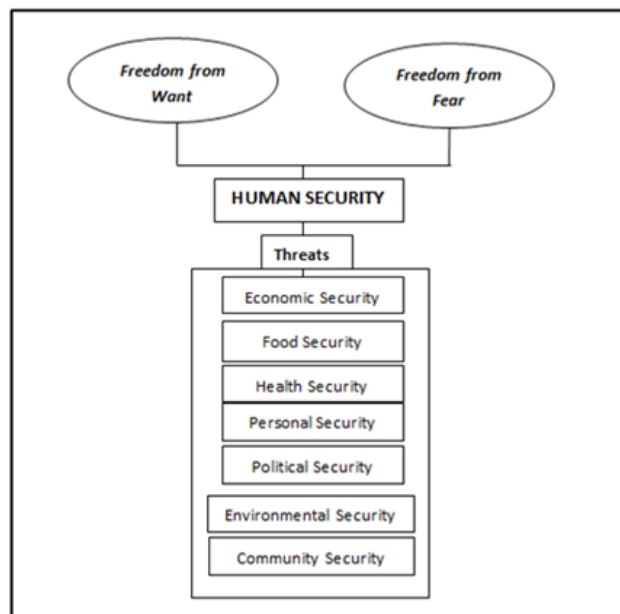
Apart from arrest and detention, other issues of concern for urban refugees are poverty, housing, lack of educational opportunities, not being accepted by the host society and safety. For accommodation, they usually have to share living spaces since they can't afford spacious ones and so it is overcrowded. This in turn increases the chances of violence to happen especially sexual violence and gender-based. This is caused by the fact that these refugees share accommodation with other refugees that are not related to them. For these urban refugees, the only solution will be to be resettled in a third country because integration isn't much of an option in Thailand.

Nut even then, resettlement is a process that takes a long time therefore they are stuck in these unfavorable conditions (FMR 2007).

African urban refugees in Thailand have an even harder time as they face discrimination from both the authorities as well as the community. The police are also known to harass the African urban refugees and extort money from them even when they have not done anything wrong (refugees.org, 2015). Also due to the fact that they are not in the camps, this means less assistance for them from UNHCR and the NGOs that offer assistance in the camps. This contributes greatly to their problem of achieving human security.

## 2.3 Theoretical framework

### 2.3.1 Human Security Framework



*Figure 1: Human security framework*

The human security concept is a people oriented concept that is based on the same principles as those seen in both the human development concept and the human rights concept. This is evident in how they all aim at protecting humans regardless of their nationality, race, sex, color or religion. Human security is made up of two components which are freedom from want and freedom from fear as seen within the United Nations theme. In the beginning, it was mostly used in the context of the latter rather than the former. Also there was a shift from security in the sense of the forces between the military authority and the states up until the end of the Cold War.

Although human security is not defined in international law, it complements the legal concept of refugee conception. Often times, the human security is not a concept that is used in the explanation of the refugee context but this study will use it in that way. Asylum seekers and refugees as a group of people are a major indication of human insecurity crises. I used this concept in relation to refugees because they are victims to twice the insecurity. The insecurity for refugees can be viewed from how they fear for their own safety and decide to flee their home countries and then how they end up facing the various dimensions of insecurity under human security once they become urban refugees.

Human security as a concept was promoted by the UNDP in 1994. There are seven dimensions of threats to human security that were identified as follows: health security which involves access to health care and a harmless environment, economic security involves a guaranteed source of basic income, environmental security which has been weakened by climate change and poor use of land, food security which involves access to food, community security since people develop security by belonging to some sort of community and lastly personal security which involves being secured from any form of violence and abuse (UNDP, 1994).

Looking at the scope of analysis of the concept of human security, it is clear that this concept can take up different directions in how its policy can be applied. It can shift its focus from the security of the state to that of individual people that make up a country. The direction can be described as upwards when it involves the security of the international systems. The downwards direction will thus mean the security of individuals and even that of the NGOs (Rothschild, 1995).

The UN Commission on Human Security was founded in 2000 to focus on protecting the people that were forced to move from their homes. According to the Commission on Human security, they define it as:

“...to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms – freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people’s strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic,

military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihoods and dignity.” (CHS, 2003)

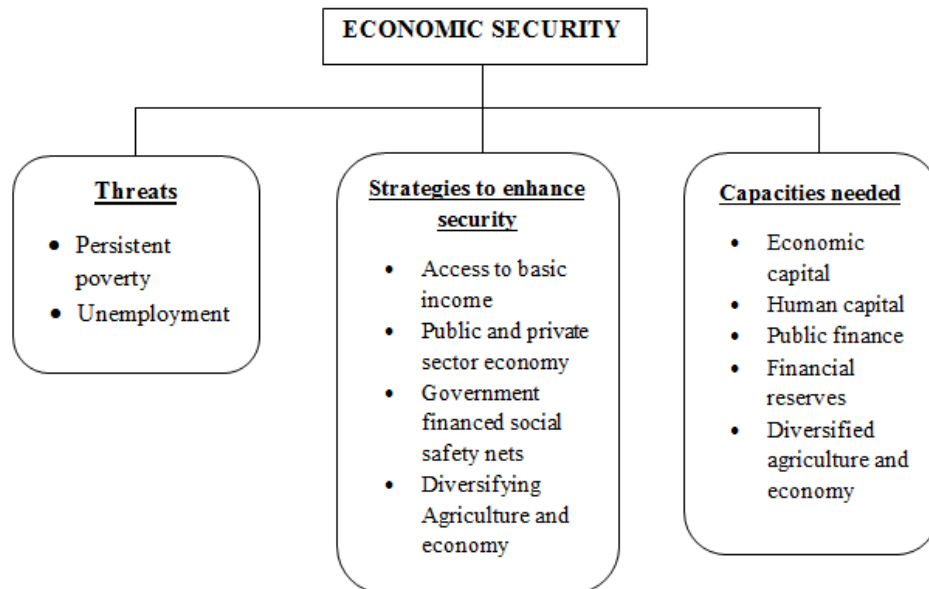
Most research has been done in trying to find indicators of gauging human security beyond the several actions of the United Nations. It is quite difficult as stated in the UNDP report that shows that an exact measure of human security is not possible. However there are some ways that may show whether the human security within a state is facing some difficulty or if it is flourishing. Nevertheless even with these difficulties there have also been improvements in the indicators of human security from both the qualitative and quantitative side (Hastings, 2011).

There has also been criticism in the structure of human security as a concept. According to the Human Security in Theory and Practice (HSU), when evaluating human security and even the dimensions under it, one need to take into account other factors such as the age, socio-economic status and gender at all stages. Moreover, the threats posed by the various types of security are interrelated. One can bring about the other, for example with economic security, once there is poverty that could lead to malnutrition and diseases which is a threat to the human security (United Nations, 2009).

There is still a lot of debate regarding the concepts of human security and how to approach it as a theory. For the case of refugees, there is the threat perspective where they are considered as a vulnerable group that needs protection. These are people living in fear for different reasons. Therefore the first argument is that human security is looked at from the angle of different threats to refugees, (Bowcott, 2014).

A major shift happened in the guidelines of the UNHCR's protection approach in 1991. It increased its scope ranging from issues such as access to health care and skills training to the design of the camps. This is different from the initial approach which mainly focused on the role of the states in granting asylum and the legal terms involved such as the principle of non-refoulement.

### 2.3.2 Economic security



**Figure 2: Economic Security framework**

In order to more precisely understand the economic situation and the extent of access to economic security of African urban refugees in Bangkok, I will attempt to use this pillar of the human security concept as defined in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report in its conceptual framework. Economic security necessitates having access to a basic income, some form of financial protection or safety net. This involves that one is able to access employment and all matters involving it such as getting a regular income. The main types of threats to economic security are unemployment and insistent poverty. The capacities that are needed include human capital, economic capital, financial reserves and public finance (United Nations, 2009).

The case in Thailand is that refugees are not allowed to work outside the camp. Since they are considered illegal immigrants, they therefore resort to illegal forms of work. This is a further problem because these jobs are not a long term guaranteed source of income, (Lee, 2014). This means the refugees are not able to sustain themselves for a long period of time and they need assistance. This is where the NGO's are supposed to come in and offer assistance in various forms. Most NGOs offer vocational training for the camp based refugees, so that they have some set of skills once they do leave



the camps. The skills taught include hair-dressing, sewing, electricity repair, computer skills, entrepreneurship classes and cooking (Song, 2013).

Most of the refugees that are able to communicate in English end up working for the NGOs and the community based organizations. They can be invited to work as interpreters or any other jobs such as help the clients that need assistance in filing in forms. This is however not ideal because once these refugees get to experience the real world, they move on and forget about the others in the camps. One cannot blame the refugees for wanting to find better opportunities out of the camps but also this will mean that only a few will be benefitting from the programs with the rest left in the same crisis (Song, 2013).

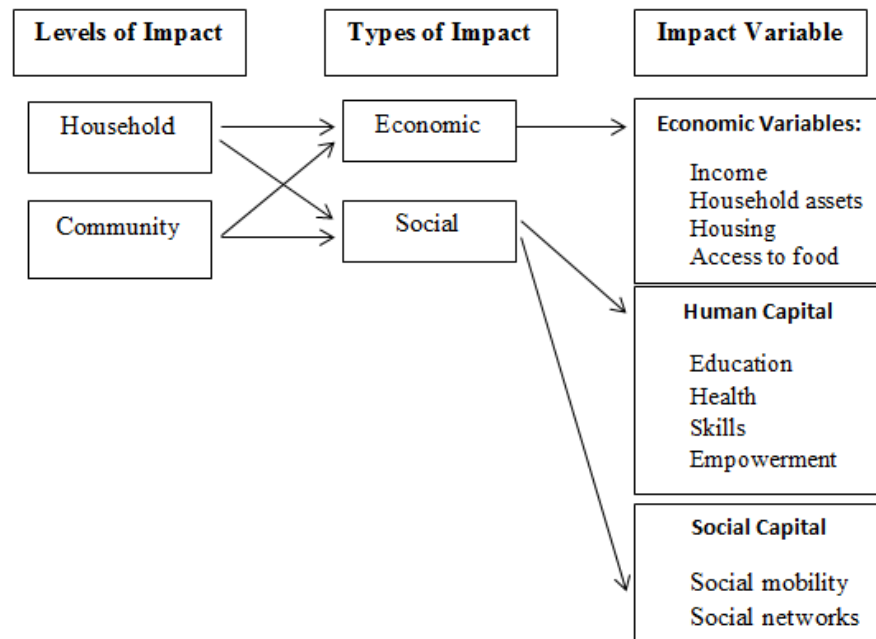
Another issue related to economic security is on whether it increases the willingness of refugees to integrate in the host community or repatriate to their home country. This is because at times once the refugees are able to earn more or have a successful business; it might bring about hatred by the people of the host country and therefore encouraging repatriation. Even without any influence from the attitude of the host country, these refugees might decide to repatriate and share this new endeavor with those in their origin country. Sometimes, an increase in the refugees resources might bring about better relations with the people of the host community hence encourages integration (Bakewell, 2000).

In some instance it has been observed that competition between the refugees and the locals over the scarce resources has been a problem. For example if the scarce involved is land and both the refugees and the locals require it in their income generating activities to improve their economic security, they will fight over it. These refugees don't have access to these resources in the camps and therefore this situation worsens into conflict with the locals. The opportunity cost of being involved in conflict is low for these refugees and that's why they engage (Salehyan, 2007).

One big challenge is reducing the vulnerability of refugees to being exploited by offering economic support. In most developing countries, women in displaced situations are at the risk of being sexually exploited as they try to sustain themselves. There are far more opportunities for men since they are preferred by assistance agencies. Women also tend to work in the informal sector for example as domestic workers and handicrafts (UNHCR, 2008). While this clearly shows women being

disadvantaged, once more focus is set on them through empowering projects by humanitarian agencies, men are then left out. So finding a balance is hard and necessitates the use of gender-sensitive approaches (WCRWC, 2006).

### 2.3.3 Microfinance



**Figure 3: The conceptual framework on microfinance and its impact**

Microfinance here is used in seeking to answer the question on the different types of financial support systems that are available to African urban refugees and asylum seekers. Microfinance is the provision of financial services to low income people. These services are usually in the form of savings, credit and may even extend to insurance and payment schemes (Ledgerwood, 1998). For the purpose of this research, the main focus will be the financial support systems, both formal and informal, offered to urban refugees since they are not offered any formal microfinance systems. However for this part of the theoretical framework, I will look into both the formal microfinance that has been offered to refugees in some countries as well.

Most microfinance assistance is usually not offered to refugees as they are considered unsuitable and a risky population. This is for various reasons such as lacking proper documentation, likely to not be able to pay back the loans, temporary stay in one place and even complaints from the host community. This however doesn't mean that there hasn't been microfinance offered to refugees. There have been microfinance

programs set up for refugees in Kenya, Sudan and Congo, (Jacobsen, 2002). The one problem is that the success of these programs is mostly measured in terms of how much it paybacks to the Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) in terms of the repayment rates rather than how much it has assisted the refugees in improving their economic security.

There has been mixed results of introducing microfinance to a community that was once affected by conflict. On one hand, offering capital to the refugees may mean that they will be able to start a business rather than getting involved in illegal ways such as prostitution. But also it might mean that they will need to keep up the illegal forms of business on the side in order to be able to pay for the interest on the loans (Jacobsen, 2002).

Although no microfinance institutions currently operate inside of the camps in Thailand, there are some grant, loan, and rent-to-own options available to camp residents through organizations such as The Border Consortium (TBC) and American Refugee Committee (ARC). These programs were each found to have their own particular barriers. In most cases, loans for start-up capital were only available to members of village savings and loan projects, which operate as small groups. Joining these groups requires a certain amount of social capital and a certain amount of steady income to build the required savings (EMC 2015).

Previous work has been done in forced migration and the evaluation of micro-finance programs for refugee populations. Omata draws upon his personal observations and field experiences regarding microfinance assistance. He discusses self-reliance, entrepreneurship and microfinance for refugees. Under microfinance in refugee contexts, he looks at the key lessons and arguments on microfinance provision to refugee populations. He further looks at models of microfinance as well as three case studies providing information relevant to different providers of microfinance for refugees. The following are the different forms he discovered; international peer-to-peer lending, large-scale self-sustaining UN MFI and finally development agencies sourcing local partners as MFIs (Easton & Omata, 2016).

There are several lessons learned from the Alchemy Project, an experimental project in Africa aimed at supporting displaced people's livelihoods by providing access to a variety of forms of credit. It argues that before designing and implementing credit-

based interventions, it is important to understand both what the refugee community brings, by way of traditional credit systems, group and leadership structures, skills, rural/urban experience and so forth, and what the refugees encounter by way of government policies, the host community, security problems and so on (Jacobsen, 2004).

#### **2.3.4 Adaptive Strategies**

For the purpose of this research, I will use the term adaptive strategies to mean the different ways that the refugees use in trying to deal with the challenges they face in trying to improve their economic situations. Adaptive strategies can be at times be explained as the short term comeback to an unpredicted or unusual food strain and then incorporate these strategies in the normal routine.

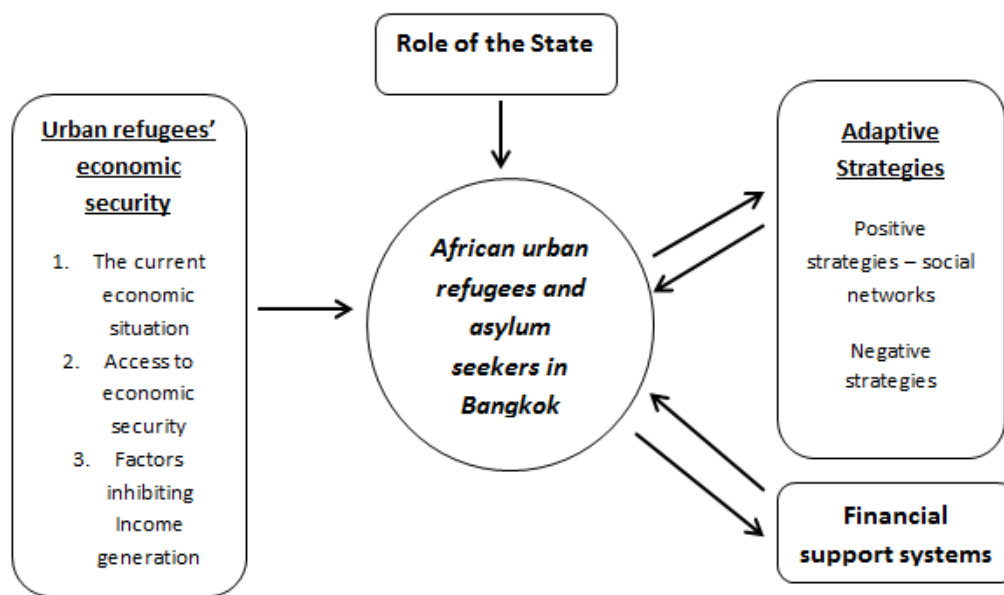
An example is when refugees are faced with shortages in food; they need to find ways in which to cover this shortage. According to most studies on refugee adaptive strategies, there are three levels; Insurance mechanism, disposal of productive assets and destitution behavior. The first step is to adopt strategies that will have little long run cost. An example of such strategies is using up any savings or remittances. Once those are depleted and the situation hasn't improved, the refugees sort out to strategies that have a long run cost such as selling their assets and finally they may decide to fully migrate of the land (Cutler, 1986).

Adaptive strategies have also been categorized into either being internal or external resources as seen by (Halcón, Robertson, Monsen, & Claypatch, 2007). The external resources are such as social support and the surrounding environment while for the internal resources they are such as education, health and personal beliefs. Other common adaptive strategies that have been discussed in previous studies before are such as the precise activities that refugees use in trying to cope with negative feelings such as reading.

Since there are usually restrictions for the refugees in the camps, they usually need to find ways to attain their livelihood security. These restrictions may in turn push the refugees into taking part in illegal activities like prostitution or stealing. Therefore in order to evade such negative activities, the NGOs that deal with refugees employ the skills that these refugees already possess to turn them into positive adaptive strategies. Examples of positive adaptive strategies are such as practicing subsistence farming

for consumption, income generating programmes, mobility and transnational resources and international assistance. Examples of negative adaptive strategies are such as activities that deplete the environment, prostitution and manipulation on the provided international aid (Halcón et al., 2007).

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework



**Figure 4: Practical Conceptual Framework**

The situation of urban refugees in Thailand is one that needs more attention, especially African urban refugees. Any refugee that has fled from their home country due to fear of persecution is faced with the threats under human security. The seven dimensions under the human security concept are what these refugees seek to attain in order to improve their wellbeing. However the situation is far much challenging for the urban refugees that do not live in camps but instead live in the urban areas. This is because they do not get as much support from NGOs and humanitarian organizations like the refugees in the camps. It is even more challenging for the urban refugees that are in Thailand since they are not recognized as refugees but rather as illegal immigrants.

Therefore this framework is an interpretation of what my study will be about. In as much as understanding the human security of African urban refugees, I will mainly focus on economic security. This is because urban refugees are not allowed to work in

Thailand and yet they need an income to overcome the main threats under economic security which are unemployment and poverty. Therefore with the guide of the concept of economic security, I will seek to answer the two main questions of this study which are on the current economic security and the extent of access to economic security as well as the factors that inhibit income generation by African urban refugees in Bangkok.

The role of the state will come in when the paper discusses the factors that inhibit the economic security of urban refugees and asylum seekers. The role of the state is usually discussed by looking at the task of the state of generating situations in the legal, economic or political sense that will inspire the public and individuals in improving their lives. Since Thailand does not recognize refugees and therefore doesn't have laws that specifically protect the refugees, the study will look at how that affects the income generating activities of this urban refugee's population.

The right side of my conceptual framework focuses on what the African urban refugees are doing on their part towards the forces acting upon them. This is where the adaptive strategies are introduced. Adaptive strategies are the ways in which these urban refugees try to survive despite not being allowed to work according to the Thailand laws. The adaptive strategies may be on a positive nature where they find ways to earn an income such as having an informal business or using their social networks of selling fruits or negative adaptive strategies such as prostitution.

Other than adaptive strategies, these African urban refugees and asylum seekers need some sort of financial support system. Under financial systems I will look into any forms of informal forms of microfinance that are there for example any informal credit systems. Also since it is clear that micro-finance institutions do not offer financial services to refugees, the study will then shift to the financial assistance they get from the NGOs as well as the humanitarian assistance provided to them.

## CHAPTER 3

### STORY OF THE INVISIBLE

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the first main research question of the thesis as well as the sub questions under it. Therefore it mainly concentrates on the current economic situations of the African urban refugees, their economic adaptive strategies and explores any form of financial support system that is available to the African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok. This chapter tells the story by giving an insight on the lives of these urban refugees and asylum seekers from the moment they decided to flee their home countries up until their current situation as the invisible people of Bangkok.

#### 3.2 Leaving home for the unknown

Somalia has borders with Ethiopia in the west, Kenya on the south west and Djibouti in the northwest.

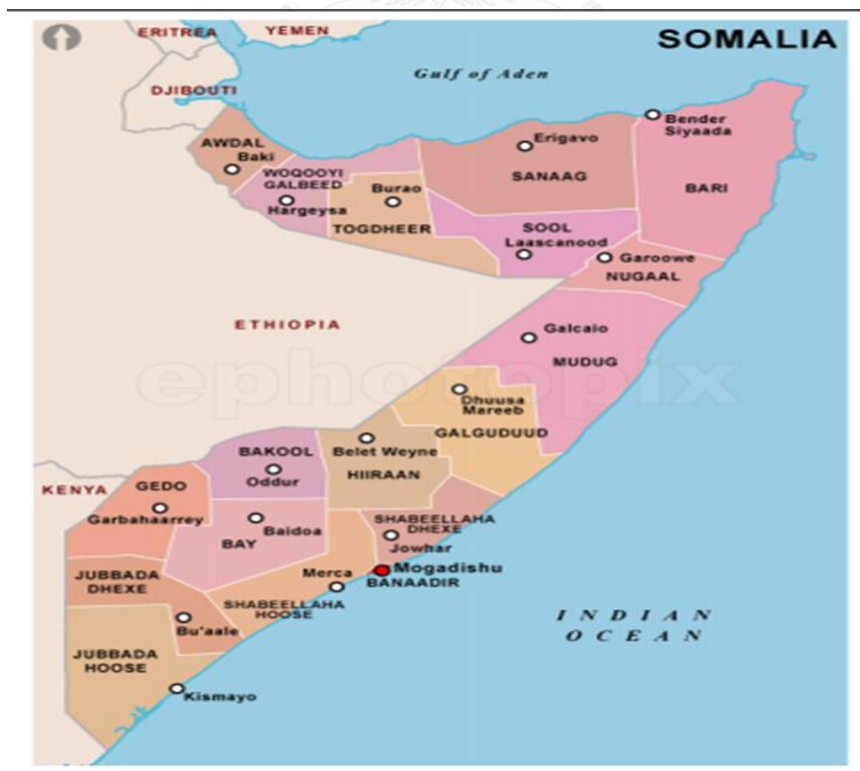


Figure 5: Map of Somalia Source: (ephotoxix, 2012)

“My reason for running away from Somalia is a personal one. It is still hard for me to think about it, but I had to accept it and run away. I saw my whole family getting killed, my father, my mother and my younger siblings. This took me almost one year before I could stop crying every time I remembered that day”

This is the answer of the young 23year old Somali man after I asked him for the reason that made him leave Somalia. Sadly enough, this type of answer was common among the participants of the interview. The civil war in Somalia is a major reason for the migration of millions every year. The political instability in the country is another reason that causes the people of Somalia to see refugee in neighboring countries as well as those miles away. Most of the Somali refugees migrate to Kenya where they are accommodated at the Dabaab refugee camp. But with the refugee crises growing, there are more refugees also from other African countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and South Sudan that are also seeking refuge in Kenya. This has seen the speculations that the camp might be closed down, and so forcing refugees to migrate to further countries.

In Somalia, clan systems are a very important form of identification. Another recurring reason is the war between clans and ethnic groups. These disputes got severe as most of them lost family members and faced fear of being persecuted as well. It was mainly between the majority clans and the minority clans in Somalia. It was stated that these majority clans were usually triggered by even the slightest presence of the minority clans and they would attack the entire clan. Among the majority clans that were mentioned were the Darod and Hawiye. While those from the minority clans stating to be from the Bagadi and Ashraf clans.

Unlike other African countries that have several ethnic groups with different languages and culture, Somalia has only one ethnic group that has one language, culture and even religion. It however has several clans with several members varying from thousands to hundreds of thousands. These clans can be divided further into several sub-clans. These leaders of these clans play important roles in mediating conflicts within the Somali communities. The leaders of these clans exercise power by using government officials in high positions. These government officials also use these clan leaders to offer them support through their clan members to remain in these



high government offices. Most of the political parties in the country are focused on the interests of the clans and tribal systems rather than the general interests of the country of Somalia (Mohamed, 2009).

Intermarriage between the clans that were considered to be of different social and economic levels also led to persecution. One of the participants in my interview was from the higher clan and had decided to get married to someone who was considered to be from the lower clans. The husband was killed as well as his two brothers and the woman was also to be punished for the marriage. That was when she decided to flee Somalia for her own safety.

Nevertheless, one of the male participants explains how these persecutions and violations were not just a result of clan disputes. It was also common of the powerful militia to harass the locals and get into fights that ended with locals being killed. With nowhere to report such injustice and having no family left, it was time for this young man who was then 20 years to flee the country.

Another reason that was stated by three of the respondents was that they had to flee due to pressure to donate their kidneys. Although these three ladies were from different parts of Somalia, it was shocking that they were all victims of such malice. One explains that after the death of her parents, as an only child she was adopted by the family that her mother worked for as a house help. She was not aware of the plan to donate her kidney up until they had taken her for several checkups at the hospital without her asking.

Three of the participants were victims of gender based violence back in Somalia. These women were often abused by their husbands and the community turned a blind eye to that. With most of these young ladies having lost their families and married off at a young age, they usually feel like they have no other option. Therefore these three are the case of the brave that feared for their lives as it was getting more dangerous with time. But to the community they left behind, they believe that they are considered a shame and a big disgrace.

Finally in some rare cases, these asylum seekers and refugees leave their home country due to false advertisement by “agents” that life is cheaper and better in Thailand. With such false potential, the one Sudan family I interviewed decided to use all their life savings to get to Thailand. Once they got to Bangkok, the “agent” had no

job prospects and even cut off communication with them leaving them to set up a new life in a foreign country with barely enough money to survive and with no passports. Another common problem that forced the refugees to leave their home country is political problems. This was especially when the participants or their close relatives were actively involved in political activities. Their involvement in often times led to the threatening of the participants or their families. Aisha narrates how as an orphan, she was taken in by her mother's brother. The uncle treated her as his own daughter and they lived a comfortable life as he was involved with the politics of the Somalia. Everything seemed to go well up until the day they received threats that the uncle needed to avail himself to a certain place if he didn't want any trouble for the family. Knowing that this was a serious threat to his family, the uncle decided to send the wife and the kids out of the country. Aisha explains that they had seen what these kinds of threats from political problems ended terribly for the targeted families and so they had no option than to flee Somalia. Aisha and her aunty with one other cousin got separated during the travelling and she doesn't know what happened to her uncle back in Somalia either.



*Figure 6: The map of Sudan*

People are aware that there is a war between the Northern Sudan and Southern Sudan but very little is known on the severity of this civil war. More than two million people have died due to this civil war with millions more having to flee the country and some internally displaced. Habib, a 35 year old man who was a participant in the interviews explains the reason why people like him were forced to flee. According to him, this war has been going on for a long time and it was mainly due to the difference in religion between the two regions. The north was dominated by the light skinned Sudanese that were mostly Muslims while the southern was dominated by the darker skinned Sudanese that were mostly Christians. Therefore since he was from the southern part and a Muslim, he was frequently insulted and intimidated together with his family until one day a Christian group attacked his village and he was lucky enough to leave with his wife and two kids but sadly his other family members were killed. War due to ethnic and religious difference was the major cause stated by the participants of this interview who were all from the Southern Sudan. Another reason that caused the rivalry and war between the two regions was due to the discovery of oil Southern Sudan. Even though South Sudan is an independent state as of 2011, there are still thousands of South Sudanese that are living in exile in neighboring countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt and Uganda (Turner & Fozdar, 2010).

### **3.2.1 Mobilizing funds for the Journey**

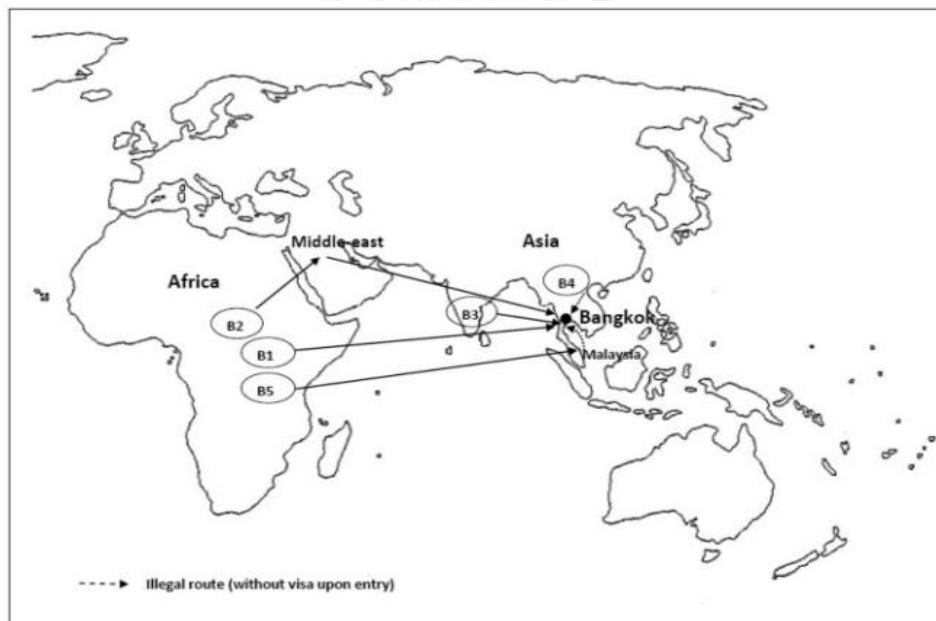
From the interviews, the participants expressed the various sources of funds that enabled their exile. For some, they had to contact relatives in Somalia to help them with financial assistance. Although a few of the participants for the interviews explained that they were economically stable back in Somalia and they could pay for their trip, they needed additional financial assistance as they didn't have anyone in Bangkok. For those participants that still had relatives in Somalia, those relatives were their primary source. These relatives were also involved with organizing the trips from Somalia sometimes with the help of travel agents. Therefore in general, the funds that were used by participants were from their own personal resources for example two women explained that they sold their jewelry, and the rest of the participant's funds were from close friends and family.

The "agents" that keep on being mentioned by most of these participants are smugglers that were in charge of arranging these trips. The smuggling business in

Somalia is common with the information easily accessible among the locals. However these smugglers are only interested once the client can prove that they can mobilize enough funds for the trip and the service.

### 3.2.2 Migration routes

From the map in the next page, it shows that there are three routes that the refugees from Africa take. B1 shows that they can travel directly from Africa to Bangkok. This however is not common among the refugees as it is a more expensive route compared to the other two options. The second route B2 that these refugees can use is travelling from Africa stopping at the Middle East especially Dubai before then proceeding to Bangkok. Lastly, the third route B5 involves the refugees travelling from Africa to the Malaysia then travel to Bangkok. These last two routes are the common ones as the participants of my interview identified B2 and B5 as the routes they used.



**Figure 7: Migration routes from Africa to Bangkok Source (Shum, 2014)**

Gathering from the information from the interviews, most of the Somali urban refugees and asylum seekers travelled from Somalia to Malaysia then Thailand. They travelled by plane from Somalia to Kuala Lumpur where they usually stayed for a few days before being smuggled into Thailand by bus. Eight of the interviewees travelled with the “agent” who was in charge of all the travelling details and planning since all of these participants had never travelled out of Somalia before. Although none of the

participants had used this route, they explained that there was the option of travelling to Dubai before flying to Thailand.

Once they arrived at Malaysia, the period in which they were in Malaysia varied for the interviewees. Some reported that they were only in Malaysia for some hours while others had stayed for days but not more than a week. Since the Somali are Muslims they had an easier access to Malaysia as they were allowed a visa-free travel to Malaysia for one month. These agents had further convinced them that the cost of living in Thailand is cheaper compared to Malaysia. With no place to go back to and mostly very little money left, they agreed to come to Thailand. They were then transported from Kuala Lumpur to Bangkok by bus illegally. Unfortunately they were abandoned once they arrived in Bangkok, in most instances around the areas where the Somalia urban refugees' community resides.

Another way by which the Somali and the Sudan urban refugees and asylum seekers got to Bangkok was by a direct plane. The participants explained how they got tourist visas to come to Bangkok and once they arrived in Bangkok, they overstayed their visit until the visas expired. That meant they were now considered illegal immigrants. The "agents" took their passports so that they could not be traced back to them in any way. One of the Somali ladies explained that she didn't understand how important the passport was. This was the case with most of the Somali ladies I interviewed because they didn't own a passport before.

Traveling from Africa to Bangkok on a direct flight requires an extensive amount of funds. These smugglers offered a variety of services such as preparing the necessary documents needed to travel, organizing the trip and sometimes even accompany their clients. Most of the participants that had acquired the services of smugglers had been accompanied especially the women. Once they decided to hire a smuggler, they had no control over the process anymore.

Mariam, a single mother of one recalls how once the "agent" had decided to offer his services to them, he took total control and hardly consulted Mariam on any issue. Mariam did not know how long the trip will be from Somalia to Thailand, she didn't even know that she was coming to Thailand. The smuggler had just mentioned the day they would leave, how she should dress, what she should carry and promised to take her to a better country. She even confessed that in her mind she thought she

might be going to Europe maybe as she had heard rumors of the “agent” having connections in Europe. However, her journey ended in Bangkok, with a backpack, her son and 300 dollars. The smuggler took her to an old lady who agreed to take her in for a month as she found her way around this town that was to be her new home.

### **3.3 Urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok**

Thailand is a Southeast Asian country with Bangkok as its capital city. The city of Bangkok which happens to also be the largest city in Thailand has a population of over eight million people. Bangkok is active in housing most of the financial and economic centers of the country as well as a recognized force in the Southeast Asia market. It is also widely known as a tourist destination with the tourist sector contributing to 17.7% of the Thai GDP by the year 2016 (Therapat, 2017). Due to being a popular tourist destination, this has made the country to offer more lenient requirements in getting the visa. This move has also in turn been helpful for refugees to get access into the country.

The number of refugees by the end of 2015 was 108,261 and asylum seekers were 8271 (UNHCR, 2016). These statistics however are for Thailand as a whole and there is no information to be specific to Bangkok only. According to the social worker from AAT he states that:

“Generally right now with urban refugees we have around 7600 refugees and asylum-seekers in total. The number in the past during 2013 - 2014 was less than 3000 but it increased to 9000 by the end of 2015 which is almost triple the number. I think this was due to the migration crisis that was happening during 2014 - 2015. This migration crisis saw millions of people migrate to other countries and most of them also came to Thailand. In this 7600 refugees and asylum-seekers, around 2800 are women and children, the unaccompanied minor are around 100. The majority of urban refugees and asylum-seekers are Pakistani which is around 50% of the 7600. Then followed by the Vietnamese and then those maybe from Cambodia and finally the African population of urban refugees and asylum-seekers they are the least. I am not sure of the exact number but among the African population the Somali have the highest

number and we also have those from Sudan, Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of Congo.”

Getting the precise number of African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok is not an easy task. This is due to reasons such as most of these urban refugees and asylum seekers are trying to hide from the authorities in Bangkok. Also the UNHCR provides information on the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok but does not provide further grouping in regards to country of origin.

### **3.4 Economic situation**

In order to understand the economic situation of urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok, it was important to assess factors such as income. There is currently very little information on the African community. This can be attributed to the fact that they are not the largest group of urban refugees and asylum seekers and they are not open to offering information. Though through the in-depth interviews with the officials, the first thing they explain is how refugees are not allowed to work in Thailand. Therefore, in trying to analyze any economic situation of urban refugees and asylum seekers, it is imperative to have that in mind.

Refugees in the camps have access to basic needs such as food, health services, shelter and education that is offered to them while those in the urban areas must pay for their own. Urban refugees need to find ways to pay for their own food, rent, education for their children and medical services. This is almost impossible as the urban refugees and asylum seekers do not have enough funds saved from their home countries to last through years. The only option is finding a way to generate an income while they are not allowed to work officially.

For most of participants, their economic situation is terrible and almost non-existent. They explained that with no form of employment, they lack any source of income and so that is threatening to their economic situation. Mariam who is a single mother of one explains that she mostly relies on the weekly English classes offered at the NGO. Here, the students are offered an allowance that is very little but to her it's better than nothing. She explains how there are days when she has no money at all with her and she has to go to her neighbors just to get something to feed her son. With this example, it is clear that the economic situation of the urban refugees and asylum seekers is unfavorable.

With that established, the next question will be on how they survive in a foreign country without working. The official from AAT explained that despite the no employment rule, some urban refugees and asylum seekers still seek employment. For the Somali urban refugees, they can work as interpreters, as house help, cleaners at the Arab owned hotel and nightclubs. Education levels are relatively low among both the Somali and Sudan communities with only two that could communicate in the English language from my participants. With the lack of English speaking skills and also not being able to communicate in Thai, it is even harder for most of them to get employed.

All 13 Somali participants in the interview expressed that they had a strong interest in learning English and Thai. This is because they believe that learning these two languages will be good for them in finding a job in Bangkok. They can form business relations better and explain what kind of skills they can offer. They also expressed their interest in learning different set of skills such as making handicraft items that could be sold for money. They however want to learn skills that will allow them to work from home as they fear for their security.

As these urban refugees and asylums seekers did not decide to come to Thailand as migrants, they are not allowed to work. For the few that came with any form of savings from their home countries, it doesn't last for long as it becomes their only option of survival. For the Somali interpreter that I interviewed, he explained that he came to Bangkok with some money but with nowhere to live and no prospects of income, he had to use it all.

I found that only one out of the fifteen participants received an income from making homemade jewelry. This was by the Sudan family where the father made these and the wife later on took them out to sell. Since this man had some medical issues and he could not be on his feet for a long period, he let his wife take them out but just around the neighborhood they lived. Although these jewelry were not expensive and there were days that they sold none, they still felt better about trying to improve their economic situation. It was clear that the economic situation wasn't good but the little income they received from their effort was a way that kept them alive in Bangkok.

For the participant that received income through employment, this was however not guaranteed. As it was an informal type of employment, they were times when they



would go a full week without a day of work. This was challenging as these urban refugees and asylum seekers have no form of saving and so they rely on the day to day income they can earn. This means that if a young Somali lady does not work for a week, she will have no money that week and so proving a terrible economic situation.

Source of income	Number of participants
UNHCR allowance	5
Money from NGOs	10
Money from employment	6
Money from Family abroad	0
Money from savings	0
Money from charity	6

***Table 2 Sources of income***

Most of the participants that were employed were paid under the table as it was illegal. This had the participants at the mercy of their employers who often took advantage of the situation. All the participants that have ever worked illegally in Bangkok have a story of being exploited by the employers. One of the young Somali ladies narrates that she together with two other Somali girls were once hired to help with packaging of some locally made drinks. They had discussed with their Thai employer through difficulty as only one of the girls could speak some basic Thai. After the day's work, as they expected to be paid for their hard work, this man decided to pay them only half the amount they had agreed on earlier. What was worse was that he threatened to call the police and let them handle the case if the Somali ladies felt they were treated unjustly.

These urban refugees and asylum seekers are forced to find ways to earn an income no matter how little it is while staying under the radar. They would however rather live under poor economic conditions than be exposed in Bangkok. This is because they are particularly afraid of being detained. All of the participants had only heard the terrifying stories about the detention centers but they had not been detained before.

Another issue that came up when discussing employment for African urban refugees and asylum seekers was that it was more difficult for them compared to those from other countries. This is because the Thai employers and business owners do not want to get in trouble for hiring a refugee. And the African refugees look different from the Thai people and so it is easier to identify them. This is when you compare them to the Pakistani or Vietnamese who can somehow pass for a Thai, when among the local Thai people.

### **3.5 Adaptive strategies and Survival in Bangkok**

Since most Somali and Sudan urban refugees and asylum seekers do not have any form of employment, survival becomes a greater challenge. The Thai law makes it illegal for asylum seekers to work in the country. Therefore one of the main concerns of this thesis was if they cannot work, that means they have no sense of income and so it makes one wonder how they pay for their daily meals and rent.

Through observations at the BRYC workshops and meetings, the researcher witnessed several of the Pakistan refugees were educated with some of them even having worked back in their home country. This keeps them at an advantage because with skills and being able to communicate in the English language their chances of getting employment are better and so is survival. But then, adaptation to the current conditions of being an urban refugee and asylum is even harder for them comparing to what they came from in their home countries. On the other hand, almost all of these Somali and Sudan participants had suffered back in Somalia due to the frequent wars. They are therefore better at adapting to this condition in Bangkok and finding ways to survive.

Most of these Somali women explained that they live in groups to share the cost of living. This meant that they share the rent and contribute on food. They rely mostly on the assistance from NGOs such as JRS to provide financial assistance. They mostly mentioned the BCB that was offering monthly financial assistance to refugees that were under the age of 18years. This is no longer available and now most of them just rely on each other.

“I am currently living with a Somali woman whose husband lives in Canada. She took me a few months ago when I had to leave the room I was living in because my roommates were arrested. This Somali woman is

also living for Canada in a few days. I will have to find somewhere else to live. But like before, I believe I will find another place within the community *Insha'Allah*”

Urban refugees and asylum seekers living in Diasporas always have no option than to find ways to solve their own problems. These problems may vary from lack of employment to fear of arrest. One common strategy that this population uses is to maintain social interactions among the local community especially when they are not recognized by the host country’s government. An example is how these Somali participants that lived among the few Muslim communities in various places of Bangkok. Even though there is the language barrier between the two communities but they get interact in the mosques.

This maintenance of social interactions with the local communities can be viewed as an adaptive strategy because these same local communities end up being the customers to their services, employers and even offer charity to the African urban refugees and asylum seekers. Mohammed explains in the interviews that since Muslims have celebrations where they need to offer charity and mostly food, they usually remember him in the offerings. He believes that these small forms of generosity help him in his life in the city. A friend of his also gets a chance to exercise his plumbing skills for the local Thai Muslim community at a lower price compared to the Thai professional plumbers.

	OCCUPATION		
	No occupation	Informal Sector	Entrepreneur
<b>Male</b>	0	3	1
<b>Female</b>	9	2	0
<b>Total</b>	9	5	1

**Table 3: shows the number of participants in relations to their occupation.**

Relying on networks of the people from the same ethnicity is also an adaptive strategy for the African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok. These networks exist in the regions such as Nana in Sukhumvit, Lat Phrao and even the Pratunam market.

The smugglers usually make sure to abandon the asylum seekers in these areas because they know that they will get someone from their ethnicity to help them. Once left at these places, the African asylum seekers then proceed to approach anyone that looks like they are from Africa and most specifically from their ethnicity. After the initial interaction, they would go further into detailing their helplessness with the hope of getting assistance from their new found networks. If the stories of these asylum seekers is too miserable, this increases their chances of getting assistance from these networks. They then usually help them by offering temporary shelter and food for free but just for a certain period of time varying from a few days to a few weeks.

While these new African asylum seekers were offered the free food and temporary shelter, they in turn had to help around. The help could be in the house such as doing the chores and cooking especially if they were women. For the men, they would be taken to the businesses of these African urban refugees to assist in activities such as packaging. The African urban refugees that have lived in Bangkok for a longer period would offer advice on how they should approach the UNHCR, where the offices were located and the process of filing a claim. Since the process of getting the refugee status by the UNHCR takes some time, the asylum seekers then have to shift places as the fellow African urban refugees and asylum seekers could not support them for long due to their own limited resources.

For the participants that I was able to visit their homes, they lived in rooms that were in mostly old buildings. The participants settled in places that had already been established as living places by previous urban refugees and asylum seekers of their ethnicity. Having people of the same ethnicity close by made them feel a little safe and they were guaranteed support in case of any. All of my Somali participants shared the rooms with other Somalis except the young men who had wives. This made it easier as they shared the cost of rent and food as well as other utilities such as electricity. Some of the rooms were well managed while some were not as clean.

The women participants also had to sell some of their belongings in trying to find an adaptive strategy. Since they didn't bring a lot of goods with them when they fled Somalia, most of them only had the option to pawn their jewelry. Although the participants didn't get the amount of money that was worth the jewelry, but it was better than not getting anything. Salma narrates how she was devastated to pawn her

wedding ring for just a few thousand baht that wasn't even half its worth. But with this money she was able to contribute her share of the rent and food for a month when she was still new in Thailand and didn't know how to survive.

Marriage and having a relationship with the Thai people was also another adaptive strategy. Although these marriages were not recognized under the Thai law, it hasn't stopped them. This is mostly by the African men who set up relationships with Thai ladies for material support. Some even have children and start families. This doesn't necessarily mean that they are accepted by the Thai community but it helps them get financial support from their spouses. Through these relationships the African urban refugee men were able to get some connection on some informal work especially if the relationship is a serious one.

### **3.5.1 Community**

The Somali urban refugee and asylum seeker community prefers to live close in the city of Bangkok. They however keep the community to a small number so that they don't get too much attention on them. This is a community that would rather stay invisible in the city as they go about their normal daily routines. This has unluckily not been a successful tactic as the participants of the interview explaining how there have been several raids in the neighborhoods forcing them to move frequently. In most cases, the Somali urban refugees and asylum seekers live in the same building with each room having three to five people living together. For the Sudan participants they have a bit of a different situation due to their small number in the Bangkok. They therefore live among the Arab community in the city.

One of the advantages of having such a strong sense of community is that they support each other once they are new to the city. With several cases of young ladies being taken in by different Somali women throughout the first few months was common among the participants in the interviews. Another advantage is that this sense of community is an adaptive mechanism. With more than seven of the participants having lost their entire families in Somalia, this helps them work through the trauma. Living together as a community is also beneficial as they get to share information on different matters and assist each other with their problems. An example was how in the English classes that were offered at AAT, the young ladies

would bring new members whenever they could as they shared information on the available classes offered to them.

On the other hand, their connection with the Thai community is not as strong due to the language barrier. These Somali and Sudan urban refugees and asylum seekers only speak Arabic with very few speaking in English and so they can't communicate with the Thai people. They however interact in the mosques since most of them prefer to live in areas near mosques.

### **3.6 Financial assistance**

“The prices of things we eat and use every day keeps getting higher. The price of things such as cooking oil and the price of bread have increased for that time I started living in Bangkok. This meant that we have to get more so that I can still buy the cooking oil and bread today as it increases. But sadly, the allowance we get from UNHCR is the same amount after all this time. What can we do?”

Refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok heavily rely on financial support from NGOs that deal with refugees. Lack of access to employment leaves them with no choice but to rely on this financial support for their support. With the statistics showing that there are more urban refugees and asylum seekers moving in Bangkok, the financial support is becoming insufficient. As explained by the one of the young ladies in the interviews, what she receives is not enough to pay for rent and cater for food expenses for a month. Therefore with the funds being reduced further, that will mean more challenges for these urban refugees. According to the social worker from JRS, she states that;

“With JRS, because they know that if you are a refugee you get support from the UNHCR, they only support the asylum seekers. But JRS doesn't have the monthly support like UNHCR. They offer financial support for some specific criteria, such as single mother, disabled, unaccompanied minor, elderly, people with health issues and mental problems. So JRS assess cases using case workers. The asylum seekers need to register with JRS first. There are two types of support; the first one is where you can talk to a case worker and then they will assess if you need continuous support. We have three months and six months and then we will re-assess

if they still need it and we offer it. The other type is the emergency support that only happens one time and you can't come back for another three months. The emergency cases can be for housing, medical issues like pregnancy but only for the first term, other medical support you need to get a case worker to accompany you to the hospital to get details on how much assistance you need.”

Although UNHCR offers financial assistance to refugees, this is not helpful for the urban refugees and asylum seekers that are not yet registered. Once registered with UNHCR, those that are considered to be very vulnerable are given a subsistence allowance (UNHCR, 2015). This financial assistance is to allow the refugees to survive as they seek ways to sustain themselves. This is especially useful because most of these Somali and Sudan urban refugees and asylum seekers leave their home countries with no money. As revealed in the interviews, most did not have even enough money to cover their travelling expenses and they had relatives offer to pay for them. According to the social worker from JRS;

“Before, when you come to Thailand as an asylum seeker and you get registered with UNHCR as a refugee, you would get support from the UNHCR through another organization called BRC. Two years ago, when you received refugee status you would get support like 2000bhts but sometime this year they have changed the system. This is due to the limited funding from the UNHCR. Now it is mostly for those who are very vulnerable and they will have the case worker to assess not available for everyone anymore.”

There was a Thai man that was mentioned by most of the Somali community, *Mr. Yatim* that was supporting them by paying rent for them. With rent catered for, the burden of expenses is usually less for this community. The little money they may get from NGOs can cover food and clothing. Almost all the participants explained how they only had two meals a day and one meal on tough days. Although this support from the Thai man is much appreciated, it is not enough to assist all urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok.

Eight of the 15 participants of the interview explained that also used to get financial assistance from a JRS programme that used to offer 2000bahts a month to under age

children that were urban refugees and asylum seekers. However this programme came to a stop, and left most of them with fewer options in finding financial assistance.

There is also the system of borrowing money from each other. This is not common because most of the participants explained that they hardly had enough to survive themselves. They could therefore not afford to lend money to the other African urban refugees and asylum seekers. The African urban refugees that have been in Bangkok for a very long time can afford to lend money to the new urban refugees and asylum seekers. Also the urban refugees and asylum seekers that were working were at a better position to lend out money. This money was not lent out at an interest and more of an informal style.

The one outstanding thing was that this informal borrowing that happened among a few of the African urban refugees and asylum seekers extended past the ethnicity. These young Somali lady explained that after spending time in Bangkok, going to the markets and mosques, they had made friends of different ethnicities. Although they mostly interacted with other refugees from African communities, these social ties were helpful in time of emergency. The amount of money that was borrowed was usually between 100-300 baht. They didn't feel right to borrow a lot of money from their friends as they were afraid of not being able to pay back. They also didn't borrow a lot of money as they understood the general conditions of all urban refugees and asylum seekers as full of struggles.

These urban refugees and asylum seekers of a different ethnicity from the Somali and the Sudan also offered information on religious networks. These religious networks offer financial assistance to asylum seekers as well as offer a place where they can pray and interact with other asylum seekers. The act of coming together for prayers and to celebrate religious holidays was a coping strategy for most of these refugees. Even with all the changes that they were facing in the different stages of their lives, they all turn to religion as a source of comfort. And despite their different ethnicities, languages and skin complexion, once they get to a mosque, they are one community and that is something they value.



## CHAPTER 4

### ACCESS TO ECONOMIC SECURITY

#### 4.1 Introduction

This section of the thesis focuses on the second research question. This section looks into the extent of access to economic security that is possible to African refugees. Here, economic security is discussed in relation to income generation and most importantly, discussing the factors that inhibit their access to economic security.

#### 4.2 Access to Economic Security

The strain between the different policies of a state and the international human rights laws is more visible when it is time to offer protection to refugees and their different rights especially livelihood rights. In the 1951 refugee convention, article 18 lays out the right to suitable conditions for self-employment in different sectors such as handicraft and trade among others while article 17 clearly states that refugees have the right to engage in wage earning employment after living for three years in the country of asylum (UNHCR, 2010). There are other several international human rights documents protecting the right to work. Despite the clauses that insist on the rights to not discriminate and the idea of universality, it is still up to the individual country to implement them and the current governments mainly focus on the rights of their citizens but usually not those that have fled.

Once a refugee is unable to integrate in the host country due to factors such as the lack of a legal status, unfavorable national laws or discrimination by the locals, then they have limited access to employment and their condition deteriorates. Even though the urban areas offer a better chance for refugees and asylum seekers to getting employment, they still face limited access to both employment and more specifically income. But since refugees and asylum seekers are not allowed to work in Thailand, this further reduces their access to employment to almost becoming non-existent forcing them to rely on outside support from NGOs, humanitarian organizations and charity.

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis economic security entails having access to a basic income, some form of financial protection or safety net. Therefore in trying to answer the second question on the extent to which these urban refugees and asylum-seekers have access to Economic Security it is important to look at these two aspects. First, by looking at their current access to employment and second, by looking at what they use to support themselves as the safety net in case they don't get access to employment.

#### **4.2.1 Self-help support group**

These urban refugees and asylum seekers find their own ways to support themselves and also improve their access to economic security. Looking at access to economic security, the social worker from JRS explains that:

“Other than support, there are asylum seekers that work, but we are not sure about a lot of them. Mostly we know of interpreters that work for NGOs like JRS and AAT and are paid 75 baht per hour. Others that are working that we have heard about, we are not sure because they don't tell us and they are trying to hide. They work at the hotels and some even help families that have come for medical treatment in Thailand by offering housekeeping services. Some also help business men that come to Thailand that speak Arabic in locating markets and information in Thailand. We try not to dig much into asylum seekers and their working situations. These people are living in very terrible conditions. They live in tiny places with a lot of people. Sometimes 4 people share a room mostly for the women. These women mostly work for housekeeping, others work at salon but they find it difficult to work in Thai owned salons because they cannot speak Thai, or even speak English.”

In exploring the access to economic security for urban refugees and asylum seekers, it is vital to use information from the interview with the official from the Chamaliin group. The Chamaliin group is an income-generating group that is made up of refugee women from different countries such as Pakistan, Vietnam, Somalia and Sri Lanka. These women understand that they have an inadequate access to employment because Thailand does not allow refugees to work and also because they are not recognized as

refugees in the country. They thus decided to apply their different skills in embroidery and add that to different commodities that they sell to earn money.

These women just like most urban refugees are in fear of getting arrested and recognize that they are at a disadvantage in trying to access their economic security due to their freedom of movement and so they decided to do this from the comfort of their homes. The staff of the group offers the different materials that they need to make their products for selling and these women pick them up and go back to work from home. The official from the group first explained how these women had very limited access to employment to begin with. This was for the same reasons as explained in the previous chapters such as the laws of Thailand that do not favor urban refugees and also the lack of a legal status for urban refugees and asylum-seekers in the country. He explained that the purpose of this group was to increase the chances of these women in finding a form of employment while at the same time not risking their safety.

The activities of the group involved designing of different products such as t-shirts, pillow cases notebooks and bed sheets. The official explained that;

“We have the young ladies that have skills in applying the henna and making of such drawings but then they don’t get as many customers to draw on. That is why we came up with the idea of letting them draw these designs on notebooks that they also make, to make them more appealing and different from the regular notebooks you would get from a bookstore. While for the older women, especially those from Vietnam design different embroideries and styles on the simple bed sheets and pillow cases that they can sell for some profit. They even make these books and pillow cases from scratch and even though they are simple and not the same quality as the ones you'd find in the shops but it is still a way for these women to keep themselves busy and earn some money.”

The women once they have made these items, they then present them back to the organization where they are sold on their behalf. These goods are currently advertised and sold through a Facebook page but they hope to expand to a website in the future. After the items are sold, the women get the profit and a little percentage goes to buying more materials for them to use in making more products. This is a good way

to promote self-reliance among the urban refugees because if they don't work hard in making more products, they will not earn as much and so the amount of income they earn depends on their commitment. This is what more NGOs should promote whenever they set up programmes to support urban refugees and asylum seekers.

#### **4.2.2 Vocational Training**

The ministry of interior reviewed the policies that were set up prohibiting income-generating activities. It hence allowed for the NGOs to offer vocational training in the camps as well as for the urban refugees. This is to enable the refugees to be occupied and to be equipped with skills that they may use once they are resettled or repatriated. Even though there is a variety of training that is offered, there are still some limits on some training such as electrical training. Although vocational training is an important step towards helping refugees to be self-reliance, there is still a gap as refugees are not allowed to work and are restricted in their movement.

Vocational training is a way by which the refugees are equipped with skills that will increase their access to employment. Since most refugees lack the natural resources such as a piece of land to practice farming, these skills come in to offer them a chance at earning an income through other skills such as leadership and language abilities. These skills can also prepare the refugees for their shift if they are to be repatriated. With skills from vocational training, refugees will be able to earn a living back in their home country.

Another reason for offering vocational training to refugees is to allow them a better chance in finding livelihoods in case of resettlement. Although for a country that does not offer the legal status for refugees to work, gaining skills doesn't seem efficient. Amina explains that she was interested in taking classes in hairdressing. She however only attended it for a few weeks as she felt that these skills would not help her in Bangkok. With her situation as an asylum seeker, her movement was limited and so she couldn't go out to find clients. She also could not find work in salons as she spoke couldn't speak Thai and lacked proper identification papers. Vocational training in Bangkok involved hairdressing, sewing and cooking. The social worker from AAT explains that:

“Most of those who finish the course use the skills, an example is one client that does hairdressing but not at a saloon. She gets calls to go do hair

for tourists and henna most of the time that are told about her by friends.

What is important is to have a positive attitude in trying to find a living.”

JRS is currently offering training on hairdressing, dress making and computer classes. The courses are for a period of 6 months and they mostly target the ages between 16-24 asylum seekers. The asylum seekers have the option of choosing which course to take according to their interests. The courses are offered five days a week. The main advantages of this training apart from imparting useful skills on the young ones, it also keeps them occupied, increases their self-esteem and out of trouble. The social worker from JRS explains that:

“In terms of vocational training, we currently have a programme that offers training. The training is in hair dressing, dress making and computer classes for the men. We don't own the workshop where this training happens but we have rented out a space. It is called the Fatima Centre in Din Daeng area where they offer dress making and hair dressing for Thai people. So since they don't allow men for this training, we decided to add computer classes for the men to learn basic computer skills like making a document, saving it and therefore they can use those skills while looking for a job. But the problem is we can't promise that after completing the training you will get a job. We just hope that it can help them to get a job in the community, in the NGO or when they will be able to be resettled.

The trainings are for 6 months. It mostly targets the youth population from 16 years to 24. The reason for this is because the children under 18 years, they are offered support from the UNHCR through the BRC. They are usually helped in trying to enroll in the Thai school. But the Thai government has the requirement that all the people that are non-Thai they need to start in grade one. But most of these asylum seekers already come here when they are older like they are 14 years and so they can't join grade one as there will be problems. These older kids may bully the younger kids and also catching up is harder once they have missed so much already. So children that come to Thailand at 15 and 16 years, their only option becomes an international school but then the fees are too expensive here and they can't afford. It is only possible for those that get a scholarship

which is a very small number. That is why we target the youth at that age. And we accept around 35 every year but if we have extra spaces we accept asylum seekers that are older than 24 years old.

BRC also has some training in cooking, sewing, and hair dressing too. But they only accept those who have already taken Thai classes before because their training is offered in Thai. The one by JRS, we offer the classes in Thai and in English and we also use previous students that have passed these trainings come in and help with the classes and interpretation. The JRS training is offered from Monday to Friday. The BRC training is just three days a week.”

Vocational training is a useful practice by the NGOs and now it is up to the government to be less restrictive on income generating activities by urban refugees because the reality is that these refugees exist and they need assistance. Allowing them to have some income generating activities will be a way to assist them while also letting them to not be totally reliant on outside financial support.

### **4.3 Factors inhibiting access to income generation**

#### **4.3.1 The Thai Constitution 2017**

This constitution of Thailand in its third chapter, states all the different rights that are offered to Thai citizens with examples as the right to receive health services, right to education, freedom of movement and the freedom of religion. Yet the same constitution doesn't offer any precise rights to asylum seekers and refugees. There are sections that are vague and so do not specify if they are to apply to the Thai as well as the Non-Thai or not. An example is section 28 and section 40 of the constitution. As per section 40, it states that;

“A person shall enjoy the liberties to engage in an occupation. The restriction of such liberty under paragraph one shall not be imposed except by virtue of a provision of law enacted for the purpose of maintaining the security or economy of the country, protecting fair competition, preventing or eliminating barriers or monopoly, protecting consumers, regulating the engagement of occupation only to the extent of necessity, or for other public interest. (Constitution of Thailand, 2017)

While section 28 of the constitution states that;

“A person shall enjoy the right and liberty in his or her life and person. Arrest and detention of a person shall not be permitted, except by an order or warrant issued by the Court or on other grounds as provided by law. Search of the person or any act affecting the right or liberty in life or person shall not be permitted except on the grounds as provided by law. Torture, brutal acts or punishment by cruel or inhumane means shall not be permitted. “

(Constitution of Thailand, 2017)

Therefore with such unclear distinctions in the sections of the constitution, it still leaves the refugees unprotected and vulnerable. This urban refugee population is treated as if they don't exist in Thailand and that becomes a problem in trying to determine what rights are provided for them and what freedoms are they being denied if they are totally ignored in the provisions of the constitution.

#### **4.3.2 Immigration Act**

Since Thailand lacks any domestic laws on refugees, the Immigration Act administrates all issues regarding refugees and asylum seekers. The act considers any person that is not a Thai citizen and is entering the state through improper channels and without permission as an illegal alien. And these illegal aliens are to be arrested, detained and deported once identified. The law bans anyone from entering the country in areas other than the authorized checkpoints and if they also lack the proper documents and visa they should be considered as illegal aliens. (Immigration Act, 1979)

Under this act, there is the definition of who is considered as an alien in Thailand and it even goes further in breaking it into types of people that can't go in to the country. Examples of such types of people include those that decide to stay in the country even after their visas expire and those that have been deported from Thailand before among other types. (Immigration Act, 1979)

Although it is uncommon, but the ministry of interior can make an appeal on the decision of deportation of an alien only when they have the required visa and proper documents. Although these laws seem to be directed at controlling foreigners and not refugees specifically, there are no special visas available for the people of concern in Thailand. Hence, even when the Thai police are aware of the refugee situation, they

are expected to follow the law that clearly states that those without a valid to be subjected to arrest. (Human Rights Watch, 2012)

### **4.3.3 Refugees under the Thai Law**

#### ***4.3.3.1 Right to employment***

According to the law of Thai, refugees and asylum seekers are not allowed to work or to take part in any activities that will bring about profit. The reason for such limitations according to the state is that they are trying to preserve the economy of the country, protecting the public system and maintaining fair competition among other interests. (Constitution of Thailand, 2017) Asylum seekers and refugees in both the camps and those in the urban areas are not allowed to own any place that is strictly for conducting business and also they shouldn't possess any business license. (Survey, 2008)

But then the survey report from 2008 on refugees states that the states infrequently allows migrant workers when they experience a deficiency in labor. Unfortunately these migrant workers end up working in dangerous areas and receive low wages in return. Then again, these migrant workers lack the refugee status and this denial lead to an increase in their arrest and extortion by the police. (Survey, 2008) There is a serious need for policy that will be inclusive of refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand.

There is also a need for a legal framework that will offer a tool for the refugee status determination that will be uniform for all asylum seekers. Thailand should have the protection of refugees and their rights as a priority. A country should not use its state laws as a way to lessen its responsibility of respecting and protecting human rights. Consequently, asylum seekers need to be allowed their different rights and most importantly the freedom of movement and freedom to employment. The state's immigration act should correlate with the international human rights principles to safeguard asylum seekers and refugees.

#### ***4.3.3.2 Freedom of Movement and Residence***

In Thailand, asylum seekers are not allowed the freedom of movement. For those that live in the camps on the Thai border, they are also not allowed to leave the camp. The only times there is an exception is if they have to out to get medicine or sometimes to



go visit family among other emergency cases. (UNHCR, 2006) Once these refugees are caught out of the camp without a proper reason, they are arrested and deported. This is more prone for urban refugees and asylum seekers since they have to move around the city as they try to find jobs. This urban refugee population faces more challenges compared to the camp-based refugees.

#### **4.3.4 Discrimination**

This was a topic that appeared from three of the 15 participants. These participants stated that among the several challenges that urban refugees and asylum seekers faced in Bangkok, discrimination was one that only the African community faced. It was easy for them to be discriminated against as they were effortlessly singled out due to their appearance and complexion compared to other refugees from Asian states. One of the 23 year old male that was interviewed explained how he and his friend were rejected when they tried to rent a room. They were turned away by 20 different house owners even before they could explain their situation with most of them simply stating “Somali, No”. This is the same situation when it came to finding employment. Most of the male participants explained that whenever they went to these construction sites, they would be picked last once all the other communities had been picked. Although not expressed by most of the women participants in the study, it seemed to be a stronger trend among the male participants.

Through my time conducting this research, it became clear that not a lot of Thai people knew much about urban refugees. The case was even worse of urban refugees that were from African countries. Some of the Thai people that I had a chance to discuss with about my thesis, were surprised that there are refugees living in Bangkok that were from Africa. I looked at this lack of enough information to be one of the reasons behind the discrimination that some African urban refugees faced. The Thai people having no or little information do not understand the conditions that made the African to flee their countries to Thailand. Without understanding the terrible situation back in Africa, the Thai people do not understand why these African urban refugees would not go back to their countries. This then turn in to suspicion, untrue stories and negative attitude towards the African urban refugees and asylum seekers.

#### **4.3.5 Intimidating environment in Thailand**

As explained before, urban refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand are considered illegal immigrants and are vulnerable to arrest, detention and deportation. This is irrespective of their UNHCR certificates that prove that they are refugees in the country. For any illegal immigrant according to the Thai law, whether they are waiting to be repatriated or are accepted for resettlement, they can be arrested and have to pay an over-stay fine of up to 20,000 baht or get detained. African urban refugees mostly face more harassment from the police compared to other refugees (UNHCR, 2009).

“I have been arrested one time before. Getting arrested is one of the things we are very afraid of as urban refugees. We hear stories about the detention center and we all don't want to go there. So whenever anyone of us gets arrested, we usually give the police everything we have just so we don't go to the detention center. Some of us are not lucky they go to the detention center. I am afraid I will not be lucky next time I am arrested”

#### **4.3.6 Refugee status determination**

I decided to discuss the refugee status determination under the factors that inhibit their access to economic security because the lack of a status reduces their chances of getting employed even in the informal sector as well as increase their vulnerability. This was also a common theme among the participants of the interview for this research. The Refugee Status Determination process involves the consideration of the various cases of families or individuals by interviewing them to get information on what was their experience in their home countries. From the participants in my interview, three had requested appeals and were waiting for the results after their first time was rejected. Five participants had been accepted at the first appeal, seven had been rejected even after the second appeal.

Since Thailand is not a party to the 1951 refugee convention, the UNHCR office is therefore responsible for handling all issues relating to asylum seekers and most importantly the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process. In the protection part of Thailand through the UNHCR in the country, the refugee status determination plays an important role. This process is significant as all refugees need to receive an

unbiased and qualified Refugee Status Determination. It is however not uncommon for the UNHCR in Thailand to use a pre-determined styles to the Refugee Status Determination instead of putting into consideration the individuals' issues. (Asylum Access, SOS;, & Foundation, 2009)

For the refugees that have not satisfied the 1951 refugee convention definition but are still determined to be people of concern to the UNHCR they are then identified as extended mandate refugees. For this category of refugee, making a decision on their case seems more challenging. This is evident as more of the refugees that comply with the 1951 refugee convention are getting resettled; while those that are considered as extended mandate refugees are not resettled. These extended mandate refugees are left unsure of what is next as they have no legal status in Thailand, cannot go back home and there are no chances of them being resettled.

Other than the international conventions, the UNHCR also depends on other handbooks and guidelines. Examples of these documents are such as the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) Handbook and the Refugee Status Determination Procedural Standards and Resettlement Handbook. This is what is used in regulating the screening and possible resettlement of refugees. Disapprovingly, UNHCR officers mostly conduct the screenings and assessing of the various cases without the proper referencing to the above mentioned documents. They may decide to use information available from confidential reports such as those offered from the asylum seekers' origin country. This leads to claims being rejected because these reports are mostly not the same what is really happening or as reported by the human rights organizations.

Looking at the case of the Somali in Thailand, they are not accepted as Convention refugees. This happens to the Somalis that have reasons that fall under the Convention definition of persecution. This is due to what appears to be a common policy that all Somalis are to be granted the status of an extended mandate refugee. This is more unfair as these Somalis are aware that other UNHCR centers are offering the Convention status to Somalis. UNHCR on its side has defended itself for not offering reasons and the rejection to appeal by claiming that the Convention status and the extended refugee status have no difference in regards to treatment. (Asylum Access et al., 2009)

From the participants, some of them expressed that they felt as though they were not given a fair chance for their cases to be considered by UNHCR in Thailand. This was especially amongst the Somali participants as a large number of them had been denied even after the second appeal. They explained various problems they encountered during this process for example they were not given enough time to express themselves and some were afraid that some information was lost in translation. These asylum seekers were however still hopeful as they had the chance to appeal. But this was not the case for the mandate refugees as they don't have a chance to correct any initial faults and worse is they are not sure as to why they were rejected the Convention status.

According to the social worker from AAT:

“The most difficult group is the Somali because of its big population and so the refugee process takes a long time. For the Congolese and those from Eritrea they access the UNHCR and their process is fast because their population is small compared to the Somali. The difficulty for the Somali Group is because it is hard for UNHCR to process them for many reasons. One reason is the difficulty in finding an interpreter who is Somalia and qualifies for the UNHCR job meaning that they have to be legal, have passports and finding such people from Somalia is hard. But then there are a few Somalis that can speak English, do work for these organizations as interpreters.”

Once the refugee status has been determined, they are therefore eligible to receive some financial assistance that is offered on a monthly basis as well access to education for their children if they have any. This however does not make them safe from arrest and detention. The refugee status does increase their chances of resettlement if possible. Refugees are not allowed to work as they wait for their refugee status or even as they wait for their resettlement.

One other point with the RSD is the complaints from participants on the extensive waiting period for the interviews to take place, when to be notified about the results and the process of requesting an appeal. With all this waiting, refugees get miserable and susceptible because there is nothing that they can do while they feel like there is

no hope for them. All they can do is stay by their phones as they wait and that really is depressing because some are afraid that their cases might be closed forever.

In conclusion, the refugee status is not the overall solution to asylum seekers but at least with the UNHCR card, the urban asylum seekers ladies would have been able to use as a form of identification as they seek employment. For example the young Somali participants, once they attend the vocational trainings and they learn skills search as hair-dressing; they can seek employment in the few African salons that can be found in Bangkok. Getting the refugee status for all these asylum seekers in Bangkok is a positive step towards their otherwise helpless condition.

#### **4.3.7 Arrest and Detention**

For the urban refugees and asylum seekers that are currently living in Bangkok, arrest and detention is one of their biggest fears. This is the main reason they opt to be an invisible population in the city. Even for the refugees that have been registered with the UNHCR, they are in constant fear of getting arrested. The participants explained that African urban asylum seekers had been randomly stopped on the streets by the Thai police because they looked different from the Thai locals and so it was easier to identify them. There were also cases where their apartments were raided once these police were tipped off of any asylum seekers living in the area. There have been instances where these officers asked for bride while threatening to put the asylum seekers and urban refugees into detention centers.

Since the conditions of these IDCs are terrible and unhygienic, all asylum seekers and urban refugees do not want to be subjected to such an environment. The detention center has been accused of not taking into consideration health issues of these people detained. There are cases of detainees not receiving a proper diet meal instead they only receive two meals of rice a day. For a grown man, that is not enough food especially considering the small quantities that are served.

Safety is also an issue inside the center where there are communities that are from different countries and so their difference makes it difficult for them to live in the small space. The beddings offered to the detainees are said to be very dirty, and sleeping is tricky as the place is also very small and it's not enough for the detainees in there. The general conditions in the center are chaotic and unsanitary as these

detainees also need to share a few toilets among a lot of detainees. (Human Rights Watch, 2012)

Once these asylum seekers are in detention, they cannot appeal and there is very little information offered to any relatives or friends they have on the outside. The Thai Immigration Division is also not cooperative in offering information about the people that are detained in terms of their statistics and their period of detention among other information. In the detention center adults are put together with the children. These detainees can only be released under the following instances; if they are approved to pay bail, if they are to be resettled after becoming refugees or if they decide to be repatriated (refugees.org, 2015).

.According to the social worker from AAT he explains that:

“Although these refugees say that they are afraid to be arrested and that is why they do not go out and find jobs I don't totally agree with them. I agree that it is hard for them to live in fear but they also need to find ways to earn a livelihood. The available assistance cannot help everyone and so people need to find ways to help themselves to. This is why organizations are offering vocational training.”

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter, it is clear that urban refugees and asylum seekers are part of the population of Bangkok. Even though they lack a legal status, this does not stop them from trying to improve their lives. This population faces several challenges in the city and one of the top one is the limited access to economic security. Here the concept of economic security is applied by looking into the aspect of income generation. The first reason that limits their access is the lack of a legal provision that is specifically aimed at protecting and recognizing them.

The condition is made worse by the RSD process that seems to be taking long or even plainly rejecting the requests of these asylum seekers. Once this process takes a long time, some of these asylum seekers are forced to overstay past their visas and that makes them illegal immigrants. With the lack of a legal status and unable to make an income by working, these urban refugees and asylum seekers are faced with a difficult situation in trying to survive in a foreign city.

The findings suggest that the national law of the country is a major factor that contributes to the extent of access to income generation. The presence of national laws that limit or deny the refugees and asylum seekers certain freedoms such as freedom to work and freedom of movement also inhibit their income generation activities. The continuous threats of arrest, detention and deportation also create this fear among the urban refugees and asylum seekers. Once this population is afraid to move around the city, this limits their chances of getting employment or trying to find markets for their skills and items.

It argued that refugee status and resettlement are governed through inconsistent practices, as well as formal and informal practices. The urban asylum seekers insisted on this point because they believed that the refugee status determination was also a great factor that influenced their economic security. Without the refugee status, getting employment is difficult for them and also they are more vulnerable to arrest without the refugee status. The stories recorded in this chapter imply that the refugees perceive the RSD process to be a pre-determined process and therefore it wasn't serving its humanitarian purpose of offering assistance and protection as expected. Unfortunately I didn't get a chance to interview any officials from the UNHCR due to security reasons and so I didn't get their point of view on such concerns of urban refugees on their humanitarian duties and more specifically on the process of the Refugee Status Determination and its limitations.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

In trying to understand the concept of the invisible urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok and their economic situation, this research decided to go back and examine the beginning of their journeys as refugees. This research therefore explored the conflict settings in the refugee's home countries, their routes to countries of refuge by using legal or illegal routes and finally the reasons why they chose that country. For the purpose of this study, the host country is Thailand and the refugees are those from Somalia and Sudan respectively. Therefore there is an extensive look at the migration experiences of these African refugees as they seek asylum in Bangkok.

For all of the participants of this study, the conflicts in their home countries that were threatening their lives were the main reasons for their migration. The reasons behind these conflicts were such as ethnicity and religious differences, political instability. When the extent of these conflicts became unbearable the participants decided to seek refuge from neighboring countries as well as countries far away from their homes. This is how we have African refugees in Asian countries. Asia is a host to almost one-third of the refugees from all over the world.

Urban refugees and asylum seekers face a lot of challenges that are more specific to their nature and are more critical than those of other refugees. From this research, it was evident that since the refugees are considered as illegal immigrants in Thailand that means that they lack any legal protection and so they have to live in fear of arrest, detention and deportation. This negatively affected the situation of these refugees in both economic and social aspects and seems to add on to the already difficult lives of urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok.

The first main research question was to understand the current economic situation of urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok. This research question was answered as the findings in a summary showed that most of these urban refugees and asylum seekers had no form of employment. Out of the fifteen participants, only six had some



form employment. This employment was mainly in the informal sector such as selling homemade jewelry, applying the decorative *'henna'*, working at construction sites, Arab-owned restaurants, as domestic house-help (maids) and one worked in the formal sense as an interpreter for an NGO. For the other nine participants that didn't have any form of employment, they had some forms of adaptive strategies that will be explained in the next paragraphs.

In this research, the African urban refugees and asylum seekers are identified as the invisible because they usually hide and try to keep a low profile while they live amongst the Thai community. This is to protect them so that they cannot be identified as illegal immigrants and have to face arbitrary detention. With the knowledge of the conditions in the IDC, this is one of the biggest fears of urban refugees. The IDC violates several human rights violations due to its poor hygienic conditions and the lack of proper nutritious food for the refugees. This fear limits the freedom of movement for refugees among other rights.

Second, the research answered the first sub-question which was to identify the adaptive strategies that African urban refugees and asylum seekers use while residing in Bangkok. The findings showed that they used various ways in order to cope with the challenge of being urban refugees that were not allowed to and yet had to survive. The adaptive strategies were as follows; they lived in groups to share the cost of rent and food, they relied on NGO allowances and so they participated in various activities offered by NGOs to get the allowance, they relied on charity from mosques as all Somalis are Muslims, they relied on social networks of those from their ethnicity as there is a strong sense of community among the Somalis, some set up agreements with the African refugees that have lived in Bangkok for a longer period to allow the new ones food and shelter in exchange for free labor, pawning of jewelry and finally maintaining a relationship or even marriage with a Thai for material gains.

The second sub-question of this research was to determine the different types of financial support systems within the African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok. The initial aim of this question was to determine if there was any form of microfinance systems among the urban refugees but later discovered that they were none. Although there was the informal borrowing amongst themselves but this was also very rare as they explained that they feared not being able to pay back and they

had barely enough to survive let alone lend out. Other forms of financial support systems present were those from NGOs, the UNHCR allowance, local Thai support and religious networks.

For the second main research question, the aim was to explore the accessibility of economic security and any factors that inhibit the access to income generation by African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok. The findings of this research indicated that their access to income generation and employment was very limited. When the few had the opportunity to get employment, it was not guaranteed and they were vulnerable to exploitation by the employers. In looking at the accessibility of employment, it was clear that the lack of refugee specific laws and the lack of legal status for the refugees were the main reasons behind their limited accessibility. Other factors that hindered the access was such as the discrimination they faced from the local Thai, the intimidating Thai environment, the Refugee Status Determination process and the issue of arrest and detention.

Since Thailand recognizes several international human rights instruments, and a body of international law that provides the required framework for protecting refugees, it should therefore recognize and respect the rights of urban refugees in the country. Most importantly, Thailand should be able to respect and allow the practice of the rights of these refugees mainly their freedom to movement and their freedom from arbitrary arrest. Through the stories from the participants in this research, it was clear that they were treated unfairly by the Thai police and they had no one to rely on for protection.

The international humanitarian organizations are doing their best in trying to address the various needs of refugees in Bangkok but there are still some gaps that need to be worked on. It is understandable that these organizations cannot address all the needs of refugees whenever they arise especially in a non-signatory to the refugee convention host country such as Thailand but there is need to put more emphasis on some needs. One important one is the refugee determination status process because this is of great concern for all asylum seekers.

This research has hopefully updated the few existing research on African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok and on their migration details. This can be important in the scheme of interventions that will be aiming this specific group of

refugees as well as help the local Thai community in understanding this population to allow better relations between the two communities. This research has presented that urban refugees will pursue ways to survive even in terrible conditions in a foreign country.

## **5.2 Analysis**

As the title of the thesis suggests, this urban refugee and asylum seekers population is one that is invisible. They live amongst the local Thai citizens but try their best to stay away from being detected. This population lives in the urban areas of Thailand and tries as much to integrate with the locals although it is difficult for them as they lack access to education, employment, housing and health services. But then they find their own ways to compensate for this limitation and they find some forms of employment, places to live, some medical attention in case of emergencies and even get their kids some education in Bangkok. This according to me is what makes them invisible. They get to have lives amongst the citizens of Thailand that are protected by the laws of the nation and have access to all these facilities while they don't.

Compared to the refugees at the camps, urban refugees and asylum seekers face more challenges and yet receive less support. The refugees in the camps get assistance and are protected as part of the UNHCR mandate. While the refugees in the urban setting lack a legal status and so they are vulnerable to exploitation, arrest and detention, those in the camps also face risks such as rape and domestic violence. But the difference comes with dealing with such risks and injustices, while those in the camps have prevention and response programmes and mechanisms to offer justice, those in the urban areas have no one to offer them such protection and so they need to find their own ways to protect themselves. Despite all these challenges together with the lack of access to social and economic services for urban refugees and asylum seekers, they still find ways to survive.

The UNHCR recognizes urban refugees even though they have no consistently applied definition of one. UNHCR explains that it is up to the refugee to decide to live in the urban areas and that it is up to the host country to allow him to live there and the refugee needs to be able to sustain him and the family. It further emphasizes that there needs to be more interventions by host countries to allow the urban refugees access to: employment, health services, education, other social services and the

naturalization process (UNHCR, 1997). Therefore this shows that the urban refugees are to be allowed the same rights as the other refugees for the countries that have ratified the refugee convention and the protocol. And even for the countries like Thailand that are not party to the 1951 convention and protocol, they still need to consider the urban refugees with the same humanitarian context as the refugees in the camps.

This research had a conceptual framework that sort to understand the economic security of African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok by concentrating on three areas which are; the current economic situation, their access to economic security and the factors inhibit income generation. Starting off with the current economic situation, from the findings only six were working out of the fifteen. And we are aware that urban refugees and asylum seekers are not allowed to work but then I believe that the terrible to almost non-existence economic condition is made worse by the refugees.

Thus this suggests economic insecurity among the African urban refugees and asylum seekers. This is clear through the threats they face such as unemployment and persistent poverty. Even though they find informal employments, these jobs are usually short term and not guaranteed and so they spend more time being unemployed than having employment. And even though they try to make some money in the various ways they know how to, they are still living in poverty. Looking at their living conditions, there are signs of poverty as they live in crowded tiny rooms in old buildings that are sometimes not even safe. They have to share amenities such as the toilets among a lot of people that is not hygienic.

One thing that is worth noting is that these securities are interrelated and the threat to one leads to others. An example here is how once these African urban refugees and asylum seekers have economic insecurity and they face a threat such as unemployment that can become a threat to food security. If these urban refugees do not work, they don't make an income and so they may not be able to afford food. It was evident in the findings that this population does not have enough meals and even skips them altogether when the times get too difficult. Also if there is economic insecurity then this can threaten the health security of the urban refugees as they can get infectious diseases from sharing unhygienic toilets, and malnutrition.

Another important aspect to look into about African urban refugees and asylum seekers is their vulnerability. This vulnerability begins from their home country when the civil wars disrupted their lives and left them with nothing and forcing them to flee. Most of them decide to flee to neighboring countries such as Kenya for the Somali and Sudan refugees. Kenya has the Dabaab camp that is one of the largest refugee camps in the world and home to millions of Somali refugees but due to the terrorist attacks that were linked to the Somali terrorist group '*Al-Shabaab*', Kenya is now less accommodating to Somali refugees and so their vulnerability increases as they need to find a second host country. Some of them acquire the services of smugglers to help them flee to further countries and at that moment, they give all the power to the smugglers who decide all the details of the journey. These asylum seekers are in a constant state of vulnerability until the moment they reach to the host country such as Thailand.

It is until they arrive in Thailand that they realize their lives would not drastically improve as promised by the smugglers. Once they become aware that they will not be recognized as refugees in Thailand due to the country not being a party to the refugee convention of 1951, they then become vulnerable once again as they need to find ways to survive while avoiding arrest. One important thing is that these refugees turn this vulnerability to capability as they find different ways to earn income and get some type of financial support. They accept their situation and try to cope to it by finding housing near their communities, they live in groups, they enroll in vocational training and try to apply these skills in earning some money, they form relationships to help them survive among other strategies.

I understand that they fear for their safety and that they may be arrested but looking at the six participants that are risking their safety on a daily basis just to improve their conditions makes the other nine seem less affected by the challenges in Bangkok. Looking at the concept of economic security, the two main threats are persistent poverty and unemployment and the humanitarian community and NGOs can only be of assistance to a certain extent and so the urban refugees need to find ways to limit their vulnerability to these threats so as to improve their economic security

The next two areas in the conceptual framework under economic security were on the issue of accessibility and the factors that inhibited income generating activities.

According to the findings, the main agent that is responsible for the poor access to economic security by African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok is the state; through not offering a legal status to refugees and also because the laws of Thailand that do not take into account the specific nature of refugees.

For any intervention that the host country or the international humanitarian plans to provide for urban refugees and asylum seekers, they should aim at increasing their human security. By doing so, they will be decreasing the vulnerability of these refugees and enabling them to find strategies to improve their living conditions with long-term solutions rather than short term ones where the refugees receive the monthly allowance and they are totally reliant on outside support. I am not condemning the financial support offered by NGOs but I am advocating for other ways that will promote sustainability and self-reliance for the urban refugees and asylum seekers.

Through the various stories of the participants of this research, it is clear that their unfavorable economic situation is greatly influenced by their This is as if the country believes to be a stopping point for these refugees as they continue their journey somewhere else. Thailand doesn't offer any safety to urban refugees in a legal sense and so if these urban refugees are arrested, they are detained in the horrible detention centers while their rights are violated.

From the conclusion of this research there is the presence of two themes that are migration and economic security. Starting with migration, it is indicated that the situation of refugees is different for various countries especially in the reasons behind the migration, and even the routes taken to the host country. The reasons varied from more of an internal matter such as ethnic conflicts among various groups in the country to those on a larger scale such as political instability in country. Then the research illustrates the various routes used and once they arrive in Bangkok they are considered illegal immigrants.

This research in Chapter 3 gives a detailed analysis on the migration process of these African urban refugees and asylum seekers from Somalia and Sudan to Bangkok. This process is more than just a group of refugees fleeing to another country, there are strategies implemented in gathering funds for the journey, there are decisions made and sacrifices made in the overall process of becoming a refugee. And an important

point to note is the evolving of the migration journeys as it has shifted from refugees travelling for days by sea to arrive to their destinations to current refugees entering countries through the international airports as tourists.

Then looking at the conceptual framework again, there is the issue of adaptive strategies. The phrase adaptive strategy in this research was used to mean the ways that the refugees use in trying to deal with the challenges they face in trying to improve their economic situations. From the finding, it adaptive strategies varied from economic one to social ones and they illustrated the different ways these urban refugees use to survive in Bangkok.

As the adaptive strategies in the conceptual framework are grouped into negative and positive strategies, the same can be applied to the findings of this research. As discussed in the conclusion part of this research, they are all of the positive nature except the pawning of jewelry and finally maintaining a relationship or even marriage with a Thai for material gains.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

First and foremost I would like to acknowledge that African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok face more challenges than those from other countries. These challenges are on the individual level in addition to those on the structural level. On both these levels, the issue of access to economic security through employment and income generation activities is one of the major problems for African urban refugees and asylum seekers. Therefore this research provides the following recommendations that would be valuable in assisting this distressed population in Bangkok.

In order to offer improved protection to refugees Thailand needs to have an inclusive refugee policy that also has a systematic mechanism that offers a uniform framework for all the legal refugee issues. It needs to ratify the asylum law or if not it should then revise its Immigration Act of 1979 so that refugees can seek asylum in Thailand. The Thai government should also understand that there are delays in the process by the UNHCR at times and so they should acknowledge that and offer a less intimidating environment where the asylum seekers are given time to wait for their cases to be approved. As they wait, they will need ways to survive in Bangkok and so they should not be arrested and should be allowed to seek employment.

Also, there should be more attention focused on the African urban refugees and asylum seekers and more research done on them. Although they are not the highest number of urban refugees in the country but they are seeking refuge in Bangkok and they are facing more problems that are more specific to their backgrounds and identity on top of the common problems faced by all urban refugees in Bangkok. More research needs to be done on even the smaller populations of African urban refugees and asylum seekers such as those from The Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea and Rwanda. This will create a better understanding of these groups as well as reduce the discrimination they face.

Any policy that is to be related to refugees needs to be based on humanitarian principles. Under the humanitarian principle, the number one factor to be given the utmost attention should be the issue of human rights of refugees and asylum seekers. In terms of their right to work, there could be temporary work permits distributed to refugees so as to allow them to work. Through working these refugees will rely less on the assistance from the host country or the humanitarian organization and get to practice self-reliance. And any form of assistance that the humanitarian community would offer needs to be renewed.

For the cash allowance offered by the humanitarian organizations on a monthly basis, they need to be revised from time to time. As the participants explained, the cost of utilities and even sometimes rent changes over time while the allowance received remains the same. This means that they usually have to forego some of the necessary things they need such as cut down on the number of meals per day so as to cover the rise in the cost of living. The organizations need to make sure that the allowance they offer is at least able to cover the basic cost of living of a refugee.

There is need for better and open channels between the organizations that deal with refugees and the beneficiaries as well as the urban refugee communities so that they can be well informed on the issues affecting this population. The refugees and asylum seekers need to be involved in some of the refugee service programs because sometimes the funding available is directed towards programs that are not what the refugee need. This can be due to assumptions based on what these organizations assume the needs of this refugee population and the challenges they face are not solved.



The detention centers need to be urged into developing the conditions of these facilities while observing the international guidelines that are set up for any person in detention. These are such as the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, the Standard Minimum Rules of the Treatment of Prisoners and The Guidelines on Applicable Criteria and Standards Relating to the Detention of Asylum Seekers. These international instruments will be able to provide the guidelines that will protect those in detention which are currently not practiced.

As it is clear that the situation of asylum seekers in Bangkok is one full of difficulties, the UNHCR should consider this and make the process of gaining a refugee status a bit faster. The UNHCR can decrease the time for these interviews and increase the number of people working on these refugee cases as these cases keeps on increasing. They should also enhance their asylum decision making by involving these asylum seekers through the process and offering information once their requests are denied. If these processes are more transparent, these asylum seekers will be more at ease and have trust in the system which is not the current situation.

Also the UNHCR and the NGOs that deal with refugees need to set up more interactions between refugees and the local people. This will create awareness on the issues that these refugees go through and the locals may have suggestions on how to help them as well as reduce the suspicion that they may have from the beginning about refugees and asylum seekers. With these interactions, both the refugee community as well as the local Thai community can learn on the different cultures and they can hence respect each other more and live in harmony.

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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX A

#### List of African Urban Refugees and Asylum Seekers Interviews

No	Country of Origin	Sex	Refugee status	Number of years living in Bangkok
1	Somalia	Female	Asylum Seeker	2 years
2	Somalia	Female	Asylum Seeker	3 years
3	Somalia	Female	Refugee	3 years
4	Somalia	Female	Asylum Seeker	2 years
5	Somalia	Female	Asylum Seeker	2 years
6	Somalia	Male	Refugee	4 years
7	Somalia	Female	Refugee	3 years
8	Somalia	Female	Asylum Seeker	2 years
9	Somalia	Female	Asylum Seeker	1 year
10	Somalia	Female	Asylum Seeker	3 years
11	Somalia	Male	Asylum Seeker	2 years
12	Somalia	Male	Refugee	3 years
13	Somalia	Female	Asylum Seeker	4 years
14	Sudan	Female	Refugee	2 years
15	Sudan	Male	Asylum Seeker	5 years

*All the names used in this research for the African urban refugees and asylum seekers were pseudonyms to ensure their confidentiality were maintained.*

**APPENDIX B****List of Key Informant Interviews**

No	Name	Position	Organization	Date of Interview	Remarks
1	Ms. Sasikarn Paankate	Programme Officer	Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) – Thailand	14 <sup>th</sup> June 2017	All the information offered by this informant was of her own personal opinion and not on behalf of the organization
2	Mr. Chawaratt Chawarangkul	Senior Policy advisor	Asylum Access Thailand (AAT)	19 <sup>th</sup> May 2017	All the information offered by this informant was his own personal opinion and not on behalf of the organization.
3	Mr. Bernado	Programme Director	Chamaliin	4 <sup>th</sup> May 2017	



## APPENDIX C

### **Interview Questions for the African Urban Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Bangkok**

#### **Part 1: Basic Information**

1. Name
2. Age
3. Sex

#### **Part 2: Information on the Country of Origin**

1. Where are you from?
2. What was life like there?
3. What did you do for a living?
4. When did you leave your home country?
5. Why did you leave your home country?
6. Why did you choose to come to Bangkok, Thailand?
7. How did you get to Bangkok, Thailand?
8. Where did you get money for the journey from Africa?
9. Did your family leave together or at different times?
10. Did you get to Thailand on your own or did you go through an agent?
11. If yes, where did you know about this agent?
12. Why did you decide to seek refuge in Thailand?
13. Do you still have family back in your home country?

#### **Part 3: Economic security**

1. Have you ever worked in Bangkok?
2. Are you currently working?
3. If yes, where?
4. How did you find the job?
5. If no, why not?

6. Did you have a job back in your country?
7. What would you like the international community to know concerning your economic situation?
8. Do you make any money from any other way like selling items you make?
9. How do you afford to buy food and pay for rent?
10. Do you know any other African urban refugees and asylum seekers that work?
11. How easy or hard is it finding a job in Bangkok?
12. If hard, why do you think it is hard?
13. If easy, why do think it is that way?

#### **Part 4: Financial support**

1. Have you received any form of financial support?
2. What kind of financial assistant do you get from NGOs?
3. Where else do you get financial support from?
4. How often do the NGOs offer financial support?
5. Do you have any savings?
6. Is there any form of a financial system within the refugee community?
7. Is there a way to lend and borrow money from other refugees and asylum seekers?
8. Are there any forms of credit and saving schemes within the refugee community?

#### **Part 5: Adaptive strategies**

1. How are your relations with the urban refugee community?
2. Where do you live in Bangkok?
3. Are there other urban refugees and asylum seekers where you live?
4. Do you live alone or with roommates?
5. How do you afford everyday survival in Bangkok?
6. Have you ever been arrested?

7. If yes, how was the ordeal?
8. If not, how do you hide from officials while you live in Bangkok?



## VITA

Fatma Swaleh Issa was a student at the Master of Arts in International Development Studies (MAIDS) at Chulalongkorn University 2016-2017. She was born in 1993 at the coastal town of Mombasa in Kenya. She attended The Kenya Methodist University in Mombasa during the period of 2011-2014. She graduated in 2015 after studying Business Administration (B.B.A), majoring in Finance. She then proceeded to work for 2 years as a Financial Assistant in one of the leading logistic providing companies In Kenya. Fatma decided to venture further past Business Studies into Development studies because she believed she could offer more of herself and her expertise. She decided to focus on African urban refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok because she plans to relate to the cases of refugees back in Kenya in trying to solve and improve this global refugee crisis.

