

## Minutes for Transitions Stakeholders' Advisory Network meeting #6

**Theme: International Development Sector: exploring issues around employed participation by development professionals with refugee protection status**

Date: Monday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2012 Time: 2.00 – 5.00

Venue: Red R, 250a Kennington Lane London SE11 5RD

**Present & Apologies:** colleagues present.

**Green = candidates** **Blue – INGO colleagues** **Orange = other colleagues**

H	A	Mechanical Engineer from Iran. 25 years' experience. Transitions candidate
Wahidullah	Aziza	Humanitarian Relief Professional, Afghanistan. Transitions candidate.
Ahmedin	Ali	Agriculturalist & UN refugee camp officer/Employment Adviser for refugees, previous Transitions candidate
Tarik	Begic	RedR HR & Recruitment Services Coordinator (Speaker)
Justin	Brett	Transitions Director
Gioia	Caminada	Transitions Director
Benti	Debella	Food Security professional. Transitions candidate (Speaker)
Toby	Gould	RedR membership Manager
Andy	Gregg	Refugee employment consultant Transitions Core Advisory Network member
Erik	Harvey	Head of Technical Support, WaterAid
Sheila	Heard	Transitions, director
Stella	Hobbs	MANGO Recruitment
Mehreen	Khan	Oxfam, HR Executive in Humanitarian Department, Oxfam GB. Diversity focal point in HR team.
Kibreab	Kidane	Accountant/Auditor. Transitions candidate
Peter	Lokuju	Islamic Relief
Annie	Macklow-Smith	Save the Children Head of Humanitarian HR
Azadeh	Mashhadiagha	Refugee careers adviser
Amanuel	Misghina	Civil Engineer Transitions candidate
Martin	Mongalla	Medical Corps UK International Recruiter
Samuel	Negassi	Fisheries Science and Fisher Management for sustainability
Tesfaldet	Okubayes	International Public Policy professional. Transitions candidate
Name tba		Pastoral and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa
Natasha	Soper	HR Officer Overseas Development Institute (DNA?)
Mesghina	Tedla	Elearning in development context/Social Media, REdR /Transitions intern,

Isaac	Welde	Human Rights academic. Transitions candidate
Selamawi	Zere	INGO Manager/IT tutor
Abraham	Zere	Environmental Scientist. Transitions candidate.

### **Apologies received**

Catherine Fletcher (MSc, PhD)	Programme Development London International Development Centre	Not free.
Mebrahtu Ateweberhan	Eritrean Marine Conservation Biologist, Transitions candidate	In Madagascar
Daniel Garza	Eritrean, INGO Peacekeeping trainer/Transitions candidate	On technical training
Isar Sarajuddin	Afghan Political Economist and Journalist, Transitions candidate and advisory network core member	Teaching Dari, with no leave entitlement.
Hayatullah Khan	Afghan Civil Engineer. Former UN Regional Manager. Transitions candidate	Mondays at University on part-time MSc course.
Mudher Takhialdeen	Iraqi Electrical Engineer, previously employed by British Council in Iraq as Education project manager. Transitions candidate	Health check
Hussein Enayat	Afghan Civil Engineer/INGO manager. Transitions candidate	Previous appointment

#### **1) Welcome and introductions.**

Short powerpoint presentation by Transitions on objectives/structure/outcomes to date of Transitions and the Stakeholders' Advisory Network. Highlighting

**The key question for the meeting was: Exploring what are the key transferable competencies and particular unique strengths of refugee development professionals and what the dynamics are that either prevent or enable them to find suitable posts with International Development Agencies with UK offices.**

#### **2) Presentation by Benti Debella, Food Security Scientist and former Ethiopian Crop protection Department Head, Oromia Agricultural Bureau, Ethiopia.**

**Please also see attached presentation.**

- 15 years' (until 2005) professional agronomist and senior management experience in Ethiopian Government, working on national and internationally funded programmes of food security
- MSc qualified in Sudan (2002)
- In the UK, had to wait 5 years to be given Refugee status. Before that, he was not allowed to work in his profession.
- UK employment as cake factory operative.
- Highlighted that refugees are recipients of persecution and that this is widely misunderstood in the UK.
- He has been refused work for not having British citizenship
- Now looking for experience in a UK NGO to rebuild his working life and contribute his first-hand skills and experience to the UK development sector.

## Questions/Comments

- Over qualified or under-experienced: Several comments that reflected similar experience of not being shortlisted for either being over-qualified for some jobs or not having UK experience for jobs that do match their profile.
- Young local applicants Andy Gregg noted that NGO's commonly recruit young, British recent graduates/post-graduates for jobs and internships, responding to mid-career development professionals with refugee protection as less competitive.

## Presentation by Tariq Begic, HR Co-ordinator at RedR

**Please also see attached presentation.**

- Tariq acknowledged some challenging jobsearch features for professionals who have to move countries mid-career.
- Has experienced having to leave his country and has lived in 4 countries, each time having to acclimatise to the new working culture of that country and has been successful.
- Acknowledged that the competency based selection system often has little space to explain the complex context of being a professional, mid-career, forced to migrate.
- Acknowledged that busy HR professionals don't always make the equivalency checks they should or even know where to look. Also that the employment rights of refugees are widely misunderstood.
- Advised candidates to focus on what they can influence and not on jobs market aspects that are very difficult to change. Can influence making written and spoken presentations effective in the business culture context of the UK, clearly showing equivalences and particular strengths. Use the role description to structure applications – make it quick and clear for HR staff to follow and score. Candidates can be proactive to request feedback.
- Advised HR Colleagues to look for strengths in such candidates, especially unusual strengths that are rarely found in UK born candidates – for example, first-hand, professional experience of development issues and potential solutions in developing countries, availability in the UK with no visa, multilingualism

## Questions/Comments

- **Regarding high level skills**: Candidate commented that he has experienced being treated as an entry level professional during an internship, when in fact he had been working on this same project for 8 years in his country. Tariq acknowledged this. His advice is to concentrate on demonstrating those strengths and enabling colleagues to see them quickly.
- **Discussion around 5 years that Refugee Status is given**, (then ILR is applied for). Some employers refuse to employ candidates, even after successful interview. Agreement that candidates should request advocacy about that and enable employers to act in a more informed way.
- **Internships (ie work experience)** : discussion highlighting that UK experience in a relevant professional role often assists greatly with competitiveness.
- **Discrimination does happen**. Discussion around the lack of refugee supporting services, lack of legislative protection for refugees and need for more statutory bodies to rebuild their refugee supporting policies – currently all dormant. Crucial to self-advocate and not become cynical.

### **3) Small group notes: (4 groups) Questions:**

**What skills and knowledge can humanitarian aid professionals from development countries offer to UK based agencies? What issues keep those professionals and those employers apart? Why? What can be done & by whom?**

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## Key written points recorded by small groups:

### Transferable Specialist Competencies (for UK and/or overseas roles:

- First-hand regional knowledge, experience, training
- Deep understanding of underlying issues and potential solutions
- Cultural competencies overseas and cross-cultural communication skills in UK
- Proven adaptability/coping mechanisms in harsh environments.
- All Transitions candidates are graduates: Often have both overseas and UK Higher Education
- Often have already received (and delivered) extensive training by international agencies
- Often have extensive experience of managing international, multi-agency projects overseas
- Deep appreciation of local attitudes to international aid, potential impact, potential resistance, local regulations, how to facilitate.
- No UK visa requirement
- Multilingual

### Issues and Reasons for applicants/employers staying apart:

Issues	Possible reasons
➤ Employers often not deeply aware of above points	Need for information
➤ Candidates understating above points	Cultural and linguistic influence
➤ Mutual miscommunications:	Cultural and linguistic influence
➤ Discrimination – sometimes direct, sometimes indirect, sometimes unconscious/conscious.	
➤ Not seen as strong candidates for UK local jobs	Space for further staff training & for internships
➤ Not protected by UK anti-discrimination law – staff therefore not often trained in refugee rights.	

### Written actions recommended to Transitions by small groups

- **Increase internships: Gaining UK experience assists the process greatly. Exposure to UK work culture is crucial to being competitive.**
- **Encourage NGO's to recognise value of internships for refugee candidates to their organisations**
- **Increase information to employers about the skills - and employment barriers – that development professionals in the UK with refugee protection can provide.**
- **Increase current number of Transitions workshops on effective self-marketing/mock interviews**
- **Increase advocacy services**
- **Increase network/collaborative lobbying by refugee supporting agencies**

### Round discussion

**Work experience** with clear roles a highly effective way of addressing/enhancing diversity management skills in organisations/potentially recruiting from this group without shortcutting rigorous competitive recruitment systems. Work experience candidates can apply for advertised jobs and can compete more effectively then.

Discussion around whether NGO's can use a **double-tick system** (currently used to level the playing field vby many employers for applicants with disabilities) to enable refugee professional candidates with skills that match minimum criteria to be interviewed. This would potentially address negative shortlisting decisions and increase mutual exposure/orientation and may increase recruitment.

Tariq Begic, RedR HR, highlighted that **effective jobsearch uses project management skills**/record keeping. Mesghina Tedla, candidate, and others agreed.

**Name-blind shortlisting** systems suggested.

**Temporary/consultancy positions:** Transitions is keen to provide a recruitment service for this, putting forward candidates for shortlisting.