The Migration Summit 2022 Report
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The Migration Summit 2022, organized by the MIT Refugee Action Hub (ReACT), Na’amal, Karam Foundation, Paper Airplanes and the MIT Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab (J-WEL), was a month-long global convening in April 2022 designed to build bridges between diverse communities of displaced learners, universities, companies, NGOs, policy makers, and other key stakeholders around the key challenges and opportunities for refugee and migrant communities on the theme of “Education and Workforce Development in Displacement.”

The goal of the Summit was to create new spaces of collaboration and risk-taking, share best practices and deepen cross-institutional connections in order to address these critical gaps and challenges in education and livelihood for displaced communities. We sought to build community and capacity among conveners to establish new ways of working collaboratively together to yield new practice and research spaces in the area of refugee education and livelihoods.

In interactive sessions, 900 participants from over 30 countries and 150 speakers from cross-sector organizations joined a learning journey of exploration of each others’ work, inquiry into the systemic challenges in the field, and discovery of new insights, processes and paths forward together.

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On numbers

- +150 Panelists
- +40 Live Events
- 20 Days with Live Events
- 5 Partnering Organizations
- +30 Countries Represented

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Activate diverse, supportive and energizing communities of refugees, migrants and displaced people and those working with them.

Establish communities of practice to come together to build more inclusive and equitable education and workforce systems where refugees and displaced persons can advocate for their needs and thrive.

Explore new ways of showing up that create more inclusive, generative and sustainable spaces for systemic collaboration.

Establish shared forums and safe spaces for experimentation and honest discussion to create connections and activate change.

Center the perspectives and experiences of refugees and displaced persons as we work together.

Create prototypes, proposals, working groups, and recommendations that will continue post–Summit to advance education and workforce development for displaced communities.

In this report, we highlight the outcomes of the Summit and point out thematic recommendations we heard from the ecosystem, and share concrete ways for you to engage through our calls to action.
Owning the Narrative and Envisioning Ourselves as Changemakers

Designing with refugees, not for refugees

The experience of forced migration can often be perceived as a monolithic narrative with those most impacted losing their ability to speak and advocate for themselves and their communities. By creating space for those directly impacted by forced migration to share their personal stories of resilience, struggle, and triumph, we can affirm the lived experiences and challenges of the displaced while empowering them to disrupt a narrative that has seemingly been created about and not for them. In a session with Migration Jam, a refugee-led storytelling platform, we were reminded of how sharing our personal stories is not only cathartic, but impacts how we “see ourselves, our emotions, paths, choices and relationships.”

Recommendation: Refugees and migrants should be given the space to tell their stories on their own terms – when, to whom, and under whichever circumstances allow them to take control over their own narrative. As listeners and witnesses to these stories, we all must openly, respectfully and reverently hold space for reflection and inquiry. When designing programmes for refugees, their expertise is needed and interventions co-designed. The idea of the refugee as the ‘beneficiary’ that interventions are designed for needs to be replaced with the narrative of the refugee as the expert determining what is in their interests.
From dependency to agency

The Migration Summit 2022 organizers, presenters, and attendees represent a broad and vibrant community of stakeholders invested in initiatives and efforts that aim to improve the well-being and livelihood of refugees and migrants. While the perspectives of non-migrant academics, researchers, and organizers are important, the true expertise on how to move people from dependency to agency lies within the refugee individuals and communities themselves.

However, the challenges associated with launching or operating a business or organization, including securing capital and developing and implementing business management processes, can be especially laborious for refugees and migrants, who are more likely to live beneath the poverty line, experience discrimination, and have smaller professional and social networks as a result of their circumstances. For this reason, it is critical that we examine the systems in place that may thwart the emergence and achievement of sustainability for refugee-led initiatives and programming.

“Often, people who are displaced get agency taken away from them. They lose agency. That is why we feel that involving them in a process where they prioritize the problem and come up with the solution really is a way of restoring agency, and can be transparent.”

Martha Thompson
Humanitarian Innovation Specialist
The MIT D-Lab Co-Creation Toolkit

In a session on its Co-Creation Tool Kit, the MIT D-Lab led a discussion around how humanitarian actors can work alongside displaced persons, acknowledging the biases and power dynamics that may prevent indigenous and migrant expertise from being interwoven into initiatives intended to benefit these very communities.

Recommendation: In addition to uplifting refugee voices through storytelling, humanitarian actors and organizations must place the expertise of migrants at the center of their efforts through deliberate co-design, collaboration, and implementation.

Click & Watch!
Community Resilience: University of Geneva InZone
The MIT D-Lab Co-Creation Toolkit: Bringing people together to co-design solutions
Holistic Support: Seeing and Supporting the Whole Human
react.mit.edu/migrationsummit
Redefining the notion of entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is often cited as a solution for refugees, offering a means for livelihoods and economic growth while directing innovation towards initiatives that can positively impact the well-being of migrant communities.

The potential impact of refugee-led organizations on national economics can be significant. In both the United States and European Union, immigrants start a greater number of new businesses compared with non-immigrants. A study found that the recent reductions in US refugee resettlement cost the US economy $9.1 billion each year including a loss of $2 billion in tax revenues. Progressive net migration policies have positive economic consequences for revenues and employment but the global playing field for businesses and RLOs is bumpy and inconsistent.

Throughout the Summit we were joined by many refugee innovators and entrepreneurs including Mohammad Alhoumsi who spoke to his experience launching a food subscription business called Healthy Choice with support from the non-profit Jusoor. Though Alhoumsi received financial support from the International Rescue Committee (IRC), he still faced challenges when it came to registering Healthy Choice as a legal entity due to his status as a Syrian refugee living in Jordan. In Jusoor’s session, the Entrepreneurship Program Manager Ziena Abu-Dalbouh emphasized that obtaining funding from investors is one of the biggest hurdles to overcome for innovators like Alhoumsi.

Recommendations: We must redefine the notion of entrepreneurship, allowing for broader acceptance of initiatives worthy of investment. The Western paradigm of the Silicon Valley start-up, characterized by rapid growth, scale and profit is a limiting one. From street vendors to technology founders, we need greater support mechanisms for refugee entrepreneurship through access to capital, mentorship, markets and new ecosystems and economies, while also embracing alternative models of success and impact.

Click & Watch!

- Entrepreneurship Education for Refugee and Migrant Communities
- Designing Entrepreneurship Support Networks
- A Project Presentation and Discussion - Fishing in the Desert: The Story of Vijana Twaweza
- How Refugee Founders of Impact Companies are Succeeding Against the Odds
Overcoming Barriers to Migration

Policies in many host countries still operate with the assumption that displacement is a short-term temporary status, yet it has been established that protracted situations last 15 years or longer. Placing human lives ‘on-hold’ for an extended period of time is not only harmful for the individual, and accompanying dependents, it is also detrimental and a loss of opportunity for host countries. The Brookings Institute outlined a win-win-win formula around hosting, refugee integration, and the right to work. First, displaced communities can rebuild lives, earn better wages, and invest in their own human capital. Second, host communities’ benefit from more productive workers, contributions to the local economy, new businesses, and more diverse markets. Third, this can lead to residual benefits to the home country through remittance, diaspora connections, and knowledge sharing.

Recommendation: We need to design holistic education and workforce support systems with refugee experiences at the center to ensure such programs are not only aware of such barriers and opportunities, but develop self reliance and other skills to navigate migratory systems.

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Education and Employment Pathways

Across the Migration Summit during sessions ranging from K-12 to university and workforce, we heard a call for recognition—recognition of identity and belonging, of rights and protections, of prior learning and current competency. Focusing on the proliferating space of education certifications and credentials, there were stories of certificate fatigue or learners with binders full of certificates, and yet remain financially insecure and stuck on the margins of formal education and industry. We need systems that enable learners to stack and weave these traditional and digital course certificates, diplomas and degrees together into recognized and valued credential pathways that enable access and mobility in the workforce.
Yet, despite the recognised importance, very few refugees can access higher education. According to Manal Stulgaitis, Education Officer for the DAFI scholarships at UNHCR, in the session, Post-Secondary Access: University Admissions, Scholarships and Sponsorship, “in 2019, 1% of refugee youth enrolled in higher education. Today we’re at 5%. And our goal for the next 10 years is to achieve 15% enrollment for refugees in higher education.” Stulgaitis highlighted that the only way to achieve a critical mass of refugees who are able to access higher education is by opening up national higher education systems. Another challenge that hinders university access for refugees is the English language requirements, signaling a need for expanded language learning support as well as expanding local university pathways for learners to study in other languages.

While we recognise the importance of education for refugees and other displaced people, the need for livelihoods is crucial, as this is what creates self-reliance. Post-secondary education should be linked to a pathway for employment for refugees and displaced people by focusing on skills building directly linked to the labor market, and this includes digital literacy skills as well as human skills.

In the session Post-Secondary Pathways for Refugee and Displaced Students, Dr. Chrystina Russel, the former Senior Vice President and Executive Director of Southern New Hampshire University’s Global Education Movement and Co-Founder & Executive Director of rewirED, was explicit that learning for the sake of learning is often not an option for refugees and there needs to be an economic outcome associated with their learning. Lorraine Charles, the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Na’amal also iterated that employment is the core of refugee resilience. We must first think how parents can sustain their livelihoods through employment so that they can take care of their families and provide an education for their children.

**Recommendation:** It is only through decent work that refugees and displaced people can provide for their families, maintain their dignity, become more self-sufficient and shape their future, while contributing to their host communities. Post-secondary (and secondary) education for refugees should provide pathways to dignity and self-reliance via livelihoods.

**Click & Watch!**

- A Bridge to Where? Determining the goals of bridging programmes for displaced learners
- Evaluating Access to Labour Mobility Pathways for Refugees
- Pathways to Education, Livelihood and Hope
Employment Rights for Displaced People: Toward Formality for Remote Work

Formal (legal) and decent work should be the ultimate goal for all refugees and displaced people. Yet, the reality is that 70% of refugees live in places that place restrictions on their right to work, leading to informal and often precarious work situations. In the session Employment rights for the displaced: Making work fair and safe, Zulum Avila, Specialist on Employment Strategies in the Digital Economy for the International Labor Organization, stated that decent work is productive, safe, offers a fair wage, with rights and protection for workers.

Digitalisation has generated new employment pathways. Internet-based virtual work (remote working), on-demand work through online platforms (digital freelancing as well as on demand services) e-commerce and other new forms of revenue-generating work (such as social media influencers) have become increasingly common. In particular, the ‘gigification’ of jobs in the wider economy has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase in the global demand for online freelancing by 11 percent annually since 2018 is testament to this shift in the way we work. A study reported that over 80 percent of employers plan to rapidly digitalise core work functions and will potentially move 44 percent of their workforce to operate remotely.

For many refugees, “freelancing is a great springboard to move into more permanent and more secure roles in different companies and can be a genuine, ethical, and transparent opportunity for people globally to get access to remote opportunities, especially in the tech industry.”

Remote working and this includes freelancing, an integral part of the digital economy, has become more acceptable among both employers and employees. This means that employment no longer needs to be bound by geography and immigration controls.

Paola Pace, Deputy Chief of Mission and Senior Regional Project Manager, International Organization for Migration shared that digital remote work is not regulated in Tunisia (and in many other countries), meaning that it can be an opportunity for refugees and migrants struggling to find employment in the local economy. Like in Tunisia, in Jordan, refugees have
restricted access to employment, Sofiane Ammar, the CEO of Chams, in the session, New Skills for New Economies, shared that there are refugees who live in Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan who now work remotely for fintech companies in San Francisco, while others work as freelancers.

“I think it’s really the beginning. It’s something that is in progress. And we hope that private companies will bet on these talents. Because this is the next thing. And with COVID I think that remote jobs are democratizing more and more. It enforced the priority, the opportunity, for the refugees to work as freelancers but also to work in private companies or remotely. Four years ago, no one believed in the model.”

Sofiane Ammar
CEO of Chams
New Skills for New Economies.

The digital economy could therefore offer greater access to employment for refugees and displaced people who do not have the legal right to work in local labour markets. They could potentially equally access this growing digital workplace offering democratised employment opportunities. Filipa Matos, VP of Special Operation at Remote, commented that “if refugees are talented, location is not a skill, background and socioeconomic background is not a skill.” She continued that hiring refugees remotely is not only a moral responsibility, to achieve corporate social responsibility targets or to satisfy the conscience of employers that they are doing good, but there is a business case as employers not only need talent, but see the benefits of getting the right people to the right role instead of just hiring by location.

Digital remote work for refugees and displaced people takes advantage of these legal gray areas presented by online work, allowing refugees who are excluded from local employment to gain access to work. Yet, this means that most digital work for refugees, particularly online gig work, digital freelancing and e-commerce, which is more easily accessible to refugees and displaced individuals, is also almost always informal and can be precarious. As Jina Krause-Vilmar, CEO of Upwardly Global explained, even when there is work authorization, there is a huge informal economy. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that more than 60 percent of workers globally are employed in the informal sector, so it is not only displaced people who are affected by informality. Yet, as Paola Pace iterated, we cannot employ refugees and displaced people in the digital economy without safeguards to ensure that they are not be-
ing exploited, and this means formal work. There is a clear paradox here. **While digital work can allow greater access to, and better opportunities for, work** for displaced populations in ways that supersedes local employment regulations, **this is still informal and thus without the protections that formality brings.**

**Recommendation:** As we move toward this digitalised economy, with more jobs being conducted online, **we need a global agreement** to allow refugees legal access to the global digital economy, even if they don’t have legal access to work in the local labor market. This means that they would be protected from the precarity of informality. This could be a temporary solution, as Pace iterated, if we act right now while we work on policy and legislation, with safeguards, for refugees and the displaced. In order to make this a reality, the **ILO is proposing collaboration with different actors, such as governments, employers and workers to build institutions that create an enabling environment,** one that not only protects workers but also protects employers from unfair competition.

**Financial inclusion**

In order to participate in the skilled labor market, refugees need increased access to formal financial systems. Existing financial and banking systems have not evolved sufficiently to include displaced people, leaving many unbanked, without legal, protected and trustworthy financial accounting. New systems need to be more inclusive. Decentralized financial systems (such as cryptocurrency) offer promising opportunities to address the challenges that refugees (and all the unbanked) face.

Brookings, and others, note that many forcibly displaced people and migrants in host or resettlement countries cannot achieve full financial independence without the ability to open bank accounts, establish lines of credit, or apply for loans. Even when regulations change, implementation lags. Without basic banking rights they are also unable to secure coveted well-paying jobs, and the benefits and social safety-net that accompany them.
For institutions, the need for documentation, lack of familiarity with these displaced and migrant populations, and discrimination stymie progress, makes inclusive hiring at times difficult to navigate for both employee and employer.

“I was first forced to work as a volunteer because of the challenges that I had for not being able to access all the documentation I needed. Organizations should work with governments to dissolve legal barriers, including the right to work and refugees’ ability to open bank accounts to receive their pay.”

As well, in the closing session of the Summit, Nadia Asmal, Co-Founder and Director of Programs at rewirED, advocated that “we need to be creative within existing systems and we also need to advocate for new systems.” In a hackathon session she hosted earlier in the month, Asmal offered a set of recommendations that could be extended equally to not just to promote financial inclusion, but to ensure that displaced people have access to dignified and formal work. She recommends that: displaced people need to be equipped with the knowledge and skill to be employable, to navigate host country bureaucracy and an understanding of how they can attain access to financial services, and advocate for refugee and migrant right to work and official documentation. Most importantly, an accommodating regulatory environment is necessary where employers, financial institutions and the United Nations (UN) collaborate to ensure displaced people have equal employment rights and are financially included.
Funding of refugee led organizations

The funding requirements of many institutional foundations, funding agencies, and donors are structured so that smaller NGOs (including refugee, minority led in the global south) are locked out of funding opportunities, with funding going to larger ‘western’ organizations. A new mechanism is needed to give refugee led organizations better access to funding.

The banking and financial services limitations compound the obstacles facing Refugee Led Organizations (RLO) and migrant and forcibly displaced entrepreneurs and small businesses. “Money is power. There is no equal footing for funding here at all,” said Sana Mustafa, the Director of Engagement at Asylum Access, during her keynote. She further reflected that very little “money goes to the people on the ground who are doing the work, the people with lived experience, the people with proximity...The first excuse that comes up for not receiving funding is that they do not have the capacity to receive significant funding. Did you ever think because we systematically starved them from funding, did we ever think because of so many barriers... would we never enable them to receive funding? They always function in survival mode.”

While direct funding to local and national organizations returned to historical levels in 2020 – in part due to the COVID-19 response – it was still just 3.1% of total humanitarian aid. For migrant and refugee-led SMEs and start-ups, their lack of access to private capital and support means that some goods and services do not reach the markets and communities they have the expertise and opportunity to reach. Mustafa challenged the chronic claim from western-led humanitarian groups that refugee-led NGOs have a ‘conflict of interest’ in providing services and aid to the communities. Rather, this excuse is a relic of the colonialism and ‘closed-shops’ that has plagued the development sector for many years. This exclusionary approach no longer has a place in humanitarian aid and development, and is contrary to the communities’ objectives.

**Recommendation:** As a sector, we must critically examine and dismantle the assumptions and biases built into historical institutions and processes, and build new anti-racist systems with the communities.

**Click & Watch!**

- From Intentions to Impact: Decolonizing Refugee Response
- Empowering Refugee-Led Community Based Organizations: Journeys to Belonging
Democratizing Internet Access

Now more than ever, digital inclusion has become a human right. It is estimated that global Internet traffic in 2022 will exceed all that occurred up to 2016. Yet, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) only 63% of the world’s population is online, leaving some 2.9 billion people without internet connectivity. There are significant costs to digital exclusion. One trillion USD is lost in economic potential just due to the exclusion of women alone. Lack of Internet connectivity is hampering equitable access to education and livelihoods and this disproportionately impacts women and girls.

Without Internet connectivity, refugee communities will continue to remain marginalized, without access to education or livelihoods. Shai Reshef, Founder and President of University of the People, firmly believes that the only way to secure post-secondary education for millions of refugees is through online learning. “There is no way this can be delivered in a face-to-face modality,” in Reshef’s view if we are to address existing learning gaps at scale. The rise of digital work has the potential to provide greater access to employment for refugees. Yet, as Rediet Kasaye, Program Manager at IKEA Foundation shared, while digital livelihood programs for refugees are great, we also need to make broader investments in making the Internet accessible.

Democratised access to the Internet is not an easily achievable goal. According to the Alliance for Affordable Internet, the cost to achieve universal connectivity to quality broadband Internet is $428 billion.

**Recommendation:** We need to develop sustainable solutions for digital connectivity through broadband and satellite infrastructure projects that can open up digital access to information, education and livelihoods. We need the cooperation of the private sector, governments and international institutions to ensure that equal access to the internet is achieved.

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**Building Ecosystems**

There is a loneliness in displacement - living within it, and working within the field. During the Migration Summit, the traditionally siloed existence of organizations working within the displacement space was clearly evident. Many remarked that efforts are duplicated, ineffective and at worst harmful. We need to exit these silos through collaborative efforts that include refugees. By establishing communities of practice, we can build robust and impactful ecosystems.
We need to invest in human resources and technological solutions to further nurture these communities of practice. We must develop our collective capacity for developing generative relationships between institutions, communities, and individuals – starting with cross-community gatherings and practices to support healing and developing our awareness of how we show up to this work together.

We’re all people who are involved in service to humanity, service to people who just need that push, need that feeling of hope. And so my question is, how can we use this summit as a catalyst for further conversations and increase the power of networking and increase the power of networks? How can we come out of our silos and find each other globally? We’re able to do so many things virtually, but it’s only in these times it seems that we make these connections. And I know there are a number of organizations trying to do it, but it would be great if we found a way to do it faster and more efficiently.

**Recommendation:** In this spirit of community practice, we invite you to join our global working groups based on the key themes that have emerged from the Migration Summit. These working groups, based around communities of practice, will be convened to further develop and advance these above recommendations.

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- **Multi-Sectoral Approaches:** How to Create Collaborative and Innovative Projects
- **How Do We Show Up Differently?** Creating a Shared Vision to Serve Displaced Learning Communities

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How to Get Involved

Meaningful solutions to the systemic challenges in migrant education and livelihoods can only be achieved through real collaboration and systemic response. To do so, we need to show up to the work differently — as individuals and as a collective system.

We invite you to join us in this work:

- Join the Organizing Committee to shape the future of the Migration Summit.
- Participate in the Migration Summit Working Groups.
- Join the Migration Summit Community LinkedIn Group.
- Check out the Public Resource list of the Migration Summit.
- Support the Migration Summit by joining us as a sponsor. Email migrationsummit@mit.edu to learn more about how you can support this community.
- Register for the Migration Summit mailing list to receive announcements of future events and opportunities.
- Email migrationsummit@mit.edu with reflections, questions and suggestions.
In the News

Migration Summit Week 1 Recap.

Pathways to Education, Livelihood, and Hope.

Those We Throw Away are Diamonds Recap.

Migration Summit Week 2 & 3 Recap.

Migration Summit addresses education and workforce development in displacement.
Developing global education programs that target the needs of underserved communities, including refugees, migrants and economically disadvantaged populations.

A foundation for the future of Syria. Invests in young Syrian refugees so they can build a better future for themselves and their communities.

Supports refugees and other under-represented communities through skills training, mentorship and remote work placement opportunities.

Engaging educators, technologists, policymakers, societal leaders, employers and employees and member organizations to address global opportunities for scalable change in education.

They bridge gaps in language, higher education, and professional skills training for conflict-affected individuals. By harnessing virtual learning technology and the benefits of peer-to-peer connections, they seek to provide a means of pursuing educational and employment opportunities.

Want to be a part of it?

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Participating Organizations

Act for a Better Future
Advocacy Initiative for Human Development
Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
Ampio Ventures
Arizona State University, Education for Humanity
Asylum Access
Cambridge University Press and Assessment
CE International
CHAMS
Chatterbox
CONCAT
Construyendo Puentes Dignos (Building Worthy Bridges Cooperative)
Dídean
DignifAI
DuoLingo
Eat Offbeat
Education for Employment Jordan
Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH) Zurich
Fordham University
Global Health Corps
Global Mentorship Initiative
Harvard University
Hello Future
Help the Less Privileged Association
Ikea Foundation
International Organization for Migration
International Rescue Committee, Re:Build
Journeys to Belonging
Jusoor
Kakuma Vocational Center
Karam Foundation
Kiron
Konexio
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, D-LAB
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Future Heritage Lab
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Refugee Action Hub
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NetHope
New York University, Abu Dhabi
New York University, Center for New Immigrant Education
Niya
NuVu
Open Cultural Center, Barcelona
Open Door Policy
Opening Universities for Refugees
Paper Airplanes
Presidents Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
RAND Europe
ReCoded
Refuge Point
Refugee Investment Network
Refugeee Network Center Malaysia
Remote
ROAR for Good
Save the Children Jordan
Southern New Hampshire University, Global Education Movement
SPARK
Syrian Youth Empowerment (SYE)
Talent Beyond Boundaries
Talent Lift Canada
Tamkeen Relief and Educational Assistance Program
Techfugees
Thaki
There is Hope Africa
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI)
United States Dept of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
University College Dublin
University of Auckland, Center for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies
University of Calgary
University of Edinburgh
University of Geneva, InZone
University of the People
University of Warsaw
Unleashed
Upwardly Global
Vijana Twaweza Youth Club
Whitaker Peace Development Initiative
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