

IASFM20 Podcast Series Full Transcript Episode 6. Voice of Participants Part 1

Opening credit

Forced migration due to war, conflicts, disaster, climate change and urban development impacts is a critical issue requiring attention from multiple stakeholders. The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration, or IASFM, is a global interdisciplinary association committed to advancing research, policy analysis and understanding of forced migration and displacement. The 20th Conference of IASFM was held on the 21-23 January 2025 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, with a topic of “Forced Displacement in an Urbanizing World”. This audio series, supported by the Washington University in St Louis, presents various reports from this conference.

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Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Hello everyone, welcome back to IASFM20 Podcast Series. I am Akino, your host for today. In this episode, we introduce voices of participants, a different format of episode, where we hear presenters and attendees giving a glimpse of their research, discussion, or impression of their panel or the conference as a whole. Today we have Marofa Sharifi and Banafsha Mudaber reporting from the conference site.

First, here is Marofa with Prof. Ulrike Schultz from Friedensau Adventist University in Germany, discussing her panel on “Construction and reconstruction of displaced persons, migrants and refugees” from the first day of the conference.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

We have Professor Ulrike with us here, all the way from Germany. How are you doing, Professor Ulrike?

Guest: Prof. Ulrike Schultz

I'm good, but I didn't come from Germany this time because I've just, for last semester, I'm in Ghana in a class, so I came from Ghana, which is even a longer way than coming from Germany. But I'm based in Germany.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

Was it in your panel that you had earlier, and it's about constructing and deconstructing displaced persons, migrants and refugees. How and why did you decide to focus on this issue, and also, in this topic?

Guest: Prof. Ulrike Schultz

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I think in migration studies here, for a long time, we really reflect on categories.. We are also always somehow forced to do it and but we also challenged, because there's a migration policy, we also categorize people. This has consequences for people, and people also resist categorization. And we as researchers, we also have to reflect on this. And on the other side, we are here on a forced migration conference, and many of us are also a bit critical about the concept of forced migration. Because, what about the other migrants? Are there not forced? Can we distinguish between forced and not forced migration? So I thought it for this kind of conference is the right conference to have this reflection.

And I have a colleague in my university, Kwaku Arhin-Sam. He's a postdoc research. I used to be, in very long past, he was my student but now he is my colleague. So he also asked himself similar questions. So we thought, we can do this and come to Indonesia to do it, I think it's also we also asked other colleagues and friends to also contribute. We also thought it's nice to go to Indonesia, not to also reflect about it in another region, because most of us are from African Studies. And we have a lot of students who come from Asia. Maybe to benefit from different discussions, you know, like Indonesian examples.

Before we came, we also went to to Kalimantan, because we have a subject in our relationship to university to Untan (Universitas Tanjungpura). So this was also nice to combine the two things.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

So this is interesting. What impact would you like to see, or do you expect from this kind of panel?

Guest: Prof. Ulrike Schultz

I think usually I'm a bit modest. I don't think it's a big impact, but I think generally these discussions, I think they should, especially I think my experience goes along with those NGOs and international organizations like IOM or the UN, they always categorize people. And from my own research in Sudan, I realized that there are really consequences for people. Their categories in a way which is not really reflecting their own lives, but it's reflecting the necessities of politics.

Like, for instance, if you want to, in my case, there was a new nation since then, was distributed, divided in two. So they wanted to categorize people along.. belonging to this part or belong to that part, but it was not was people really felt and what people was, but also created displaced people. The categorization created them. And so we always talk about constructing. And so they are trying to reconstruct, but also people also reconstructing. It's also kind of a process. So don't have displaced and people are not displaced. You also construct them on the way of dealing with them, or dealing with people, or implementing our policies. And so we should be careful as researchers not to do the same.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

Based on what I got, I feel like you mean in academia and what you are trying to do is to not label, is not categorizing as the same as not giving a label. Because, as you said, these categories and giving this label of like forced or not forced or different categories is more about politics and fitting in certain box, right? So do you see this categorization as the same as like label, or is it any different?

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Guest: Prof. Ulrike Schultz

I think we can't avoid to categorize in academic. We have to use our research also in the end when we end up with some categories, of phenomena, of people, of something like this. But I think we have to be critical and reflective about how we do it, and about the process of categorization. So we have to also think about the history of categories. And I think we should not take the categories of the policy makers, but we should start with the categories of the people themselves. How do they categorize themselves? How do they see themselves as migrants, as refugees, as ordinary people, as somebody who has his home or her home here, as mobile people, or whatever. And then we start a conversation with them, and then we develop something like our...

Host: Marofa Sharifi

So do you think that what you expect from not having these categories, and mostly listening to those people and hearing from them, how do they categorize themselves, right? Maybe, for some people, they're just human, and they don't even pay attention which country they live, what border they passed. They simply believe that I'm a human and I am on Earth. I'm living, right? So do you mean this the same thing that... do you see it as, something visible and possible living in this political world that you see a society or maybe in the future that we live in a world where people are categorized based on what they consider themselves in a state of having this, you know, political categorization. What do you think?

Guest: Prof. Ulrike Schultz

I think it's more, a bit more complicated, because as a way we categorize ourselves is also influenced by these discourses. Also we use.. you are Indonesian, maybe you feel very much as Indonesian, maybe not, I don't know. But, because this is what you know from here, yeah? But I think if as a researcher, we have the opportunity to look at people in different situation in different ways. Sometimes they connect to each other as human beings, sometimes they connect to each other as part of certain groupings or groups. And I think that's also changing.

And sometimes you get really beautiful statements of people. That they really talk about something which the politicians don't see anymore, or what we all don't see when it was in a place where people fight against each other along ethnic lines. They talk like about their neighborhoods, and they're all human beings, and they help each other despite all this. But sometimes people are also very much categorizing others or seeing others as also kind of a difficult thing, but I think we can contribute maybe, to help them also people to reflect on this as much as we also have to reflect on it. I think that process of research.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Next, we have Marofa again, speaking to Dolf te Lintelo from the Institute of Development Studies in the UK, taking about his presentation from the “Access to social protection for displaced people in urban areas” panel from the second day of the conference.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

We have Dr. Dolf here with us. Dr. Dolf, how are you doing?

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Guest: Dr. Dolf te Lintelo

Thank you. I'm doing really well. My name is Dolf te Lintelo. I'm a research fellow, which is based in the UK, on South Coast in Brighton, where I lead a group of people called the cities research cluster.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

I have some questions regarding your research, also regarding your presentation. Your title was patchworks of provisioning. Could you tell us about this?

Guest: Dr. Dolf te Lintelo

I was presenting a paper called “Patchwork of provisioning, social assistance and the urbanization of refuge in Lebanon”, was based on work done with my colleague who's also with us in the audience and answering questions and had prepared a presentation with me together. This work is funded by the UK Foreign Office. This research is part of a larger research program called “Better Assistance in Crisis (BASIC Program)”, which is looking at ways in which social protection approaches can change in protracted and emerging crisis contexts. So program at large tries to understand how humanitarian forms of assistance provisioning and protection can better connect with state based provisioning and social protections of programs. That's the context of the paper.

In Lebanon itself, we look at Beirut. And we've been particularly interested in understanding how different nationalities who are living in urban informal neighborhoods of different kinds, how have they experienced access to social assistance? And with social assistance, we mean the material transfer of goods, cash or food in kind, for instance, other forms, medicines. And the interest we have in this is that in a larger context of deep economic and political crisis and war in Israel, we wanted to understand how communities who have been historically displaced, in terms of longer history for Palestinian populations, but more recently, the last decade and a half nearly for Syrian populations, as well as the Lebanese low income groups, how have they been able to get assistance? In all their instances, they are in deep needs. We looked at the poverty levels. Even for Lebanese these days is around 80% of Lebanese are below the poverty line. For Syrians is well over 95%. So there's a very deep impoverishment. And the idea of social assistance, social protection, often is to protect people from the worst harms. So we try to understand how humanitarian system, but also the state has been playing a role in providing people with assistance.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

you mentioned everything really perfectly I just want to give one more moment to say if there was a particular thing that made you focus on this issue, or why did you wanted to have this theme?

Guest: Dr. Dolf te Lintelo

Well, on the one end, we've seen a lot of reforms at the policy level in Lebanon over the last few years, even while the state was in deep crisis, partially through a lot of initiatives from the international aid and humanitarian sector. That's one thing. And the other thing is a lot of the way in which humanitarian sector works, it tends to focus on the latest crisis. So in Lebanon, it has a late crisis, not quite that latest. And

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now humanitarian sectors moved on. There's been a very strong emphasis in supporting the Syrian population over the last decade. But at the same time, there's a deep impoverishment also of other populations, and we try to understand to what extent humanitarian programs take account of those.

And we try to understand why social assistance is not just provided simply by the state and by the international humanitarian actors, but actually, our empirical findings were showing that many people were drawing on support from local institutions, from local NGOs, from local church and mosques and other non state actors, and they are often not part of the picture in the larger level discussions about social protection reform in the country, for instance, or in discussions about how humanitarian aid can better align with with state based social protection. It focused typically on the central state, on the central government, and sometimes they look also at local government. But they forget about looking beyond whereas there's actually a lot of responses are actually happening at that level. So we try to bring that into the picture when... I mean, if we want to understand more cohesively and holistically how social systems occurs or feels.

Host: Marofa Sharifi

So this leads to my next question, what do you hope through this study to be done and to be heard or to be taken away from this?

Guest: Dr. Dolf te Lintelo

We need to better understand how the how those local systems of support work, both in terms of.. for whom are they working, which people are being supported by these systems? In Lebanon, there's a strong history around sectarianism, where different religious sects, Christian, Muslim and its various denominations that have histories of catering to their own people. But now what we're seeing is that with large numbers of protractedly displaced people from abroad, it's not clear where they're getting support from and so we want to understand better how people may access or may not access support, either in relation to their nationality, but also in relation to their religious affiliation or their sectarian identity. I think that's really.. I mean, we need to understand that much better, first and foremost, because it seems that people might be falling through the cracks.

In relation to that, we also need to better understand how those local institutions function. How do they select people that they support? Through what kind of processes do they identify people? Which people are falling through the cracks? Maybe are not considered, deemed worthy of being supported. Which people are benefiting? This is really important.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

We move on to Banafsha, reporting her conversation with Rebecca Murray and Daniel Mutanda, both from the UK, about their panel on “Negotiating exclusion and belonging within higher education”. Both are also part of the Education, displacement and (im)mobility Research Cluster in IASFM, who organized a brown-bag session on the second day of the conference to introduce the new research cluster.

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Guest: Rebecca Murray

Yes. My name is Rebecca Murray. I'm a lecturer at the University of Sheffield in the UK.

Guest: Daniel Mutanda

So I'm Daniel Mutanda. I'm a research fellow based at the University of Exeter in the UK. I'm also a member of the tertiary refugees student network, so I'm one of our global leaders.

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

When talking about your paper? What is the first word that pops up and why?

Guest: Rebecca Murray

Education. Everything that I say... I, we, brought... my colleague, Daniel, here with me, have brought to the conference relates to education. Particularly higher education, but we're really interested in all areas of education.

In terms of why that's important, the reason why I focus on education, particularly access to and experiences in education for people who have experience of displacement is because that was an issue that was identified to me as being a priority in the lives of young people who wanted to be resettling their lives in the UK around 20 years ago when I first started working with people who were seeking asylum in the UK. And that's stayed with me throughout everything that I've done before coming into higher education myself as an academic, in my practice, my advocacy campaigning work is all centered around opportunities and equality of access to higher education.

Guest: Daniel Mutanda

Exchange. Particularly in terms of knowledge exchange. So being able to share experiences. A lot of the work that I do builds on my own lived experience of accessing higher education while coming from a displaced background. So everything that I try to now contribute towards research is very much informed by my own lived experience, the lived experience of my peers as well that I work with, and I think the ability for us to share knowledge across contexts is super valuable. So exchange is something that I think is a key point that I think I would like to highlight in this paper.

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

What is your impression of the conference?

Guest: Daniel Mutanda

Yes so far, I think there is a real sense of... and this is drawing from one of the things I was mentioned during the panel this morning, where someone said that whenever they come from to these conferences, they feel like they're amongst their people. So I think there's a real sense of like a camaraderie, or real sense of, a shared sense of wanting to address a large problem that requires multiple points of collaboration to be able to address. So I think there's a real good sense of, sort of shared struggle, a sense of, I think, a reality in terms of how challenging the global landscape is right now, but still with a sense of hope. And that hope very much being embedded in the collective work that we do all together,

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which I think is usually great. It's very inspiring. This is my first time coming to this conference, to the IASFM. And I hope I'll be able to return again, because I think there is a sense that it is something that is growing and building as well. So yeah, it's been great.

Guest: Rebecca Murray

I agree with everything Daniel just said. For me coming to the IASFM conference is a bit like coming home, because it's very really inspiring to be here, but it's also really comfortable in the sense that there are so many... the discussions around forced migration displacement that take place in this space feel very different to those that take place in other spaces. That's in terms of who, whose voices are centered and the diversity of issues that are discussed. I really love the focus on this region, which is, it's not something I know much about, but I'm learning so much just by being here and meeting people.

And I think in terms of the IASFM, I think because of I recently formed research cluster, which Daniel and I are members of, around education, displacement and mobility, is that the IASFM has become something that we think about more often than just the conference. And thinking between the conferences and how we can represent the work of the IASFM through other projects and pieces of work we do. So many of my close collaborators I've met through the IASFM. I've made so many wonderful relationships that have continued between and beyond conferences. So it really is my favorite conference to attend and participate in.

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

So why are you interested in joining this conference again and again?

Guest: Rebecca Murray

I think because it gets better and better, I have more and more reasons to be here. And again, just to kind of to come back. One of my colleagues here, who's also part of the research cluster, is Tanya Aberman. We first met at an IASFM conference. Another collaborator is a member of the IASFM Committee, Mary Setrana, so I've gone and spent a month in Ghana with her. We've had, you know, lots of experiences outside the conference. Tanya and I and Daniel are working on a project which is about exchange between the UK and Canada, and thinking about how we can extend that even further. And it's really through contacts you make at the IASFM. They're the best people to, I would argue, to start with, to kind of build and kind of extend collaborations and have really meaningful, do really meaningful work, not just research, but also impact and practice.

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

So what is your takeaway from this conference?

Guest: Daniel Mutanda

So I think there were a few points that have, I think, expanded the way I view my work. So in particular, those one concept raised on ecological activism, I don't think I've got the term correct there, but around that ecosystem advocacy. I think it's a really good way of understanding how advocacy works in the system, in terms of how it's interconnected to multiple components, and especially the value of data.

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And again, with me highlighting knowledge and yeah, and of course, with our work data being a key part, I think that's something I'm definitely going to take away and continue to explore, because I think it's a very useful way of understanding the work that I do.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Next up is Banafsha's conversation with Victoria Forsgate, who is attending the conference as a moderator in one of the panels. But in this conversation, she shared her thoughts about the conference in general.

Guest: Victoria Forsgate

So my name is Victoria, and I support community-led and -founded organizations to resource their work and achieve their goals and navigate these complex systems that we're in.

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

What do you up here to do, session on refugee-led youth initiatives?

Guest: Victoria Forsgate

I wouldn't have missed it, especially the chance to hear young people boldly leading and driving change. It was a really important moment, I think, in this conference, seeing young people living displacement, claiming their space here, and boldly sharing... not just their challenges, but a vision of what the world would look like if they were provided the funding and the support and the platforms to achieve their goals

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

Which story or project stood out to you the most, and why?

Guest: Victoria Forsgate

What really struck me about the discussion and the event as a whole was that it really demonstrates that there is so much space for unity, but also space for people to share different experiences. That all people, including people with lived experience of displacement, are not a monolith, and there can be a temptation to try and generalize or to find one representative or one voice. And I think what was really powerful about this event was seeing young people who are all individually leading change with different organizations with different roles, many of them doing many different types of roles, but coming together, presenting a united front, but at the same time, sharing that they have also different perspectives and different experiences.

Host: Banafsha Mudaber

What would you say to others about the importance of spotlighting refugee youth leadership?

Guest: Victoria Forsgate

I would say particularly talking to people, including people like myself, who don't have lived experience and who have many other privileges, is that we need to listen, and I mean, really listen and take it seriously. And that as you are listening, if there are things that bring doubts to your mind, that make you

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question whether what you are hearing is really the right thing, or whether it would really make sense, or it would really work, I think we need to question why we're thinking that question, those doubts. I think in these conference spaces, we can often... the people who come to conferences like this regularly, we can all become a bit comfortable with the status quo, and we can become very comfortable with status quo in our work, even as we're trying to push for social or political change. So I think that's really important that we all take notice of that, not just take part in these sessions, but really start to question our work and how well we are listening to people who have that experience and are sharing it so boldly in these spaces.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

That was our episode for today. Thank you Marofa, Banafsha, and our podcast field team for sharing these wonderful conversations with us. On behalf of the podcast team, I would also like to thank our guests today: Prof. Ulrike Schultz, Dolf te Lintelo, Rebecca Murray, Daniel Mutanda, and Victoria Forsgate for sharing their insights.

Thank you for listening to this episode. I'm Akino as your host today will stop here. Stay tuned and wishing you a lovely day ahead.

Closing credit

The 20th International Association for the Study of Forced Migration Conference is organized by the Resilience Development Initiative in collaboration with the Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

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