

## Home Visiting with Immigrant and Refugee Families

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Welcome to our session.  
We are glad you are here!



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## Introductions

- Who we are
- Who we think you might be



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### Apartment Living Like a Prison

A lot of the adults said that they had a better childhood than their own children. And I was like, what do you mean? They were all describing the environment they grew up in. We were not all in a prison of little apartments. We were outside, we were not sitting in front of a TV. We were playing, we were creative. We didn't have toys, so we were making toys, we were using our imagination.

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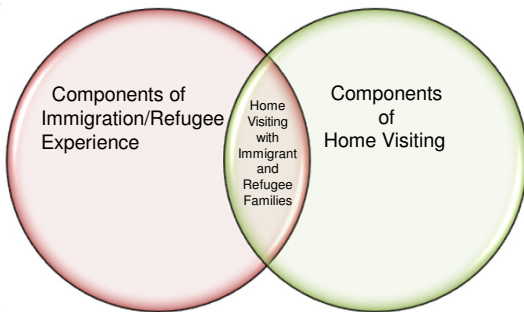
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### Two large topics, one intersection



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### Minnesota was historically an immigrant state

- In 1896, voters received instructions in 9 languages
- Early 1900s, ranked 7th highest among all states for foreign-born residents
- Immigration to state ended in the 1970s, fell to one of lowest percentages for any state in the US
- Churches and resettlement agencies began helping refugees:
  - Southeast Asia, Somalia, former USSR, Ethiopia, Burma, Liberia, Bosnia
- In 2004–06, Minnesota resettled more than 18,000 refugees (one of every nine refugees in the entire country) Source: Immigration Reform: MN's Changing Face Of Labor, 2013

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### Current Representation in Minnesota

- Approximately 7% of Minnesotans are foreign-born  
The 15 largest groups are:
  - Mexico, Laos (including Hmong), India, Somalia, Vietnam, Canada, Ethiopia, Liberia, Korea, China, Thailand, Germany, Kenya, the Philippines, and Cambodia
- Additional countries include:
  - Nigeria, Uganda, Sudan, Eritrea, Burma, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Bosnia, former USSR
- Minnesota's foreign-born population is different from the rest of the US: More people from Asia and Africa, fewer from Spanish-speaking countries

*Source: Minnesota Foundation*

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### Twin Cities

- More than 80% of foreign-born residents in Minnesota live in Twin Cities
- Cultural and linguistic diversity in public schools
  - Minneapolis: 90 languages are represented in homes of children
  - St. Paul: 40% of children speak one of 103 languages

*Source: The Advocates for Human Rights*

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### St. Cloud

- Small mid-western city of 60,000. Greater St. Cloud is approximately 100,000
- German Catholic farm families in 1980 to exploding diversity by 2010
- African American population swelled 283% from the year 2000 – 2010; Asian American population increased 35%;
- Currently 28% students of color in St. Cloud Public Schools

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**Parent Perspective:  
Background of St. Cloud Focus Groups**

- 5 immigrant/refugee organizations conducted a series of focus groups with immigrant/refugee women and men in 2011 in the St. Cloud area.
- Parents were recruited who had children 0 to 5, from the Somali, Sudanese, Latino cultures.
- The focus groups were designed to elicit information about
  - cultural beliefs and values about child development
  - social-emotional needs of families with young children
  - resources accessed
  - barriers to accessing early childhood services




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**Home Visitor Perspective:  
Twin Cities**

- Home visitors from Early Head Start, Early Childhood Special Education, Public Health, and other home-visiting programs in reflective consultation groups
- Mostly female, American-born, English-speaking, but many bilingual and/or bicultural
- Some had recent immigration experience themselves or in their family

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**Home Visitor Perspective**

- Home visitors from Burma, Cambodia, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Thailand, Laos, El Salvador
- Languages spoken include Spanish, Cambodian, Hmong, Karen, Thai, Somali, Oromo

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**Definition of Terms**

- Immigrants: People who have moved to this country for reasons such as economic opportunity, education, freedom of expression, or reuniting with family
- Refugees: People who were forced to leave their country of origin because of reasons such as persecution, fear, war, or natural disaster and have resettled in this country

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**Loss of Home/National Identity  
(Belonging?)**

- Complex feelings about country of origin
  - Loyalty, nostalgia, longing
  - Enormous loss
  - Anger, sadness, regret, relief
  - Grief about experiences that cannot be passed on to children
- Cultural identity and practices are embedded in each of us regardless of changes in status, residence

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“What is patriotism but the love of  
the food one ate as a child?”

Lin Yutang

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### Adapting to Multiple System Changes

- Government
- Laws, legal system
- Medical care
- Education, school system
- Employment, economic system
- Housing, utilities
- Transportation
- Food
- Social services
- Politics, advocacy



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### One Example: In-Home Services

- Foreign idea to many parents
- May imply government-sponsored interest or intrusion into family life
- May be confusing: How is one in-home service different from another?
- May represent threat, specifically around children and parenting issues
- Similar to American-born fears but complicated by language, trauma, national and cultural differences



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### Home-Visiting with Parents and Children

- Home visiting has built-in complexity
  - Being allowed into someone's home
  - Being asked to introduce ideas and/or suggest change
  - Being asked to introduce ideas and/or suggest change about parenting, the most charged, deeply rooted, deeply unconscious, personal content of all
- Each home visitor comes from his or her own deeply rooted family culture, assumptions about what is healthy for children and healthy in parenting



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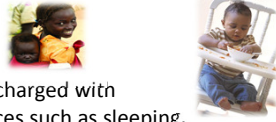
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## Home-Visiting



- Each home visitor also is charged with teaching parenting practices such as sleeping, feeding, toileting, education, discipline, and health
- Add cultural, racial, religious, national and language differences between home visitors and families
- Now include refugee experiences, including persecution, war, displacement, loss, and trauma
- How are the home visitor and parent to understand each other? How can the home visitor be of help?

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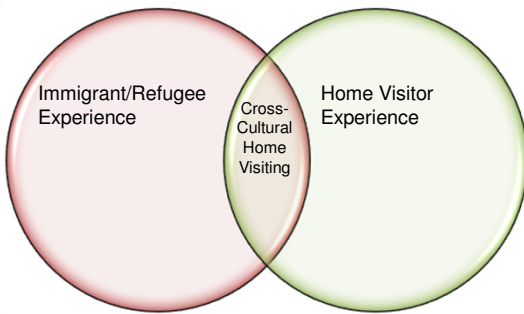
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## Cross-Cultural Home-Visiting



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## Goals for Today

- 1) Increase understanding of the experience of those who have come to this country through choice or necessity
- 2) Increase awareness of how home visitors may be viewed by parents from diverse cultures
- 3) Increase awareness of how home visiting evokes our own cultural patterns and beliefs and how they manifest in our work
- 4) Understand the need to inform ourselves about families' national origins in order to have some context about how they became who they are (and, likewise, how we became who we are)

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### Is There Ever Monocultural Home-Visiting?

- Even when national, racial, cultural, and religious factors are *shared*, there are substantive differences between home visitor and families
- Majority v. minority culture
  - Socioeconomic differences – unspoken class issues
  - White or middle class privilege
- Educational differences
  - Vocabulary, language structure, practice with critical thinking, challenging ideas
- Possible biological, psychological differences between home-visitor and families: sufficient nutrition in childhood, protected brain development, less past trauma, loss
- Possible fewer current life stressors: home, job, safety

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### Cross Cultural Differences in Home-Visiting

- Communication
  - Language differences
  - Use of interpreters
  - Lack of interpreters
    - “Non-verbal” home visiting
  - Communication styles
  - Conventions/politeness/appropriateness

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### Parent Perspectives

- “Parents already feel powerless and frustrated because they do not speak the language or understand expressions.”
- Sudanese: “The mom is illiterate and doesn’t speak English like her child. It is a barrier between the mom and the child. The child may not know a word in their home language, so the mom can’t communicate that idea to the child.”

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### Parent Perspectives

- Kenya: “I was even hungry for two days when I arrived...and I did not know where to go shopping. I was told to go down two blocks and shop. Two blocks? Blocks mean bricks in Africa, construction material, and so I did not know what that meant.”



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### Parent Perspectives

- “The Interpreter should prepare the family and the home visitor should prepare the interpreter about the language (terminology) that might be used.”



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### Home Visitor Perspective

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### Cross-Cultural Differences

- Different perceptions about role
  - Teacher who comes to the house: What is that? Safe? Mandatory? Government sponsored?
- Boundaries
  - Tasks, time
  - Food, drink, invited to family or religious celebration
  - Personal information: what is appropriate to ask, to share
- Survival needs may be more salient than program goals
  - translating, housing, health insurance
  - Possible clash between purpose of home-visiting program and family needs

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### Parent Perspectives

- “Relationship building has to be the basic beginning.”



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### Parent Perspectives

- Uganda: “Do not underestimate the parents’ feeling of helplessness especially if they have older children who assume power, leadership and do not want to cooperate any more. Allow parents to express their knowledge.”



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### Parent Perspectives

- “Government is generally not trusted. Is the visit parent initiated or professional initiated?”
- “The concept of parent involvement in school is not understood.”

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### Home Visitor Perspective

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### Cross-Cultural Differences

- Perceptions about family and parenting
  - Who is in family: Nuclear family v. extended family
- Who is responsible for raising children?
- Respect and care for elders
- Goals of child-rearing: Individual v. collective success
- Safety issues: Women’s safety, children exposed to violence, home visitor safety

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Parent Perspectives  
Sudanese

- “Children should respect and care for the elderly. However, we find that here the children abandon us when they are older.”
- “The parents who are not that educated find it difficult to assist their children in doing their homework. The parent feels dead because they can’t help their kid. If they are alive they are supposed to help their children.”

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Parent Perspectives  
Sudanese

- “Here there are no community responsibilities in bringing up a child. In the Sudanese community that we come from, a child’s upbringing is the responsibility of every adult in the community. – Children belong to the community. Everyone is responsible for disciplining the child.”



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Parent Perspectives  
Sudanese

- “When the mom is pregnant the baby is inside the mom and is the mom’s responsibility. As soon as the child is born the child belongs to the whole community.”



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### Loss of Support

- Latino: “In Mexico, once you have a baby and are bedridden, many people of your family come and bring food and take care of you until you heal. There is no support system of this kind in the US. They are more likely isolated, especially if they do not have family here.”

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### Parent Perspectives Somali

- “Children were taught by their parents. Now they don’t take the opinion from parents. Instead it comes from the T.V.”
- “They used to learn from the mother such as mom singing for them, but now they learn all that through toys.”



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### Parent Perspectives African Women’s Alliance

- “Here there often is no daycare help with young children, when it is often you and your husband alone, unlike in Africa where there are always other family members available to help for free.”
- “Respect for elders is very important in Africa; it is simply imperative – somewhat a ‘natural law’.”

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### Home Visitor Perspective

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### Cross-Cultural Differences

- Roles: Conflict between family’s and home visitor’s expectations due to gender, age, religion, education, who is going to be at the home visit
- Expectations for children based on gender, age
- Marriage: Arranged v. non-arranged, age of marriage, consent

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### Parent Perspectives

- Somali: “We taught our girls to do house chores by age 4 and beyond, and the boys went with their dad and learned to work with their dad.”
- African Women’s Alliance: “Parents have distinct roles. Children birth to age five are to be taken care of by mothers.”



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### Home Visitor Perspective

- Roles: Conflict between family's and home visitor's expectations due to gender, age, religion, education, who is going to be at the home visit
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### Cross-Cultural Differences

- Differences in thinking about mental health/illness and other difficulties, such as deafness, cognitive delays
  - May be no concept in culture, no words in language to talk about it
- **Challenge sorting out language differences from education from trauma from disorientation due to immigration from mental illness**

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### Parent Perspectives Sudanese



- “The life here does not give parents the opportunity to spend enough time with the children, hence we don't know what our children are doing.”
- “If parents have developmental concerns, we would ask elders or parents.”

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Parent Perspectives  
Somali

- “If they have a little stomach and fat cheeks, then they look healthy. The physical appearance were the clues we looked for to see if they were healthy.”
- “We rely a lot on our religion. If our children get sick, we take them to the Mosque and have the Sheiks read Qu’ran on them and that helps a lot.”

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Parent Perspectives  
Somali

“They need to learn our system at home and respect it, such as the positions of authority, or bringing something home that we don’t use or get offended by it.”



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Parent Perspectives  
Latino

– “...A family that does not have insurance cannot make multiple [doctor] visits. My son was very sick once from an ear infection and respiratory problems. [When] I made an appointment, ...the worker told me that I needed 2 separate appointments—one for the ear infection and one for the respiratory issues. I could not afford [this].”

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Parent Perspectives

Latino

- “The “evil eye” (mal de ojo) can cause injury or bad luck.”
- “Our culture is not based on paperwork. Our word is meaningful.”
- “...There are many more things about our culture aside from mariachis and tacos. Professionals should know our values, not our stereotypes.”

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Parent Perspectives  
African Women’s Alliance

- “Sometimes doctors don’t believe you. They ignore mother’s instincts. The doctor did not believe us initially; he attributed our child’s slow speech acquisition to the fact that we speak three languages at home plus he is a boy and they don’t always learn to speak quickly. At 18 months the child was finally diagnosed with autism – 6 months after the mother first expressed her concerns to the doctor.”

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Home Visitor Perspective

- Differences in thinking about mental health/illness and other difficulties, such as deafness, cognitive delays
  - May be no concept in culture, no words in language to talk about it

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**Cross-Cultural Differences**

- Eating: Nothing is more culturally determined than what and how we feed our children
- Examples:
  - Children eat separately, not family style
  - Eating on the floor
  - Communal eating out of a big bowl
  - Eating two meals a day instead of three
  - Feeding child by the parent –
    - Somali culture – the family will feed the child until 5 or 6 – has a whole different meaning
  - Rice, rice, rice – how do the kids do?

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**Cross-Cultural Differences**

- Sleeping: Medical recommendations v. cultural practices
  - Co-sleeping
  - Lack of cribs
- Toileting
  - Expected age for toileting
  - Methods
- Teaching
  - Content – expectations for teachers
  - Goals, methods

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**Cross-Cultural Differences**

- Discipline
  - Goals
  - Methods
  - Fear of government intervention, removal of child

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### Fear of Child Protection Removing Your Child

- In our Cultural Forums, this concern was the most common concern of the immigrant and refugee families that were interviewed.
- It is not easy to explain child protection laws that are based on 'it depends'.



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### Parent Perspectives: Discipline

- Latino: "If I want to spank my youngest, I can't because he always tells me "I will call the police." American parents value punishments like taking things away from them. I find the American culture very difficult to understand."
- Sudanese: "Everyone is responsible for disciplining the child. We believe that if the child is brought up in a good way, it will benefit the whole community."

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### Mistrust of Schools

- Latino: Many parents expressed a lack of trust in the schools. It was perceived as 'us and them,' that the schools were not set up for their child.



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### Home Visitor Perspective

- Eating
- Sleeping
- Toileting
- Teaching
- Discipline

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### Family Stories/Concerns: What might be affecting parents and parenting?



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### What might be affecting parents and parenting?

- Experience helps home visitors know what kinds of issues might be affecting families from more familiar cultures
  - People from Mexico or Central America may have left children behind so that they could earn money to send home
  - Parents may not have documentation, fear sudden separation from children
  - People from war-torn countries or refugee camps may have lost previous children or whole families

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### Depression and Loss

- Monica's Ah Ha moment
- Depression is not just about being lonely, if you add child care issues, language barriers, transportation issues depression makes sense.



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### What might be affecting parents and parenting?

- Parents and home visitors may never discuss an issue because home visitor doesn't know it exists -- or the parent may assume home visitor knows and thinks that it is not something that should be talked about
- *Example: Dry babies*

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### What might be affecting parents and parenting?

- Refugee status, immigration status, family relationships
  - May be life-threatening or status-threatening reasons to not tell the truth about (to us) seemingly innocuous things: birth date, real name, real family relationships, how family earns money
  - Home visitors have to manage knowledge of being lied to/relationship with family without taking it personally
- Fear underlies many of the decisions to lie/misrepresent
  - fear of deportation, government reprisal, revenge (ethnic conflicts)

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### Parent Perspectives

- Latino: “They may not always tell the doctor the whole truth because of fear of being judged.”
- African: “Parents might feel spied on, so they will lie about where the child sleeps or what the child was fed or what chores the child does. Parents feel good when they are made to feel that they know a lot but just different.”

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### Home-Visiting Beliefs that have been Challenged

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- Matching cultures between home visitor and family is best
- Within small or recent immigrant communities, some may not want staff from within the community. Some families ask for an “American” because they:
  - Do not want someone from their community in their business
  - Want their children to learn English and the American way of learning
  - Believe a Caucasian home visitor is more knowledgeable than a non-white or non-American born home visitor

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- People from other cultures are open to people from other cultures
  - Have been surprised/shocked that immigrants have prejudices
- Sharing/understanding language and culture of a family makes the work easier

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- Beliefs that have been Challenged**
- Immigrant families will be more challenging than American-born families
    - Immigrant families may not have the multigenerational poverty and abuse that are present in American-born families
    - Stabilization of family needs may be all family needs – no disturbance in parent/child relationship

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- Beliefs that have been Challenged**
- Families are uneducated and cannot work
    - In fact, many of the parents were highly educated in their own countries and could work if they spoke the language (30% of foreign-born families in MN have a four-year degree or more)

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### Lessons Learned

- Handout – compilation of lessons learned by cross-cultural home visitors

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### Summary Slide

- Parents want what is best for their children, and what is best is culturally determined.
- Families from different cultures think what we are doing is just as incomprehensible as what we think they are doing.
- Relationship is possible regardless of language and cultural differences.

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### Acknowledgments

- ❖ Staff & Volunteers from African Women’s Alliance, Casa Guadalupe, Perseverancia, Somali Women’s Association, United South Sudan
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