

ROOT OF CONFLICT

Root of Conflict Podcast

Episode: Coping with the Global Refugee Crisis

featuring

Cindy Huang, Vice President of Strategic Outreach, Refugees International

interviewed by

Sonnet Frisbie, Pearson Fellow

Mwangi Thuita, Pearson Fellow

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Full Transcript

University of Chicago Introducer: This is Taylor Griffin and you're listening to University of Chicago Public Policy Podcast.

Root of Conflict Interviewers: You're listening to Root of Conflict, a podcast about violent conflict around the world and the people, societies and policy issues it affects. You'll hear from experts and practitioners can conduct research, implement programs and use data analysis to address some of the most pressing challenges facing our world. Root of Conflict is produced by UC3P, in collaboration with the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflict, a research institute housed within the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago.

Sonnet Frisbie: I'm Sonnet Frisbie.

Mwangi Thuita: I'm Mwangi Thuita.

Sonnet Frisbie: And you're listening to Root of Conflict. So, our guest today was Cindy Huang, the Vice President of Strategic Outreach at Refugees International. She's also a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Global Development. She develops and leads initiatives to build support for improved protection for refugees and displaced people in the United States, but also around the world. So, she really has a vast depository of experience on these issues. She also has been a senior executive in government and of course, nonprofit, and has led major policy initiatives on forced displacement, food security and conflict prevention. While she was in government, she served as the Deputy Vice-President for Sector Operations at the Millennium Challenge Corporation, but also a Director of Policy of the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, and a Senior Advisor at the State Department.

So, she really has a lot of experience. She had a lot of what I thought were fresh different insights and real evidence-based policy proposals related to refugees. So, Mwangi, I'm really excited about the guests that we have on today. Listening to the news in the last few years, you probably have heard about the refugee crisis, 70.8 million people, more than the population of Thailand, displaced by war conflict and persecution, tens of millions more displaced by climate events and natural disasters. And of course, it's a human issue, but it's also a political issue, with governments either capitalizing on it as a wedge issue with voters or struggling with how they should respond on a humanitarian basis. And there's a lot of misperceptions about refugees.

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Mwangi Thuita: And one of those misperceptions about refugees is that they're going to be in a host country for a short while, and then go back home. But increasingly, we're seeing that protracted periods of displacement are becoming more common. And another thing is that living in a developed country as we do, we may be tempted to think that hosting refugees is a rich world issue, but the burden has mostly been shouldered by low- and middle-income countries like Uganda, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Jordan and Lebanon.

Sonnet Frisbie: That's absolutely right Mwangi. and not only do we often think that the rich world is shouldering the majority of the burden in terms of numbers, but also, we think of the wealthy world, in particular, the United States as being a real leader in this area. and it's true that the U.S. used to accept, I think it was more than all other countries combined, which is no longer the case, but it's also instructive if you look at it relative terms to population and those trends are really shifting. So, our guest talked quite a bit to that point.

Mwangi Thuita: Another thing that she mentioned that I thought was interesting was that 40% of displaced people today are actually IDPs, that's internally displaced persons. And that means that they're not subject to international conventions and protocols that were designed to protect refugees, who are people who've sought sanctuary in a different country. So, I think the issue of internally displaced people is something that listeners will benefit from hearing about. We also sort of solicited her advice for aspiring development professionals and future managers in nonprofit and government.

Sonnet Frisbie: All right. Well, thank you so much for being with us today. We're really excited to talk to you. So, as we mentioned, currently 70.8 million people are displaced by war conflict and persecution. Can you contextualize that number for us in terms of the last hundred years or so, maybe some of the bigger trends, and how does that look different today, from a hundred years ago?

Cindy Huang: Yep. The number has been on the rise. and so, you'll often hear, and it's the case that this is the largest number of displaced people. At the same time, it's important to then get down to the next level of detail where more than 40 million of those people are internally displaced in their own countries, and about 25 million plus have fled to another country. Another piece of information that's really important is the absolute number compared with the global population. And so, there have been times in history, I think we're kind of reaching parity with the level of displacement, for example, after World War II, as a percentage of population, I will say that it's important to think about those absolute numbers. At the same time, we also know that it's almost less about the numbers and more about our approach to including refugees, because sometimes people hear the number and they feel really overwhelmed and think about what we can do, but there have been times where we have accepted globally, a large number of refugees without the negative political backlash that we're seeing today.

Sonnet Frisbie: Hmm. And what are some common misperceptions about refugees and displaced people? And I mean that both on the part of policymakers, and let's say the public, the average Joe?

Cindy Huang: So, one of the misperceptions is that people flee and after, one or a couple of years, they're able to return home. But the average length of displacement is 10 years, and for those people who are displaced in protracted situations for five years or more, they're displaced for more like 20 years. And I think that makes a huge difference, I think both from the perspective of the public and policymakers, which means that a lot of the solutions that we've come up with, like providing food, water, and shelter for refugees, that makes sense if they're displaced for a short period of time, but think about 10, 20, 30 years, we need more sustainable solutions.

Sonnet Frisbie: And it's interesting because I think one of the misconceptions that I've heard is often that, well, they don't actually want to go home and they're actually economic migrants. And during the recent refugee

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crisis in the EU, for example, there was a lot of conflating of economic migration and refugees. So, I'd be interested to hear how you describe the distinction between the two and then how should the policies be differentiated for the two groups?

Cindy Huang: Yes. So, for refugees who are fleeing violence, war and persecution, we have international protocols to deal with them. And so, I think it is important to separate them from economic migrants who may also be fleeing circumstances that are very dire, but at the same time, aren't suffering from that same level of lack of safety, and that really is what the international protection regime is about. From a policy perspective. I think that means that we do have to be clear that that system for seeking asylum and providing refugee protection is really critical. At the same time, I understand that some of the confusion in the public mind, because there are cases of people who seek asylum who don't win their case. It turns out that they were trying to use a channel that they don't qualify for. I think people have a lot of empathy for refugees. And I think the issue is that we need systems that are transparent and function well.

Sonnet Frisbie: And I'm curious, what do you see as the United States role in the refugee process? I know a few years ago, I would hear it often touted that we accepted more refugees than any other country, but I know that that was only an absolute term since we already talked about absolute versus proportions. So, how do you see the U.S.'s role?

Cindy Huang: Historically, the U.S. has anchored the refugee resettlement process. And for those of you listeners who aren't as familiar with refugee resettlement, those are refugees who have fled to another country and they aren't able to find safety in their new host country, and therefore, UNHCR and that system identifies them for resettlement to a third country like the United States or Canada or the UK. Historically, we used to resettle as many refugees as the rest of the world combined. And so, it was a very big commitment. However, more recently, Canada has accepted more refugees than the United States. Canada is a much smaller country. So, the role of the U.S. has been not only in accepting refugees, but really in upholding the principles of international protection. And as we've seen U.S. leadership roll back, we are seeing global retrenchment of support for these principles. And it's not always only up to the U.S. but we were an anchor of that system.

Sonnet Frisbie: So, you mention the principles of international protection of refugees? And it strikes me that you also mentioned internally displaced people, IDPs, a moment ago. So, can you talk about where IDPs maybe fall through the cracks in that system, and perhaps where maybe they have advantages? I'd be interested in how those groups differ.

Cindy Huang: Of course, the situations between various refugees and IDPs differ among themselves. So, it's really important to have responses that are locally contextualized. It is very different in terms of legal status in particular. So, I work a lot on access to jobs for refugees, and once you've crossed a border, you are facing a lot of constraints where host countries don't allow refugees to work. If you are an IDP, you're still a citizen of that country. So, in theory, you still have access to services and access to jobs in practice. Often times, people who are displaced internally don't have that access. So, I would say, I think it's, well, there are significant differences. I think it's important to also look at the practical barriers that people are facing, whether they're IDPs or refugees, and try to overcome them. I'll just put in one final plug: there's a new high-level panel of the UN that's looking at IDPs, and we all can be rightly skeptical of high-level panels and what is implemented at the end of the process; however, I do see it as a very positive sign of the attention that's being paid to the unique situation of IDPs and what more the international community can do.

Mwangi Thuita: And you just spoke about labor market access. So, I'd like to talk to you more about that and about some other policies that benefit refugees and how you, at Refugees International approach measuring

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the evidence for the success of policies. So, living in a Western country, as we do, with a constant stream of news about refugees over the last few years, you would think that most refugees and displaced people are actively seeking sanctuary in Europe or North America. But as we know, most of these people actually end up in low- and middle-income countries in the Middle East and Africa and Asia, and these countries face significant challenges in providing resources. Some of these challenges are material. Some of them are political. There's a fear in many of these countries that allowing refugees to work or have an education or even allowing them access to national safety nets will act as a pull factor and lead to more refugees, who will stay for longer periods of time. What does the research actually say about these concerns?

Cindy Huang: So, as you noted, the vast majority of refugees live in other developing countries, and that figure right now is around 85%. So, it's really important to challenge some of the misperceptions about who is doing what in this world around refugee protection. I will say that the evidence generation around the sets of questions that you asked is relatively new. And I think it's great. Now we have new actors like the World Bank starting to dig into these questions. My understanding and assessment of the evidence is that, when people are first displaced, those policy conditions that you talked about, like, "Oh, can I have access to the social safety net system? Can I get an education?" When they're fleeing violence war and persecution, people are not really carefully weighing those factors, because – I most recently did a study in Bangladesh and, the Rohingya were fleeing massive war crimes and that, that wasn't really a factor.

So, I think it does depend on the various push and pull factors that are in place. I think we have evidence from a number of cases that shows that other policies beyond the kinds of benefits you can get are far more influential. So, I mentioned some push factors, like what people are fleeing from, also when countries close the border, and that just has a much larger impact. So, I think one other, as you said, rightly, many governments are concerned about the pull factor. I've now, in talking to government representatives around the world, I've heard more about the "stay factor," meaning that there's concern that by providing these services, refugees won't want to return, even when the conditions in their home country have improved. There is evidence around that that shows it really is mixed. It depends on the policy conditions in the hosting country and the country of origin. And there are examples of people who, when they have access to livelihoods, when they are able to make a living, they might be more likely to return home because they have education and they have assets that they're able to return to their country to rebuild. And that really goes to one of the hearts of the question, which is the vast majority of refugees say, "If my country is safe, I would like to return home."

Mwangi Thuita: And there are some of these low- and middle-income countries that are increasingly allowing some provisions for refugees to work. I think maybe Jordan, Turkey, Colombia, correct me if I'm wrong. What are some effective ways of convincing these governments, that it is actually beneficial both to them and to the refugee populations?

Cindy Huang: So, there has been movement, you rightly note, and also in Ethiopia where there's been positive laws that are passed. And then we have some stalwarts like Uganda, which have always had really excellent policies on the inclusion front. So, one of the ways that the international community has been thinking about this question is what are the resources that we can offer to align interests, such that it makes sense for both refugees, host communities and national development to allow refugees to work and increase their self-reliance? And in cases like Jordan, we've seen that the international community has come together to offer Jordan assistance, in particular, this development-led assistance where we as the international community can make investments in their health system, for example, so that their health system can include refugees, as opposed to the traditional model of having a totally parallel system go on for years and years.

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And I think it's really important to do that around economic growth more generally, because in all of these countries, you have vulnerable host populations saying, "Oh, it's wonderful for refugees to get assistance, but what about our situation?" And so, I think being able to design packages, which are not about conditionality, not "We'll give you a bridge or a road here if you'll give rights to refugees," it's really about how can we use these new resources to align interests so that we can overall grow the pie. And people have been so creative there in the Jordan case, there were trade concessions with the European Union. There have been discussions of ways to catalyze private sector investment. I don't want to oversimplify, because the devil's in the details and implementation is really tough, but I really appreciate the creative and new thinking around bringing humanitarian and development objectives together.

Mwangi Thuita: And some of these models for international partnership are relatively new. What can we say so far about how they've been implemented and the successes that they've had?

Cindy Huang: So, I've looked most closely at the compact in Jordan that was around jobs and economic growth. And the one in Ethiopia is quite new, I will say, as you said, this process really started in 2016 or so, and in development terms, that's quite a short period of time. But I do see some bright spots and I'll give two or three examples. So, one is that there's really been learning in the implementation process. So, in the case of Jordan, there was at first a significant focus on refugees being employed in industrial zones and in factories. But when the program was starting to be implemented, people found – well, refugees, that's a long way to travel. They were afraid to leave their families. You've just fled another country. There was fear, there were the costs around traveling to the workplace, there was no childcare. And I think people really did take a step back and say, "Okay, well, how can we improve this system, but not lose the spirit of wanting greater access to the labor market?"

So, there have been changes, like a new regulation that allows Syrians to have home-based businesses, which allows more women to have catering businesses or sewing businesses. So, I think there has been that learning spirit. At the same time, there's still a long ways to go. And I think one of the tricks in all of this will be, how can we implement these projects and compacts in a way where we're seeing positive benefit and therefore there's momentum to do more and more, versus, feeling like there's going to be a backlash because people haven't really seen the benefits that we've promised?

Sonnet Frisbie: There's a big role for the private sector as well. How do you see – and you mentioned a little bit with like home-based businesses – how do you see the private sector, maybe, companies that want to hire refugees, how have you seen them also influencing the policy process?

Cindy Huang: Yes, I think they they've played a really important role and I want to call out the Tent Partnership for Refugees, which is a coalition of companies that want to do more, both in the U.S. and around the world. And it's been really important to have Tent and groups like Tent at the table and the companies that are in their coalition to make specific commitments around the hiring and the investment that they would make if policy changes were implemented. Because it's very nice in theory to say, "Please make these policy changes and you're going to see these benefits," but, the countries which are under pressure, they want to know that there's something at the end of that policy change process, which can be quite difficult at times. And I know that in Colombia where there's a more progressive policy around labor market access, there've been conferences and really requests for companies to come in and increase the overall pie.

Mwangi Thuita: You spoke of the differences between cultures of welcome in countries like Uganda, which have historically been very open to having refugees work and be integrated in the social safety system and provided for social services. Obviously, that's a bit simplifying it a little bit. But what do you think are some major determining factors in how open and welcoming a country is to refugee populations?

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Cindy Huang: One major one is the previous experience with displacement, and that's the case in Uganda, and now you see in Colombia. So, for, during the civil war in Colombia, Venezuela hosted a lot of Colombians. And so now, as we see the flow moving in the opposite direction, there is a feeling that, we were welcomed and now it's our turn to welcome our neighbors. So, I think historical experience is an important determining factor. There have been studies about the cultural closeness of the displaced and host populations being a factor. And now, there's new research as well, that's looking into both the economic and the perception of the economic effects of hosting refugees. So, I'm working with a fantastic researcher, Thomas Ginn, at the Center for Global Development, who's looking at how welcome changes when host communities know or don't know that part of the benefits they're receiving are because they're hosting refugees. And actually, that experiment is in Uganda, where now it's quite common, and I think it's a very good thing that is part of a humanitarian response, a certain percentage of the funds should be invested in the host community. So, then there's a question of, does that change people's perceptions and the sense of welcome?

Sonnet Frisbie: So, you had mentioned the Rohingya earlier, and I know that you actually gave testimony to Congress in July of 2019 on that topic. And you talked about among other things, encouraging U.S. to increase international pressure on Myanmar to ensure participation of the Rohingya in the response, and to increase support for Bangladesh as they grapple with the refugee crisis. I would love to hear how you calibrate your message when you're called on to give testimony before Congress, maybe how that experience was for you and how the aftermath has been as far as seeing impact.

Cindy Huang: So, we talked earlier about the fact that U.S. leadership has waned a bit on refugee issues. I will say even with that change, the U.S. is still such an important voice in the international community, and in the case of Bangladesh and hosting Rohingya, the U.S. is by far the largest donor. And you can say that about a number of crises. So, I took that duty and opportunity very seriously because speaking to members of Congress who hold the purse strings, who are leaders on policy in many respects, it was a really great and humbling experience to be able to share my ideas. What impressed me most about it was the level of engagement. As your listeners and you may have noticed, there's just a lot going on in our country now and a lot going on in Congress. So, I thought, "Okay, well, some people will show up and ask some general questions," and that was not the case at all.

There was a large, maybe even a dozen members who came in at different points in the hearing, extremely well-informed questions, even things like, "What's the curriculum that Rohingya children are being offered?" People who just know a lot about what's going on. And that honestly gave me a lot of hope in our democracy and the fact that it's not perfect, but people were taking time to understand the issues and understand where U.S. pressure and engagement could make a difference. In terms of follow-up, there has been progress on the Burma Act. It hasn't been passed, but that includes a number of measures that I referenced such as greater accountability and individual and business sanctions on Myanmar. I think you can't ever attribute anything, one individual thing to what you've said in front of Congress, but I do think the chorus of voices really matters. And that's something I would say to those who are listening, who have very bright futures in policy and practice, is that it's really about the ecosystem of change. And I think the more you can understand where the pressure points are, and how you can build alliances, including with people who you don't agree with a hundred percent, or even 50%, it's really important. And I, again, was heartened by the bipartisan nature of support and interest in the issues.

Mwangi Thuita: I'd love to hear about what kind of arguments, in your long experience in both the nonprofit sector and the government, what kind of arguments do you find to be most effective in swaying policymakers? There's moral arguments that appeal to our values as a nation, or perhaps, human rights and refugee rights

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based arguments, or perhaps and how to take into account strategic considerations, given it's the U.S. government that you're trying to appeal to?

Cindy Huang: Yeah. It's important. It's a lot of work and it's so important to tailor the message and lift up. We always want to be extremely evidence-based and there are always opportunities, depending on who you're engaging to lift up different aspects of the arguments. One thing that I found in my work, which previously focused more heavily on the economic aspects, is that even with the ministries of finance and the more economic actors, that it is still a combination of factors. And so, I'll give an example, which is that when we were talking to stakeholders in Jordan and we were focused on the potential economic benefits of giving greater rights, we learned that making the argument that increased labor market access in many cases would reduce child marriage and child labor was compelling, because these are issues in places like Jordan and in Bangladesh that the government has been working on and paying attention, even aside of the refugee crisis.

These are issues that they've been working on. So, I think to the extent you can really look at shared interests and make an argument that has many pillars, especially when it comes to policy makers. It's important. And then the last thing I'll say is more of my recent research has been on narrative shift and communications. And it's really important for everyone to remember that policy makers are people too, meaning that stories and human beings, contact with human beings, also makes a big difference. So, for example, I think even though you won't have an RCT to show the evidence around congressional delegations, where you bring members of Congress to different countries, or to refugee resettlement offices in the U.S., I can just tell you from experience, it really makes a difference. And so, how do you combine that in a way that, that uses your time and resources wisely, and those of other members of the coalition? To me, that's the art and science of change, policy change, social change that I love to engage in.

Sonnet Frisbie: Kind of an off-the-wall question, but you've had a really fascinating career, and a lot of it in areas where I would say you have to be somewhat of an idealist to keep your optimism. Is there a book or a person who has had a big influence on you and your ideals and morals surrounding your work?

Cindy Huang: Yeah, there are a number of influential figures in my academic life and just reading through the years, hopefully this doesn't sound overly macabre, but I will never forget reading Victor Frankel's *Man's Search for Meaning*, which is about how he survived. He's a psychologist and an intellectual, and also just lived through so much during the Holocaust. And that's that it has been a touchstone for me in terms of, without ever being too harsh on ourselves, to say, what other people who have been through the worst of the worst are able to find in terms of meaning in life, and finding hope? I've just had so much luck and privilege in my life and to be able to use that to try to better the conditions of humanity, I see, as not just a responsibility, but a privilege.

Sonnet Frisbie: So, shifting gears a little bit, we're here at the Harris School of Public Policy, and we have hundreds of classmates who are going to go out into the world after graduation, some of whom have already worked in policy, but definitely will work in organizations, many of them in development, let's say, or NGOs. What are two or three things your experience has taught you about working within organizations like NGOs and government – I know you've also had experience there – and what type of advice would you give to those students?

Cindy Huang: So, the first will be extremely boring, which is that management and bureaucracy can be your friend. I did a PhD in anthropology, so I got in intensive interaction with a variety of academics, and I think it's always wonderful to have time to be free to think and write and reflect. I will say, having worked in larger organizations, that you can do so much, with the leverage and power of a team and a bureaucracy behind you, that is change and opportunity at scale. And there is no brilliant idea out there that is adopted just because it's

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great and brilliant. There is so much blood, sweat, and tears that goes into getting it adopted and scaled and adopted. So, make that investment, it is hard.

Every year, when it comes time to do annual performance reviews, I think, “Oh my gosh, I don't have time to do this.” But ultimately those are the resources that I have to affect change in the world. So that is one thing that I've learned. I would say it's probably not my natural tendency. So, it's one that I've had to work on. The second is that the world out there is big, but actually this community, and the community that you will work in probably is relatively small. The golden rule, when I first went to the State Department, I saw how some people came in, and maybe they're political appointees for the first time, and they were just a little bit too big for their britches, you know? And I said, “Oh, well, that's going to be the same person.” That desk officer you weren't nice to is going to be your boss and you're going to interact with them at some important meeting.

And I know again, it sounds pretty basic, but really going in with that spirit that we're in a community that is trying to work together is really important. And then the third piece, which is linked to the first two, is as you move up in the world and I know Harris School students, and anyone else listening will move up in the world. Like how can you also create space to go back to first principles? So, I came into all of this as an anthropologist, really believing that refugees, other affected populations have to be at the heart of what we do. That becomes harder as you move up, because there are a lot more meetings so that you can get to scale and have bigger influence, but how do you maintain that connection? And also, it's just good for the soul, because you're being reminded of why you wanted to embark on this journey in the first place.

Mwangi Thuita: That was fantastic. Thank you so much. And in line with that management and bureaucracy and administration are often things that are underlooked. Policy research and analysis is a little fancier and more attractive. But when you look at the vast landscape of humanitarian aid organizations doing good work to alleviate poverty and suffering around the world, what are some things that you think the industry as a whole could be doing better? Is it greater transparency? Is it more evidence-based approaches? Are there any kind of structural or systemic issues that you think they could improve on?

Cindy Huang: I think in the basket of just do no harm and do basic right by people. I think there's a lot more work that could be done. We've seen a number of cases where, NGOs haven't done the basics to make sure that there is a safe workplace or that beneficiaries aren't exploited or abused in some way. So, I think that is important, and that is linked to a broader issue of transparency and accountability. And I do think it's easy again, to put off some of those issues as less about the core policy, new idea or programs, but we've seen some organizations where really it becomes an existential threat to doing your work if you lose your credibility. So, I think that's one area that's really important.

Another area is, after development, we've tried to grapple with this, but I think we still have a long way to go, which is just really, saying the serenity prayer and saying, “We outside NGO government, we cannot drive or really do development in a country.” It really is about the people living in that country. And it's really hard to hold on to that humility because there are big problems and there are ways that we can help. So, I think having that, there's a lot of great both rhetoric and starting to be some practice around “What does it mean to include these populations in the design and execution of projects? What does it mean to really work more closely with governments, while still holding them accountable when they are perpetrators of injustice?”

So, I think that's another big area of work. And finally, just because it's one that's really close to my heart, is bridging what I referenced before, in terms of there being a divide between different sectors, humanitarian and development, or you can look across any number of sectors, of really siloed approaches. And just coming back to that reality that people are whole people who live in communities. So, while we know we need different

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kinds of technical expertise, what can we do to have a more holistic picture of where indicators can be improved, and also including people in the process of setting those indicators?

Sonnet Frisbie: So, it's a difficult question, but to the point of systemic issues and aid, you recently penned an opinion piece along with a couple of other authors in the Oregonian about the sexual scandal involving the founder of Mercy Corps, Ellsworth Culver, and in it, you and your co-authors posit that the rash of abuse scandals in the development community is actually symptomatic of a broader issue and not simply one-offs. So, I feel like I'd be remiss after what you just said if I didn't ask you about that and what you think the future is in the industry and where you think the fixes are?

Cindy Huang: Yeah. I do stand by what we wrote in terms of it. I think it is often too easy to say, "Oh, well, that was just one bad apple, you know? Oh, okay, well, we didn't catch it that time, but now we have this gold standard policy in place." I think it is about the development community, but it goes much broader. And we see this in the Me Too movement. And we are working against thousands plus years of patriarchy. So, it's going to be a long journey and we should accept that and take from that, that really nothing can be too much in terms of paying attention to these issues and the investments that we need to make. So, I think it, as with all systemic change issues, we need both the policy change and then we need culture change.

And I think we're at a place now where a lot of organizations, partly in response to the scandals at Mercy Corps and Oxfam and Save the Children, they do have the gold standard policies. So, I do feel we're now at a point where it's really about how we set a tone and a set of values to start changing the culture and also make sure that leadership is resourcing those. We need independent audit functions, independent reporting. We need that to become part of the system. And what does that speak to in the broader picture? I think, in addition to just the general power dynamics across the world, I also think we have to be very attentive to the specific power dynamics when it comes to development and humanitarian programs, which is that we are talking about extremely vulnerable people, in the case of refugees, who have fled their country out of absolute necessity who don't have their belongings, whose family members have been targeted and killed. So, I mean, what do we take into that? We have to understand that good intentions are not enough. Those power dynamics are there, and we do need safeguarding. We need systems in place to mitigate the harm, intentional or unintentional, that can be done in those situations.

Mwangi Thuita: I want to close with two quickfire questions. So, first, how does your background – you said you had a PhD in cultural anthropology – how does your background shape your approach to policy research and implementing interventions?

Cindy Huang: I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that I also did do a Master's in Public Policy.

Mwangi Thuita: Yes, at Princeton, at the Woodrow Wilson School! [laughter]

Cindy Huang: Also an excellent school, alongside Harris. [laughter]

Sonnet Frisbie: That was the right answer. [laughter]

Cindy Huang: So how that affects my approach, and you may have heard it in some of my responses, is that we have to put people at the center, and anthropology still has among the most trenchant critiques of why development programs don't work, because there was a cultural insight or a power dynamic that really put things off kilter. And I will say, that's great, and we're asking tough questions, and now the charge to the next

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generation is how do we do that in a way that also allows us to make the maximum contribution we can to supporting people in their journeys of development?

Mwangi Thuita: Okay. And the final question is about refugee camps. Having visited refugee camps yourself, and seeing the conditions that people live in there, do you think that they're a necessary evil or something we can realistically work to make obsolete in the near future?

Cindy Huang: I think in the near future, it will still be a mix. And I think that does get the point of what are the tailored solutions that are needed. So, there is evidence that shows that, for some groups of people, camps are really helpful because housing costs are too high elsewhere, and they're not able to work. And so, I think what I would love to see is not the camps where we have generations of people growing up without opportunities, but camps as part of a safety net system, where it does make sense for certain vulnerable populations, but that are really a launching pad for new and better opportunities now and in the future.

Mwangi Thuita: Thank you so much, Dr. Cindy Huang. Thank you. Thank you for listening to this episode of Root of Conflict, featuring Dr. Cindy Huang. Special thanks to Yi Ning Wong for engineering this episode, and Aishwarya Raje for editing. Your interviewers were Sonnet Frisbee, and Mwangi Thuita. We'd like to thank UC3P and the Pearson Institute for their continued support of this series. For more information on the Pearson Institute's research and events, visit thepearsoninstitute.org and follow them on Twitter.