



CANADIAN ORIENTATION ABROAD (COA) OBSERVATION VISITS TO NEPAL, KENYA, SYRIA

Summary Report

Introduction

IOM, with funding and support from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), organized Observation Visits for Canadian service provider organizations (SPOs) to Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA) sites where orientations are provided to Government-Assisted and Privately-Sponsored refugees. The purpose of the visits was to enhance the knowledge and links between service providers and COA staff, through on-site observation of COA sessions and IOM processing, exchanges of information on overseas and in-Canada orientation programming, and mutual sharing of advice and concerns.

An invitation to apply for these Observation Visits was sent to the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP) and all Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) service providers across Canada, with the exception of Québec. After careful consideration, the COA sites selected by IOM for observation, in March 2010 were: Kenya, Nepal and Syria. These sites were selected due to their high volume of cases being processed, the frequency and regularity of COA sessions, their perceived interest as ideal locations to visit by SPOs, the related services/functions IOM provides to Canada in these sites, and their populations or caseloads (both urban and camp-based refugees, GARs and PSRs).

There was a great amount of interest to participate in these visits and IOM received many applications from qualified service provider staff. On the application, the applicants were asked to rank their choice of site and explain their rankings, how they would engage and participate during their visit, the skills and experience they would share with IOM and other participants as well as the ways they would disseminate their knowledge of and feedback about COA upon their return.

IOM was able to commit increased funding to this initiative, augmenting the number of service provider staff selected from 5 to a total of 15. As such, 5 persons were sent to each of the 3 sites. SPO staff “nominated” by their agency were generally in supervisory positions: program coordinators, assistant managers, managers, and one executive director. Participants were selected from large and small SPOs and representing 8 different provinces. This was to allow the representation of a wide range of experiences and perspectives, including one staff member who is currently working on a training program for private sponsors.

The length of time spent visiting each COA site varied based on intended activities and the fact that they were all to take place in March 2010. The Nepal visit was approximately 11 days long, while the Kenya one was for 9 days, and the one to Syria was for 5.5 days. In each site, SPO staff were to take part in the orientation session, attend meetings with various IOM departments involved in Canadian resettlement activities, as well as meet with UNHCR and Canadian missions abroad (where applicable). In both Nepal and Kenya, SPO participants visited and participated in COA sessions in the refugee camps while Syria has only urban refugee cases.

COA is normally offered for 5 days to participants in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. However, in an attempt to keep the length of the visit manageable, it was decided to only provide 3 days (instead of 5) for the SPOs to observe. Moreover, due to unexpected flooding, SPOs were not able to participate in the second day of COA at Kakuma as the roads to the training location and camp became unpassable.

The visit in Syria unexpectedly had to be shortened by 1 day, forcing IOM to organize many important meetings/activities in a shorter time frame. As such, SPOs were given the choice to participate in the 3rd and final day of the session or spend the morning in a meeting with UNHCR. SPOs elected to meet with UNHCR in the morning and to be back at the COA session in time to participate in the wrap-up discussion and subsequent graduation.

IOM provided all of the coordination and organization of the visits including booking of domestic and international flights, hotel reservations, provision of medical information (advice on immunizations), relevant country conditions and security advisories, domestic travel in Kenya and Nepal, related government permissions and laissez-passer to visit refugee camps and secure areas in airports (to witness refugee departures), facilitation of Syrian visas in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Syria and the Syrian Embassy in Canada, as well as provision of frequent advice and support leading up to travel.

IOM-COA Project Manager, Louise Bélanger, travelled from Amman to Damascus to spend the duration of the Syria visit with the group. IOM-COA Project Liaison and Resource Developer, Tracy Vunderink, travelled with the group to Nepal and also accompanied them for the duration of the visit. Lastly, COA Addis Ababa Trainer/Operations Supervisor, Meheret Telila, travelled from Ethiopia to Kenya and accompanied the group for the duration of their stay in Kenya.

As per their participation in these visits, each SPO, in addition to their agency providing funding for their immunizations, visas, and salary while out of the office, IOM required a written report by each participant outlining their impressions, thoughts and comments about COA, IOM operations, and more generally about their overall overseas experience .

This Summary Report is chiefly comprised of direct comments and thoughts expressed by the SPO participants in the individual reports they submitted to IOM upon their return. As much as possible IOM has copied direct quotes from the site reports submitted by SPOs. However, in order to maintain some anonymity for participants, the comments presented are not necessarily attributed to the particular author and where required some corrections were made for clarity. Some participants specifically answered the reporting questions that were included in the Reporting Guidelines (below); however, others formatted and structured their reports on a day to day basis, which ended up being a step by step commentary of their visit. For the ease of comparing and contrasting thoughts, comments and experiences [for those who did not follow a question and answer format], their quotations were included in the relevant section of this report by IOM.

COA Observation Visit Participants

Kenya SPO Participants:

1. **Getachew Woldeyesus**, Assistant Manager of Settlement and Family Services, Regina Open Door Society, Saskatchewan
2. **Marufa Shinwari**, Manager, Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO), Hamilton Ontario
3. **Heather Asbil**, Life Skills Link Coordinator, Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISIS), Halifax, Nova Scotia
4. **Gulalai Habib**, RAP Case Manager, Immigrant Services Society of BC, Vancouver, British Columbia
5. **Carlos Vialard**, Settlement Services Manager, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc. (MIIC), Winnipeg, Manitoba

Nepal SPO Participants:

1. **Mary Gharwal**, Program Liaison, COSTI Reception Centre, Toronto, Ontario
2. **Anahit Falihi**, Manager of Settlement and Family Support Services, Saskatoon Open Door Society, Saskatchewan
3. **Margaret Styczynska**, Manager of Resettlement and Integration Services Division, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, Alberta
4. **Lucila Cabrera**, Community Integration Support Program Coordinator, Ottawa Catholic Immigration Centre, Ontario
5. **Bozana Sljuka**, Manager of Settlement Programs, Lethbridge Family Services-Immigrant Services, Alberta

Syria SPO Participants:

1. **Richard Campbell**, Director of Settlement Services, YMCA-YWCA Saint John, New Brunswick
2. **Nermin Basic**, Program Manager, Better Access to Services in the Community, The Multicultural Council of Windsor & Essex County, Ontario
3. **Yosief Araya**, Refugee Sponsorship Training Program Co-Manager, Catholic Cross Cultural Services, Toronto, Ontario
4. **Lois Berrigan**, Settlement Services Manager, Association for New Canadians, St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador
5. **Tara Blanchard**, Executive Director, Moose Jaw Multicultural Council, Saskatchewan

Overall Results and Achievements (from the perspective of IOM):

- Increased and direct communication between IOM/COA and senior level staff in RAP SPOs; thus facilitating future collaboration and information sharing
- Increased mutual understanding of the services and challenges of overseas and domestic service delivery for refugees
- SPO staff personally met, interacted and dialogued with COA Project Manager, Project Liaison, CO Coordinators and COA trainers, personalizing COA for SPOs and emphasizing mutually shared caseload of refugees
- SPOs are better informed about COA in general: site locations, COA content, training methodology and staff
- SPOs are better informed of the IOM organization [which was chosen by CIC to implement the COA project abroad], its relevancy internationally as well as IOM's specific role in Canadian refugee resettlement (particularly in the three chosen COA sites)
- SPOs developed more in-depth knowledge of the various resettlement partners and their functions (i.e. Canadian visa posts, UNHCR, and other international NGOs)
- SPO staff gained the opportunity to network among each other as a group, learn about services/programs provided in various locations across Canada, share their best practices and models of service, as well as participate in a unique experience that resulted in closer professional linkages
- IOM received constructive comments and recommendations regarding the content, resources and style of COA orientation sessions by SPO observers
- IOM has been referred to additional resources developed and used by SPOs in Canada, and SPOs have commented favourably on our COA-developed resources as well
- IOM received valuable inputs from SPOs on the content and wording of the Power Point developed by COA on Canada's Resettlement Programs. This Power Point is presented for both GAR and PSR participants
- IOM has been invited to attend future conferences in Canada (the COA Project Liaison, for instance, was invited to present at an RSTP-organized National SAH Conference, and to potentially co-facilitate a presentation at ARAISA about COA and Observation Visits with Atlantic region participants)

Site Report Guidelines

Participants were required to submit a report of their experience and findings to their employing organization, COA, and CIC within one month following their return to Canada.

The reports were to be between 5 to 10 pages in length, to focus on highlights of the visit, and to describe the best lessons learned during the visit.

The report was to include a brief summary of the visit and the staff member's impressions about the COA activities and resettlement operations abroad. Observations and/or recommendations regarding the COA visits were to be included.

Observations about COA activities:

- ✓ Did you participate in COA activities? If so, how were you included?
- ✓ What topics were covered and what questions were asked by refugees?
- ✓ In your opinion, did the refugees benefit from COA? If so, in what way?
- ✓ What comments and/or recommendations do you have (if any) for your hosts regarding their COA activities?

Observations about overseas resettlement operations:

- ✓ What did you learn about IOM Operations and how resettlement is conducted overseas?
- ✓ What were your observations, lessons learned, biggest surprises?
- ✓ What do you want your colleagues to know about COA and about IOM processing overseas?
- ✓ How do you plan to apply your experiences and new knowledge in your work? (Please consider how this might apply to other colleagues)

Syria Visit Reports

Saturday, 20 March	Main Agenda
	Meet Louise Bélanger in the afternoon for briefing
Sunday, 21	
9:00 – 10:00	Meeting with C.O. staff – Tour of the various training rooms Day 1 - COA session
10:00 – 12:00	Warm-up and introductions Over Canada DVD - Working with the map of Canada Facts about Canada, Assessing knowledge and attitudes
12:00 – 12:30	Lunch Break
12:30 – 15:00	Travelling to Canada (all aspects: baggage size, weight, content, restrictions), flight, transit, medical assistance, food vouchers, in-Canada airport formalities Canadian laws and rights, Obligations and Responsibilities
15:00 – 16:00	Meeting with IOM staff (Management)/ Daily COA session de-briefing
Monday, 22	
9:00 – 10: 00	Meeting with Ibrahim Massad (OPS Manager) and the operations team Day 2- COA session RAP (Health – SIN and Housing included): <u>First Steps</u> DVD
12:00 – 12:30	Lunch Break Education
12:30 – 15:00	Transportation and driving in Canada Canada Day to Day DVD
15:00 – 16:00	Meeting with IOM OPS staff (continued)
Tuesday, 23	Two options (Split groups): To be discussed
10:00 – 12:00	the 1st option: UNHCR Damascus UNHCR Damascus: Attend resettlement counselling day; then visit to Douma Registration Centre the 2nd option: Attend the final day of COA Day 3 – COA session Warm-up activity Banking Employment: How to find a job, keeping a job, volunteer work, work ethics, etc. Budgeting: Using store flyers, discuss how to manage money and discuss expenses
12:00 – 12:30	Lunch Break
12:00 – 15:00	Cultural Adaptation: Culture shock, Attitudes towards differences <u>First Steps</u> DVD Graduation/ Daily COA session de-briefing
Wednesday, 24	
09:00 - 12:00	9-12 AM: Meeting with CIC Refugee Unit staff at the Canadian Embassy
12:30 - 15:00	Meeting at UNHCR Damascus
Thursday, 25	Departure

Observations about COA activities:

Did you participate in COA activities? If so, how were you included?

(As indicated in the agenda above the 5 SPO participants spent several days observing and answering participants' questions in the three-day COA Damascus session)

"My visit allowed me to fully participate in the three-day session. Except for the few hours that I missed to attend a meeting with UNHCR staff, I attended the three-day session in its entirety and learned a lot about the various topics covered in the session. Also, I was given an opportunity to ask questions and provide personal input as well as participate in the discussions. Since there were a few private sponsored refugees in attendance during the session I was asked to brief them on the Private Sponsorship Program (PSR). I used the opportunity to explain how the PSR program is different from the GAR program and what refugees, sponsored through a private sponsor, can expect in their place of destination. I also offered advice on dealing with issues which could arise between sponsors and co-sponsors."

"I had the pleasure to observe several orientations given to those about to leave for Canada."

What topics were covered and what questions were asked by refugees?

"The COA session covers a wide range of topics related to life in Canada. Some of the areas covered included history, geography, people, cities, tourist attractions, families, laws, multiculturalism, anti-discrimination and others. The session attempted to cover all aspects of Canadian life. The Power Point presentation and video shown in the session were very helpful. I was especially impressed by the video that explored the different Canadian lifestyles from the Maritime coast through to British Columbia. Also, the video featuring newcomers was important as it gave insight into the experiences of others."

"A number of questions were asked during the sessions such as: How is Iraqi education recognized? Which grade I will be placed in? Should we translate our documents here? Would they be recognized? Is it possible to buy a house? What do you need to buy a house? Can we also speak our language? How far is Vancouver from Toronto? Can we travel to the USA?"

Trainers begin asking: "What do you know about Canada? What do you want to know about Canada? What are your fears and concerns about Canada?" During the second part of the morning session, Ms. Louise Bélanger joined Mr. Hovig Sarkissian in introducing Canada to the participants. The large Canadian map was utilized to point to each of the provinces and territories and their individual geographical, industrial, historical, etc. significance for Canada and Canadian people. Few participants were familiar with the map of Canada, its size, where people lived, where they were headed in relation with other destinations, which is the city and which is the province, etc. After lunch, the session was completely dedicated to the journey to Canada, starting with family preparations for travel, travel documents and obligations, and detailed description of their trip from Damascus to the final destination. Recognizing that this travel and pre-departure preparations are in most cases accompanied by the initial cultural shock for new immigrants, the COA curriculum has paid due attention to this segment in their sessions."

"The second day started with the Power Point presentation on differences in status and services received between Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) and Privately-Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) once they land in Canada. The whole group consisted of Privately-Sponsored Refugees exclusively, therefore this session was mostly about managing their expectations and possible misunderstandings

why they wouldn't get same services as GARs, especially financial support provided by Government of Canada to GARs."

In your opinion, did the refugees benefit from COA, and if so, in what way?

"In my humble opinion, Canadian Orientation Abroad is an exceptionally well designed and executed process. The sessions not only focus on each individual client's needs, but are also strongly driven by their strengths. Since the Iraqi refugee population is expected to have high short-term expectations, the sessions are customized to manage those expectations by painting a realistic picture of Canada in a sensitive fashion and without "scaring them away". The visual materials, videos, Power Point presentations, flip charts are effectively utilized throughout the session."

"Canadian Orientation Abroad is a very important part of Canada's settlement services offered to immigrants and it is absolutely essential that better communication between them and Canada-based services is achieved in near future. This whole initiative of service provider organizations visiting COA sites was something ingenious..."

"COA is a beneficial project for any immigrants or refugees destined to come to Canada. COA also helps to ease a newcomer's anxiety and dispel any myths that they may have heard from friends or relatives. As service providers, we repeat some of the information that the newcomers receive during COA. It's beneficial as service providers to know what clients have been told pre-departure and that the information they are receiving is accurate and up to date."

"It is important to note that the information given in these sessions was both valuable and timely."

What comments and/or recommendations do you have (if any) for your hosts regarding their COA activities?

"I would like to congratulate my hosts for offering such excellent sessions. Both the coordinators and trainers did a great job in delivering the COA session. The use of Power Point and video enriched the training. The fact that the two trainers are Canadian citizens of an immigrant background allowed them to include practical examples from their personal settlement experience in Canada which, in turn, enriched the overall experience."

"Many of my colleagues, all from smaller receiving centres in Canada, felt that the video focused mainly on life in the big cities. It would be important to update these videos and include the experience(s) of refugees who have been resettled to smaller cities and communities. Moreover, the session could also be enriched if the video featured the settlement experience of previously settled immigrants who descend from the same cultural or language backgrounds."

"Indeed, the information provided by the trainers was quite useful and well presented. However, I would recommend that they ought to provide refugees with a more realistic overview of Canadian living. In some areas, it is not always a smooth transition. For example, if an individual is ill, then there is a waiting period to find a family doctor or to see a specialist; appointments could take up to six months; and not all drugs are covered by the Interim Federal Health Program. One of the key pieces of information a refugee should know is that, in the case of Government Assisted Refugees, the Canadian Government provides them with just enough money for them and their family to live in Canada. These refugees will not have money to send back to their family." (Note: It was never mentioned in the COA session that refugees would have enough money to send back home and no specific dollar amount of RAP income assistance is ever provided to refugees).

“The video “Over Canada” was screened, and was in English only. It highlighted each province and territory and provided an overview on living in Canada. The second video was “First Steps,” which was produced to augment the First Steps Handbook. It was produced by Ontario and was clearly biased in favour of living in Ontario“.

Observations about overseas resettlement operations:

What did you learn about IOM Operations and how resettlement is conducted overseas?

“Part of our professional development visit involved meetings with UNHCR and Canadian Embassy officials. The aim was to give us a better understanding of their roles in the refugee process. We had total access to knowledgeable people who took the time to explain their duties and responsibilities. We came away from those meetings with a better feeling for the overall time-line involved in extracting people from the country. There was a strong sense of linear progression of events; clients registered with the UNHCR, received materials and information from the Douma Registration Centre, had their visas approved by the Canadian Embassy, attended the COA sessions, and left for Canada.”

“For many years, there has been a major disconnect in information concerning how GARS are processed overseas, what information is told to them, and what their expectations are when they arrive in Canada. It has been too easy for settlement agencies and perhaps CIC offices as well, to blame the overseas orientation process for what often seems to be a lack of Canadian information by newly-landed GAR cases. Being given this opportunity to finally understand the challenges faced by IOM, UNHCR and Canadian Embassy officials in Damascus, highlighted key issues for us.”

“The planned agenda was tight and packed with wonderful professional development opportunities. Seeing the two UNHCR sites first-hand, as well as our visit to the Canadian Embassy, gave us the understanding that we are all working towards the same goal; that is, ensuring that our GARS are given correct information and that it will mesh into the orientation information given to them after they have arrived in Canada. *What I found out is that we are all on the same page.* This surprised me because of the original disconnect but it showed just how professional the COA project really is.”

“The visit has enriched my knowledge of the role of IOM operations in relation to resettlement. During our visit, we met with the IOM staff from their Operations department. They briefed us on how they arrange the travels and medicals for refugees who are selected for resettlement. The designated medical practitioner explained to us how medical checks are performed, and reported to the Canadian officials responsible for medical screening. Meeting IOM staff who, not only make travel arrangements but escort refugees to their destinations, provided us with ample opportunity to hear hands-on experience from experts in the field. As well, we learned of their experiences in dealing with refugees with high medical needs and who require special travel arrangements.”

What were your observations, lessons learned, biggest surprises?

“I have been working 13 years in the settlement sector in Canada, specifically with Government-Assisted Refugees. I can certainly testify that some of us, when we encounter problems with clients upon their arrival, we sometimes fall victim to blaming not enough or incorrect information given to them pre-arrival. However, after the visit to the Damascus office of the International Organization for Migration, I am completely convinced that this is not true...”

“IOM-COA Global Project Manager, Louise Bélanger, escorted us through the five-day visit. She and her staff were easily accessible, answered all of our questions, and were very open to constructive criticism.”

“Perhaps the most important objective I had was to establish a networking link with COA. That was accomplished. Louise, Ola, and Hovig were personable, open to suggestions, and were equally interested in forging bonds with our settlement organizations. Together we can become stronger.”

“The lead facilitator was Hovig Sarkissian who is a Syrian national and also a Permanent Resident of Canada. This duality was beneficial to the class participants because not only could he speak their language but he also had a good understanding of Canada. This gave him instant credibility and showed that IOM values this as well.”

“Ultimately I was deeply impressed with the professionalism demonstrated in the COA project. It is a valuable service that ensures newcomer GARs are given critical pre-departure information about their new country and how they can become contributing members of it. I am re-assured that Canadian taxpayers’ dollars are being spent efficiently and wisely through the COA project.”

“I can say without a doubt that this was an excellent opportunity and one that I would recommend for any SPO settlement worker. The experience allowed me to view the settlement process at its origin and to advise workers in the field regarding the challenges SPOs face once clients have arrived in Canada.”

“The most important lesson I gained from this experience was from observing how the UNHCR, IOM and Canadian visa office work on the resettlement of refugees. The resettlement mechanisms created by the international community seem to work well in this area and allows the refugees to have access to a number of services such as rations and financial assistance to help them with rental expenses.”

“I was somewhat surprised at the number of refugees who frequent the UNHCR office. I expected that there would be a higher number of refugees present but there were not many people at the UNHCR registration centre during our visit. The other big surprise was the accessibility of the UNHCR office.”

What do you want your colleagues to know about COA and about IOM processing overseas?

“The COA project emphasizes realistic expectations and the reality of life in a new country. *It will not be as you might think it is.* It will be hard, challenging work.”

“The three facilitators/trainers that I observed are professional, empathetic and knowledgeable, and are the perfect first faces of Canada to new immigrants. They demonstrate very efficiently what our beautiful country is all about. The humble Canadian patriotism, something that, in my experience, inland settlement services often lack, is well-placed and introduces new immigrants to a country that do not want to assimilate them but rather integrate them into our multicultural mosaic.”

“Our departure from Syria coincided with the exit of several Iraqi GARs from the Damascus International Airport. They too were travelling to Canada. We were able to witness the last professional assistance offered by IOM Damascus staff – assistance that was also provided to us. This work was being done at 2:30 AM.”

“From the time a refugee seeks asylum in another country to their disembarkment from the plane at their final destination, all of the agencies are puzzle pieces that fit together to protect refugees and to offer them a chance at a better life. I marvel at the fact that so many people, separated by so many miles, are all dedicated to the same cause.”

"I believe that it would be most beneficial for my colleagues to have a similar opportunity and learn first-hand how the COA session and IOM processing is done. In particular, meeting with refugees and listening to their questions, anxiety and expectations will help and develop the capacity of anyone who receives refugees or works with the receiving community."

How do you plan to apply your experiences and new knowledge in your work? (Please consider how this might apply to other colleagues)

"I will spend the next few weeks preparing a Power Point presentation on all of the information I learned while in Damascus to present to my staff and board of directors. I also plan to share information on refugee resettlement with the community to create a better understanding of the entire process. In May, the Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement & Integration Agencies (SAISIA) is having its annual general meeting. Three of the delegates for Nepal, Kenya and Syria are all from Saskatchewan. We plan to co-present information from our respective site visits for the federal and provincial governments, members of settlement agencies and others who will attend our AGM."

"I will apply my knowledge and experience in offering training and advice to the private sponsorship community. So far, I have already shared my observations during the meeting of Southern Ontario Sponsoring Group and I will also do a presentation related to my visit during the National Conference of the Sponsorship Agreement Holders. Since RSTP offers training and support to the Sponsorship Agreement Holders, and other sponsors, similar working visits will contribute in developing the capacity of trainers and thereby enhance the support to the sponsorship community."

(One delegate spoke on his local CBC radio station about his experience in Damascus and impressions about COA. This same delegate mentioned a potential presentation with another SPO delegate at the Atlantic region conference in the fall).

Additional Comments/Advice/Recommendations:

"Upon arrival to Syria, a couple of hours after midnight, on March 20, 2010, we were welcomed at the Damascus Airport by the COA Global Project Manager, Ms. Louise Bélanger....that preparation and organization for our arrival and subsequent days was immaculate."

"It was very impressive to see that, for the first time, at least in recent memory, an organization/individual actually took this daring initiative to bridge a geographical gap between overseas services for future immigrants to Canada and in-Canada settlement service professionals and bring us together to share experiences and exchange thoughts."

"It would be wise for Tracy to begin developing close ties to all the settlement agencies across Canada. She should attend all the major settlement conferences. She should network with CIC Program Officers in all the major settlement regions."

"I believe that the COA attendance should be mandatory for all newcomers that are destined to travel to Canada. I also think it would be beneficial for refugees travelling from remote locations to be offered accommodations while in Damascus. It's hard to retain information when you are tired from travelling. The reimbursement for mileage and lunch for clients was a nice touch and incentive for people to attend the orientation."

“CIC funders are losing a real opportunity to see their money at work by not having staff visit the COA sites. Just as we were given this opportunity, it might be wise for CIC to send representative staff members from across Canada to visit these sites. It is significant that IOM now has Tracy Vunderink working out of Ottawa.”

“While I did learn much during my visit, I would recommend the visit be extended by a couple days as the information learned was often times overwhelming. I found that while I was processing the information learned in one session, I found I had to shift gears in order to listen to new information. However, it was nonetheless an excellent opportunity. In fact, I firmly believe that this is an excellent use of CIC funds as it allowed me to gain a unique perspective on the settlement process and the information I learned will allow me to better fulfill my role as a settlement counselor.”

Nepal Visit Reports

Schedule for Canadian Visitors to Damak - 06 Mar - 17 Mar 2010

Saturday, 06 March 2010	Sunday, 07 March 2010	Monday, 08 March 2010	Tuesday, 09 March 2010	Wednesday, 10 March 2010
13.30 Arrive at Kathmandu	08.30: Transit Centre Visit	08.30 - 09.30: Security Briefing at Guest House (With Jon)	08.00 - 14.30: COA Observation (2 Visitors/Site)	08.00 - 14.30: COA Observation (2 Visitors/Site)
	13.10: Fly to Damak	09.30 - 10.30: Tour of IOM Compound	11.30-12.30: Lunch	11.30-12.30: Lunch
	17.30: Dinner with Peter	10.30 - 11.30: Tour of IOM Medical (With Olga and Dima)	16.30 - 17.00: Discussion with COA Trainers (At CO office in IOM Compound)	16.30 - 17.00: Discussion with COA Trainers (At CO office in IOM Compound)
		Lunch.		
		14.00 - 15.00: Meeting with UNHCR		
		15.30: Meeting with CO Team.		

Thursday, 11 March 2010	Friday, 12 March 2010	Monday, 15 March 2010	Tuesday, 16 March 2010	Wednesday, 17 March 2010
08.00 - 14.30: COA Observation (2 Visitors/Site)	08.00 - 14.30: COA Observation (2 Visitors/Site)	09.00 - 11.30: Walk in through Beldangi Camp	08.00: Departure for Airport.	16.30: Departure from KTM for Canada.
11.30-12.30: Lunch	15.45 - 16.30: Meeting with CARITAS	11.30 - 12.30: Lunch	09.30 - 11.00: Visit to Goldhap Refugee Camp (on the way to airport)	
16.30 - 17.00: Discussion with COA Trainers (At CO office in IOM Compound)	16.30 - 17.00: Discussion with COA Trainers	14.00 - 16.00: Discussion with Peter and CO Trainers	13.05: Departure for KTM.	

Observations about COA activities:

Did you participate in COA activities? If so, how were you included?

"We were part of all training activities and participated in group discussions with refugees. We assisted the refugees while working in small groups, or provided clarification to trainers on questions asked by refugees if they asked us for our opinion or to answered questions that refugees had specifically addressed to us. The other part was observing the training, information provided to refugees and the

way activities are conducted. A Nepali interpreter was provided for all the training sessions. At the completion of 5-day training together, we were involved in handing out COA certificates to those who have participated in the orientation.”

“After every day’s work, we all met with Nepal COA team to debrief on the content of the topics provided to Bhutanese refugees. This gave us the opportunity to share our views, share our own experiences with Bhutanese refugees regarding gaps, day to day challenges they may face when arriving to Canada, give inputs to improve/update written materials, etc. Every day we learned something new about the overall overseas activities, most of our questions and inquiries were answered immediately from the group of knowledgeable staff in Nepal.”

“It was in these group activities that my partner and I (the visitors) could sit down with the participants divided into smaller groups of 3 or 4 and join them and assist them with the assigned activities.”

“We participated in many activities during the COA sessions guided by very knowledgeable, well trained and friendly local trainers. Our participation was mostly when there was a group activity. At the end of sessions, we also answered some of the questions asked by participants about available possibilities for their future life in Canada.”

What topics were covered and what questions were asked by refugees?

During the five-day COA sessions that we participated in, the trainers covered the following topics:

Topics for day 1: Life in Canada (geography, languages, time zones, weather, climate, multiculturalism), a briefing on the Resettlement Assistance Program, individual rights/responsibilities and laws, activities from the *Life Book* and a tour to the washroom facilities on site.

Topics for day 2: Housing, education, cultural adaptation and more information regarding RAP, LINC, settlement agencies and Quebec resettlement information.

Topics for day 3: Employment and role playing (shaking hands, eye contact, writing signatures, mock interviews, etc)

Topics for day 4: Transportation (including public transportation), traveling to Canada (including the traveling process and what to pack/not pack)

Topics for day 5: Budgeting and money management, health care (including IFH) and healthy hygiene practices

Question to participants: When you reach Canada what is your dream?

- To learn new languages
- To have my kids in high school
- To get good education/good work
- To write book about freedom and culture in Canada
- To establish a Christian community, to help other people.

Questions to participants: Benefits we want when we arrive to Canada:

- Languages, education, job opportunities,

- Vocational, professional trainings, to help getting jobs in Canada
- Medicines, medical treatment, health facilities, treatment of diseases not being cured in refugee camps
- Beautiful houses, clothing, food
- Human rights, cultural rights, protection for everyone including for the disable, elderly
- Platform, opportunities to show the talents of Bhutanese refugees in Canada

What do I want to know? – General questions from participants that we were invited to answer (whenever possible):

- My girlfriend is in US, Can I visit her, Can I bring her to Canada if we're getting married?- How long does it takes?-Is it easy?
- Can we marry American people?
- Can we visit US without a visa?
- Can we travel in the future to Nepal and/or Bhutan?
- Will my High school diploma be valid in Canada?
- Will my university degree be valid in Canada, will I be able to work in my profession?
- Can we get a scholarship or student loan to go for post-secondary education?
- Is Nepalese language introduced in Canadian schools?
- I'm afraid to travel by plane, what should I do?
- What kind of work we can get in Canada?
- Is there any problem being affectionate?
- Are there Hindu Temples, Hindu wedding traditions in Canada?
- Are boyfriends asking parents for their daughter's hand?
- Who will help us to communicate if we fail to learn the language?
- What if I can't learn French, is it compulsory to learn French?
- Can 10 people live in one apartment? (Shared other client's experiences in Ottawa, tenant's responsibilities...)
- How do we help the disabled?
- Participants asked about our settlement experience with Bhutanese in Ottawa, what challenges/needs they are having, we shared some examples/experiences
- What about funeral arrangements, religious practices on the streets, are they allowed in Canada?
- If my relative is ill, can I stay overnight at the hospital or clinic? Do I have to pay for it?

In your opinion, did the refugees benefit from COA, and if so, in what way?

“Refugees do definitely benefit from the Canadian Orientation Abroad and information that is provided to them during the five days of the orientation. Many refugees do not have any knowledge of Canada or basics of living in western society while others have some basic information on Canada. “

“Participating refugees receive basic and accurate information through COA that will assist them in the first few days after arrival, what to expect once they arrive to their final destination in Canada, and beyond. This information gives them the tools to initially navigate through so many new systems in Canada. Also, they are provided with information on what is expected from them once they arrive in Canada and to take responsibility for their own settlement with support of the settlement agency in Canada. This was obvious through the question/answer period and the group's interest to start working/learning the language as soon as they come to Canada. The groups who received the COA were very anxious to get to Canada as soon as possible.”

"I consider that Bhutanese refugees already accepted for resettlement to Canada benefit greatly from the COA sessions as they receive accurate information about living in Canada as well as real examples regarding gaps and challenges that refugees encounter when arriving to Canada."

"The COA training will help refugees come with realistic expectations which, in turn, will ease the work of resettlement agencies helping refugees from Bhutan."

What comments and/or recommendations do you have (if any) for your hosts regarding their COA activities?

"I believe that the COA sessions are designed carefully with enough information to provide a general overview and guide for newcomers to Canada; yet they try not to provide too detailed information about the availability of certain programs and activities for newcomers to Canada; as the programs might be different in each province and city and also might not be available in certain small centres."

"At the end of each day, in our group meetings with the C.O. coordinator and the COA trainers, we made comments and provided suggestions for improving the materials and topics discussed in these sessions. For example, I made a comment about and suggested that there is a need to emphasize the fact that Canada supports the individual's right to keep their own religion, culture and even encourages them to maintain their own language through Heritage Language Programs. This should be added to the COA teaching materials. I brought this up after two of the refugee participants in two different sessions were asking if they would be allowed to speak their ethnic language and what would their religion be after they came to Canada."

"The trainer seemed very confident and there was an instant bond between the trainer and the participants. Trainer's interactive approach was very encouraging, engaging and the response was very productive."

"Lessons were planned with emphasis on independent work and materials were carefully prepared in terms of their relevance to the topics covered and the use of same orientation material such as First Steps Power Point and DVDs as used by RAP SPOs, maintains consistency and reinforces retention of information."

- To include more pictures for **who is Canadian?** More photos of ethnic minorities.
- Should spend less time on geographical knowledge.
- If possible, do not use the tourist videos. It may give a wrong impression about their places of resettlement.
- To add a personal safety lesson.
- To include in housing orientation, especially for single cases.
- To give more emphasis on personal hygiene information.
- To balance information about learning a new language/high school education and getting a job.
- It was suggested that "X" as signature is not being accepted by some provincial government offices in Canada. Participants should be encouraged to practice writing at least the first letter from first and last names as their signatures.
- To clarify during IFH health information session that "Hospitals" are to be used ONLY in case of emergencies.
- We shared information about day to day realities of newcomer refugees in Canada and the challenges they face.
- While doing role plays, some challenges were shown while pairing youth/young adult with Senior or Male with Female, they were very shy with each other.

“The feedback we have provided to trainers and coordinator is that information provided to Bhutanese refugees is just right and that there is no need to add more information. All information provided to refugees is accurate and covers the most important aspects of Canadian life and information they need to make their first stage of settlement process successful.”

Observations about overseas resettlement operations:

What did you learn about IOM Operations and how resettlement is conducted overseas?

“Canadian Orientation Abroad is only one of the responsibilities that IOM has. IOM has two offices: one in Kathmandu and another in Damak. In Kathmandu, IOM operates a transit centre where Bhutanese refugees stay for 3 days prior to departure.”

“The Transit Centre also ensures that all refugees have their documentation for the resettlement country, and that they are properly packed and that they are safely escorted to the airport. At the airport, the refugees are assisted through the immigration and customs and escorted to the final gate. In addition to Canada, IOM in Damak is involved with other countries that came forward to also resettle Bhutanese refugees...”

“IOM is responsible for transportation of refugees between the IOM compound and refugee camps when they need to attend interviews, needs’ assessments, have questions on their cases, departure or medical screening. Since refugees stay at the IOM compound for one full day, until everybody is seen by an immigration official or IOM staff, IOM provides the meals during their stay at the compound. Another major operation of IOM in Damak is the IOM hospital where medical screening is done for all refugees. “

“The visit provided me with a better understanding of the IOM operations, its role in refugee movement and resettlement, and its well-coordinated collaboration with UNHCR, other UN agencies, host country government and other foreign and local bodies. Observing COA sessions, visiting the refugee camps and seeing how many NGOs were involved in the operations of the camps and refugees’ welfare and refugees’ involvement and decision making in their own affairs and our interaction with refugees and being able to provide answers to their questions and respond to their curiosities was truly a very enriching, exciting and most importantly interactive learning experience.”

“I am astonished by the tremendous amount as well as the quality of educational work and humanitarian effort involved in the process of preparation of a refugee before his or her arrival in Canada.”

What were your observations, lessons learned, biggest surprises?

“The biggest surprise for me was the IOM hospital; services provided there for refugees and how amazingly it is run and organized. I was unaware of its existence and I thought that all medicals are done by local doctors at local hospitals. Besides COA, this was for me one of the biggest highlights of this professional development visit. “

“One of my observations, at the camps we visited, and interactions with refugees, was that they are very excited about their resettlement to Canada“.

“We should not assume that because clients have lived in refugee camps that they know nothing about urban life. I experienced first-hand that many Bhutanese (especially males) are working outside the camps, in urban settings in Nepal, and some even have Masters’ degrees because they went to university in neighbouring India.”

“What was strikingly impressive, were the knowledge, zeal and efficiency of the staff and refugees’ energy and eagerness to learn. Local facilitators conducting the sessions either had studied or lived in US or Canada or had a good knowledge and familiarity with the North American lifestyle.

“Also I have noticed that there are not many seniors attending the orientation which would be very beneficial to them ... The same applied for people with disabilities - where people with hearing problems could attend with assistance of a sign language interpreter or taught in the classes at camps.”

“I would like to state that my COA site visit trip to Nepal was professionally and personally a fulfilling trip. I am very glad that, after a number of years of recommendations from different RAP SPOs and other refugee serving SPOs directly involved with GARs, the COA site visit took place, for which I would like to acknowledge and appreciate IOM’s efforts in considering and organizing this site visit and for CIC to make it possible.”

“Despite all the hardships and difficult life circumstances that they faced, I was deeply impressed by the refugees’ level of patience, courage, organization, discipline, and respect in making the best use of the limited resources available to them in order to develop their skills and to maintain hopeful and positive attitudes for the future, for themselves and their children. For me, having the opportunity to observe their life before coming to Canada confirmed my observation of the tremendous level of resiliency and amazing personal skills in problem-solving that refugees bring to their future life in Canada.”

“Visiting the refugee camps was an even more amazing and eye-opening part of this trip. Here we had the opportunity to closely observe life in the refugee camps as well as getting a chance to know about the many different “help systems” which are made available by or funded by various foreign donor countries and organizations.”

What do you want your colleagues to know about COA and about IOM processing overseas?

“I would like my colleagues to have all information about COA and IOM processing overseas as I do. I therefore intend to present it to them. It is very important for them to know that COA has the same goals for the refugees as we, in the settlement sector, and that all information provided to the refugees is jiving with information provided by settlement agencies in Canada. My colleagues and myself will know how to handle situations when we are told by refugees” but they didn’t tell me I have immigration loan” or about spousal abuse or about their responsibilities in Canada --- which in the past wasn’t the case and we were so quick to criticize the COA.”

“I think that IOM processing overseas will clear some of our misconceptions on operations and who is responsible for what in order to refer refugees to the correct place when comes time to inquire about status of application for their family members. I know that UNHCR and IOM do not have information on the refugee’s application status and that they are also unable to provide information to the refugee on what is the next step unless they receive information from the immigration visa post giving them the green light for medical and security checks.”

“The trainers are very knowledgeable of Canada, its life and are doing an amazing job with the training of Bhutanese refugees and keeping them occupied and interested.”

“The main message of the orientation is self-sufficiency, independence and integration, which is the main message of the settlement sector in Canada too.”

“I observed the effectiveness of well-trained local COA trainers and refugees’ preparedness and positive response to COA sessions. I definitely believe that COA seminars assist refugees greatly in their resettlement process and therefore, I emphasise the importance of all refugee serving organizations to work together and to be more educated on each other’s mandated services and operations; through regular site visits.”

How do you plan to apply your experiences and new knowledge in your work? (Please consider how this might apply to other colleagues)

“Some parts of the activities done at COA are going to be implemented as part of our client feedback here in Lethbridge. As a base, we will use the *Culture Shock* activity that is done overseas where clients assess their vulnerability towards culture shock by picking an answer to a coloured button. We, at Lethbridge Family Services-Immigrant Services, will ask the same questions six months after their arrival and assess where they have been before coming to Lethbridge and where they are currently which may give us an idea where they are with their settlement and integration process.”

“I want to take every opportunity to share the exceptional experience of this trip with my colleagues in our organization as well as with other service providing organizations in our province. In fact, I hope to be able to share this with other community groups who have provided more general help and support to refugees over the years such as the Kinsmen, the Chamber of Commerce, and other Service Organizations in and around Saskatoon.”

“I also deeply appreciate the opportunity this program gave me to be able to be involved in the Canadian Orientation Abroad process. I believe that this experience has inspired me and our colleagues to develop and improve our own programs.”

“On the other side, what we are going to try to implement or change, as best as we can, is the way we do orientations. Before we address any topic, we will first ask refugees what they know, as they always do in COA, and build it from there with more detailed information. We do not want to repeat what they already have learned but provide more clarification on the subject they may need, now that they are in Canada and the way it is affecting them.”

“The COA materials were very well designed and I am looking forward to utilizing and sharing them with my colleagues. Some of the COA presentation methods and design features of the orientation materials for our clients at the centre, particularly more independent or small group exercises, role plays and quizzes will be suggested to our own staff.”

“I, more importantly, gained greater understanding seeing as I myself was a newcomer (during this trip), in a new country, having to deal with language barriers, new food, eating habits, religious beliefs, political issues (such as witnessing unfolding transportation strikes), a new culture, and social life (becoming aware of the caste system referring to refugee’s last names). With this I also got to know the beautiful Nepalese and Bhutanese people, who made me feel so welcome wherever I went, always smiling and greeting me with, “*Namaste*”. All this helped me to better understand the needs, culture, values and customs of refugees from Bhutan.”

“I plan to further share my experiences and lessons learned by developing a slide show (including information from this report, photos taken during Nepal visit, as well as a video provided by IOM in

Nepal regarding history of Bhutanese refugees living in Nepal, services provided and overseas resettlement activities) that can be used as a reference point by me, my colleagues, and other refugees serving agencies, to raise awareness of the needs, gaps, challenges, and hopes of refugees from Bhutan resettling in Canada.”

Additional Comments/Advice/Recommendations:

“At least, on 3 occasions during the COA sessions, the participants expressed their frustration about the uncertainty of waiting to travel to Canada and at least in every group, a couple of participants asked my partner and I, as when they would travel to Canada. They had thought we were representing the Canadian government and have the answer to their question. Although, I understand that, the issue of refugees’ long waits is not an IOM matter, as we were explained, and it has more to do with CIC Destination Matching and some other technical factors, but to me the length of time refugees wait before they travel to Canada after having attended their COA sessions, would definitely compromise their retention of the information they receive at COA sessions and that, in turn, compromises the work of IOM and impacts on the effectiveness of COA sessions.”

“We’ve encouraged IOM to continue using the Bhutanese Resettlement Needs Survey, as this has become a very useful tool for resettlement agencies as it allows us to better understand family values, health needs, education, language, transferable skills, to connect clients with friends and relatives in Canada, etc...”

Kenya Visit Reports

March 23, 2010	Main Agenda	Remarks/Action
	Visitors arrive in Nairobi	Pick up from Airport
March 24, 2010		
9:00- 10:30	Time with CO-coordinator and COA Senior trainers	Discuss the COA curriculum
11:00- 12:30	Meeting with Mr. Ashraf El Nour, MRF Nairobi Regional Representative, Ms. Rana Jaber, Regional Head of Operations and Dr. Alexander Galev, Regional Head of Medical	Briefing from the Regional Representative (RR) - IOM and Heads of Units (Ops & medical) on role specific units' role in the Canadian resettlement process.
14:30- 17:00	Visit to Medical Health Assessment Centre (MHAC)	Acquaint with the IOM - MHAC for Canada bound refugees/migrants
	Visit to Transit Centre	1 st hand understanding of the refugee departures- Preparations, Airport pick up, escorts, etc
March 25, 2010		
7:00–8:30	Trip to Loki (Air)	Security Clearance and Camp Permits
8:30-9:30	Trip to Kakuma (Road)	Security Escort
March 26, 2010		
8:00-9:00	Meeting with IOM Field Operation & Medical in Charge	Develop an understanding of the field perspective of the refugee resettlement processing from the two units.
9:00-10:00	Meeting with Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA) and Camp Manager	
11:00-12:30	Meeting with UNHCR Sub Office	
13:00-14:30	Lunch	
15:00-17:00	Debriefing at IOM Field Office	
March 27, 2010		
8:00- 13:00	First Day of COA Session	
13:00-15:00	Lunch	
15:00-17:00	Session Debriefing	
March 28, 2010		
REST		
March 29, 2010		
8:00-13:00	Second Day of Session	Due to flooding this day SPOs were not able to attend the session
March 30, 2010		
8:00-13:00	Third Day of Session	
13:00-15:00	Lunch	
15:00-17:00	Debriefing after last day	This day was in actuality longer to make up for missed time lost the previous day (flooding).
March 31, 2010		
	Return to Nairobi	
April 1, 2010		
	Return to Canada	

Observations about COA activities:

Did you participate in COA activities? If so, how were you included?

“In terms of the physical setting, we were seated along one side of the training room and spent the majority of the time as observers, taking copious notes and photographs with the permission of the participants.”

“We were invited to offer our own comments at our discretion, and were also liberally incorporated into the session itself by the trainers who sometimes directed questions at us or deferred to us when a participant asked a question. We were also asked to provide detailed responses on certain occasions. I felt the trainers skilfully incorporated us into the session to provide additional value to the session as the participants were able to hear the SPO perspective.”

“On the first day of the session, we introduced ourselves through an “ice-breaker” activity that was used with the whole group. As we observed the session, the facilitators regularly asked for our input into the discussion, were open to our comments and questions and flexible with the learning activities they had planned.”

“On the second day that we were present in the orientation, the COA facilitators used our presence as a learning opportunity for the group, regarding services in Canada, how refugees are received etc. Following each day’s orientation session, the Canadian delegation and the COA staff met for a “debriefing”, during which we gave feedback and had lively, rich and mutually beneficial discussion about the day’s COA activities.”

“I felt that we were included in COA activities in ways that were useful and mutually beneficial, given the time constraints.”

What topics were covered and what questions were asked by refugees?

- Warm-up and introductions
- Assessment of Needs and Current Knowledge of Canada
- Facts about Canada
- The Climate and Weather in Canada
- Journey to Canada
- Rights, Obligations and the Law in Canada
- Housing in Canada
- Health Care in Canada video (Day 2 – without the observers)
- Education in Canada video (Day 2 – without the observers)
- Transportation
- The Work Situation in Canada
- Budgeting and Spending
- Cultural Adaptation
- Additional topics (Day 4 – without the observers)

Questions /Comments from participants in the COA session:

- Do slums exist in Canada?
- Will I be able to continue with my exercise (running)?
- Washing machines? Do I need to keep mixing clothes myself in the machine?
- What if the plane crashes?
- I have never been in plane before - what happens in flight?

- I don't know English or how to read and write. How I will communicate? What will happen with my child who is sick?
- How cold does it get?
- How will I get to Nairobi?
- Can't I throw something out the window on the plane?
- What about the oven? How does that work?
- Can I clear this loan before the agreed upon time?
- What about my health condition? What will happen?

Questions that were raised by facilitators (perhaps too taboo for participants to raise themselves):

- If we have freedom, why can't we have more than one wife? As Somalis, we have this tradition, yes? Answer: (from group) - We are going to a country which had laws before we went there. Need to conform / abide by laws of that country.
- What about female circumcision? Not allowed and is considered abuse in Canada. Everyone has the responsibility to report abuse by law.
- What about same-sex couples? What will you do? How will you react to this reality?

Expectations / hopes expressed by participants:

- Vision of being given house with very green garden, good medical services
- Good house- different from Kakuma, safe, doesn't leak, made of blocks (cement)
- High hopes, opportunity to learn what I have missed. Having lived in Kakuma for 15 years, looking forward to a different life – education, housing
- Very happy. I want to go to Canada. Expectation to have equal rights, get education, opportunities, employment. No fears. The fear that I have is here in the camp. Have been here 10 years. I am afraid when I go running. People have died here when running.

In your opinion, did the refugees benefit from COA? If so, in what way?

"On the whole, our team was *extremely* impressed with the quality of the orientation sessions. The COA team in Kenya (and Ethiopia) is made up of committed, hard working and dynamic individuals. The approach is thoughtful, flexible and respectful of the life experiences that participants bring with them into the room. The barriers that participants may face, due to the differences between life in the camps and urban North America are addressed through practical and creative activities. The learning environment is one where humour is used to address sensitive issues, where gender dynamics are taken into account, and where participants feel comfortable asking questions... Wonderful sessions!"

"Yes, I feel that the participants in the session we observed definitely benefited from the session, in the following ways:

- The combination of the relaxed atmosphere, participatory activities and lots of small group work, allowed participants to open up and ask questions; practice things they were unsure of.
- The participants seemed very engaged in the activities; particularly the practical aspects...From my perspective, as someone dealing with clients when they arrive, I think that the value of reducing the stress of settlement, by making things even a little bit less "strange" cannot be underestimated (i.e.: having seen what the inside of a North American house might look like, even if it is not exactly the same, will no doubt help).
- Addressing taboo questions and rumours directly, must have some effect on the impact on the rumours that circulate in the camps. I also get the sense that IOM staff has an

opportunity, through these sessions, to be seen as trustworthy and approachable sources of the “right” information.”

“Group participation and contribution has been a great approach of COA sessions. Trainers’ efforts in relating the examples to the current realities of the camp further encouraged participatory learning.”

- “Trainers’ knowledge of Canada has been so comprehensive and detailed that, occasionally it exceeded the level of knowledge of Canadian SPO staff! “
- “Skilled and knowledgeable trainers who were able to adapt to the challenges posed by the shortened session as well as suggestions offered by the observers.”
- “Content well suited to prepare refugees to have a basic understanding of Canada, to prepare for air travel, and to begin to explore the change in cultural context.”

What comments and/or recommendations do you have (if any) for your hosts regarding their COA activities?

“The details of Canadian geography, territories, population, etc, were useful and could be covered as a one-page information sheet in the package for future references when needed. It was recommended to minimize time on such discussion with statistics that could not easily be memorized. Instead, more time needs to be allocated to participants’ questions. A package of information for clients to carry with them to Canada was recommended. “

“Additional visual information, models and updated videos would be highly effective assisting the trainers with accuracy of information.”

“The approach on having first language as well as co-facilitators has been highly important in maintaining the energy level of trainers and a change for participants.”

“A possible age-specific setting might also help the children and seniors to brainstorm on their focused issues... I would encourage the trainers to identify additional means to involve all participants in the process.”

“The following ideas and feedback were offered by various members of the Canadian team, as part of the debriefing and discussion we had each day, after the COA session:

- What about doing some activities in gender-specific groups? (Note: COA facilitators confirmed that on other occasions, this has not worked well. Upon reflection about other ways to handle it (i.e.: not for all activities), COA staff are willing to try it again, for some activities.
- Good use of visual materials. SPOs in Canada have lots and could also help with this.
- Even more opportunities for questions...?
- What about having a binder with pictures of phone, power, etc with plastic sleeves – for people to follow; particularly for those with literacy challenges?

- What about displaying items on a table (rather than a list) and do an activity where families need to decide what to pack / not pack?
- During the discussion of seasons, showing pictures of nice bungalow in winter and summer may lead to false expectations (“So this is Mohammed’s house?”). Most will not be able to afford a house like this for quite a while and will more likely live in a high-rise.

Note: The purpose of this winter/summer house is to reflect on how life will change during the two distinct seasons.

- The section on employment may be a bit too detailed and more than what is needed at this point.
- Maybe something could be included on security issues in apartments, specifically. Maybe something on safety and security issues in Canada?
- What about something on coping with winter in Canada (being inside all the time – what can you do as a family). Also – what about something on how to handle materialism with children and within family when you will still be living on a limited income?
- If COA staff can play a role in emphasizing the importance of declaring all family members on forms, prior to leaving Kenya – it would be wonderful.”

Observations about overseas resettlement operations:

What did you learn about IOM Operations and how resettlement is conducted overseas?

“We learned that IOM is a very large operation with a broad spectrum of responsibilities throughout the globe and that its Canadian component is a miniscule part when taking account of the entire operation.”

“The IOM Medical Unit provided the big picture on IOM medical responsibilities for Canada. We gained a greater sense of the processes involved in the medical examinations and pre-departure screening for Canada and it was contrasted with IOM involvement with USA bound cases.”

“IOM staff prepares the IOM bag and its contents. One of the staff who prepares the package personally stated that the IOM bag includes:

1. CPR – flight details including date of departure, etc.
2. Exit card to allow them to leave the country
3. X-rays (in some cases)
4. Pre-departure medical forms for each family member (always)”

“It should be noted that our original travel plans to Kakuma Refugee Camp, on the UN plane, were on and off several times on the 24th and that IOM continued negotiating until just prior to departure before we were able to secure our seats. Our initial travel plans to Kenya had also been delayed earlier in the month due to space issues at Kakuma Refugee Camp. This underscores the logistical challenges faced by the IOM, CHC and others serving refugees in this area.”

“We were provided details on CHC selection interviews at Kakuma and IOM’s role in medical examinations, pre-departure screening, travel arrangements to the transit centre, and relaying information on changes in family composition.”

What were your observations, lessons learned, biggest surprises?

“At the Transit Centre, we saw orientation rooms with educational posters, fire extinguishers in hallways, fully equipped washrooms, and bedrooms that give refugees an initial apartment living experience. There is a central kitchen where all meals are prepared for the refugees. I had not expected that refugees would have had a chance to experience some of these amenities that so closely replicate those in Canada.”

What do you want your colleagues to know about COA and about IOM processing overseas?

“The IOM-COA services are vital for the settlement of new immigrants in Canada. This role needs to be more visible and recognized. COA is an active partner in all aspects of the settlement sector. Continued communication and networking is recommended.”

How do you plan to apply your experiences and new knowledge in your work? (Please consider how this might apply to other colleagues)

(Most answered through a variety of presentation for their colleagues working in different programs as well as presentations at regional/national conferences).

Additional Comments/ Advice/ Recommendations

- “Cultural discussions and sharing the Canadian contexts of practices such as Polygamy, Female Genital Circumcision is too complicated and too sensitive, but seems to be easily conveyed by the trainers. “
- “The debriefing on the first day lasted 2.5 hours, when we had only scheduled one hour. I believe this is clear evidence of the level of engagement that took place between COA staff and SPOs. On a personal level, I found this an excellent opportunity to reflect not only on what happens in COA sessions, but on the orientation that happens through our agencies upon arrival in Canada. In fact, I would love to have the opportunity for COA staff to observe some of our activities in Canada and receive their feedback.”
- “Refugees’ transportation to/from the camp to IOM Sub-Office is a major challenge and time/resource consuming efforts. With availability of funding, alternative arrangements such as, developing resources and a mobile team of trainers to deliver camp-based, home-based and/or community based individual/group sessions or in partnership with other local NGOs in different zones of the camp might reduce the problem.”
- “Exchange of language-specific resources, orientation material and tools; including life skills manuals, visual material (maps, signs, flyers, pictures...), youth/senior/childminding resources with COA as an effort to minimize translation cost and provide up to date information to COA. “

- “Revision and adjustment of RAP Canada orientation format, style, and material to be in line with the COA pre-departure orientations. A focus on participatory and culturally relevant orientation format with the learning objective of information, attitude and behaviour. This would help GARs to relate the first phase of learning at the pre-departure stage by COA with the second phase of learning on province-specific details of services by SPOs after their arrival in Canada.”
- “Exchange programs between COA and SPOs staff are highly necessary as this would bring mutual benefits in terms of sharing resources, learning opportunities and minimizing barriers to settlement of new refugees.”

Final Comments and Conclusions (by IOM):

The stated objectives of the COA Observation Visits were achieved. Moreover, additional accomplishments were realized, these are stated by IOM on page 4, and reiterated throughout this report in comments made by the Service Provider staff.

IOM is also in agreement that our ability to fund and arrange future visits for other SPO representatives would be mutually advantageous and is a worthwhile allocation of funds and resources made by IOM. It is our belief that future visits would continue to further our initial objectives with the inclusion of additional staff members, including SPO representatives from Québec (IOM would pursue funding for these from the Québec Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Communities).

IOM is pleased to note that overall the level of enthusiasm, participation and dialogue during the Observation Visits was excellent. Many SPO participants also allocated significant thought and consideration to their visit, which was reflected in the length and depth of their reports. IOM is appreciative of the post visit communication and updates regarding presentations and other outreach activities conducted by SPOs upon their return.

Several service provider staff mentioned during the visits that it would be also very useful and practical for persons from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to have this opportunity to participate in COA first-hand, to meet with other IOM staff as well as partners in the field, and to share concerns and information. IOM is in agreement with this, and in particular if persons from CIC Headquarters could participate in the visit, accompany the group (with the COA Project Liaison), it would increase their understanding of the daily concerns and challenges that COA staff experience abroad.

In terms of planning another tentative visit to COA sites abroad, IOM would take under consideration the need to hold these visits earlier in the fiscal year, both to accommodate IOM and the service providers' need to submit various reports and financial claims.

If these visits are undertaken again, IOM would ensure that someone from COA management would accompany each group. It is believed that there is an immense benefit to have someone accompany the group as this person can provide an overall perspective on COA, compare the training provided to different refugee groups as well as provide a global perspective of the project and how it operates globally with various categories of migrants (and not only for refugees).

COA management is very grateful for this opportunity to share and learn from each other. We have already incorporated many of the SPO's suggestions in our sessions and are working on the implementation of others.

In summary, the Observation Visits were extremely beneficial to both COA/IOM staff as well as Canadian Service Providers. IOM would like to again extend their thanks to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for funding as well as for their provision of information and support. The Project Manager and Project Liaison would also like to thank all of the wonderful service provider participants, for embarking on this journey with us and for sharing their thoughts and experience, for the benefit of all. It was very gratifying for all to bridge the gap between in-Canada and overseas service providers through this unique venture.

Prepared by COA Management and submitted to CIC Ottawa on 27 July 2010.