



**Interview with:** Florence (10)  
**Interviewed by:** Ruth  
**Date of interview:** 15 February 2017  
**Travel:** Uganda – Kenya – Tanzania – Zimbabwe – South Africa

**Ruth:** Good evening, Ma Florence.

**Florence:** Yes, I am good and how are you, sister?

**Ruth:** I am a researcher and I would like to talk to you. Can you introduce yourself and tell me your story?

**Florence:** All right. My name is Florence, as I told you earlier on. I am from Uganda and I came to South Africa in 2007. In Uganda there was political instability and this is the reason why I left Uganda. In the north of Uganda there is a problem. Kony is there and has been killing so many people in north of Uganda. Many people have lost their lives. There is also a problem of displacement of people who have had to look after their own safety. Our house was burned down back then. I lost my two cousins and my granny. But some of us managed to escape.

**Ruth:** What happened to you was so sad.

**Florence:** It is not only my family. This thing has been happening in other parts of Uganda, especially in the north and families all around have been affected. I wonder why that war cannot come to an end. The government tried. The Americans tried. The African community tried. But Kony is still there and is killing our people. It's a really bad story.

**Ruth:** I am so sorry you have lost a loved one.

**Florence:** Yes, we lost our loved one—our neighbour and our family member. Really I don't want to talk about it. Really, it is a hard thing that happened.

**Ruth:** I'm sorry to remind you about the pain.

**Florence:** It was just too much. But all and all I ended up here. It was a friend of mine who really told me about South Africa, that is a very good country.

**Ruth:** So when did you lose all your loved ones in Uganda? How did you hear about South Africa? How did you travel and what transport did you use? Why did you decide to leave Uganda and come to South Africa?

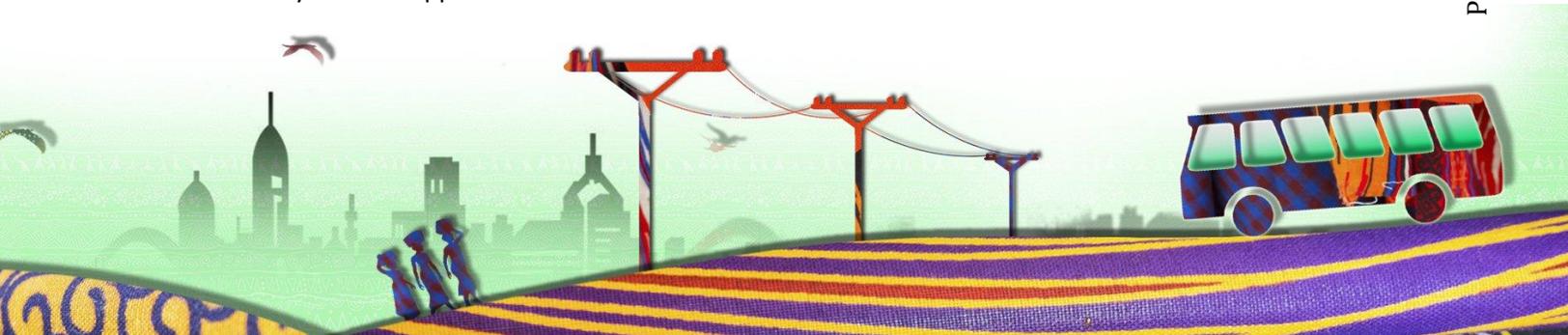
**Florence:** All right. After the trauma that happened to me, with losing my family, I decided to run to the central of Uganda. But things are not easy there. The rate of employment was too high and you move to a new place with nothing. It was very hectic. When I was there in central Kampala I went to a church where I found this madam. She told me that South Africa is a democratic country, a good country. Mandela had fought for all Africans. In South Africa they understand humanitarian [issues] and human rights—how people can live—and when people go there they can change their lives. That is why I decided to come to South Africa.

So I had to come by bus. What I did was first was to go to Kenya for some days. Then I went to Tanzania and from there I went to Zimbabwe. Eventually I arrived in South Africa. It was not that easy. It took almost two months to travel from Uganda to South Africa.

**Ruth:** So you travelled for two months?

**Florence:** Yes, it was not easy—travelling from one place to another, looking for money, and for some piece-jobs to do just so that we could survive. It was really very sad. I arrived in South Africa, my sister, but unfortunately what I found was that my dream about South Africa was the opposite.

**Ruth:** Why? What happened?





**Florence:** They told me how welcoming people are and how good they are. But [I found] that people were very [hostile] the moment they discover you are a foreigner. No one will help you. They can tell by your accent when you are speaking English that you are a foreigner. When they discover this they turn against you. This is one of the challenges.

I am here [with my boyfriend and my children]. But even my children are unable to go to some schools, especially those good schools, because when you take your child there they ask you for a birth certificate. But my children do not have birth certificates so they cannot go to those nice schools because you cannot register in those schools without a birth certificate.

**Ruth:** Florence, are you telling me that you gave birth in South Africa, but your children don't have birth certificates? Did you try to apply?

**Florence:** Yes. What happens is that they don't give you a birth certificate. Rather, you get a certain paper ... and that paper is not recognised anywhere. When you take it to the school they ask you ... 'What is this?' That is the problem. That paper does not even have a birth certificate number. So that means it is useless. It only shows that the child was born here, but it is not a birth certificate. I have been travelling with my children from Durban to Pretoria just to try to apply for a birth certificate. I did this because I used to get my asylum seeker's document from Pretoria. Applying for [status as an] asylum seeker is worse. Those officials will push you, pull you, shush you away. I remember I was once beaten in the queue, my sister.

**Ruth:** Beaten? How?

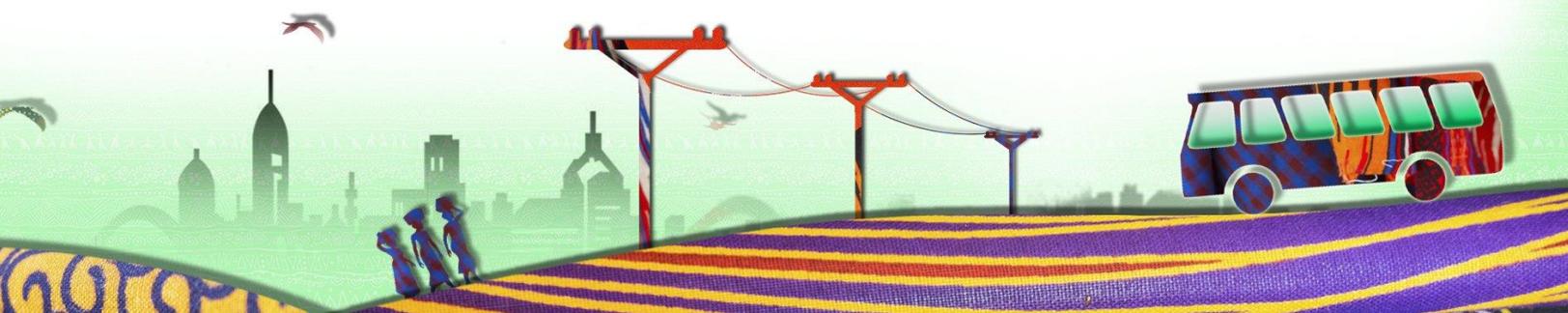
**Florence:** Yes. In the queue they push and beat you like a child. I asked myself: Oh my God, am I in the wrong place? Is this the freedom Mandela fought for, as my friend told me? It was just horrible. At Home Affairs they want a bribe. They need money before serving you or assisting you. That is why they always care about the Ethiopians and Somalians. These people used to give them money. But for us Ugandans—they don't care about us because we don't have money to give them. They treat us [poorly]. Like when I have to go to Pretoria from Durban, they can turn us down. So, I have to come back to Durban and the next week go back to Pretoria and they can turn me down next week Friday also. You have to find rent for a hotel to stay in until the date they have given you, but this is so expensive, so you go back to Durban and next week, back to Pretoria again. Can you imagine! So you are in trouble. These are some of the challenges we are facing. Finding a job is also a problem.

**Ruth:** So, you need to travel back again to Durban, and back to Pretoria next week when you have a date?

**Florence:** Yes, you have to come back to Durban and wait for the next week to go to Pretoria again. It's up to you whether you hang around, and whether you rent until the date for renewing comes round. You will stay in a hotel which is so expensive. So, life is so difficult in South Africa.

**Ruth:** So, Mama Florence, can I know about your qualifications? You have qualifications but you are jobless in South Africa.

**Florence:** I have got a bachelor's degree in education and also a diploma from UNISA. But because you are not South African you cannot really get a good job. I have tried to go to schools to apply for a job [as a teacher], but they will take someone with a certificate if he or she is South African. But you've got all the qualifications for the job! They cannot give you the job, only because you are a foreigner. So, because I am not a South African, it is not easy to get a job in private schools where you can be teaching. In private schools, when the start paying, they pay South Africans first, then they will pay you, piece by piece, because they know you can't report them or take them to court. In South Africa, we don't have rights. When it comes to renting as well, they ask you for your green ID before they give you a flat. When you show them your asylum seekers [document] they don't know it. Everything here is the green





ID. If you want to open an account, they need it. SASSA, they need it as well. It is a challenge for us. Even if you want to open a small business you have a problem because they want work payment, so there is nothing we can do about it.

**Ruth:** So how you manage to stay with your kids because you are jobless? Are you managing to survive?

**Florence:** Really, I am living a difficult life. Basically, it is by the grace of God [that I survive]. When you look for a job, like in a private school, you will find that a South African will get maybe R10 000 a month, but you get R3 000, even though you have higher qualifications. On that R3 000 you have to pay rent, school fees and food. So it is difficult because there is so much inequality in the work place.

In South Africa, people don't know really care about foreigners. If you approach any South African with a problem, you feel: Oh my God, why don't I just go back to Uganda where they are killing people?

They can arrest you because you don't have the proper document. When I went to Home Affairs, week after week, when my paper expired and there was nothing given to show for that period, they arrested me in Hillbrow and kept me over a weekend. My children were alone here in Durban and I was like: Oh, my God, what can I do? My boyfriend, the father of my kids, is a South African and I am from Uganda. When I think I should take my kids to Uganda, my boyfriend says: 'No, you can't take the children to Uganda'. He says they are still small. Even if I tried to go back because the government is chasing me away, I can't leave my children with the father because they are still small.

I wanted to apply for what we call 'the relative permit' because my boyfriend is from here, but Home Affairs turned me down. They said they couldn't see a reason for me to apply, even though my children were born here. I explained that as their mother, I can't leave them with their father now. But still I struggle with my papers. I have been here for more than seven years, but they haven't given me [refugee] status or permanent residence. I am still using the six-month asylum seeker's document. After three or six months I must travel from Durban to Pretoria to renew it. They give me three months, or if they are in a good mood they will give me six months. So I am not safe. Some of our sisters are rejected too and I am scared that they may reject me as well when I go there next month.

**Ruth:** So, you are not happy about this situation and you are scared?

**Florence:** My question is, should I go with my children or should I leave them here and go back home?

**Ruth:** The children are South Africans and you are from Uganda, but you don't have stable documentation.

**Florence:** You have a point.

**Ruth:** You don't know what you going do?

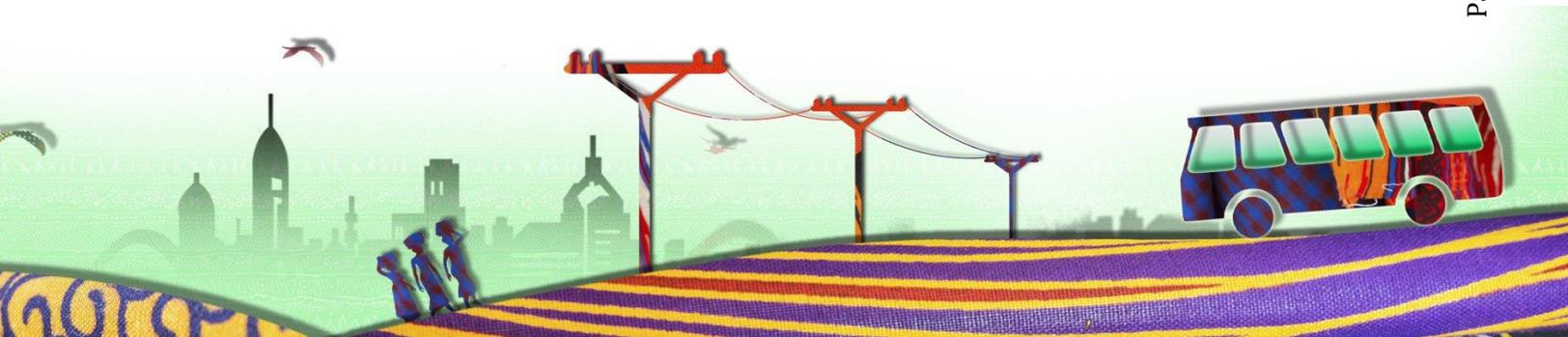
**Florence:** Yes, I don't know what to do. I really don't know what to do. If they don't give me permanent residence or [refugee] status, and there are no birth certificates for the children, that becomes a terrible problem.

**Ruth:** What about hospital?

**Florence:** When you are sick you can go to hospital and they give you medication or treatment. But these nurses, some of them are xenophobic. I went to give birth and the way shouted at me: 'You kwerekwere! Why can't stay in your country?' Those nurses just embarrass you. A certain lady went there to give birth and the baby fell down because the nurses didn't help. There were laughing at her, saying: 'You kwerekwere! You are taking our boyfriends, now suffer!' Can you imagine! And the child died.

**Ruth:** Hoo, shame!

**Florence:** That is the problem at the hospital, especially in the labour ward. It is so terrible. Even if you go for medication, the attitude is really very bad. These are some of the challenges we are experiencing, sister Ruth.





**Ruth:** What about schools? Are the children schooling? Is there any problem there?

**Florence:** They are studying at school but, as I told you earlier, they cannot go to a nice school because I have failed to get them birth certificates. I tried some school in Johannesburg, but no. Even there they need birth certificates at private schools and government schools. They won't register them without birth certificates. I have to apply for a work permit, so that they can get passports. I have to go back to Uganda to apply and that is so difficult. So, that is how it is.

**Ruth:** So, it's not easy,

**Florence:** No, it is not easy. We are pushing very hard. Even during the xenophobia, a group of people came with pangas and sticks to beat us. Even your neighbour will treat you so badly. So we just lock ourselves inside the house for our own safety. Oh, my God! They were banging at the door, coming with pangas and knives, just to tell you to: 'Go back to your country, you kwerekweres! You are taking our jobs, our husbands.' We are discriminated against in all areas—even from a religious point of view, we are discriminated against.

**Ruth:** That is so sad.

**Florence:** We stay here and ask ourselves why we are suffering like this. What did I do to deserve this? It is a bit calmer now, but we are scared. We are afraid. We don't know what will come next. When we are on a bus or some place where there are many people, we keep silent. We don't respond even to phone calls because when you talk they will start asking you many questions in Zulu, and when you cannot respond they catch you out. We are working hard to fit in here. Even the learners have got this thing in them. I don't know how they get it when they are still young. But they grow up with it. Maybe a learner will come late to class. I will ask: 'Why are you late?' The learner will answer me in Zulu, or tell me to shut up in Zulu. You will see the class laughing at me. Those who understand do not feel good. You ask them what the learner said and they say it was insulting to me.

**Ruth:** Even at school? They are doing that? So they discover that you are a foreigner?

**Florence:** It doesn't take even a minute for them to discover that you are a foreigner. Whenever you speak they can discover you, especially in KwaZulu-Natal. Most of them speak Zulu in the workplace. We are really discriminated against. At school some of the lessons are in Zulu only. Sometimes I ask myself what I am doing in this place.

**Ruth:** Are you sure?

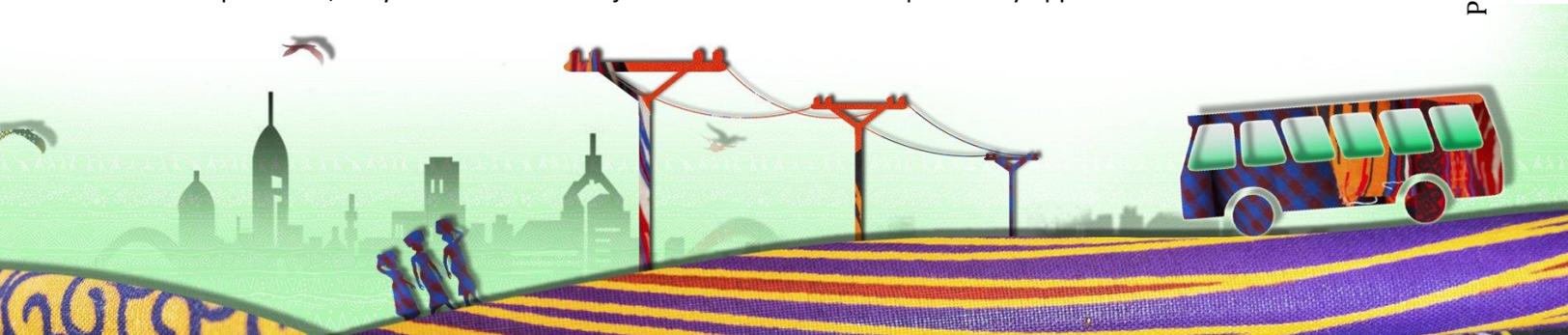
**Florence:** Yes. You can see from their reaction that they don't want you to participate in some activities that they have chosen for themselves. So we are really discriminated against, even in religious areas.

**Ruth:** So sad.

**Florence:** It is not a good story. We don't see a future. We just stay here like that. I always tell my friends that if you are a foreigner in South Africa you must at least have God. When you have God there is hope for you. With God you can keep going.

**Ruth:** So, how do you manage to survive in this kind of situation, where you are not free? The future is uncertain because you don't know what will happen tomorrow. So what is your plan? You left Uganda after losing loved ones. You came here with a dream, but you found another thing here. I want to know how you see the future.

**Florence:** Basically I am just looking for another country, where they can accommodate immigrants or foreigners, especially those seeking asylum. As I told you earlier, there is still trouble in Uganda. I can't go home because Kony is still alive there. I can't risk my life there. I was thinking if the government here can make things better for us, then I will be able to stay. If the government really considers our problems, they can make some adjustments for us. I would personally appreciate this. I have children





here and I would love to stay here and at least try to support my children. If I plan to go back to Uganda, it will be hard, unless they stabilise things. But at the moment it is terrible there. I can't go there to die. I can't go to another African country. Only South Africa accommodates us. If you can at least plead for us to the authorities. If they can consider us, recognise us, and also give us proper refugee status, that will be good. We would appreciate it a lot. The government must try to educate people by telling them about other countries in Africa. We are all one Africa. Most people here don't know Uganda. I was so surprised. When they ask where I am from, and I say I'm from Uganda, they ask: 'Where is Uganda? Is it in Europe?' I was so shocked.

**Ruth:** Hooo!

**Florence:** Yes. There are people here who think that South Africa is not in Africa. So people need to be educated. South Africa also goes to other countries. In Uganda we have Shoprite, Nandos and other shops as well, and other big companies owned by South African people.

**Ruth:** Are you sure, Florence?

**Florence:** Yes. It means that people are moving from one place to another just for their safety. In our country we respect and try to protect foreigners at a high level. It makes me wonder if this country can also be kind to foreigners. Life is not good here. We struggle here and there. We just trust that God will help us. Even a bursary you cannot get because you are a foreigner. This is so sad. We need birth certificates—nice documents—but without them you are discriminated against. We need your help. That is my request. We need something to sustain us, even during xenophobia.

**Ruth:** I hear your story. It is so sad.

**Florence:** We have been asylum seekers for many years. We cannot even get a grant or anything from the government. We keep struggling every day. There are many opportunities out there but the opportunities are only for South Africans, not for foreigners. I hear that there is a law which says that a foreigner can only be offered a job if all South Africans are completely out of that field. So you cannot be hired unless the human resources manager proves with no doubt that no South African has the qualification needed to do that job. So you can get a job. You end up being in a private company, but here they mistreat you because they know that you don't have any place to take them.

**Ruth:** So, before they take you, they have to check if there is a South African for that position. Is it a new law?

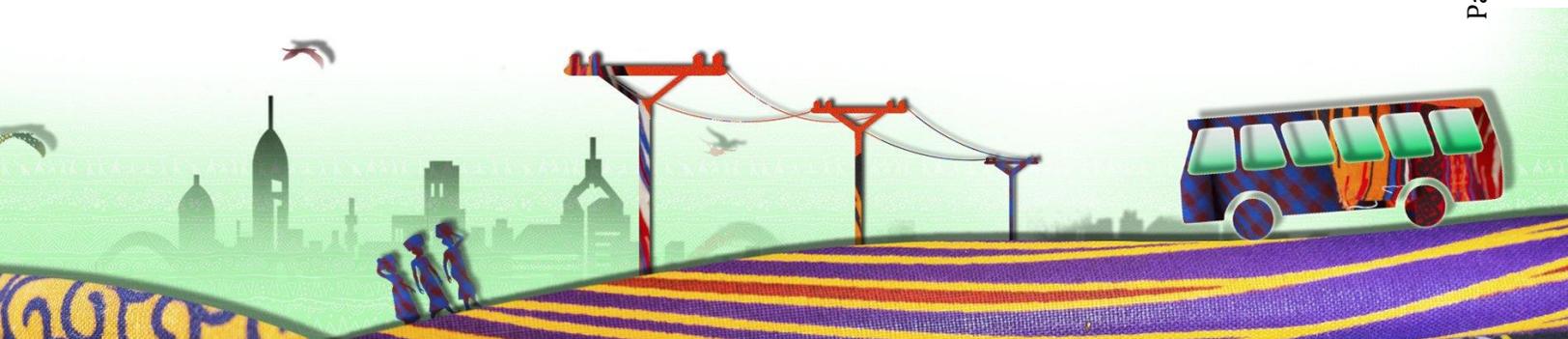
**Florence:** No, is not a new law. It's been around.

**Ruth:** So, in your story, you told me that sometimes you go to Pretoria to renew your papers. Who looks after your small kids in Durban?

**Florence:** Actually, I have two friends. They are also foreigners: one from Uganda and one from Kenya. Normally when I go I leave my kids with my friend and then I go.

**Ruth:** So, how do you survive for a week in Pretoria because you don't know anyone there? Do you stay in a hotel?

**Florence:** Because transport fares are too high, I have to stay until I get the paper. They will only give three months or six months. In Pretoria I got very sick and went to the hospital there. I don't even want to talk about it! It was terrible—so sad. Then they gave me only three months. They can't even transfer me here [to the Durban office]. I wonder why, because we don't have jobs. We are struggling but they must just shift us from where we are to a place for asylum seekers. I don't know why they don't recognise us in those other offices because I understand that it is the same system all over. The moment they put my number on the document they can see me and help me, even if I go to another





province. But they want you to go back to where you got it from. Even in March—next month—I will have to go back. Once I went with my child when he was a small baby, just three months old.

**Ruth:** You are facing a tough situation.

**Florence:** Yeah, these are things I am telling you, sister Ruth.

**Ruth:** I really hear your story.

**Florence:** We are just appealing to the government to intervene so that at least our lives can change. We don't leave our homes for fun. We are still struggling in this place. For sure, our lives are complicated.

**Ruth:** You have been travelling from here to there.

**Florence:** Yes, because I don't have money, but I have to use the train to go for my documents in Pretoria.

**Florence:** That's how it is.

**Ruth:** It's not easy. Up until now, your kids still don't have birth certificates.

**Florence:** No, I haven't got anything for the kids. You end up taking your children to those substandard schools because they want a birth certificate at private and government schools. I can't produce papers for their father or mother. What can I do but take them to those schools? You have no choice.

**Ruth:** The children there are complaining. Maybe they are teasing them.

**Florence:** Yes, at school other children discover that they are not from here because they don't understand Zulu very well. They are born here but they are still discriminated again. They get pushed around and teased. The school administration says no bullying at school, and most schools listen to that.

Please do something for us so that at least we are considered and helped to live a better life. Thank you for understanding me. It was good to share my story with you.

**Ruth:** Thank you, Florence, for your time and for sharing your story with me. Stay strong. It is really a sad story. But keep trusting in God for a change. Thanks.

