

Secondary Education through Distance Learning for Sudanese refugee students

Brief Background:

Since 2003, hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee Darfur seeking refuge in Eastern Chad. While the educational needs of refugee children have been the focus of attention of many humanitarian aid groups, the needs of adolescents and youth have comparatively been grossly ignored. From 2003 until 2005, displaced Sudanese adolescents and youth who make up over half the refugee population, had been forgotten in development agendas and remained without the benefit of organized activities in the twelve refugee camps of Eastern Chad. As a result of this two year developmental gap, these adolescents and youth have emerged idle, frustrated, neglected, hopeless and vulnerable as targets for recruitment into armed groups on both sides of the Chad-Sudan border.

Name of the approach:

Secondary Education through Distance Learning (SEDL)

Description (methodology, techniques and strategies used) :

History has shown that half of all countries emerging from conflict relapse into violence within five years. If countries that have experienced conflict have an increased likelihood of violence in the future, investing in the future of uprooted adolescents and youth in war-ravaged parts of the world is a very effective and efficient way to prevent further instability, conflict re-emergence and achieve long-term resolution of violent conflicts. Consultations with young people continue to confirm education as one of their top priorities. Conversely, many young people cite lack of access to formal or informal education as one of the primary factors motivating them to join armed groups.

The project's aim is to make refugee adolescents and youth self-reliant and to empower them through completion of their secondary education, which enhances their knowledge and skills through learning, and protects them at one of the most critical ages of human development.

The SEDL programme has been implemented by the RET in collaboration with the *International University of Africa* (Khartoum) which provides an accredited secondary education certificate. The programme started with the recruitment of young Sudanese or Chadian students who had completed their primary education in the camps or Sudan, or had seen their secondary education interrupted due to displacement. Learning takes place through self study, sharing of knowledge among students, but also through learning support from peer educators who lead in subject discussions and sometimes do actual teaching drills. The peer educators have been selected by the RET among the best students, and been trained in the different subjects and teaching skills. Peer educators help learners understand difficult concepts in different subjects: Arabic language, mathematics, sciences, English, history, etc. The examination is organized in collaboration with the International University of Africa and takes place once a year in one location with refugees coming from the 12 camps and from the local Chadian communities.

What is innovative about this approach/tool/project :

Of all education programmes taking place in Eastern Chad, the RET's end of primary and secondary education classes and exams are the only ones accredited by the Ministry of Education in Sudan, and recognized by several universities in African and Arab countries. Refugee students know that the time they spend in class and efforts they put into learning will very concretely affect their future since their studies are accredited: they can continue with their tertiary education in the host country or at home once peace has returned, or access qualified jobs such as teaching.

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Distance learning allows young refugees to continue and complete their studies in the host country, lowering the risk that they cross the border in search of accredited education and get enrolled by the military or rebel groups. In addition, the self study has created self-reliance and empowered the students. It enables youth to take ownership of the programme, as shown by the fact that many refugee students are now teaching to their families and peers.

If the educational and recreational needs of refugee and internally displaced younger children have been given increasing attention, those of adolescents have been grossly ignored. Despite the fact that demographic trends show that they make up the largest youth cohort in history, the needs of young adolescents in countries engulfed in, or emerging from, conflict remain tragically neglected.

Evidence of results and impact:

Since 2007, a total of 778 Sudanese and Chadian students gained their secondary education certificate. More than 50% of the former SEDL students are now employed as teachers, received training for becoming nurses, statisticians, or serve as aids for surveys and deliveries to the community.

The training of Peer Educators has had a ripple effect in the community. A number of them conduct their own private classes where they teach other youth and adults. It is estimated that an additional 500 students attend these private classes.

Costs associated with the development and implementation of the activity:

USD 100,000 for 300 students over a year (including subject and exercise books, teachers salaries, exam fees, and support costs).

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