

TPT Document 21: Fact Sheet on Refugee Youth and Poverty Reduction

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Background: Refugee Youth

According to the estimates of UNHCR (The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) there are the total of 2,863,400 refugees in Africa. The data by country looks as follows:

Ghana 43,947 Refugees
Kenya 237,512 Refugees
Uganda 230,903 Refugees
Malawi 3,202 Refugees
Zambia 226,697 Refugees
Tanzania – around 600,000 Refugees.

In general, about 35 out of 100 refugees are young people between 12 and 24. These are the people outside of the “development mainstream” – that means that the main Governments and donor development projects generally don’t reach them. In the same time, they play important role in the life of their host-countries and in their native countries when they return back. Different research project on the refugees were carried out in the Buduburam camp. They have demonstrated that the refugees can not only take care of themselves, but also contribute to development of the community where they live.

What do PRSPs say about refugee issues?

In the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) process, refugees are usually seen as a challenge to the country’s development. The new National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty in Tanzania mentions the post-disaster actions to reduce the impact of refugee influx. In Zambian Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) refugees are among the “threats” to the public health. In Malawi’s PRSP refugees are called a factor of “external shock”, while the first Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) and the Kenyan PRSP didn’t mention anything on the refugee problems.

Among the reviewed Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers the one, which address the issue of refugees in the best way is the one of Uganda. Ugandan PRSP asserts that the Government will continue to implement the policy of self-reliance of the refugees. The refugees are named among the vulnerable groups. The PRSP also contains action plan including the humanitarian aid in the initial stage, psychological support and promotion of self-reliance. The PRSP recognizes that the refugees can take care of themselves and participate in the productive activities of the local people. The assistance to them is also seen as an important investment.

The PRSP notes many challenges, such as pressure on environment (because refugees use water and forest resources), need of social services such as health and educations (which requires new hospitals and schools as well as professional workers), spread of HIV/AIDS and insecurity, which the refugees feel as well as their poor living conditions. These problems can be solved through the local districts’ programs with support of the refugee communities and the international partners. The PRSP recommends international partners supporting the refugees to coordinate the efforts with the local authorities.

What do PRSPs say about youth issues?

In most Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers youth is called vulnerable group. However, it is treated in very different way. For example, the Ugandan PRSP is mostly concerned with enhancing youth participation in decision making. For example, to encourage youth involvement, part of the Parliament or Local Council membership must include youth representatives. It also notes, that training on gender issues must be provided to make sure that youth organizations represent both men and women. New Tanzanian strategy also looks at the youth participation, saying that the youth leaders were not consulted when the first strategy was made. The error was corrected in the preparation of the second strategy, where youth organizations were included in the consultations.

Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) gives particular attention to the youth entrepreneurship. For example it tells that a lot problem are related to the fact that the young people migrate from rural areas to the towns to become petty sellers or hawkers, unable to find a good job opportunity. Therefore it is important to improve youth participation in the agriculture activities. It notes that the traditional way of work on the land is unattractive to the youth. It is necessary to modernize agriculture, promote young people access to land, new agricultural tools and technologies. The GPRS also puts particular emphasis on youth employment. Many young people have good training, but still are not able to find employment. GPRS also doesn't look at youth as one category, but looks at the categories within the group. For example, it contains special provisions for young girls and disabled youth. Kenyan PRSP also talks about the special programs for transition from school to work, career guidance and in general, inclusion of the young people in the workforce. The PRSP of Malawi has some special provisions on the out-of-school youth. It proposes to create the multi-purpose youth centers and out of school youth clubs. In such clubs young people could spend their leisure time, but also develop professional skills, practice sports and receive counseling on the issues such as HIV/AIDS. In the future we would like to open such center in the Buduburam camp and we look forward to learn from the experience of Malawi.

The Zambian PRSP proposes to use ICT to reach the youth. It can be also used to reach out of school youth. The use of computers is growing and young people spend more and more time browsing the Internet. It is important to have local websites reaching out to the young people and attracting them. It also can be a good way for the young people to share their problems and concerns.

Conclusion

All PRSPs, which we have reviewed, treat different issues in their own way. Each paper has some particular experiences to share. While in one paper, refugees are just considered a problem; other paper proposes how to look at them as useful and productive resource for development. The same happens with the youth issues – since some papers just view youth as vulnerable group, other recognizes their potential for the future. Even though all the problems of the country can never fit into one paper, we must work together to improve them.