

March 2005

Project: **Education Assistance to Refugees from Burma**

Locations: Thailand and Burma Border

Implementing Organization: Consortium of World Education and World Learning

Type of Programming: sustainable education, capacity building

Target group/beneficiaries: Refugees in Karen and Karenni camps, Thai communities along the Thai/Burmese border, refugee educators and other NGOs

Stage: Crisis (long-term conflict and internally displaced populations)

Environmental Context of the Program

SOCIAL: Ethnic groups in Burma make up roughly one third of the population and live primarily in the 7 ethnic minority states. Differences in ethnic origin and political aspirations have been the basis for internal conflict since independence in 1948. The on-going fighting and human rights violations in Burma have resulted in hundreds of thousands of people crossing the border into Thailand. In the Karen refugee camps, some 34,000 students are in school every day. Approximately 1,100 teachers and trainers provide instruction. In the Karenni refugee camps there are 347 teachers teaching 6618 students.

CULTURAL/RELIGION: As of April 2003, 134,716 refugees are being supported in 9 border camps and an additional 11,725 in Mon resettlement sites. 65% of the refugees are from Karen State, 18% are from Karenni State, 10% are from Tennesserim, 3% are from Mon State and 4% are from a variety of states and divisions, including: Kachin, Irrawaddy, Magwe, Mandalay, Pegu, Rakhine, Rangoon, Sagaing and Shan. The majority of Karen refugees live in 7 camps in Tak, Ratchaburi and Kanchanaburi Provinces. In the 2 remaining Karenni camps, 73% are Kayah, 8% are Shan, 8% are Karen, 4% are Kayan, 3% are Kayaw, 2% are Paku and 1% are Burmese or belong to other ethnic groups. Christians and Buddhists are the two main religious groups among the refugee population. In a survey conducted in the Karen refugee camps in 2002, 65% are Christian 28% are Buddhist and 11% are Muslim. In a survey conducted in the Karenni camps in 2001, 35% of refugees practice traditional beliefs, 25% are Catholic, 22% are Baptist, 18% are Buddhist and 1% are Anglican.

ECONOMIC: Although the Royal Thai Government forbids refugees to engage in economic activities, some refugees have been able to find work as daily laborers on nearby Thai farms and in factories. Other economic activities include weaving, cooking food for sale or running small shops. Most camps have at least small shops and larger camps have markets.¹

Political Relationships: Since 1984, Thailand's border with Burma has been flooded by Karen, Karenni and other ethnic minority refugees who seek asylum and protection from human rights abuses and constraints on their political freedom. Recent estimates indicate that in addition to the 134,000 refugees living in camps stretching along the Thai-Burmese border, nearly a million more live as illegal migrants along the periphery of these camps. The Karen and the Karenni both maintain governments in exile.

¹ Bowles, E. (1998). From village to camp: refugee camp life in transition on the Thailand-Burma Border. *Forced Migration Review*, 2, August.

Program Description

TARGET GROUP: In the refugee camps, project staff work with teachers (nursery school, primary school, middle school, secondary school, special education, non-formal education) and school administrators. Project personnel also work closely with refugee education leaders and parents. Outside of the camps, project staff work with district officials, school administrators, village leaders and primary school teachers.

MATERIAL/PHYSICAL RESOURCES: Training in the camps consists of pre-service and in-service training as well as on-going teacher support. Two types of pre-service training are provided: 2-4 weeks during the summer and a 2-year Teacher Preparation Course. In-service training emphasizes teaching skills. In the camps, the project provides materials for training and for teachers to make teaching aids. Outside of the camps, schools are provided with equipment and seeds for school gardens and school infrastructure support. In the Karenni camps, curricula and textbooks are provided for English, geography, math and social studies. In the Karen camps, curricula and textbooks for science are provided. Computers and AlphaSmart word processors are available for teachers and students at project offices or on loan. In the Karenni camps, libraries are provided with books and other educational materials.

FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES: The project shares responsibility with ZOA Refugee Care and ABWAID to provide monthly stipends for all teachers, trainers and school administrators in all of the Karen refugee camps. The project supports nursery school teachers in 4 camps. All refugees hired as project staff are also provided a monthly stipend. Teachers and school administrators who attend intensive training sessions receive a small amount of per diem to cover lunch expenses. A key component of project support for education and capacity development in and outside the camps is extensive pre-service and in-service training. Training is provided in school management, supervision of school personnel, student-centered learning, Karen sign language, Karen Braille, use of curricula, teaching techniques, adult literacy, English, word processing, and (outside of camp) Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in Agriculture.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION: Outside of camps: consultations with district officers, school and community leaders, teachers, orientation to IPM and inputs provided (documents, seeds, equipment, teaching materials, school infrastructure materials). School Support and Training: teachers regularly paid, English and teacher support classes offered weekly, pre-service training provided 2-4 weeks in the summer and for 2 years (for selected high school graduates), and inputs provided (curricula, textbooks, teaching materials). Special Education (Deaf, Blind, Early Intervention): consultations with education leaders, school administrators, teachers and parents, home visits, teachers trained, parents awareness sessions organized, and inputs provided (sign language books, talking books, Braille materials, curricula and texts, stationary, teaching materials). Libraries (Karenni camps only): school meetings held, consultations with school administrators and teachers, and inputs provided (books, educational materials). Parent Education Program (Karenni camps only): consultations with education leaders, school administrators, teachers and parents, committee meetings held, trainers trained, 10-week Parent Education Program, and inputs provided (teaching materials). Adult Literacy: consultations with community leaders, adult literacy trainers and teachers trained, and inputs provided (teaching materials, stationary, Muslim Community Center, construction materials/furniture).

TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM: Education specialists promote participatory, student-centered teaching methods rather than traditional learning by rote. New teachers take part in the Teacher Preparation Course. Refugee educators are developing science, social science and

health teaching materials in diverse ethnic languages. Teachers have opportunities to increase their knowledge through a Teacher Training College or 3 Teacher Preparation Courses, and can enroll in intensive English courses. Regular surveys assess needs.

Programming Interventions: Impact and Effectiveness

ACCESS: All services and activities are provided to all teachers and school administrators on an equal basis, regardless of ethnic background or religion. To ensure participation of the Muslim population in training courses, care is taken to provide documents in a language they can access (most often Burmese, rather than Karen). Committees to support special education have been organized to ensure community ownership. Meetings have been held with school administrators, teachers, community leaders and parents to reinforce the concept that education is for all, including those with disabilities or learning difficulties.

MANAGEMENT: The project has a commitment to support capacity development among education leaders in the Karen and Karenni camps to manage their own educational systems. While the 3 organizations that provide stipends to teachers have managed the distribution system, this is being transferred, in steps, to Karen education leaders. The Teacher Preparation Course, which operates in 3 camps, required a significant amount of this project's support and staff resources when it was implemented two years ago. Two TPC's are now completely managed by refugees. The third has identified counterparts and is moving toward self-management in the coming year. The adult literacy and special education programs have shown significant progress toward being able to operate on their own.

QUALITY: Many refugees have limited educational experience; few completed high school before fleeing Burma. Many of the teachers in the refugee schools never taught before but are selected as teachers because they are literate in Karen, Burmese and/or English. This has required a considerable investment in teacher training not only in use of curricula and texts, but in basic knowledge of teaching skills and methodology. Pre-service and in-service training is not compulsory; teachers volunteer to attend and participate. That the training sessions are consistently well-attended is an indication of their value to the teachers and administrators. Teachers rate the training sessions highly and classroom visits indicate many teachers apply what they learn in the classroom. The quality of the project's work is enhanced when the school or community takes a more active role in an activity's conception and implementation. This has been particularly apparent with the Special Education and Adult Literacy programs. Curriculum development is also enhanced when the work is negotiated with teachers in a process that involves them at each stage.

OVERALL PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS: Hundreds of teachers, previously untrained to be teachers, have been taught how to create participatory, student-centered learning programs. Educational opportunities for all segments of the refugee population have been increased. Children with special learning needs now have access to educational opportunities that were not available to them previously. Non-literate adults have been trained to read and write S'gaw Karen, P'go Karen, Burmese, Karenni, Urdu and Arabic. These literate adults are now in a better position to contribute to the development of their communities. School administrators are better prepared to manage their schools and support their teachers. Parents, many of whom never attended school in Burma, now have the opportunity to experience an educational course to prepare them to better understand and support their children in school. Teachers and school administrators outside of camp have gained valuable information and skills, through the Integrated Pest Management in Agriculture program, in order to implement organic gardening in their schools.

EQUIP1: Building Educational Quality through Classrooms, Schools, and

Communities is a multi-faceted program designed to raise the quality of classroom teaching and the level of student learning by effecting school-level changes. EQUIP1 serves all levels of education, from early childhood development for school readiness, to primary and secondary education, adult basic education, pre-vocational training, and the provision of life-skills. Activities range from teacher support in course content and instructional practices, to principal support for teacher performance, and community involvement for improving school management and infrastructure. EQUIP1 works with food for education issues and contributes to the provision of education and training in crisis and post-crisis environments.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) is the lead organization responsible for implementing EQUIP1 and is joined by fourteen outstanding partners: Academy for Educational Development, Aga Khan Foundation USA, CARE, Discovery Channel Global Education Fund, Education Development Center, Howard University, International Reading Association, The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, Juárez & Associates, Inc., Michigan State University, Save the Children, Inc., Sesame Workshop, University of Pittsburgh, and World Education, Inc..

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