

From **Emergency**  
to **Empowerment**

**AED** •

*The Role of Education for Refugee Communities*



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From Emergency to  
Empowerment

*The Role of Education  
for Refugee Communities*

By Annie Foster  
for the Academy for Educational Development

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The Academy for Educational Development is pleased to share this report with our colleagues in the international development and relief communities to help focus on a fundamental ingredient of humanitarian assistance: the education of refugees and displaced populations.

Over the last decade, the number of refugees has doubled. Today seven out of every eight refugee children have never been to school. The consequences of this reality are disastrous for the future of these children and their families. When denied the opportunity to acquire even basic knowledge and skills, refugees face the challenges of surmounting daily hardships, rebuilding their lives, and contributing to strengthening the economic and social fabric of their communities.

As this report compellingly articulates, education offers immediate and long-term benefits. It promotes both relief and development goals, bridging the two spheres of international assistance to the advantage of all. After life-and-death needs of refugees have been met, education is often the first and most important concern voiced by refugees themselves.

The right of every child to an education is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the World Declaration on Education for All. But education for refugees goes beyond a basic individual right. It can promote durable solutions to refugee crises by equipping refugees with the skills they need to become self-reliant—whether they return to their homelands or resettle elsewhere.

The Academy for Educational Development, colleagues, and donors are attempting resourceful, low-cost approaches to help refugees provide education and training to their communities. But greater and consistent attention to this issue by the international community is urgently needed.

It is for this reason that the Academy has drawn on both its own long history in providing education services in developing countries and the expertise found among other relief, development, and education practitioners to prepare this report on refugee education. For our part, we look forward to building on the experiences described in this report and to continuing our collaboration with our colleagues interested in assisting the world's most dispossessed populations.

Stephen F. Moseley  
President and CEO  
Academy for Educational Development

## **Education: Strengthening Relief and Development**

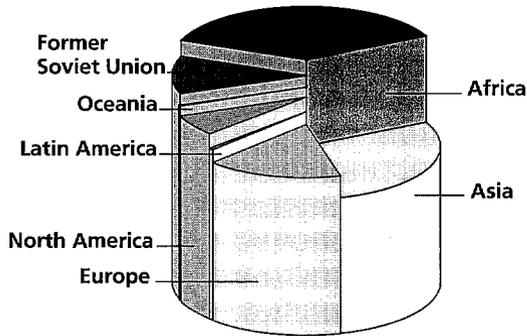
Today an estimated twenty million people are living beyond the borders of their home countries as refugees—double the number of ten years ago. Another twenty-six million are displaced in their own nations. In 1983, nine countries produced more than 50,000 refugees each. In 1992, thirty-one countries produced that many. In total, nearly 1 in every 115 people in the world is currently in flight. Over one-half of these are children, and the overwhelming majority are in the developing world.<sup>1</sup>

Virtually all of those uprooted are located in some of the world's poorest countries, such as Mozambique and Pakistan, or in countries such as Bosnia and Georgia, whose war-shattered economies are unable to meet even minimum human needs. In both cases, today's refugee crisis is hitting regions already straining to achieve economic growth and dependent on international assistance. In fact, the world's ten poorest countries—each a recipient of substantial international development assistance—are all struggling under the burden of large refugee or displaced populations.<sup>2</sup>

When a disaster triggers mass movements of people, hard-won development gains are immediately at risk and are often reversed. After an emergency, the road back to sustainable development is daunting. As the world is witnessing in Rwanda, Mozambique, and elsewhere, affected nations and their international partners must often rebuild economies from the ground up.

The longer that development goals are put on hold while populations remain displaced, the more difficult the process becomes of putting development programs back on track. In the international assistance arena, a division often exists between relief and development—in funding streams, objectives, and bureaucracies. This division makes the transition from relief to development for refugee and displaced populations difficult. Funding is the major constraint. When disaster strikes, the bulk of funding of necessity will go to relief operations that focus on the immediate conditions of emergency—food,

## LOCATION OF THE WORLD'S REFUGEES



Source: UNHCR October 1994

shelter, and security. Long-term economic and social development goals that were of high priority under conditions of stability can no longer be at the forefront of concern.

As examples cited in this paper illustrate, however, development concerns are not always overlooked. Perhaps the simplest and most effective vehicle to begin the transition from relief to development is education for refugee populations. Both refugees and international agencies recognize the power of education to strengthen not only immediate relief programs, but also long-term development. Education—basic literacy and numeracy skills, secondary schooling, and even adult literacy and vocational courses—is a human resources investment that supports both relief and development goals in critical ways. By investing relatively low amounts of supplementary funding, the international community can make available education and training programs that will produce sustainable results once refugees are repatriated and that will eventually save donors vast amounts that would be needed to address future emergencies.

In developing societies, every year of schooling beyond grade three or four can lead to up to 20 percent higher wages, up to 10 percent fewer births, and up to 10 percent fewer child deaths. Farmers with four years of education are 9 percent more productive than farmers who never went to school. Overall, a 20 to 30 percent increase in literacy can increase a nation's gross domestic product by 8 to 16 percent. When women are educated, they are likely to have fewer children, feed their children more nutritious foods, and better guard their children against life-threatening diseases.<sup>3</sup> These benefits to development are in jeopardy if large portions of society are denied access to education while squandering precious time as refugees.

For the short term, empowering refugees with basic skills, knowledge, and access to information can reduce their immediate vulnerability and dependence on outside assistance. For the long term, educated refugees are better equipped to rebuild their lives and contribute to the reconstruction of their communities—reducing the need for substantial international assistance just to meet subsistence needs.

However, with an average of only 12 percent of refugee children attending school, we are facing “a state of educational emergency of refugee children,”

according to one expert.<sup>4</sup> Despite the obvious gains for development and reconstruction, the education of refugees is increasingly neglected. In 1993, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), facing budget shortfalls across the board, spent \$36.4 million on primary and secondary education—about 2.8 percent of its overall budget for that year.<sup>5</sup>

Today, concerted action on refugee education is needed more than ever—not merely because of the precipitous rise in sheer refugee numbers, but because of the changing nature of refugee assistance and the proof we now have of education's clear benefits. A decade ago, almost one-third of all refugees were from Indochina or Afghanistan. The Cold War nature of the conflicts in these two regions prompted substantial amounts of Western assistance to those uprooted by war. The United States alone funded a Filipino refugee center that served 250,000 Indochinese refugee students bound for resettlement in the United States. Between 1990 and 1993, \$90 million was allocated to programs, including extensive school projects, that assisted Afghan refugees. Both of these programs were shut down in 1994.<sup>6</sup> Today's refugees, fleeing conflicts without Cold War dimensions, do not benefit from such large-scale programs of the past.

Moreover, few of today's refugees benefit from the guidance and resources provided by the national liberation movements that represented large refugee populations in the 1980s. For example, both the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) and the African National Congress (ANC) considered education a priority for their uprooted members and made it compulsory for all children in many refugee camps.<sup>7</sup> As refugees from South Africa and Namibia have repatriated, or are in the process of doing so, their numbers are being replaced by refugees from other locations without the benefit of well-funded leadership movements that recognize the need for education.

Finally, research has proven the direct link between education and improved development prospects. Education, especially for girls and women, substantially increases economic output, improves health standards, and raises standards of living. As today's refugees face a world of violence, fragile economies, increased health risks from AIDS and other diseases, environmental deterioration, and declining foreign-aid levels, it becomes even more urgent that refugees be armed with the education and knowledge that will directly assist them not only to survive but also to prosper.

Aware of at least some of the important benefits of education, refugees themselves will usually initiate their own education efforts, despite the lack of books, tools, or training. In a refugee camp in Southern Uganda, for example, Rwandan teachers began using an abandoned building in which to teach primary school-age children, making do without benches, tables, and other supplies.<sup>8</sup> In Croatia, Bosnian refugee teachers began organizing for refugee children activities that eventually developed into regular classes.<sup>9</sup> In the mid-1980s, the Tigrayan refugee organization in Sudan established its own education system that within six months was reaching 25,000 students.<sup>10</sup> Amid the danger and chaos in Somalia in 1993, some 63,000 children attended daily Koranic “schools,” where lessons were usually taught under shade trees.<sup>11</sup> Such examples are testament to the priority placed on education by certain segments of refugee communities despite the upheaval and insecurity of their daily lives.

By assisting these types of initiatives, undertaking others, such as those described below, and recognizing the importance of maintaining educational opportunities in an emergency, the international community can help refugees to take control of their lives, prepare for their futures, and shorten the road back toward sustainable development.

## **What Refugee Education Programs Can Achieve**

Educational programs for refugee and displaced communities can contribute to meeting immediate relief needs while simultaneously serving as a crucial investment in long-term development.

### Short-term Benefits

**Building Skills for Survival.** Educated refugees are more apt to retain health messages, such as instructions on protection against disease and malnutrition—two leading contributors to death tolls among refugee populations.<sup>12</sup> Educated refugees are better able to access services, such as family tracing programs, and put to good use benefits supplied through repatriation and resettlement plans. Participating in secondary and specialized schooling can prepare refugees to take over camp administrative responsibilities, health monitoring duties, and other activities that allow refugees to take control of their situation and reduce the burden on foreign assistance.

**Empowering Refugee Women.** The percentage of female-headed households usually increases in refugee settings as families become separated during flight and because men are frequently away fighting wars or seeking employment. Training and education help refugee women to meet their increased responsibilities for maintaining their families' health and welfare. Women refugees themselves are often at greater risk of water-borne diseases and land mines as they carry out their traditional duties of collecting water and firewood. Moreover, research suggests fertility rates often rise in refugee settings, increasing reproductive health risks.<sup>13</sup> Literacy skills and health education help women—and girls—to access information about how to protect themselves against these hazards.

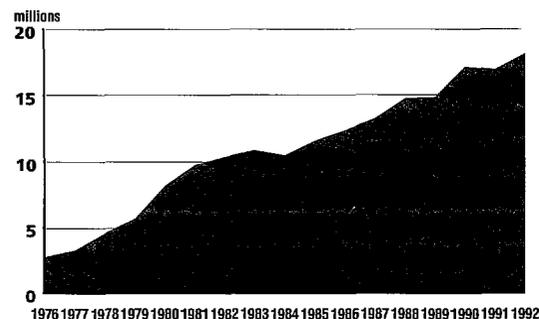
**Introducing Structure Amid Upheaval.** Education programs in refugee settings are one of the few activities that can help bring a degree of normalcy back into people's lives. The return of structure, productivity, and responsibility can be a fundamental first step on the road to recovery. One experienced refugee official explains, "The care and maintenance phase of any refugee emergency is the most frustrating—you can tread water forever. From day one you should make sure time is spent as productively as possible."<sup>14</sup>

Refugee life too often engenders dependency on food hand-outs and other assistance. Planning and participating in educational programs can provide refugees with a sense of purpose, achievement, self-respect, and hope for the future. Education can help to maintain a momentum of productivity within refugee communities—a momentum that can be instrumental later during the rehabilitation and development phase.

Refugees frequently suffer from stress, anxiety, and depression after having lived through extremely traumatic experiences. Symptoms of post-traumatic stress can last for years and even throughout lifetimes, decreasing productivity and tearing at the social fabric of communities. Recently, donors have allocated significant amounts of funds to programs providing psychosocial services to victims of trauma among uprooted communities. In just Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, at least 76 organizations are implementing some 127 different psychosocial projects.<sup>15</sup>

For child victims, psychologists and experienced relief workers agree that one of the most effective means of relieving psychological repercussions from a

#### GLOBAL NUMBER OF REFUGEES: 1976-1992



Source: UNHCR October 1994



*Education for refugee girls reaps important, long-term benefits.*

crisis is to create a secure, caring, and structured environment in which children can thrive. Regular schooling can play a key role in establishing such an environment. Organized primary and preschool activities have the added benefit of providing mothers with time away from child-rearing duties, so that they can pursue other activities.

**Providing Options for Refugee Youth.** Learning and gaining skills for a productive future provide options for youths growing up amid the violence that often characterizes refugee situations. The possible role of education as a deterrent to violent behavior and even a counterbalance to conscription activities by militias found among some refugee and displaced communities needs to be explored. In war zones, the youth population is potentially the most explosive segment among refugee communities. Education can provide young people with alternatives to crime, gang activities, and the temptation to pick up arms. The cost of such programs could be less than the eventual cost for the rehabilitation and development of the affected region caused by juvenile delinquency, massive numbers of street children, crime, and embedded violence.

### Long-term Benefits

**Strengthening Human Resources.** Educated refugees are better prepared to contribute to the reconstruction of their homelands after repatriation. If refugees resettle outside their country of origin, knowledge and skills can help them to build a new life for themselves. In either circumstance, the more quickly refugees themselves can manage the challenges at hand, the less foreign assistance is likely to be needed to maintain subsistence levels.

**Improving Development Prospects.** While it is unlikely that refugees will remain in flight throughout their lives, their education—or lack thereof—will have an important, lifelong impact. The interruption of a significant portion of an entire generation's education because of an emergency can have devastating effects on development.

**Fostering New Attitudes.** Education programs that include culturally appropriate curricula and address topics such as conflict resolution, peace education, civics, democratic values, AIDS awareness, and trauma equip refugees with methods of dealing with the past and looking productively at the future. Such specialized curricula must be well-grounded in the cultural

realities of the targeted population and incorporate traditional practices and beliefs. If implemented properly, however, the programs could have long-term stabilizing effects for refugee communities.

**Improving Educational Practices.** The vast majority of today's refugee and displaced populations are located in the developing world, where most teachers still follow traditional instructional practices. Refugee education programs provide an opportunity to train teachers in modern, participatory, child-centered teaching methods. Similarly, techniques in school administration, record keeping, gender sensitivity, and other educational practices can also be introduced. If parents and community leaders are encouraged to take on responsibilities for refugee education programs, a level of community participation that may sustain itself once the emergency is over is achieved. All of these steps would have long-term benefits for local and national educational systems—improving standards and attracting more students to stay in school longer.

## Effective Approaches

In spite of the difficult challenges involved in providing education to uprooted populations, a variety of resourceful approaches have been implemented around the world. Frequently, more than one approach is used within a given refugee context. This helps to meet the specific needs of different segments of the refugee population and to provide access to a greater number of people.

International assistance can be particularly useful in supplying resources, such as training and school materials, that enable refugees and host communities to operate their own programs. In addition, international representatives can promote coordination among educational officials within the refugee community, those of the host country, and those of the country of origin—increasing both the sustainability and legitimacy of the program.

While more careful evaluation of the approaches described here is urgently needed, they provide useful models for establishing education programs that take into account the changing nature of today's global refugee crisis. Many adopt effective means of keeping costs down and shortening implementation timetables. As these examples illustrate, successful approaches consider the specific needs and circumstances of a targeted population. In all cases, however,

# Benefits of Education for Refugees

## Short-term Benefits

- **Build Skills for Survival:** Educated refugees are better able to retain health messages, access services, and take on administrative responsibilities—all of which work to reduce the burden on foreign assistance.
- **Empower Refugee Women:** Education and training help refugee women meet their increased responsibilities and protect themselves and their children against life-threatening hazards.
- **Provide Options for Refugee Youth:** Education could be a deterrent to violent behavior among refugee youth, often the most explosive segment among refugee communities.
- **Introduce Structure Amid Upheaval:** Education can counteract dependency, bringing a sense of purpose and hope for the future. For children, regular schooling can be one of the most effective means of relieving symptoms of crisis-related trauma.

## Long-term Benefits

- **Strengthen Human Resources:** Educated refugees are better prepared to contribute to the reconstruction of their homelands, possibly reducing foreign assistance needs.
- **Improve Development Prospects:** Every year of schooling beyond grade three or four can lead to up to 20 percent higher wages, up to 10 percent fewer births, up to 10 percent fewer child deaths, and other solid development gains. The interruption of a significant portion of an entire generation's education because of an emergency can have devastating effects on development.
- **Foster New Attitudes:** Lessons addressing conflict resolution, peace education, civics, democratic values, AIDS awareness, and trauma can be incorporated into schooling programs, equipping refugees with methods of dealing with the past and looking productively at the future.
- **Improve Educational Practices:** Refugee situations provide opportunities to improve curriculum and pedagogical techniques for the long term. The decentralization and community-level participation that characterize most refugee education programs, coupled with the short-term participation of outside professionals, could offer a unique chance to reform outmoded educational practices.

essential issues to be addressed include collaboration among key players, level of education and content of curriculum, and delivery modes.

### Collaboration Among Key Players

Enlisting the participation, expertise, and general good will of officials from the host country and the country of origin for refugee education programs produces multiple benefits. Not only does it work to legitimize the effort, but also it significantly enhances the probability that the program will be continued after international assistance is withdrawn. International agencies can be especially helpful in launching collaborative relationships between refugee officials and their counterparts—both local and back home—to devise and implement strategies acceptable to all.

**Working in Partnership with Host Communities.** The 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees mandates that host countries accord to refugees the same treatment in education as is accorded to nationals.<sup>16</sup> In reality, however, the majority of today's host countries are in the developing world and are unable to provide sufficient education opportunities even for their own citizens.

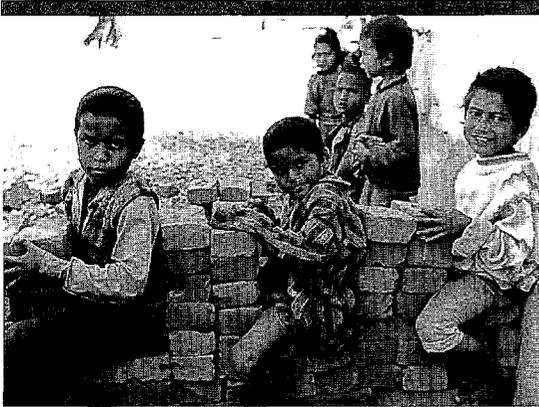
Consequently, UNHCR and other international agencies sometimes assist host countries to meet the education needs of both local and refugee populations. Innovative programs implemented by UNHCR and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in certain refugee situations take an area-based approach, incorporating the needs of both the refugee and local community. This "cross mandate" strategy has been applied in Ethiopia, for example, to equitably assist all populations—refugee, displaced, and war-affected—through community-based programs. "Quick-Impact Projects" are implemented to improve water resources, maintain clinics, and repair schools, for example.<sup>17</sup>

UNDP's Development Program for Displaced Persons, Refugees, and Returnees in Central America also follows this strategy. The program includes the construction and repair of primary schools, training of teacher trainers, literacy programs for adults, and other education activities. Each activity is initiated at the community level.<sup>18</sup>



*Refugee children from Mozambique listen to their school teacher at Chifunga camp.*

UNHCR/A. Hollmann



*Bhutanese refugee boys in Nepal play "truck driver."*

In most refugee contexts, UNHCR tries to identify means for refugee children to attend local schools. This usually entails the international community covering the cost of school fees and other expenses. Local authorities sometimes resist this approach, however, fearful that refugees will want to settle permanently or that local residents will resent the special treatment accorded to refugees. Such obstacles point to the need for participation in the decision-making process by local community and school leaders as well as by their refugee counterparts.

Innovative plans that address the needs of the local as well as refugee community can be designed. In Sierra Leone, for example, 200 Liberian refugee secondary school students were allowed to attend a local school free of charge in exchange for the provision of teaching aids and other materials that benefitted the entire student body. The cost to the international community was less than the cost of 200 scholarships. In 1992, \$12,732 in Belgian funds built three additional classrooms onto a community school in Burundi. In exchange, 200 Rwandan refugee children were admitted, the cost equivalent of \$64 per student.<sup>19</sup>

The cooperation of both host and home country governments can sometimes produce surprising results. In 1988 in Malawi, host at that time to roughly one million Mozambican refugees, UNDP officials and representatives from both countries discussed basic education needs. Although Malawian communities generally accepted the presence of the refugees, the Malawian curriculum was in English; the Mozambican, in Portuguese. Officials finally agreed to initiate bilingual educational programs for areas with large refugee populations.<sup>20</sup>

**Working with Countries of Origin.** International aid can assist coordination between the government of a refugee community's home country and refugees themselves to operate school programs. This approach is beneficial when refugees are located in remote areas or when they are unable to mix with host communities because of language or cultural barriers. Friendly relations between the refugee community and the government of their country of origin is, of course, a necessary prerequisite.

Refugees in Guinea's remote forest region established their own schooling system, which began receiving assistance from the U.S.-based International Rescue Committee in 1991 (with UNHCR and U.S. funding). Some 56,000

students—all refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia—are enrolled in preschool through twelfth grade.

Through the program, education officials from Sierra Leone and Liberia were brought together to develop a joint curriculum. Both governments have since ensured that students will receive full credit in their home countries. Trained school coordinators drawn from the refugee population ensure performance standards are maintained in each of the 169 schools. Over 1,000 teachers have been trained in child-centered instructional techniques and attend regular in-service workshops. The West African Examination Council has officially recognized the school system. Examiners from Sierra Leone and Liberia come to Guinea to administer the Council's exams to ninth and twelfth grade students. In 1993, Liberian refugee students fared slightly better on the exams than their counterparts back home.<sup>21</sup>

In Croatia, about 3,000 Bosnian refugee children attend extraterritorial schools run by the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina and recognized by the Croatian government. Again, many of these schools were started through the initiative of refugee teachers. But they face difficult and unfamiliar circumstances, such as overcrowding, a lack of supplies, trauma-related stress experienced by themselves as well as by their students, inadequate space, and fluctuating numbers of students. Through USAID's Advancing Basic Education and Literacy (ABEL) Project, in 1994 teachers attended a training workshop in curriculum development, communication skills, conflict management in schools, discussion techniques, and evaluation methods.<sup>22</sup>

**Working Directly with Refugee Communities.** When refugees are forced to reside in camps, they are often not given the option to attend local schools. In these circumstances, international assistance can build on the expertise, initiative, and resources of the refugees themselves, supporting both nonformal and formal education programs. However, without resources being invested by the host or home country, these programs risk being overly dependent on international assistance and must rely heavily on the commitment generated toward such programs within the refugee community itself.

The choice between a formal or nonformal structure often depends on available resources. It can also depend on the refugees' desires and lifestyles, which are usually diverse even within a targeted refugee population. In addition,

nonformal programs, which pave the way for more formal structures later on, can be established and supported quickly.

Refugee women's associations are often particularly productive, dynamic, and interested in the educational needs of their children as well as their own training needs. The advice and leadership of such groups can prove beneficial to establishing educational programs in refugee camps. Unlike many men, women are usually full-time camp residents and are aware of both the immediate needs and the potential pitfalls that need to be considered.

Save the Children/USA is assisting parents in refugee communities in Croatia to set up community-based preschools. Parents recognized the need for organized activities for their children as a means of reestablishing a sense of order in their lives. Save the Children trains parents to run the schools, which are supervised by trained monitors among the refugee population. Parents are responsible for finding an appropriate space, and Save the Children provides each school with \$150 for repairs or other structural needs. Each school then receives nine months of technical and financial support, including advice on fund-raising, to keep the school going.<sup>23</sup>



UNHCR/A. Hollmann

*Refugee children from Mozambique enjoy music during the school day at Chifunga camp.*

In Somalia, UNICEF support helps maintain community-based Koranic schools, in which boys and girls are taught religious precepts and basic literacy. By providing simple inputs such as benches and access to clean water, the program helps to raise the status of these nonformal schools, and the number of children participating has increased. Hopefully, the older students (eight to ten years old) will view these schools as an alternative to violence and other destructive activities.<sup>24</sup>

A more formal school program serving Bhutanese refugees in Nepal is receiving UNHCR support. Each of the eight refugee camps has its own primary school, run by refugee teachers, who use Bhutanese curriculum and textbooks.<sup>25</sup>

In Pakistan, international assistance is supporting a network of formal refugee schools for Afghans with everything from school construction and supplies to developing curriculum, training teachers, and monitoring performance.<sup>26</sup>

### Level of Education and Content of Curriculum

Basic and vocational education are commonly in the greatest demand among refugee communities.<sup>27</sup> Because children comprise over half of all refugees and because a large percentage of refugees are illiterate, basic education programs undoubtedly address the needs of the largest segment of refugees. Yet, the need for other levels of instruction, from preschool (as in Croatia) through secondary and tertiary, should not be ignored. Among Ugandan refugees in southern Sudan in the 1980s, for example, the lack of opportunity for continuing education had a noticeable effect:

*Unfortunately, too many of these "stranded students" formed the groups of listless, apathetic, angry, and sometimes even violent young people who were always so visible in settlements . . . . Every settlement had at least one psychotic and most of these were young men whose education had been abruptly terminated and who had been unable to cope with having had all their aspirations for the future so completely dashed . . . . [T]he lack of opportunity for continuing education appeared to be a very common trigger for individual breakdown.<sup>28</sup>*

**Basic and Postprimary Education.** Decisions about the appropriate approach and curriculum for educational programs should incorporate the expectations and advice of all concerned, including refugee leaders, students,

parents, host-country officials and their counterparts in the country of origin, and outside education experts.

In the past, discussions have become bogged down over whether education should be designed for repatriation or for resettlement.<sup>29</sup> Yet, the two need not be mutually exclusive. The overwhelming majority of today's refugees are fleeing from one agricultural-based, developing country to another. Literacy and numeracy skills, as well as those skills useful in farm production, marketing, small-scale enterprise, health, administration, and other areas, are extremely relevant for the future of most refugees, no matter what that future may be.

Such commonalities, however, need to be balanced with the specific needs of individual refugee populations. Curriculum appropriate for nomadic children from Sudan, for example, will differ from that appropriate for urban youths from Sarajevo. Programs that are grounded in the social and cultural realities of the targeted population can expect the greatest results.

The language of instruction is often at issue, as the use of a refugee's native tongue or that of the host country could have a profound influence on a refugee's ultimate decision to either repatriate or resettle. UNHCR guidelines encourage the use of the refugee's own language, particularly in the early grades.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, a school program that uses the language as well as the curriculum of the country of origin and builds applicable skills could work to stimulate repatriation, providing that refugees perceive opportunities back home.

Some recent experiences illustrate how refugee situations provide opportunities to improve curriculum and pedagogical techniques for the long term. Teacher training in child-centered techniques among Afghan and Bosnian refugee populations, for example, could have a sustainable impact on education systems once the crises are over. The decentralization and community-level participation that characterize most refugee education programs, coupled with the short-term participation of outside education professionals, could offer a unique and strategic chance to reform outmoded educational practices.

Similarly, basic education programs can serve as a central vehicle for addressing urgent short-term concerns, such as health risks, mine awareness, conflict resolution, and the treatment of trauma. Incorporating special lessons—in teacher training and/or directly into classroom instruction—could reduce the

need for funding full-scale parallel programs that address each issue separately. At the very least, it could reinforce any messages refugee families receive through other programs and, perhaps, strengthen refugee parents' perception of the relevance of education for children.

This approach has been pioneered in programs designed for women refugees by which health messages and other special instructions are incorporated in basic education programs. Among Hmong refugees in Thailand, for example, a health education program was proving ineffective until simple nutrition and health messages were incorporated into a broader basic education program that included literacy courses and other subjects of particular concern to women.<sup>31</sup>

A UNESCO primary education program for Rwandan refugee children in Tanzania includes simple messages on the cause and prevention of cholera. Such resourceful uses of basic education programs could have enormous impact. By linking short-term needs with longer-term education goals, such programs have broader benefits and immediate relevance to the situation at hand. Both effects could encourage greater participation by the refugee population overall.

**Vocational Training and Adult Literacy Courses.** Adult educational programs can teach refugees skills that will be useful whether they settle in host countries or return home. Courses in literacy and administration can provide refugees with the capacity to direct camp affairs. Training in specialized subjects, such as community health care or construction, can offer opportunities for immediate employment by international relief organizations as well as increase future employment opportunities. When vocational programs include lessons in basic literacy and health, the impact on long-term development needs is even greater.

Enthusiasm for vocational programs on the part of refugees stems from the very real need to earn income. Unfortunately, local economies are rarely vibrant enough to absorb refugee workers and craftspeople. Needs assessments conducted before the design of such programs must include careful attention not only to what the refugees want to study, but to the availability of opportunities for new skills to be applied either within the local economy or back home.

An apprenticeship program for Afghan refugees, supported by a Belgian organization, provides an example of an innovative approach to vocational training.

By providing training through the placement of refugees in successful local businesses, the risk of teaching unmarketable skills is reduced. Refugee apprentices were placed with local master craftspeople, who received a set of tools as an incentive and benefitted from the free labor provided by the refugee apprentices. Altogether, twenty-three different trades were included in the program. Of the 530 apprentices, 50 percent found waged employment and another 35 percent were able to start their own businesses after completing their apprenticeships.<sup>32</sup>

Adult literacy classes are frequently established by refugee women's groups and can benefit substantially from international support. For example, among other successful activities, the Khmer Women's Associations in Cambodian camps in Thailand established a thorough network of literacy classes for women and supplied teachers for preschool children while mothers attended training courses.<sup>33</sup> A similar program was established by a women's group in Chiapas, Mexico, home to 26,000 Guatemalan refugees.<sup>34</sup> In Malawi, traditional birth attendants at one Mozambican refugee camp were enrolled in literacy classes. This improved their work and provided role models for women and girls throughout the camp.<sup>35</sup>

### Delivery Modes

Formal schooling is often the preferred delivery system for most refugee educational programs, particularly because of the familiar structure it provides and the face-to-face daily interaction between teacher and pupil. However, the cost of building and maintaining schools for an ostensibly transient population can prove inhibitive. Recent experiences with nontraditional delivery systems, such as the use of prepackaged materials, distance education, and scholarships, point to the availability of viable alternatives.

**Introducing Prepackaged Materials.** A UNESCO initiative known as "school in a box" provides enough supplies for forty to eighty elementary school students for up to three months at a cost of \$150 a box. The accompanying teacher training, or training of trainers, requires only a handful of expatriate specialists. The program was originally pioneered in Somalia by UNESCO. The materials have been translated and modified for use among Rwandan refugees in Tanzania. The Academy for Educational Development is working with UNESCO and other partners to implement the program.

The concept is evidence of a bold change in thinking about refugee education—a recognition that it does not always require investing large sums of money, building schools, and hiring teachers with advanced degrees.

Designed as a quick response, self-sufficient “classroom,” the box holds slates, chalk, exercise books, a teacher’s guide with daily lesson plans in literacy and numeracy, an attendance book, and supplies for various activities. As mentioned, the kits for Rwandan refugees include illustrated health messages on preventing cholera. While the boxes are the programs “hardware,” the “software” includes training of trainers, monitoring and supervision, and teachers’ incentives. The program is designed to be used only for several months, a stop-gap measure until more formal systems can be introduced.

It is essential that members of the refugee population take leading roles in planning, implementing, and overseeing the program. This helps to instill it with cultural relevance and community character, and encourages a feeling of ownership over the program by refugees themselves.

**Distance Education.** Open learning, or distance education, uses a variety of media, including print and radio, to provide education to large numbers of students. In the refugee context, it is primarily used for secondary schooling and teacher training. One benefit of distance education is that it does not require constructing schools or employing full-time, highly skilled teachers. Moreover, sets of teaching materials can usually be produced locally and replace the need for expensive textbooks. Students can enroll at anytime and study at their own pace.

A distance education program targeting refugees between the ages of fourteen and thirty-seven was set up in Sudan in the 1980s. Assistance from the International Extension College in Britain helped to establish a unit in Khartoum that produced all the materials. Full lower secondary courses were made available in English, math, biology, physics, and chemistry comprising thirty self-study units of up to 150 pages each. A primary health care course was also available for health care trainers. Students could meet with tutors and study together at regional study centers.<sup>36</sup>

The challenge with this approach is the potential for large dropout rates. The programs do not provide the daily structure and teacher contact that help to



UNHCR/M. Amari

*Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia: Many young refugees have no adult family members.*

encourage and motivate students in more formal schooling. Creative methods for incorporating student incentives into such programs need to be examined. Moreover, programs must be carefully designed to match the expressed needs of students, and efforts to make courses relevant to local cultures and daily life are beneficial.

**Scholarships.** Several international and voluntary agencies provide scholarships to refugees. UNHCR has a special account to cover scholarships for qualified refugee students wanting to attend a university. Totalling about \$3 million annually, the fund is dependent on voluntary contributions, which, given the international community's lack of attention to this issue, are not easy to come by. The scholarships cover the cost of registration fees, food, insurance, housing, and books, and funds can help to support needy families who depend on their student son or daughter for income. The Organization for African Unity has a similar fund that annually provides about \$1 million in university scholarships to African refugees.

The qualifications and skills acquired through tertiary education prepare refugees to manage the rehabilitation of their countries and make wise use of foreign development assistance. A very limited number of refugees caught up in today's emergencies have the educational background to qualify for acceptance to a university. Still, the solid gains in indigenous human resource capacity that comes with a highly educated cadre of leaders hold enormous benefits for development. Some form of contract could be drawn up with the students, guaranteeing they will return to apply newly learned skills to benefit their home communities.

## **Constraints to Refugee Education**

Several obstacles stand in the way of educational programs becoming part of the assistance provided to refugee and internally displaced populations. Perhaps the most immediate constraint is the lack of funding for such programs. Under the press of dire emergencies, the bulk of funding goes to the most urgent concerns—food, shelter, and security—not to schooling. The small amount of funding that may be available for education means that instructional materials and basic school supplies and equipment cannot be provided to the degree needed, if at all.

The lack of commitment to invest in education for refugees stems in part from the perception that education is a long-term investment that requires expensive inputs and yields few tangible results in the short run. The lack of funding for education is also a symptom of the divide between relief and development organizations in the international community.

In reality, as the examples above illustrate, as soon as systems are in place to meet emergency needs for water, food, and sanitation, in most circumstances, educational programs can be integrated into the care and maintenance phase of international assistance at a relatively low cost. Refugee teacher salaries, for example, are usually far below the national average and can often be substituted in whole or in part with incentives other than cash, such as in food-for-work programs.

Another constraint lies in the division within international bureaucracies between disaster relief programs and development programs. Competing



UNHCR/H.J. Davies

*Refugee youth learns a trade at the UNHCR-sponsored Pakistan Government Training School.*

bureaucracies, limited resources, and divergent priorities tend to inhibit coordination and the design of a comprehensive approach that takes short- and long-term needs into consideration. While development agencies often view refugees as outside of their mandates, relief agencies tend to see education as a development activity. Consequently, refugee education falls through the cracks.

Additionally, a lack of educational expertise among relief officials works to reinforce education's low priority. Within the UNHCR, for example, education programs are usually the responsibility of community or social services officers in the field. While UNHCR has guidelines for providing education to refugees, the overall programmatic plans for responding to refugee needs are generated by field offices. UNHCR officials admit that when funding is tight, education is often one of the first programs to be cut. Training relief workers and education specialists about education would foster a greater understanding of the benefits and methods for establishing effective educational programs.

Finally, host communities are sometimes reluctant to allow educational programs for refugees. This can arise from multiple factors, including a fear that refugees will deplete local resources or compete for scarce economic opportunities. Sometimes communities resent what they view as special treatment provided to refugees by the international community. As noted above, these obstacles can be overcome by ensuring that the needs and expectations of host communities are recognized and incorporated into educational programs.

## **Recommendations**

Providing education to refugees and displaced populations is one of the most effective and essential means of assisting uprooted people to rebuild their lives and their communities. The international community can take the following immediate, constructive actions:

- Address education needs early in a relief operation. Target assistance that builds on the initiative and expertise found within refugee communities and that provides opportunities for everyone in the community to participate.
- Use the structure provided by education programs to address other essential concerns, such as the needs of trauma victims and the introduction of

conflict resolution projects and health education. Using schools as a focus for activities can reduce the need for separate and parallel programs.

- Offer educational opportunities as a constructive choice for older children facing pressure to take up weapons or participate in other destructive behavior.
- Provide training on refugee education to relief officials, and ensure education specialists are involved in relief operations.
- Forge a cooperative partnership around this issue among the international development community, the relief community, and the education community. Valuable experience in establishing education programs in developing societies can be beneficially applied to refugee situations.
- Assist in coordination between host governments and countries of origin, particularly in providing access and setting and maintaining standards so that refugee education programs are recognized internationally. The greater assurance students have that their work will be recognized back home, the greater the chance is that they will attend school as a refugee and return home once the opportunity arises.
- Provide resources to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of approaches to refugee education, enabling useful lessons to be applied across operations.
- Establish an international resource center on education programs for refugee and displaced populations to collect, analyze, and disseminate information on effective techniques, available resources, and qualified personnel.

## Notes

1. Statistics provided by UNHCR. Also see "Human Development Report 1994," UNDP, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 47.
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"World Refugee Survey, 1994," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees)  
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3. Edward B. Fiske, "Basic Education," (Washington, D.C.: Academy for Educational Development, 1993), 1-2.
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Also, "U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants and Assistance from International Organizations, 1994," (Washington, D.C.: USAID, 1994).
7. Tony Dodds and Solomon Iquai, "Education in Exile: The Educational Needs of Refugees," International Extension College Broadsheets on Distance Learning, No. 20, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: International Extension College, 1983), 33.
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9. May Rihani, "Refugee and Displaced Children in Croatia: An Assessment of Their Education Needs." Report prepared for USAID ABEL Project (March 1994).
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12. Margaret Segal, Naomi Nyirongo, and Doris Mtsuko, "Education and Its Impact on Family Health: Implications for Refugee Programming," report prepared for subregional seminar of the International Rescue Committee, Malawi, (March 1991), 1.
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14. Faye Richardson, Regional Director, International Rescue Committee (Interview: September 1994).
15. "Theory and Practice of Psycho-Social Projects for Victims of War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina," (Zagreb, Croatia: European Community Task Force, January 1994).
16. The UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 22, paragraphs one and two state,
 

*The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education.*

*The Contracting States shall accord to refugees treatment as favourable as possible, and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education other than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships.*
17. "UNHCR Activities Financed by Voluntary Funds: Report for 1992 and 1993 and Proposed Programmes and Budget for 1994," (Geneva: UNHCR, 1993).
18. DeeDee Angagaw, Officer for Refugees, Humanitarian Programme, UNDP (Interview: September 1994).
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  30. "Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care," (Geneva: UNHCR, 1994), 113.
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  34. "UNHCR Activities Financed by Voluntary Funds: Report for 1992 and 1993 and Proposed Programmes and Budget for 1994," (Geneva: UNHCR, 1993).
  35. Margaret Segal et al. p. 9.
  36. Patrick, Healey "The Work of the Sudan Extension Unit and Proposal for a Refugee Educational Network," *Convergence*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1987), 49-57.

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