

March 2005

Project: Emergency Education and Psychosocial Support Programming for Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia

Locations: Eritrean refugees in camps in Ethiopia

Implementing Organization: International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Type of Programming: Psychosocial

Target group/beneficiaries: Children, youth, and community teachers

Stage: Transition/reconstruction

Environmental Context of the Program

SOCIAL: In the two years of cross-border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea (1998-2000), it is estimated that up to 80,000 people were killed and more than half a million people displaced. Most of the displacement took place within the borders of the countries, however 4,000 or so Eritrean nationals from the Kunama ethnic group sought refuge in northern Ethiopia because they were persecuted, witnessed or fell victim to killings, were forcibly conscripted into armies or were forced from their homes.

CULTURAL/RELIGION: Eritrea's population comprises nine ethnic groups: Tigrinya 50%, Tigre 31.4%, Saho 5%, Afar 5%, Beja 2.5%, Bilen 2.1%, Kunama 2%, Nara 1.5%, and Rashaida .5%. Most of the people speak Semitic or Cushitic languages. The Tigrinya and Tigre make up four-fifths of the population and speak different but related and somewhat mutually intelligible, Semitic languages. Tigrinya and Arabic are the most frequently used languages for commercial and official transactions, but English is widely spoken and is the language used for secondary and university education. The two major religions are: Christianity 50%, mostly Orthodox, and Islam 48%. About 2% adhere to indigenous beliefs. In general, most of the Christians live in the highlands, while Muslims and adherents of traditional beliefs live in lowland regions.

ECONOMIC: The Eritrean economy is largely based on agriculture, which employs 80% of the population but currently may contribute as little as 12% to GDP. Agricultural export include cotton, fruit and vegetables, hides, and meat, but farmers are largely dependent on rain-fed agriculture, and growth in this and other sectors is hampered by lack of a dependable water supply. Worker remittances and other private transfers from abroad currently contribute about 32% of GDP.

Political Relationships: Eritrea's relations with its neighbors other than Djibouti also are somewhat strained. Although a territorial dispute with Yemen over the Haynish Islands was settled by international arbitration, tensions over traditional fishing rights with Yemen resurfaced in 2002. Relations with Sudan also were colored by occasional incidents involving the extremist group, Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ)—which the Eritrean Government believes is supported by the National Islamic Front government in Khartoum—and by continued Eritrean support for the Sudanese opposition coalition, the National Democratic Alliance.

Program Description

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MATERIAL/PHYSICAL/FINANCIAL/HUMAN RESOURCES: The program is funded by UNHCR and BPRM. The school is located in a central location of the camp and the classrooms are built with corrugated iron roofs, plastic sheeting stretched over wood poles for the walls and corrugated iron doors with locks. IRC provides basic classroom supplies such as desks, chairs and blackboards. Each class has at least a 30:1 student teacher ratio. An IRC Project Manager (national recruit) and Project Coordinator (expatriate) have the overall responsibility for coordination and management of the program. Refugee community members and representatives are active participants in the program. On an operational level, the groups work closely with project officers and consultants who had technical expertise and specialized functions.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION: The program seeks to increase the organizational ability of the refugee community to ensure its ownership and eventual sustainability. The inclusion of community members from a wide spectrum of backgrounds (parents, teachers, adolescents and elders) helps to facilitate the task of community mobilization and organization. To date, this process resulted in the selection and training of 25 teachers, 17 youth-leaders, a 100-member PTA, a 13-member school committee and 6 psychosocial research assistants. This broad participation promotes sustainability and community ownership of the program.

TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM: As minimum criteria for selection, teachers are required to pass at least grade 6 themselves. Only 4 out of the 25 teachers had prior teaching experience therefore an additional series of intensive workshops are offered to overcome any deficiencies. The aim of the training programs for teachers and youth-leaders is to provide the necessary skills and knowledge for immediate deployment as well as to address the need for long-term capacity building among the community. Training covers technical topics such as curriculum development to specific and general management skills (e.g.: classroom management, lesson planning). Curriculum development is a central feature of the teacher-training program. Initially a major dilemma was deciding what curriculum to use, and how. Not knowing where the refugees would eventually resettle, and hoping it would be back home, it appeared logical to use the Eritrean curriculum. This, however, proved problematic as there were virtually no relevant educational resources (text books, teacher guides etc), and trying to import them was difficult. The problem was largely dealt with by providing the necessary skills to teacher trainees to enable them to develop a hybrid curriculum using the available resources of Ethiopian and Eritrean origin. Shortage or absence of text books in the Kunama native language necessitated creative solutions from teachers and project staff. Those who are fluent in the languages of the available textbooks (e.g. Tigrigna, Amharic or English) manually translate the contents to Kunamina. This avoids having to use a medium of instruction that is not readily understood by the students. Teachers skilled in drawing support others by providing visual teaching aids for various subjects. Currently the Ethiopian Government recognizes the education the Kunama refugees receive and have allowed refugee students seeking secondary education to enroll in government schools near the camp.

Programming Interventions: Impact and Effectiveness

ACCESS: Provision of non-formal education activities where subjects include: Tigrigna, English, Amharic, math, environmental science, social studies, science, arts, physical education and music. Provision of youth recreational activities: handicraft, sports, games, and cultural clubs. Training of community teachers and youth leaders with a focus on child protection and psychosocial care. Building and/or strengthening community awareness and advocacy for children and adolescents through formation, maintenance and training of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Community Committees charged with identifying and working with vulnerable groups. Provision of material support, i.e. educational supplies.

MANAGEMENT: IRC program officers with the active participation of refugee community members and representatives conducted the initial primary assessment of needs to determine the appropriate grade levels of students, organize teachers training curriculum and identify youth recreational and cultural activities. Community members actively participate in the program through PTAs, School Committees, youth-leaders and school administrators. The program closely collaborates with the government's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) in information sharing, coordination and technical expertise. Collaboration with the ARRA mainly deals with the physical settlement of refugees and their legal status while engagement with MoE relates to technical issues such as curriculum development and teacher training support.

QUALITY: To deal with the low-level of education among teacher candidates in the camp, training and task assignment is differentiated by levels of competence of each teacher. Those who had a low level of formal education (which are the majority) are assigned to teach lower grade classes. This did not necessarily pose a big problem at the start as the majority of the children and youth had not received any education at all.

OVERALL PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS: The most important achievement of the program, and also the hardest to measure, is its impact in helping children cope with the trauma and loss resulting from conflict and displacement. This can be inferred from the stability and sense of normality that results from structured activities in the educational setup. During the pre-intervention assessment, boredom was cited as one of the major frustrations faced by children and the youth. The education and youth program provides structured activities that keep children active and engaged. For example, when school closed for a one month break, a group of concerned parents wrote a letter to camp leaders requesting the immediate resumption of classes, pointing out that their children were becoming involved in disruptive activities. The positive attitude of students in school is also evident from the kind of drawings children are producing in classroom and learning the local language of the host community (Tigrinya) helps children cope with the cultural differences they initially experienced. An important outcome is the ability to influence government regulation and policy given the right channels of negotiation, professional conduct and close coordination. Involving the refugee community at every stage of the program (program, design, implementation, and day to day management) increases their capacity and capability to take on responsibility for the project. Training benefits all those involved and the national education program manager has now assumed management of the program with support from IRC. The relationship between refugees and the host community was, and continues to be positive, encouraging some parents to send their children to the refugee school, or participate in youth activities organized in the camp. Children are learning the skills necessary to rebuild a peaceful community both in Ethiopia and in the event of their return home.

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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