



Education Programming for Crisis Affected Youth: Case Study

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Organisation: International Rescue Committee

Location: Southern Sudan

Date of programme: 2006 – 2009

Context: Transition and Post-crisis

Case Study Themes:

- **Vocational training provision**
- **Lifeskills Programmes (education about HIV/AIDS, conflict resolution, etc)**
- **Mitigating the risk of self-destructive tendencies i.e. truancy, drugs and alcohol, sexual promiscuity**
- **Engaging youth in public/community services**

Background:

20 years of violence in Southern Sudan have meant that the majority of its young people have never known a time without war or violent conflict and instability. The provision of the basic necessary services and creation of sustainable livelihoods remains elusive for most Sudanese people, especially in the south part of the country.

Since 2004, an estimated two million Southern Sudanese have returned home from exile or from within Sudan, with more than 90% having done this spontaneously. Only a fraction of these returnees have received adequate assistance; this failure to address reintegration and recovery needs generates frustration, can ignite communal tensions, and may ultimately jeopardize the success of the peace process itself. Youth are particularly vulnerable to these feeling of frustrations, as not many opportunities exist for this group to acquire the tools and skills necessary to support themselves.

Formal and non-formal education opportunities, traditionally lacking in Southern Sudan, continue to be insufficient. While research to date has produced little data on new business opportunities, a list of possible livelihoods has been documented based on IRC's field experience, secondary information and observation. Using this information the South Sudan Program has been involved in carrying out vocational training activities in the two states of Central Equatoria and Northern Bahr – El – Ghazal in Aweil. These activities aim to provide youth with a marketable set of skills that will support the development of sustainable livelihoods, positive reintegration, ultimately working to counteract feelings of frustration.

The International Rescue Committee established the Child and Youth Protection and Development (CYPD) technical unit in 1997 in order to strengthen its ability to respond to the complex needs of children and youth in conflict and post-conflict settings.

The CYPD unit is comprised of three sub-sectors, Child Protection, Education and Youth and Livelihoods, and currently reaches children and youth in 21 countries and territories throughout Africa, Asia, and Europe. IRC's Youth and Livelihoods (Y&L) program aims to provide holistic support to conflict-affected youth by investing in the development of youth's social, civic, human and financial assets, with anticipation that these will have a multiplier effect on other aspects of their lives and them to make smooth transitions.

Details of the Intervention

The Y&L pilot project in South Sudan was developed in partnership with the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and from 2008 complimented with funding from UNICEF. The project aimed to contribute to the social and economic recovery of war-affected communities by equipping displaced and vulnerable youth (ages 15 to 24) with the transferable and adaptable skill sets needed to sustain their livelihoods through a vocational training program being implemented on 2 sites Aweil Town and Juba.

An innovative approach was tested in these pilot projects, a multi-staged application of best practices in livelihoods programming using contextually relevant strategies on two different tracks:

- Local institution building to promote sustainable livelihoods
- Direct skills-building interventions and promotion of youth entrepreneurship.

The program's design was based on a marketable skill survey conducted jointly by IRC and Transitions International in 2006. Local leaders, youth and community members participated in the design of the program, leading the selection process of youth trainee participants. In the first phase of the program, a total of 138 beneficiaries were placed for skills training in various training centers and apprenticeship arrangements around Juba. The youth were also trained in peer education, business management and career skills. In addition, IRC has trained and supported community based organizations involved in youth and livelihoods activities. Some of the beneficiaries who completed training were provided with toolkits to assist them in starting their own enterprises and put into practice the skills they learned during the training, while other trainees received job placement assistance.

From January to April 2008 the IRC Juba office carried out research to assess the impact of its youth & livelihoods projects conducted between 2006 and 2007 in Juba. The research aimed to find out the percentage of trainees employed after the training, to document lessons learned, and to develop strategies on how best to improve the latter phase of the training program. The study highlights both the successful aspects of programming such as increasing self-esteem and confidence of trainees as well as some of the challenges faced, including ensuring an appropriate level of gender balance, providing adequate follow-up and monitoring of trainees, clarity around partnership concepts with local government, and challenges of attracting and retaining qualified staff in programs. The documented lessons learned and findings of the study are expected to be published later this year.

Challenges to Programme Implementation

- Local capacity both for organizations and their staff members is slow. It can be difficult to recruit and retain capable staff members. Qualified staff members in

local organizations and vocational training centers in the project sites are frequently attracted to higher paying positions in Juba and Khartoum.

- Lack of social cohesion within communities that are made up of both returning refugees and IDPs and host communities can make the process of engaging the community slow.
- Poor infrastructure and heavy rains provided additional challenges. Heavy rains and flooding during July and August displaced people from the villages where IRC worked, making it far more difficult to organize meetings when village leaders and community members were scattered. Trainings that were planned had to be postponed, or in some cases, shortened, as trainees were concerned about the wellbeing of their families.

Programme Successes

- Youth who were trained in research methodology and participated in the market assessment developed stronger research skills, learned about how organizations work and have taken on more prominent roles in their communities. Their roles as community facilitators have enabled them to become a liaison between NGOs who work with them and their own community. As a facilitator in their own village, they are best placed to assess the situation in their own community and pass that information directly to the village leaders. During the community sessions, the youth can also engage with the community members about issues or ideas that they have learned in trainings. Trust and respect gained from their roles in facilitating community sessions seems to lead to increased engagement in community structures. Two out of the six youths who actively engaged with IRC during the PLA process have taken on increased responsibility by being elected to positions of responsibility within their community (e.g. the community committees). The PLA training and their role as PLA facilitators, working together with IRC's staff, provides the opportunity for youth both to learn more about how an organization works and to gain valuable work experience. The youth learned, more about how an organization works through their engagement in and observation of IRC staff planning for community sessions, organizing post-session evaluations and collating and organizing data. By voluntarily engaging as PLA facilitators, the youth also gained valuable work experiences that could be demonstrated on their CVs. One out of the six youths has secured his first paid job with a locally-based international NGO.
- Participants in the life-skills and livelihood trainings indicated their appreciation that they had been able to analyze their own personal risks and ways to mitigate these, as well as increasing their knowledge of issues such as HIV/AIDS awareness. Pre and post test assessments demonstrated increased knowledge but further monitoring and long-term evaluation is still needed to more carefully and concretely examine the continued impact of the training on participants.
- Half of the participants were able to find employment immediately after participating in the vocational training, particularly those working in catering, hospitality, computer and carpentry sectors. Those that did not faced challenges of barriers to capital. While earning an income is an important outcome of a y&l program, IRC believes that improved self-esteem, civic involvement and life skills are also strong indicators of the success of the program; moreover, while some

graduates are not immediately employed in their sector of choice, many developed skills that can be transferred to other jobs.

Lessons Learned and Good Practices

- One of the main lessons learned is that youth who engage with and participate in the PLA sessions in their communities develop new sets of skills and to play a role in the development processes of their own communities. They learn how to engage community members in participatory exercises, mapping of issues, and understanding of gender and gender roles in their own community from different point of views.
- Although the voluntary nature of the role does not yield immediate financial benefit, it does provide opportunities for future advancement, as shown by the fact that one of the PLA facilitator has secured a job with an international NGO, something that may have been more difficult to secure without the skills learned through the training and the practical experiences that he has gained. IRC plans to share this finding with other NGOs operating in and around Aweil Town, given that it has historically been difficult to engage youth in volunteer work without providing a financial incentive.
- IRC has observed that Civil Society Organizations (CSO) partners tend to organize vocational and livelihood trainings based on their own interests and expertise rather than considering both the specific interests and needs of the youth themselves and opportunities available in the labor market. More work is needed to ensure that vocational and livelihood training is based on current market assessments and consultations with young people; for instance, there is a growing consensus among local CSOs and vocational training inspectors that business start up and micro-finance trainings which focus on youth are urgently needed. As a result, IRC has introduced the concept of market assessment to local CSO partners, and will continue to work closely with partner organizations to build their capacities to better identify, plan, develop, implement, and evaluate vocational and livelihood programming. This will become a focus for future activities.