

INEE Minimum Standards Case Study: Setting Up Child Friendly Spaces in Yemen

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Background and Context

North Yemen, Amran governorate: In August 2008, fighting broke out between the Houthi rebels and military forces in the Saa'da governorate. As a result, thousands of people were displaced and forced to resettle in the Amran governorate. The host population of Amran views the displaced persons suspiciously as rebel collaborators and treats them accordingly.

Children have limited access to education and most have never been to school. The educational response focused on promoted access to existing schools through a range of activities. Stakeholders involved included the Ministry of Education, schools, teachers, the host population and the displaced population. The response was coordinated with other players such as Save the Children (SC), UNICEF, UNHCR, and local partner agencies. SC took the lead in emergency education response in the Amran governorate.

Application

Foundational Standards - Community Participation

Standard 1 - Participation. Community members participate actively, transparently, and without discrimination in analysis, planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education responses.

After identifying areas with high numbers of displaced people, SC visited the homes of displaced families as well as the host population to assess the needs of the community. Community meetings were held to explain the importance of children's activities and to discuss the establishment of Child Friendly Spaces (CFS). In each selected area, the community designated a location for a CFS and SC trained adult and youth volunteers to run it. Using a box of games provided by SC and UNICEF, the CFS volunteers organized regular activities for children. As community members cycled through the local CFS, either to drop off their children or merely to visit, discussions naturally emerged around the need to support the displaced people. As a result of these conversations, communities established committees representing a diverse range of stakeholders including community leaders, service providers, and representatives of both the host population and the displaced population. The activities of the committees varied based on the needs of the community, but included discussions about local incidents such as conflicts between families and supporting access to local services for displaced people who had faced discrimination. While in most cases the formal committees consisted of men only, informal discussions among CFS mothers also took place.

In addition to adult committees, many CFS volunteers initiated and supported children's committees. These committees provided an opportunity for children of the host population and displaced population to meet in a safe space. They discussed the challenges they faced and served as a support network for one another.

Domain 2: Access and Learning Environment

Standard 1 - Equal Access. All individuals have access to quality and relevant education opportunities.

In order to ensure that displaced children had equal access to all existing educational services, SC in collaboration with UNHCR and UNICEF, engaged in an extensive and successful advocacy process at both the regional and national levels. Following a series of meetings, the regional and national Ministry of Education issued a written statement affirming that all children may enroll in school and that documentation of previous schooling is not required (*this also falls under Domain 5, Standard 1, Law and Policy Formulation*). This statement was distributed to staff, teachers, and parents throughout the schools and elicited an extremely positive response. In principle, written documentation on decisions taken by the MOE is quite powerful in Yemen. SC further encouraged children's enrolment in school by providing children with bags and school supplies, as well as recreational and sports supplies for the schools.

Yemeni culture dictates that all males must defend their village in war and those who do not support the conflict physically, are required to provide monetary compensation. SC led negotiations with local leaders and teachers to allow children who had been fighting on the frontline to continue their education and teachers to return to teaching without providing any payment (*this also falls under Domain 5, Standard 1, Law and Policy Formulation*).

Domain 3: Teaching and Learning

Standard 1 - Curricula. Culturally, socially and linguistically relevant curricula are used to provide formal and non-formal education, appropriate to the particular context and needs of learners.

Standard 2 - Training, Professional Development and Support. Teachers and other education personnel receive periodic, relevant and structured training according to needs and circumstances.

Standard 3 - Instruction and Learning Processes. Instruction and learning processes are learner-centered, participatory and inclusive.

Teachers and CFS leaders received training on the INEE Minimum Standards as well as on concepts of education in emergencies and children's right to education. The volunteer facilitators of the CFS were trained in how to implement a two-hour program that follows a set routine, beginning with a group activity, followed by small group activities, followed by free play, and concluding with a group activity such as a puppet show, theater performance, or story-telling. In later phases of the intervention, CFS facilitators offered life skills trainings including first aid and other health-related lessons.

School teachers and CFS facilitators alike received training on a mine/UXO education program for children. Through this training, participants learned how to use interactive and learner-centered educational techniques to run age-appropriate mine awareness programs.

Domain 4: Teachers and Other Education Personnel

Standard 1 - Recruitment and Selection. A sufficient number of appropriately qualified teachers and other education personnel are recruited through a participatory and transparent process, based on selection criteria reflecting diversity and equity.

Initially, displaced teachers were unable to find teaching positions in the host community due to the negative attitudes towards them. SC successfully advocated for them to continue to receive a salary, however. After a year, tensions in the area eased slightly and the Ministry of Education allowed schools to hire displaced teachers. In areas where schools needed to hire extra teachers due to the increased enrolment of displaced children, SC ensured that the schools hired displaced teachers.

Challenges

- 1. Identification of Displaced Children:** Because the displaced people live dispersed among the host population, it was difficult to target and recruit them specifically for the intervention. However, our understanding that INEE Minimum Standards functions within a humanitarian and development framework that supports the notion that education is a fundamental human right for all enabled us to look at the entire situation. We recognized that school needs to be a protective place for all children, the displaced and host populations, and we widened the scope of the project to target all children.
- 2. Attitudes of Host Population and Ministry of Education Toward Displaced People:** SC faced great challenges in implementing a program to help improve education for displaced people in an area where those displaced people were looked at with great suspicion and fear. In emphasizing the participation of all community members, as stated in Standard 1 of Community Participation, to implement and run the Child Friendly Schools, the host population and displaced population worked together for a common cause. Doing so helped the host population see that the displaced children were not a threat and that all children deserved the right to education.
- 3. Government Attitudes towards the Conflict:** The government had a negative attitude toward the displaced people who they saw as their enemies in the conflict. As such, no special provisions were established for the displaced population and many denied the issue existed at all. While the advocacy of Save the Children ultimately resulted in a memo allowing all children to go to school, the government's rationale for doing so was not entirely just. The governorate saw education as a means of controlling the youth of displaced population, whom they feared would rebel and cause further conflict. As such, they issued a memo opening schools to all children, but not for the reasons advocated for by Save the Children.
- 4. Low Enrolment in Schools Before the Conflict**

Outcomes

With the INEE Minimum Standards as a guide for our actions, we successfully established CFSs for children of both displaced and host populations. We realized that both populations were affected by the crisis and, as such, all children needed safe spaces to play, learn, and grow. Because the displaced people are interspersed among the host population and difficult to target, including all children enabled us to identify and distinguish displaced persons. This was valuable for future interventions.

Emphasizing community participation in establishing and running the CFSs united them for a common cause, the education of their children. Working and playing together helped reduce tensions and ultimately built trust between the two groups. Due to the trust and unity that developed, displaced people felt comfortable remaining in these towns rather than migrating again.

We set up CFSs in school buildings over the summer. Once school started in the fall, displaced children were familiar with the space and some of the local children, resulting in an easier transition into formal education. Additionally, SC had identified displaced children during the CFS phase and could work directly with those who did not or could not enroll their children in school.

Through these interventions, we learned that people are greatly invested in the education and growth of their children and will overcome their differences to improve conditions for children. We also saw that attitudes and long-standing traditions can change for the sake of young people, even when just returning from the front line.

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