

Case Study

Education for South Sudanese Refugees in Ethiopia



Introduction

An education programme for South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia illustrates the use of two complementary sets of standards: the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)'s Minimum Standards for Education and Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards.

Mesfin Arega, the Catholic Relief Services Program Manager affirmed the value of using both sets of standards: "Using both sets of standards side by side is good. INEE's Education Standards were used for the school construction activities and Sphere was used for WASH. They complemented each other. Having a common understanding, using internationally accepted standards is a real advantage when it comes to planning for the long term.

Background and Context

Violent conflict in South Sudan between opposing elements of the national armed forces began in December 2013. Close to three million South Sudanese fled their homes, of whom over 300,000 crossed the border into Ethiopia.

In Gambella state, Ethiopia, education is a priority for the 55% of refugees who are aged 7-14 years, many of whom have missed significant portions of their primary education. At the time of the assessment, classes were being held in temporary classrooms made of plastic sheeting and sticks which only partially blocked the wind, rain, dust and sun. There were water shortages and school supplies were lacking.

Catholic Relief Services and the Ethiopian Catholic Church-Social and Development Commission worked in partnership with the Government of Ethiopia's Administration of Refugees and Returnees Affairs, UNHCR, Trocaire and the Norwegian Refugee Council to improve education facilities for over 8,000 children in 2014-2016, funded by Irish Aid and the ELMA Relief Foundation.

The Sphere Handbook and Minimum Standards for Education

The programme was designed and implemented according to the INEE Minimum Standards for Education and Sphere Minimum Standards. The standards are an expression of the rights of people affected by crisis: the right to education, which is a fundamental human right, and the right to protection and assistance to ensure the basic conditions for life with dignity, as set out in the Sphere Humanitarian Charter.

The three main components of the programme were: classroom construction, provision of water and sanitation facilities and teacher training on student wellbeing. The INEE Foundational Standards on participation, resources, coordination and assessment were used during programme design and implementation. The design of educational facilities involved refugees and key stakeholders and the project was discussed and agreed with the Administration of Refugees and Returnees Affairs and UNHCR.

INEE's Access and Learning Environment Standard 3

INEE's Access and Learning Environment Standard 3 is, "Education facilities promote the safety and well-being of learners, teachers and other education personnel and are linked to health, nutrition, psychosocial and protection services." In this programme the sites for the educational facilities were selected through a mapping exercise which focused on safety for students and staff. A briefing was held for local companies to ensure they were fully informed of bidding requirements. The contractors employed labour from within the refugee camp community and engaged local firms and individuals for jobs. Protection risks were addressed: for example, the construction contract included a code of conduct and the site engineer was briefed on protection awareness.



Students in Zone D, Jewi Refugee Camp, before in temporary classrooms (left), and after.

INEE requires physical structures to be appropriate for the situation with adequate space for classes. The design process adapted designs provided by the government to improve ventilation and increase space in the classroom to 63m² for a class size of fifty, allowing 1m² per pupil, 10 m² for the teaching area and 2m² for storage.

The INEE Minimum Standards say, "It is important to set locally defined, realistic limits on class size, which allow the inclusion of all children and youth, including those with disabilities." The INEE Contextualised Standards for Ethiopia bring together the national and local resources and cite a 2012 joint education assessment on refugee education which recommends a teacher to student ratio of 1:60 in refugee settings, while the national standard is 1:50 at primary and 1:40 at secondary level.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion (WASH)

INEE suggests “adequate quantities of safe water and appropriate sanitation facilities, taking into account sex, age and people with disabilities,” and this project built separate latrine blocks for boys and girls, in safe and easily accessible places. Each block of nine cubicles had one cubicle with a ramp and additional space for disabled access. In Jewi camp the 18 new latrines for 600 students complied with Sphere guidance (cited in INEE) of 1 toilet to 30 girls and 1 toilet to 40 boys, and exceeded the Ethiopian Government norm of one latrine for every 150 male and 100 female students. Latrines had lockable doors and a small drop hole so that children were not afraid of falling in, a concern cited by children in the camps. Each block for girls was equipped with plastic bins for the disposal of sanitary products.

INEE references Sphere’s recommendations on minimum water quantities and minimum number of toilets for schools (Sphere WASH chapter Appendix 2 and 3). Water points were installed to meet the Sphere minimum requirement of 3 liters of water per student per day for drinking and handwashing.

Two teachers in each school were trained to teach children about personal hygiene and health, and female teachers were trained to give education sessions on menstrual hygiene, because girls were skipping school during menstrual periods. School health clubs brought together students to organise campaigns and events in the school and community, as well as to monitor the cleanliness of the latrines, handwashing stations and school grounds.

Student Well-being

Education facilities should “promote the safety and well-being of learners” and the assessment identified corporal punishment as a gap in the teaching and learning support provided by other actors. Through this programme trainers were identified and worked with the education services to train over twenty teachers in positive classroom management, to create a learning environment which promoted mutual understanding, peace and tolerance.

Conclusion

This programme used INEE Education Standards and Sphere Minimum Standards as complementary sources of guidance on the design and construction of education facilities for South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia.

