



Opportunities for the future:

basic vocational training for refugee youth in Dadaab

Refugee youth in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya consider lack of opportunities to be one of the biggest challenges to living in the camp. Education proves to be a key factor in expanding opportunities within the limitations camp life sets. Yet little humanitarian assistance addresses the specific learning needs of youth. How can education best address the needs of displaced youth with no educational background?

BY: FRED MAGUMBA AND SILJE SJOVAAG SKEIE, NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL (NRC)

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Background

The Dadaab refugee camp in Northern Kenya is the largest refugee camp in the world. Established in 1991/92, the camp was designed to host 90,000 refugees fleeing the violent conflict in neighboring Somalia. But continued influx of refugees from Somalia, especially during the 2011 draught in the Horn of Africa, has resulted in the camp now holding four times more refugees than the original capacity. In February 2012 the total population stood at 463, 023 refugees. Youth represents about 15 percent of the total refugee population in Dadaab (1).

In Somalia, less than 25 percent of school-aged children are in school, meaning that the majority of refugees arriving in Dadaab have very limited educational background. This is especially true for the rural, pastoralist population and girls. Many may never have attended school, partly because they have reached an age where enrollment to primary school is unlikely. Since little humanitarian assistance focuses on the educational needs of youth they are likely to continue being denied access to education as they move into adulthood. The case of Dadaab shows how crucial education is in accessing other opportunities, and how crucial it is that the particular needs of youth are taken into consideration in a humanitarian response.

No education, few opportunities

In 2011, actors in the education sector (including UNHCR (2) and Norwegian Refugee Council) conducted a youth survey in Dadaab camps to better

understand the needs of refugee youth and to review the assistance given to the youth.

According to the youth survey, the youths' educational background was a decisive factor for how they could access other opportunities in Dadaab. Those who had lived in Dadaab camps for long (arrived before 2003) were found to have benefitted from the educational assistance in camps. They were twice as likely to have graduated from primary education compared to those who arrived after 2004, when educational opportunities were limited.

That education is an enabling right, since it enables learners to access other rights, became evident in the responses of the youth.

Access to employment was one factor where educational background played a strong role. Youth work opportunities are extremely limited in Dadaab, partly since they are not able to seek employment outside camps. Only 33 percent of youth in the survey had employment. Out of this 33 percent, 76 percent, whom were secondary graduates had work compared to only 14 percent with no education. Those who had work were mainly employed by an agency operating in the camp. However, those who did not, worked either within a small business or were engaged in physical labor; work that is easier to access with limited educational background. The rate of employment was slightly higher for male compared to female youth. Unemployed youth in the camps survived mainly on provision

entitlements that were supplied through the Ration Card by UNHCR.

Interestingly, youth with some level of education were also more likely to receive training from humanitarian agencies than youth with none. While 87 percent of secondary school graduates had benefitted from a training program in the camps, only 10 percent of those who had never been to school had done the same. One reason for this may be that youth with education were reported to have more information about assistance provided in the camps. But it may also be an illustration of how assistance in the camps has failed to recognize and address the specific needs of youth who have not gone to school.

While some school-leavers find ways to engage themselves, most remain idle in the camps. The idleness leads to strong frustrations among the youth community prompting engagement in anti-social behaviors, khat chewing or involvement with militias. Nearly all youth in the survey considered themselves to be excluded from, or participating only rarely in, decision making processes in the camps. They also reported high levels of conflict between youth in the camps, but the conflict levels were lower for those with education compared to those without.

What do the youth want?

Youth taking part in the survey clearly agreed that the educational opportunities offered in Dadaab were not enough. Education in the refugee camps is mainly formal and follows

the Kenyan education system. For most youth it will be difficult to follow the formal education pathway, since they are above the appropriate enrollment age, lack proficiency in English, and have little educational background. There are few non-formal education opportunities for out-of-school youth.

While youth with prior education expressed a clear preference for formal education, those with none were more interested in non-formal basic training opportunities that would enable them to gain an income.

Educated youth wanted to go back to school, learn academic courses like nursing, medicine, computer and community development and then to start working for agencies. Youth with no education, on the other hand, wanted to learn language-, business-, or technical skills and preferred to get involved in business and trading.

Since education in Dadaab is mainly formal there are few opportunities for the second category of youth to realize their dreams. Norwegian Refugee Council's youth project in Dadaab is one example of how the specific needs of youth with no prior education may be addressed.

Youth Education Pack – equipping youth for life

The Youth Education Pack (YEP) is a one year basic education and training program for youth (15-24 years) with little or no prior education. The objective of YEP is to ensure that displaced youth are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to enhance

protection, improve their livelihoods and become constructive members of their communities. The YEP concept has three main components; basic literacy/ numeracy, life skills and basic vocational skills (see boxed text).

Graduates are facilitated to form working groups and to start small scale businesses to sell services and products using their acquired skills. Youth are trained in entrepreneurship and small business management, they are then provided with basic business startup tools and given mentoring and followed up by NRC.

In Dadaab NRC runs four YEP centers, one in each of the main refugee camps with a fourth YEP center in Dadaab Town where host community youths learn together with refugees. NRC applies a gender-balanced enrollment policy and female enrollment is usually at between 40 to 55 percent at the YEP centers. YEP is recognized by the Government of Kenya. Therefore, at the end of the training-program the learners in YEP are examined by the Kenyan Department of Industrial Training (DIT) that sets and marks national trade examinations. YEP learners who pass these exams are awarded a Kenya National Trade Certificate in the tested skill.

Over 1,200 youth have graduated from this program since its inception in 2007. Recent assessments found that 60% of the YEP graduates are able to continue using their acquired skills and improve their livelihoods even after two years of completion of the training. Most youth continue working in the working groups that were formed during the YEP training.

In the fourteen countries where NRC has provided displaced youth with assistance through YEP, the approach has been found to suit the needs and desires of youth with no prior education. Evaluations have shown that YEP has resulted in increased livelihood opportunities and better integration of youth into their communities. As the case from Dadaab has shown, nearly twice the number of YEP graduates (60%) have secured employment compared to youth who have not benefitted from YEP (33%). However, basic vocational training programs for youth needs to be carefully designed and implemented to produce successful outcomes.

Key recommendations for basic vocational training for youth

- Select vocational skills on the basis of a Market Assessment. NRC uses the Women's Refugee Commission's "Market Assessment Toolkit for Vocational Training Providers and Youth", which facilitates the gathering of information on market demands and helps youth determine what skills best match their needs and interests (3). Limitations to movement and likely solutions to displacement must be reflected when skills are selected for displaced youth.
- Combine a "heads, hearts and hands" approach. Youth are often more motivated for the vocational skills training ("hands") than for the academic subjects. Post- graduation, YEP students report that they use their literacy skills ("heads") to keep accounts, write receipts and keep stocks. In Dadaab, NRC sees a gradual decrease

in conflicts between youth throughout the YEP year, which is partly prescribed to the teaching of life skills (“hearts”), including conflict management.

- Teach entrepreneurship skills and small business management. Youth with non-formal, basic vocational training background are unlikely to be able to compete in the work market with those trained at a proper technical and vocational institute. Self-employment or working in youth groups are therefore likely options. Business skills training fosters entrepreneurship and prepares learners to run their own businesses.

- Create market linkages. Expose youth to the market while still in training. Let them offer goods and services to the local communities or arrange market days in training centers. This gives youth an idea of what to expect; customer’s demands, price setting, marketing and bargaining.

- Seek accreditation by the authorities. Certification by the Ministry of Education or other relevant authorities increases the chances of youth graduates finding employment or continuing their education and improves the value that youth and communities give to the training.

- Make the training gender-responsive. To ensure equal opportunities for female and male youth, NRC has an enrollment policy stating that half of the YEP students should be female. Emphasis is placed on recruiting female teachers and all teachers are trained on gender and protection. Most YEP centers provide kindergartens so young mothers and fathers can bring their infant to school and still participate in the training.

YOUTH EDUCATION PACK – EQUIPPING YOUTH FOR LIFE

Youth Education Pack (YEP) is a non-formal education program for youth (aged 15 – 24) developed by the Norwegian Refugee Council. The objective of YEP is to ensure that displaced youth are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to enhance protection, improve their livelihoods and become constructive members of their communities.

Through a one-year program YEP learners are taught basic literacy and numeracy, life skills such as health and human rights, and basic vocational skills.

The Youth Education Pack was first piloted in Sierra Leone in 2003. An evaluation of the pilot recommended the expansion of the program to new conflict-affected countries. Since the pilot YEP has become an important part of NRCs education response strategy, and in 2011 YEP was implemented in ten countries: Afghanistan, Georgia, Liberia, DR Congo, Burundi, Uganda, South Sudan, Somalia, Kenya/Dadaab and Zimbabwe. NRC previously ran YEP in Ivory Coast, Sudan, Sierra Leone and East Timor.

- Support learners after graduation. Establishing a business or finding work can be difficult. NRC supports YEP graduates till at least six months after graduation, with upgrading of skills, finding work opportunities, linking to markets and solving conflicts.

- Document results. A key criticism to basic vocational training programs is how the learners benefitted. Did the training create new opportunities? Did the youth improve their income? Documentation of results helps inform programming (for instance, were the right skills provided, were some more in demand than others?) and improves accountability to youth and donors.

- Lobby for increased recognition of the specific needs of youth with no education backgrounds, with authorities, donors and partners in the education and livelihoods sectors.

As illustrated, youths’ educational background is crucial for accessing other opportunities. More so, educated youth are better integrated into their communities and less likely to engage in harmful behavior. Displaced youth face significant

challenges in accessing education and are thereby deprived of the positive impact education may have in their lives. Education programs for youth need to move beyond formal and post-primary education and include a range of flexible, non-formal education opportunities that will equip displaced youth with skills and knowledge for the future. The focus of the *2012 Education for All Global Monitoring Report* is how skills development programmes can improve youth’s opportunities for decent jobs and better lives. Hopefully the report will contribute to increased awareness of the needs of displaced youth with little- or no prior educational background.

Fred Magumba is Norwegian Refugee Council’s education manager in Dadaab and is responsible for the Youth Education Pack project in Dadaab.

Silje Sjovaag Skeie is Norwegian Refugee Council’s advisor for Education in Emergencies. She works at NRC’s Head Office in Oslo.

Website for NRC: www.nrc.no

(1) UNHCR CAMP POPULATION STATISTICS FEBRUARY 2012
(2) UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
(3) WRC TESTED THE TOOLS IN NRC’S YEP CENTERS IN LIBERIA AND UGANDA DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOOLKIT