



Youth Education Pack: an investment in the future

by Eldrid K Midttun and Toril Skjetne

In November 2003 Thomas Nimley Yaya, chairman of the Liberian rebel group MODEL, announced that his soldiers would disarm on one condition: they wanted vocational training in exchange for their guns. In their war-torn country neither money nor food could provide opportunities for a better future. The fighters needed to learn how to survive without the use of weapons.

It has become increasingly evident that it is of vital importance to include youth in emergency and development programmes for uprooted people. Displaced adolescents have often had to drop out of school, either because they are engaged in fighting or because they are fleeing from it.

Providing youth with education and vocational training, as well as ensuring a safe environment for their reintegration into the community, is essential if sustainable development is to be achieved. Great challenges

must be overcome: ravaged economies, battered infrastructure, scarce resources, adolescent-headed households and traumatised youth.

The Norwegian Refugee Council is in the final stage of the 'Youth Pack' pilot programme in Sierra Leone. This is a one-year initiative combining literacy, life skills and vocational training. Youth participants will graduate from the programme trained in a craft that will increase their chances of securing a regular income.

The tools and materials procured for the training form a start-up package for the students when they graduate – providing additional motivation for students to complete the programme. An assessment was undertaken to ascertain skills required for employment opportunities in the local economy. In Sierra Leone the courses include agriculture, masonry, carpentry, tailoring and hairdressing.

Feedback to date has been positive and encouraging, as both participants and communities have embraced the opportunities the course offers. There are, however, many factors that need to be taken into consideration for the programme to be successful. Efforts are being made to link the Youth Pack to local income-generating loans schemes.

The Youth Pack project has proved very successful in Sierra Leone. NRC is therefore planning to extend it to its country

Mamusu Conteh is pregnant and in love and happier than ever. For over two years she was forced to be a sex slave for a rebel soldier. Today Mamusu participates in NRC's Youth Pack programme in Sierra Leone. In addition to learning how to read and write, she is learning the trade of hairdressing in order to secure an income for her family's future.

programmes in Liberia, DRC and Burundi. Other NGOs have expressed interest in starting similar projects elsewhere. The Youth Education Pack modules will be made available through the INEE, the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (www.ineesite.org) along with textbooks and modules from other education sector actors.

Making the Youth Pack work requires:

- cooperation with local education authorities and NGOs
- ensuring a gender balance in classes and keeping them below 25 students
- providing each class with two teachers, ideally one male and one female
- basing skills training on actual local needs
- continuing monitoring and further training of teachers
- enabling young people themselves help introduce and decide some topics of interest
- sensitising the local communities, parents and leaders to the goals of the programme and the importance of promoting regular attendance

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