

Skills training for youth

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LIVELIHOODS



RET/Hide Lemey

Providing skills training for youth should be a key component in promoting secure livelihoods for refugees. Young people must be given the chance to develop the practical, intellectual and social skills that will serve them throughout their lives.

Young people in conflict-torn states – including genocide survivors in Rwanda, AIDS-ravaged families in Uganda and ex-child combatants in West Africa – have heavy responsibilities thrust upon them. Whilst they hope for a bright future – a good job, a family, fulfillment and respect – they often have to put their own future on hold to support their families. Vocational training is often their most practical option. This article assesses the skills youth need to develop secure livelihoods and suggests how skills learning and practical opportunities should be organised.

No market demand, no training

There is often a conflict between the livelihood skills young people want to learn, what they need to learn for sustainable future employment and what is currently in demand in labour markets. Youth must tailor their ambitions to market realities. One of the authors (Barry Sesnan) has worked with young people on a 'value-added approach': first seeing what products and services people are paying for and then imagining what added value the potential entrepreneur could add at little risk. In Sudan and Uganda

Ockenden International has developed a system to help young would-be entrepreneurs evaluate the financial landscape, observe money circulation and assess existing and potential markets.

Apprenticeship training in refugee camps in Bajaur agency, Peshawar, Pakistan

Training must not reinforce traditional gender roles that impose restraints on livelihood opportunities. It may be possible to develop more neutral training opportunities. The trades of carpenter, electrician and blacksmith are among those usually considered only appropriate for men while mat making and weaving are more often regarded as women's activities. Agencies must consider the degree to which certain vocations may be culturally acceptable in specific contexts and therefore the basis for secure livelihoods. A female carpenter may be able to earn a living in Uganda but not in Afghanistan.

“Youth want something that pulls them into the future, not just a cow and a garden. Just barely earning a living won't substitute for the exciting lifestyle of the combatant - won't keep them from rejoining armed forces when that seems again an attractive option.”¹¹

If self-employment is the aim, then agencies also need to provide business training in areas such as bookkeeping, profit and loss accounting, market expansion, marketing and product display. Every programme must take into account market opportunities and potential. Concrete possibilities for putting skills training to income-generating use must be assessed realistically. The rule should be simple: no market demand, no training.

Intellectual skills

As far as possible, adolescent refugees in vocational training programmes

should also be taught basic education and life skills. These include reading, writing, numeracy, science, artistic expression and handicrafts, landmine awareness, HIV/AIDS awareness, gender-based violence, environmental protection, civic responsibility, human rights, resolving conflicts, personal hygiene, safety and good parenting. While it may not be possible to teach all of these in all situations, efforts should be made to link those most appropriate to the vocational skills being taught.

Youth who acquire a good mix of practical skills and conceptual understanding can more easily adapt to changes in their work, develop professionally and cope with the evolution of the market for their services. In all cases training should be linked to the social and work context in which the young person expects to find him/herself, whether in the host country, the country of origin or resettlement. Programmes must respond to specific

needs and avoid one-size-fits-all templates.

Skills delivery

Skills training programmes can be organised, presented and packaged in exciting and challenging ways, even in a camp-based situation. It is important for humanitarian agencies to:

- stress that learning is a life-long process in order to counter the perception that a young refugee's hope for a better future ends with the formal education he/she receives: they need to realise they can independently explore many diverse paths to enhanced knowledge and skills
- deliver training, wherever possible, to younger women and girls in their communities: men are much more likely to be able to access centre-based training which may take them away from home for considerable periods of time
- provide care for the children or siblings of young women in order to promote regular attendance
- use a wide range of information technologies such as radio, tape recorders, CDs and computers: in Tanzania and Pakistan the Foundation for the Refugee Education Trust (RET) has provided computers to give teenagers Internet access to transcend the borders imposed by poverty and isolation
- replicate experience in Sudan and Pakistan whereby young refugees benefit from apprenticeship schemes with artisans in accessible nearby towns: agencies should monitor and supervise to ensure that young trainees are being taught and not simply exploited
- explore scope for helping both young refugees and local teenagers: in 2002 RET supported a programme in a transit camp at Jembe, Sierra Leone, which combined training (in carpentry, bakery, tailoring, crocheting, soap making and tie-dyeing) with sports and other activities to reinforce confidence and social interaction skills. For the



local youth it had the added advantage of giving them experience of alternatives to hazardous work in the local diamond mines.

- realise that project development must involve consultation with young people; older people should not make decisions on their behalf.

Tools and credit

Lack of tools and credit is a major obstacle to practising newly acquired skills. There are several approaches to overcoming these constraints. Some agencies provide trainees with a starter kit and require them to earn the right to own the tools provided by gradually paying back a cash sum equivalent to their value. Those who have chosen to run microcredit programmes have learned that microcredit is best provided by an agency quite separate from the one providing training. A third alternative is for a resource centre to supply a warehouse of vocational tools that may be loaned or rented to graduates. Whatever the choice, inter-agency coordination is vital to avoid the risk that different schemes and conditions either confuse the beneficiaries or give them scope to play one off against the other.

In Dadaab, Kenya, with a loan from CARE's Community Revolving Fund and additional capital raised from

his friends, Abdinoor Ali Sigat started a private business in the Hagadera camp market with three computers and a small generator, offering training on six different computer programmes to an average of 40 students at any time. Abdinoor reports that business is good, with a high demand from young refugees. He said they and their families find various ways to pay for this training - which they believe will improve their future prospects.²

Conclusion

As skills training is often perceived as something of a luxury in an emergency context it has often been difficult to persuade donors to fund programmes. Even in more stable situations, funding is problematic. As with all forms of education, there is no quick fix and short-term funding often fails to allow for the types of programme development suggested above. There are promising signs, however, that donors and agencies are starting to take more interest in programmes for youth in situations of return and reconstruction.

Provision of skills training, backed up by intellectual and life skills, is an essential part of any economic recovery strategy. The earlier this training is introduced into the refugee context the more effective it is likely to be.

Those in protracted refugee situations also need the hope - as well as the skills - that training can provide.

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The authors and INEE are keen to further develop standards and good practice in skills training for youth. If you have experiences to share, please contact Ann Avery. Email: avery@r-e-t.com

1. Interview with Irma Specht, formerly of ILO InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction.

2. Unpublished paper based on research with young refugees in Dadaab, with Care International in Kenya and the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. For more information, email Liz Cooper at eccooper@interchange.ubc.ca

Interested in participating in a panel on refugee and IDP livelihoods?

At the IASFM conference, 9-13 January 2005 in São Paulo, Brazil, we would like to organise a panel on the livelihood strategies of forced migrants and the importance of understanding these in the development of solutions. The panel discussion would come under sub-theme 1 on 'Solutions: durable or temporary?'

Possible areas of discussion are:

1. Should self-reliance strategies be targeted and implemented for refugees and displaced people? For example, can microfinance -

as one strategy - be effective in the refugee context?

2. Examples of effective and ineffective practice in relation to the promotion of refugee livelihoods (research, papers, case-studies).
3. Various livelihood approaches and methodologies and debate over their use.
4. Is the debate over discourse hindering progress?
5. UNHCR's role - help or hindrance?
6. Livelihoods and cross-cutting themes such as HIV/AIDS, youth and gender.

The aim of the discussions would be to lead to increased sharing, lessons learned and future collaboration of

individuals and agencies working with displaced people. Ideally, the panel will be a mix of academics, practitioners, policy makers, government representatives and forced migrants.

Please contact Carrie Conway (conwaycarrie@hotmail.com) if you are interested in participating or would like to share your ideas.

The IASFM conference will focus on the search for solutions to forced migration. Visit www.iasfm.org for full details. All correspondence concerning the conference should be to: Heidi El-Megrissi, IASFM Secretariat, c/o RSC, QEH, 21 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LA, UK. Email: heidi.el-megrissi@qeh.ox.ac.uk. Fax: +44 (0)1865 270721.