

Strengthening education systems for long-term education responses

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Implementation of programmes in DRC and Nigeria demonstrates how the building blocks for long-term improvements can be laid in the earliest stages of an education in emergencies response, even in the most challenging contexts.

Between 2016 and 2017, Street Child and Congolese partner Ebenezer Ministry International (EMI) supported the secondary education sector in Lusenda refugee camp, South Kivu, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where around 32,000 Burundian refugees live.¹ The schooling system – into which refugee children have been integrated – has suffered from years of neglect and underinvestment² and schools were ill-prepared to receive the 7,000 refugee students (including over 1,200 at secondary level) who began arriving in June 2015. Several new secondary schools were rapidly established in rented or shared buildings to meet demand, and mainly unqualified teaching staff were employed.

Street Child and Ebenezer Ministry International provided training and resources to meet immediate and urgent education needs, including distribution of uniforms, teaching materials, stationery and recreational resources, infrastructure

improvements, and teacher training on context-relevant topics such as gender-sensitive pedagogy, child psychology and contingency planning. In addition, the support they provided integrated elements borrowed from a model for long-term, community-led strengthening of education systems. Developed by the partners over a decade in a non-refugee setting in South Kivu, this long-term model aims to enhance self-sufficiency by building structures, capacity and skills in order to empower teachers, head teachers and parents to own and lead quality improvements at an individual school level without government support.

Elements in long-term capacity building

The first element adopted from this long-term approach is a focus on building core pedagogical competencies including classroom management, student evaluation, child-centred learning and positive discipline, in order to offset the lack of qualifications

and experience of both new and existing teaching staff and raise the overall standard of teaching in a sustainable way. It comprises group training activities followed by a year of in-school mentoring by dedicated EMI teacher trainers. In long-term development contexts, both in South Kivu and elsewhere, such ongoing classroom-based support has shown excellent results in improving teacher knowledge and skills and in eliminating persistent bad practice such as lack of lesson planning, non-participatory teaching methods and regular use of corporal punishment.

The second element is a sustained focus on school management capacity in relation to finance, administration and pedagogy through working with head teachers and parent committees to establish strong, durable school management systems. This approach also combines group training sessions with in-school mentoring to reinforce learning and good practice. A particular strength of this approach in Lusenda has been the opportunity to establish parent committees (which did not previously exist in any of the schools) which include both female representatives and members of the refugee community.

A third element is the introduction of school-based income-generating projects, managed jointly by teachers, students and parents. The income is kept by schools and Street Child's recommendation is they spend 20% of profits on resources – such as teaching materials or student scholarships – in accordance with their priorities, reinvesting the remainder in developing and growing the project, particularly early on in its establishment. In long-term development settings this approach has proven an effective way to create additional resources for the school, to engage more parents in school activities and to expand students' entrepreneurial skills, business knowledge and experience.

A year after the intervention ended, these three elements are showing promising initial results. Observation of teachers and their self-evaluations indicate a marked improvement in core competencies and classroom practice as well as a growth in self-confidence. School

management shows sustained improvement, and registers, accounts, teaching timetables and student records are now being used in all schools. Parent committees have been established in all schools, most of which meet regularly and contribute effectively to school management decision making. Two thirds of the school enterprises have generated a profit, some of which has been invested in infrastructure improvements and teaching materials. And all schools report a positive change in terms of refugee integration and cooperation both among students and at the parent committee level.

Strengthening the education system through accelerated learning

Since January 2018, Street Child has been implementing a UNICEF-funded informal accelerated learning programme for 5,700 children in north-eastern Nigeria, most of whom have been internally displaced. Displacement and insecurity brought about by conflict in the north-eastern states have had a devastating effect on primary education³ and, as in DRC, prior to the onset of violence, the school system had suffered decades of neglect and under-investment and was therefore extremely poorly prepared to deal with the challenge of large-scale displacement. Nearly three million internally displaced and host community children are out of school, 57% of schools in Borno State are closed and 42% of classrooms are hosting 80+ children.

While prioritising the meeting of immediate educational needs through provision of education in emergencies (EiE) assistance (including distributing teaching and learning materials, repairing classrooms and providing teacher training), this accelerated learning programme has also been designed to strengthen education systems in the longer term.

The first element that contributes to this aim is the innovative design of the 60 temporary learning centres (TLCs) that have been created across the states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. These have a robust concrete floor, low walls that can be heightened as resources become available and solid roof supports, with the aim that

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they can be easily converted in the future into permanent structures at low cost. Many of these TLCs have been constructed in the grounds of existing primary schools, which will enable them to become permanent classrooms. In more remote locations, TLCs have been established in communities where no other school infrastructure exists, so their conversion into permanent learning centres may be necessary in the medium term in the absence of a comprehensive national-level school-building programme. Community Education Committees (CECs) have been set up to manage the TLCs, and Street Child is carrying out concerted advocacy with the Nigerian education authorities in favour of standardising them. This would include the creation of a mechanism for transforming them into permanent structures, formal recognition of the CECs, and making the TLCs eligible to receive State support like that received by their formal sector equivalent.

The second element is the focus on generating new teaching capacity within the most under-served communities. A major challenge facing the education system in the north of Nigeria is the difficulty of recruiting qualified teachers for rural schools. Street Child has recruited 120 local Community Volunteer Teachers (CVTs) in collaboration with the CECs. This approach enables teachers, who already hold a minimum qualification and are

generally integrated in the community, to gain teaching skills and experience through access to language-appropriate teaching in their remote communities. The CVTs receive regular mentoring visits from government education staff to motivate and support them, and Street Child is working closely with the Nigerian education authorities to develop a mechanism through which CVTs can apply to the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria to gain accreditation as primary teachers. This accreditation would permit them to take on permanent roles in the formal sector, and thereby pave the way to boosting the number of qualified teachers in the hardest-to-reach locations.

Close collaboration and sustained advocacy with the State and federal government authorities are integral to Street Child's approach in north-eastern Nigeria. As part of a consortium of non-governmental organisations, Street Child is supporting the government to develop an accredited EiE national curriculum, which incorporates essential life skills alongside numeracy and literacy and which sets forth clear pathways for reintegrating children who have received EiE teaching into mainstream education provision.

Learning from EiE programming

Although eastern DRC and north-eastern Nigeria face distinct challenges



Temporary learning centre in Lusenda refugee camp, Democratic Republic of Congo, constructed in such a way that it can be easily converted in future into a permanent structure at low cost.

and constraints, learning can be drawn from the experience of EiE programming in these two locations.

Firstly, the DRC example demonstrates that an EiE intervention can be used to both deepen and expand core teacher competencies and skills beyond those required to meet immediate teaching needs, and that such an approach can be integrated easily and cost-effectively even within a short-term intervention. For locations where low teacher capacity and skills are a core weakness of the education system, these case-studies suggest that even early-stage interventions are an opportunity to build back better by addressing the full range of teachers' core pedagogy and classroom skills.

Secondly, both the DRC and Nigeria examples demonstrated that it is never too early in an emergency to rehabilitate weak school management and ineffective community engagement by instituting empowering, community-led models that focus on self-sufficiency. Such transformation can bring lasting and sustainable benefits to a school. Structures such as parent associations and school management committees are integral to this and require strengthening not only through ongoing training and mentoring but also through access to funds, particularly by means of sustainable income-generation projects. Effective parent-teacher collaboration brings the additional advantage of fostering cooperation and breaking down barriers between displaced and host communities, while also filling a critical gap in the absence of strong State support and the implementation and enforcement of government education quality standards.

Thirdly, the Nigeria case provides a strong example of how an emergency intervention can address the chronic challenge of a shortage of teachers in remote and hard-to-reach areas. If, as anticipated, the Nigerian government institutes a mechanism for fast-tracking the conversion of CVTs into formal schools, this will be a permanent benefit to the education system, particularly to the schools of north-eastern Nigeria – and a significant victory for the stakeholders who have advocated for it.

Finally, the temporary-to-permanent infrastructure model piloted in Nigeria offers a potentially compelling approach to addressing long-term infrastructure gaps – in this and other settings – although there is still more to do to secure government endorsement of the model and to institute community-led or government funding mechanisms for supporting the transition. Collaboration with State authorities is more viable in some situations than others but in all situations EiE responses should prioritise the central role of communities and the need to work in close coordination with other humanitarian actors.

The short-term nature of much EiE funding remains a key challenge, and advocacy to donors for a shift to multi-year and flexible funding should be sustained. A core goal of interventions like these is to address, at least in part, the sustainability challenge caused by short-term funding. They do this by, among other things, fostering volunteerism, building skills and capacity at the heart of schools and creating income-generating solutions. In Nigeria, where government intervention to take forward the interventions is a realistic prospect, we have focused on activities such as teacher recruitment and classroom creation in such a way that they can be developed by local government authorities in the future. In DRC, where government is likely to remain weak in the short and medium term, our focus lies primarily on strengthening communities within and around schools to increase their resources and improve management and teaching standards in a lasting way.

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1. The organisation Children in Crisis established a partnership in DRC with EMI in 2007 and carried out the 2016–17 work on which this article reflects. In early 2018 Children in Crisis merged with Street Child.

2. Children in Crisis (2015) Baseline evaluation study

3. ACAPS (2017) *Joint Education Needs Assessment: Northeast Nigeria* bit.ly/ACAPS-Education-Needs-NENigeria-2017