

The road to recovery: education in IDP communities

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There has been a marked failure to incorporate youth and adult education as a standard component during displacement.

Currently, the bulk of educational humanitarian assistance is directed towards primary education, relegating youth and adult education to a marginal status. This is reflected in both political priorities and resource allocation.

A survey conducted by the Women's Refugee Commission found that education programmes beyond primary level are few and far between in states affected by conflict.¹ Additionally, at present no international agencies dealing with displaced people have a specific policy or strategy directed at literacy or adult and youth basic education.² Considering that the period of displacement for most IDPs now lasts over a decade, the need for comprehensive educational programming during this time is critical.

Three main areas within youth and adult education merit further development: basic literacy, secondary education, and technical and vocational training.

Basic literacy education for youth and adults is a critical area of need among displaced communities. In December 2009, the Belem Framework for Action was adopted at the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education in Belem, Brazil.³ It called for "redoubling of efforts to reduce illiteracy by 50 percent from 2000 levels by 2015." Additionally, it emphasised the need for increased mobilisation of resources and expertise, provision of relevant curricula and quality assurance mechanisms, and a reduction in the literacy gender gap. Currently, there is a shortage of effective literacy programming, particularly in conflict-affected areas where it is so widely needed. Basic literacy is an important tool for people to be able to comprehend the world around them and make informed decisions.

Furthermore, literacy is not only a human right but also an 'enabling' right – the key that unlocks the door to the enjoyment of many other human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, the right to participate in public affairs, the right to work, and the right to participate in cultural life.

Access to secondary education is another area that needs to be improved in conflict-affected areas across the globe. According to the Women's Refugee Commission, fewer than 6% of displaced youth are enrolled in secondary education worldwide. Secondary school provides a setting in which young people learn valuable cognitive and social skills to become productive members of society. It can also decrease vulnerability to recruitment into paramilitary groups or human trafficking which often target marginalised youth. Youth are the future leaders of their communities and their countries. They require adequate skills to assume this responsibility and become economically competitive.

Technical and vocational training also has a vital role to play in IDP communities. Many displaced persons have lost their primary source of livelihood and must develop new skills in order to become economically sufficient. For others, they may find themselves for the first time needing to earn an income following displacement. Non-formal and flexible approaches are an important consideration within this sector so as to provide greater options to youth and adults juggling different roles and responsibilities. Although technical and vocational training programmes have not been widely implemented in displaced communities, those which have been carried out report largely positive results. Inclusion of women needs to be consciously

integrated into programmes since they are frequently at a disadvantage in receiving information about such programmes, particularly in traditionally patriarchal cultures.

Today the right to education remains an unfulfilled promise for IDPs across the globe. In January 2010, UNESCO published its *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the Marginalized*.⁴ This report assessed the global progress made over the past 10 years towards the six goals set by the World Conference on Education for All (hosted in Dakar in 2000). One of the major challenges highlighted in the report was achieving progress towards Goal 3: 'Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults'. The UNESCO report notes that, "Unlike other parts of the Dakar Framework, Goal 3 has been the subject of quiet neglect. It has been conspicuous by its absence not just from the agendas of high-level development summits, but also from the campaigns of non-governmental organizations."

According to the UNESCO report, there has also been minimal progress made towards the goal of halving adult illiteracy – a condition that affects an estimated 759 million people over the age of 15, approximately one in every five adults. Two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women. Additionally, as literacy is very language-centric, illiteracy disproportionately affects those speaking minority and indigenous languages worldwide as they have fewer opportunities to acquire and use literacy skills.⁵

Intersections

To understand the underlying educational challenges, it is vital to recognise the intersection between poverty, illiteracy, and vulnerability to emergencies. Often it is those with the least resources who are the most adversely affected. A disproportionate number of those affected by armed conflict are

functionally illiterate. Presently, over half of the 25 countries with the lowest adult literacy rates worldwide are either facing conflict or recently emerging from conflict. Additionally, 10 of the 25 countries with the lowest rates of female adult literacy are conflict-affected countries.

The intersections among disadvantaged groups extend even further. Though global demographic statistics for IDPs are challenging to ascertain, national surveys conducted in states with high IDP populations demonstrate that those living in poverty, ethnic minorities and women are disproportionately affected by displacement.⁶ According to the UNESCO EFA report, these are precisely the same sectors of the population among which low levels of educational attainment prevail. This intersectionality further illustrates the widespread

need for youth and adult education in IDP communities. Primary education offers great value but by itself is not sufficient to provide displaced persons with the skills needed to navigate this transitional time and prepare to rebuild their lives after resettlement.

Youth and adult education and vocational training need to be integrated into the humanitarian assistance framework as vital components of the recovery process. Not only does education deliver life-sustaining support and stability to those displaced by conflict but it also provides crucial skills to prepare IDPs for sustainably rebuilding their lives, their communities and their countries.

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the International Labour Organization (<http://www.ilo.org>). The views expressed here are those of the author and not necessarily those of the ILO.

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