The road to recovery: education in IDP communities

Amy S Rhoades

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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

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
African refugees in Israel

Rebecca Furst-Nichols and Karen Jacobsen

A scoping study conducted by the Feinstein International Center (Tufts University) in November 2010 explored the interaction between migration, debt repayments, remittances and livelihoods among Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers in Israel. 1

African refugees began migrating across the Sinai Peninsula to Israel in search of asylum and work from about 2006, with numbers increasing in 2007. 2 By the end of 2010, there were 33,273 African migrants in Israel, up from 17,000 in 2008, and November 2010 saw the highest ever number of arrivals. 3 Most new arrivals are fleeing desperate circumstances at home, and are seeking protection – not just jobs – in Israel. Eritreans and Sudanese make up the two largest African groups in Israel. Most have temporary protection in the form of ‘2AS conditional release visas’ which are renewable every three months but they live under the constant threat that protection will be revoked. Officially, holders of the visa are not allowed to work although some employers overlook this provision.

Asylum seekers finance their journeys in a range of ways. Most borrow money from friends and family to pay smugglers to get to Israel, and repaying this debt is a priority once their basic needs are met. Any money left over is sent to their families in the home country – but most do not have money left over to send.

Many migrants began their journey with an agreed-upon amount and then were passed to other groups who demanded additional payment. We heard of cases where groups of Sudanese or Eritreans in Israel pooled money to secure the release of a friend or relative who was being held for ransom in the Sinai.

Most migrants borrow money prior to their departure but we heard of people setting off for Israel knowing they did not have enough for the full payment. One woman said that if she had asked her family in advance they would have refused to give her the money for the journey but she knew they would send it if she called in distress along the way. She felt the risk of running out of money was worthwhile because getting to Israel was her best hope for safety.

Getting to Israel is becoming increasingly dangerous and expensive. Cases of serious abuse and torture by Bedouin smugglers in the Sinai have been reported, including rape, kidnapping and killing of those who are unable to come up with additional payments. Our respondents reported being taken by smugglers to within 50 metres of the border fence, and told to run and climb the fence. In the final stage of the journey several hundred migrants have been shot and killed by Egyptian police.

Economic migrants or asylum seekers? The Israeli government claims that the majority of those who enter are economic migrants rather than asylum seekers, and indeed many respondents said they came because they were unable to support themselves and their families in Eritrea and Sudan. However, there is a close relationship between persecution and lack of livelihoods in Sudan and Eritrea, and migration decisions are influenced by a