This document addresses the problems of providing education for refugees throughout the world. The bulletin suggests that once the refugees' most pressing needs for food, shelter, health care, sanitation, and clothing have been met, many long for education. In an article entitled "Building Bridges to the Future," subjects discuss problems in refugee education such as the need for refugees to develop life skills, the lack of trained and motivated teachers for refugee children, the question of which language to provide instruction in, whether to model refugee education on the country of origin, or to incorporate the refugees into the host country, and the need for trauma programs. Articles describe aid needed or provided for Somali and Afghan refugees. The "Briefs" section includes discussion of a German fund raising effort to provide money for UNESCO sponsored basic education programs for children in need who have been affected by war in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, as well as to street children projects in Mexico, Romania, and Vietnam. In this section is an article on a conference at which China announced an effort to universalize nine years of compulsory education and eliminate adult illiteracy by the year 2000. A report titled "Education for All: Status and Trends" ranks developing countries according to five indicators of educational development: (1) adult literacy; (2) the male-female literacy gap; (3) the proportion of school age children actually enrolled; (4) the proportion of enrolled children who complete grade 4; and (5) educational expenditure as a percentage of gross national product.
Education for refugees:  
The challenge for their hosts

Yes, we are hungry, but we find something...
What's bothering us most is the lack of education.

OPINION

For many refugees, education is what they dream of. It gives a sign of "normalcy" in otherwise disrupted lives, and it builds bridges to the future. But who should take responsibility for educating refugees?

In industrialized countries, it is the host government that takes up the task. Since refugee status there implies permanency and integration, it is assumed that children and young people should share the same opportunities available to the host population. Most northern governments fund special programs to help children and adults acquire sufficient language skills to enter the school system or join the labour market.

The situation for the masses of refugees in the poorer countries is quite different. Northern-based non-governmental agencies and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) take the main responsibility for assisting refugees in developing countries. Their priority has always been to meet emergency needs first: food, shelter and health care. Chronic lack of funding has meant that even minimal facilities for primary education are only partially provided. For example, in 1991, only 50 percent of Mozambican children in Zimbabwe camps were enrolled in primary schools. In Malawi, the corresponding figure was only 35 percent. The reason education hasn't received the attention it deserves is that refugees are seen as a temporary phenomenon, while education is a long-term business.

But this line of argument is belied by studies that show that most refugees are in their host countries to stay: refugees from Rwanda, for example, have been living in camps in Uganda since 1959 and they want and need education.

But how are the basic educational needs of refugees to be met? What is the purpose of their education: should they be educated for return to their country of origin or for "integration" into their host country? Who should decide the curricula and the proper context (in a refugee camp or in local schools)?

Planning refugee education provides an unusual opportunity to promote regional cooperation. Here is an example: The fragile educational infrastructure in southern Sudan has been destroyed by war and will have to be totally rebuilt. Thus the presence of the southern Sudanese refugees in Kenya and Uganda could stimulate co-operation between the Ministries of Education in both host countries in addressing the educational needs of these refugees. The result of such collaboration could contribute to a future educational programme for the south of Sudan and be economical (e.g. shared facilities for teacher training, and for production and publication of textbooks), as well as to meeting the wider aspirations of the southern Sudanese.

Logically, it should be the refugees and the host government — not international agencies — that should be taking decisions about educational policy and content, since none of the key issues can be resolved without the full participation of refugees and their hosts. It is after all, the needs of the refugees that this education must meet.

Dr. B. E. Harrell-Bond,  
Director, Refugee Studies Programme. University of Oxford, United Kingdom

Did you know that . . .

. . . There are in the world today an estimated 18 million refugees living outside their home country as well as some 20 million internally displaced persons. Around 80 percent of the total number of refugees are women and children.

. . . Under the terms of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, they should be "accorded the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education."

. . . On average, only 12 percent of the world's primary school-age refugee children go to school today. For example, some 200,000 school-age children in refugee camps and centres in Croatia do not have access to any kind of schooling.

. . . Despite the increasing numbers of refugees during the 1980s, the amount of UNHCR educational assistance fell from US$23 million in 1980 to $14 million ten years later, a decrease of about 39 percent in current terms.

(Sources: UNHCR, UNESCO, United Nations)
Building bridges to the future

This final decade of the millennium is full of tumultuous change, much of it a cause for rejoicing. But many events in the 1980s and early 1990s have caused tragic flights of millions of refugees: the breakdown of former Soviet Union, the wrenching civil conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia, Liberia, Mozambique, Sudan, Somalia and Sri Lanka, and the Gulf War, to name but a few.

In the world today, there are an estimated 18 million refugees living outside their home country as well as some 26 million internally displaced persons. Propelled by fear of persecution, war, environmental disaster or economic crisis, the total number of the world's uprooted people today exceeds the population of São Paulo, Tokyo and New York City combined. The refugee situation threatens to become one of the most explosive issues in the coming decades.

Initially, refugees urgently need the basics to survive: shelter, food, health care, clothing and sanitation. However, once these life-protecting needs are met, many refugees long for education. In a life characterized by disorder, fear and instability, education gives an impression of normalcy and builds bridges to the future.

"The right to education is not some abstract concept," says Peter Higginson of UNESCO's Basic Education Division. "Although education cannot be compared with food, water and shelter as a life-and-death need, it is after all what makes life as a refugee bearable. Through it and through it alone, refugees have hope."

Numbed by boredom

Says UNICEF Education for Development consultant Susan Guthridge: "Children in refugee camps want to go to school, see their friends and listen to music. Instead, they spend their days walking between dormitory beds and barrack courtyards, numbed by boredom and surrounded by anxiety."

Children are not the only ones who want to learn. Adult refugees are also keen to join literacy courses, skills training, and income-generating activities. It helps them acquire skills for employment, better living conditions and independence.

But how is the demand for refugee education to be met? Under the terms of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, they should be accorded "the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education." But in most developing countries, host governments are unable to provide basic services to their own populations, much less the sudden influx of refugees from neighbouring countries.

This is why UNHCR, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), UNESCO, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, and other U.N. agencies play a vital role.

Uprooted children often bear serious psychological scars. Here, a young boy in a camp in Cambodia shows one of his drawings, which reflects something of the youth's traumatic experiences.
Little education for refugee children

Despite such efforts, refugees around the world receive little basic education. Only 12 percent of primary school-age refugee children attend primary school. In Pakistan, for example, the gross enrolment ratio for refugee children is 20 percent, compared to 40 percent for the nationals of the host country. The comparable figures in Malawi are 34 percent for refugees and 68 percent for nationals, and in Sudan, 14 percent for refugees against the national average of 50 percent. Even with some form of schooling available, refugee girls are often especially deprived of education because of religious or cultural practices.

One of the main problems besetting refugee education is the lack of trained and motivated teachers. While teachers in developing countries generally have difficult working conditions and low professional status, refugee teachers are especially hard hit. Many are completely untrained, and poorly educated themselves. They seldom have the proper school facilities or teaching aids to help them. Yet some refugees have high education levels and thrive on their responsibility as teachers and role models in the camp. A major challenge is hiring female teachers to work in refugee camps, because it has been demonstrated that female teachers attract girls to school.

Which language?

Another problem is language of instruction: should refugee education be modelled on the system in the country of origin so that the refugees can learn in their own language and prepare for return to their home country, or should the refugees be incorporated into the system of the host country, learn a new language and prepare for a future in exile?

Unlike the Vietnamese boat people who seek to resettle in a new country and therefore have been willing to learn a new language, many refugees hesitate to send their children to school if the language used is not their own. While there is no clear-cut answer to this question, a recent UNESCO policy paper on refugee education suggests that the language of instruction should be the focal point in the planning of refugee education because it determines the nature and content of the curriculum, the textbooks, teaching guides, and the strategies of teacher training programmes.

Trauma programmes

Many refugee children suffer from severe post-trauma and stress disorders that make them unlikely to learn well in a traditional school environment. UNICEF reports that in ex-Yugoslavia, where schools are military targets, half of the million traumatized children have seen dead or severely mutilated people and two-thirds have thought: "I am going to die". For these and countless other children in the world, special trauma programmes need to be initiated with capable staff who can diagnose the problems, win the children's trust and restore their faith in themselves and in the world.

Despite these various challenges, the importance of educating refugees cannot be over-emphasized. Whether they stay in the country of asylum, return to their home, or resettle in a third country, education gives refugees a better chance of surviving and succeeding.
UNESCO has raised over US$1.5 million from the international community and donor agencies to help create a new kind of “education for peace” project in war-torn Somalia. The project will initially benefit children, youth and women in urban centres where security has been established, as well as in refugee camps. It will subsequently be extended to rural populations.

In the first phase of the project, three pilot education centres are being established: one in Mogadiscio, one in the North and one in the South. These will provide an “emergency curriculum” for primary education and a non-formal literacy programme, including life skills.

In emergency situations the first objective is survival, which means giving aid for nutrition and health,” says John Beynon, Director of UNESCO’s Bureau for Development Co-operation in Education. “But survival for what? The role of education in emergencies is to hold out a promise of hope for a better future.” Each centre will serve as a “focal point” of a cluster of some ten nearby schools, and supply a curriculum using old Somali language texts supplemented by fresh materials on civics, family life, peace education, and sport and competition through fair play.

UNESCO expects that the experience gained through these centres will be quickly extended to key locations across the country. The target for 1994 is to have seven centres open in major administrative districts, as well as in neighbouring countries with large number of refugees.

The United Nations agencies, including UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and UNHCR, as well as key non-governmental agencies, met in March 1993 to discuss a comprehensive long-term plan to re-open the doors of education across the country.
Denmark leads in public spending on education

Denmark spends proportionately more money on public education than any other OECD country, Japan spends the least. This is one finding of a survey on public and private educational expenditure relative to gross domestic product (GDP) included in Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators (1992).

Public expenditure for education ranges from 3.8 percent (Japan) to 6.8 percent (Denmark), averaging 4.8 percent of GDP for the group of OECD countries as a whole. Although private expenditure plays a relatively small role in most countries, it makes up a significant share of total educational expenditures — up to 25 percent — in a few countries such as Germany, Japan and Spain.

Changes in Africa give hope for children

Dramatic changes taking place in Africa could help overcome the effect on children of the continent's prolonged economic crisis if agreements reached at the International Conference on Assistance to African Children (ICAC) are implemented, according to James P. Grant, UNICEF Executive Director.

ICAC, a UNICEF meeting sponsored by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), was held in Dakar, Senegal, from 25 to 27 November 1992. Forty-eight African and eighteen industrialized countries attended as well as various U.N. Agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Grant, referring to the recent changes on the continent, cited the crumbling apartheid system, emerging market economies, and "democracy taking root in so many countries previously dogged by authoritarianism."

Among the commitments spelled out by the meeting was the pledge to reduce military spending in favour of human development, to restructure national budgets to benefit women and children, and to work toward six specific goals: to improve children's health and survival. But an enormous amount needs to be done, not least in respect to basic education. Mr. Colin N. Power, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Education, underscored the challenge to Africa's leaders by citing recent UNESCO projections: there will be 112 million children of primary school age in sub-Saharan Africa by the turn of the century, and if nothing is done to reverse present trends, close to half of them, or as many as 52 million, will not attend school. In addition, there will be 81 million illiterate adults, most of them women. "The ultimate success of the Education for All initiative will hinge on what we can achieve in Africa," he said.

EFA Forum to examine quality factors

"Quality basic education for all" will be the theme of the second meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, which will be held in New Delhi, 8-10 September 1993.

The Forum, a global "watchdog" to monitor progress towards the Education for All goals, includes some sixty senior executives and personalities representing a cross section of developing countries, intergovernmental organizations, donor agencies, NGOs, the media and the business community.

The quality issue will be examined through four discussion topics: early childhood development, improving primary schooling, improving non-formal education and financing quality education. Three transversal concerns will also be addressed: gender equity, measuring success, and generalizing innovations. Plenary round tables will deal with: new partnerships in EFA; the contributions of the media to EFA; and basic education for girls and women. A report of the meeting will be published in the EFA 2000 Bulletin, No. 13 (October-December 1993).

Children helping children in camps

The Child-to-Child Trust has put out a new book aimed at promoting a "fun, informal approach" to health education for children living in camps.

Published for teachers, health workers and others involved with refugees or displaced people, four chapters explain the child-to-child approach, covering health topics such as malaria, hygiene and immunization. Each section suggests ways of getting children not only to improve their own health, but also to act as "health messengers" for their families and the community.

"Child-to-child is a way of teaching about health which gets children to participate actively in the learning process, to get into practice what they have learned and to help others do the same," says the book, Entitled Child-to-Child and Child Living in Camps, it is available from: Teaching Aids at Low Cost, Box 49, St. Albans, Herts, AL1 4AX, United Kingdom. Tel: 0727-853869, Fax: 0727-46852.
New report ranks 87 countries in educational development table

A report entitled Education for All: Status and Trends, which for the first time ranks developing countries according to five indicators of educational development, is being published by UNESCO for the EFA Forum.

Marking the third anniversary of the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand 5-9 March 1990), this report was undertaken as part of UNESCO's responsibility for monitoring progress towards the conference's goals.

Top five of the list of eighty-seven countries are Jamaica, Cuba, Panama, Costa Rica and Venezuela. The last five on the table are Mali, Bhutan, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Somalia.

An analysis of regional patterns shows that Latin America and the Caribbean appear as the most educationally advanced, followed by the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, and finally Africa.

To rank the countries, UNESCO created an index drawing on five main indicators of basic education: adult literacy, the male-female literacy gap, the proportion of school-age children actually enrolled, the proportion of enrolled children who complete grade IV, and educational expenditure as a percentage of GNP.

"By quantifying educational development, the index will assist monitoring progress towards the Jomtien goal of Education for All," says Victor Orofiez, Director of UNESCO's Basic Education Division. "So far, we have been measuring effort rather than achievement, by looking at factors such as government budget increases, new legislation, or donations from international agencies."

First of a series, the 40-page report also contains details of the efforts being made by governments and agencies towards providing basic education for all. Future issues will highlight topics such as women's and girls' education, teachers' qualifications and the drop-out problem.

"The data contained in this report are the most up-to-date now available," says Dieter Berstecher, Director of UNESCO's Unit for Inter-Agency Cooperation in Basic Education. "But it is still too early to assess the full impact of the World Conference on Education for All."

He added that three main signs of progress towards the Jomtien goals emerged from the data. "The number of illiterates is decreasing, donors are paying more attention to basic education, and population growth in most regions is slowing and no longer outpacing the ability of governments to provide access to education."

The report, in the press in English and soon to be available in French, contains a large number of graphic illustrations. It is aimed at providing policy-makers, development practitioners, educators the media and interested public with an overview of the situation of basic education and the direction it is taking.

It is available on request from the Secretariat of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All. UNESCO, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France. Fax: 33.1.40.65.94.06
BOOK NOTES

The Twelve Who Survive

Today, one out of thirteen children born in the world does not live to celebrate a first birthday. However, this situation is expected to improve by the year 2000. But what happens to the twelve children who survive?

In his book, The Twelve Who Survive, Robert Myers argues that international organizations and governments should go beyond programmes aimed primarily at child survival and invest much more in programmes devoted to growth, care, and development in early childhood. Increased attention to a child's creative and coping potential and to social and emotional well-being can help to increase the survival rate, even as it enhances the quality of life, says Myers. Drawing on extensive research and on numerous specific programme experiences in developing countries, Myers emphasizes the importance of participation and partnerships among agencies, governments and families. He reviews the needs and successes of programmes aimed at boosting the growth and development of children to help them realize their individual and social potential, and concludes by considering priorities for the next decade and beyond.


Women and Literacy

Poverty and illiteracy go hand in hand, so it is not surprising that 95 percent of the world's illiterate adults are in the developing countries. This high percentage is partly due to the effects of the 1980's economic crisis and adjustment policies, which led to substantial spending cuts on education by Third World governments.

Women are the hardest hit. In Women and Literacy, Marcela Ballara examines how women's lives are affected by illiteracy and demonstrates how reading, writing, and basic skills can boost their status, improve public health care, and contribute to their environment and more effective economic activity.

The book includes details on how to prepare literacy activities for women; a guide to education and action; a bibliography, including film and video materials; and a list of relevant organizations.


CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

APRIL - SEPTEMBER 1993

28 March-1 April Ongadongou (Burkina Faso)
The Pan-African Conference on the Education of Girls

>>UNESCO. Basic Education Division, 7, Place de Fontenoy,
75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Fax: 33.1.40.65.94.05

3-8 April Amman (Jordan)
Regional Seminar on Policy, Planning, and Organization of Education for Children and Young People with Special needs

>>>>UNESCO. Basic Education Division, 7, Place de Fontenoy,
75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Fax: 33.1.40.65.94.05

17-19 May Nairobi (Kenia)
Education for All in Eastern and Southern Africa: A Regional Evaluation and Planning Meeting of NGOs and Key UN Agencies

>>>>UNESCO. Basic Education Division, 7, Place de Fontenoy,
75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Fax: 33.1.40.65.94.05

3-4 June Paris (France)
Meeting of Ministers of Education of the nine largest countries

(Preparation of EFA Summit of Heads of Government of nine largest countries in New Delhi, November 1993)

>>>>UNESCO. Basic Education Division, 7, Place de Fontenoy,
75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Fax: 33.1.40.65.94.05

8-11 June Santiago (Chile)
Fifth Session of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee for the Major Project in Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

>>>>UNESCO Regional office for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC)
Calle Enrique Dejpalmo 2058, Casilla 3187, Santiago de Chile, Chile
Fax: 56.2.49.18.75

21-24 June Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia)
VIth Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and those responsible for Economic Planning in Asia and the Pacific (MINEDAP)

>>>>UNESCO. EDUCUE, 7, Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

5-10 July Paris (France)
International Forum: Scientific and Technological Literacy for All

>>>>PROJECT 2000+ Secretariat (EDSTE): UNESCO, 7, Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Fax: 33.1-40.65.94.05

8 September International Literacy Day Activities Worldwide

>>>>UNESCO. Basic Education Division, 7, Place de Fontenoy,
75352 Paris 07 SP, France.

8-10 September New Delhi (India)
Second Meeting of International Consultative Forum on Education for All

>>>>Secretariat of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, 7, Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Fax: 33.1.40.65.94.06

20-23 September Dariwawalan (Brunei)
International Conference: Towards Education for All

>>>>Organizing Committee, "Towards Education for All", Faculty of Education, University Brunei Darussalam, Gasinge 3186, Brunei Darussalam
Fax: (673) 2 42 70 03

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8 9