

## **Lessons in displacement: Challenges and solutions of girl's education in refugee camps in Kenya**

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Establishing education for youth in refugee camps presents serious challenges that range from unstable social conditions, lack of investment and potential for conflict. Research on this issue states that girls in these environments face a distinctive set of barriers to learning, especially when they reach the post-primary level of education (UNESCO 2016). At this stage, socio-cultural practices and traditions including early marriage and pregnancy can supersede a girl's choice for academic and professional development. This notwithstanding, the lack of a gender sensitive learning environment in and outside of school, and systemic poverty can contribute to early dropout rates of girls. (UNESCO 2016) As the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), education is seen as the right to inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all (Sustainable Development Goals 2016). The education of girls in these camps presents specific challenges that hinder their ability to learn and contribute to self-development beyond these communities. Organizations such as the World University Service of Canada, in partnership with Windle Trust Kenya, are seeking to increase girls' access to education in two of the world's largest and oldest refugee camps, Kakuma and Dadaab in Kenya. As part of the U.K Aid's Girls Education Challenge (GEC), the Kenya Equity in Education Project (KEEP) was launched in 2013. Since then, the KEEP project has made significant strides in creating a gender friendly learning environment for girls in both host and refugee communities in these regions through interventions that target the academic and personal success of girls. This paper will focus on the challenges in establishing productive learning environments for girls in these areas through KEEP's theory of change, which led to successful interventions such as remedial class model and gender-responsive pedagogy. Other topics such as teacher training and community awareness programs that have positively contributed to girl's access to quality education in these camps will also be discussed.

### **Introduction**

Education in emergencies refers to education for populations affected by unforeseen situations such as armed conflict or natural disasters (Sinclair 2007). In the case of refugees, the sudden uprooting in search for a safety from fear of conflict, persecution or civil instability causes severe disruptions to education and learning outcomes. The transient nature of refugee camps presents specific challenges that range from unstable social conditions due to a lack of statehood, provisional investments as the camps are dependent upon as humanitarian aid (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000) and most notably, the potential for conflict is not conducive to a productive learning environment.

These challenges are particularly difficult for girls and young women in these camps. A gendered educational disparity begins at primary and continues once they reach the secondary education level (UNESCO 2016). Due to the nature of refugee camps, it is difficult to determine the exact number of school-age girls that are not attending formal courses. UNESCO and the UNHCR estimate that nearly 15 million girls will not attend school and that only a third of girls in refugee camps attend secondary school (Ahlen 2016). Establishing innovative education strategies in these settings can help to ease these issues by providing a sense of normalcy, supporting psychological healing from traumatic experiences through structured social activities in a safe space, and protecting the investment that children and families have made in children's education (Sinclair 2007).

The world's oldest and largest refugee settlements are in Kenya. These camps host a total of nearly 600,000 refugees, of which nearly 50% are under the age of 25. (UNHCR 2015) The Kenya Equity in Education Project (KEEP) is run jointly by the World University Service of Canada and Windle Trust Kenya (WTK) and is supported by U.K Aid's Girls Education Challenge (GEC). This project focus is on bridging the gap for marginalized girls in these camps. Access to education in both refugee and host communities of Turkana and Garissa is lower than the national average due to cultural and societal pressures, lack of infrastructure and domestic burdens. In these settings, girls are particularly marginalized as they face obstacles limiting their education quality and outcomes. The project focuses on targeted interventions that address the specific needs of marginalized girls under these unique contextual factors. These interventions include addressing lack of sanitary facilities and sanitary wear, early marriage, socio-

cultural conceptions of gender and education for girls; a lack of female role models including a lack of trained teachers, and poverty, which forces girls to stay home to help with domestic responsibilities and/or earn an income (KEEP March Midline Report 2016).

KEEP's theory of change recognizes the specific needs of marginalized girls in these camps and host communities. It identifies specific demand and supplies side challenges to implementing quality education amongst refugee and host communities. (KEEP March Midline Report 2016) Additionally, the project seeks to improve the quality and supply of education by ensuring adequate incentives for parents to send their girls to school. This program is the first of its kind in this region. This paper will discuss the successful interventions of gender-responsive pedagogy and the remedial class models. These interventions have directly attributed to an increase in attendance, performance and retention of girls in these areas. Furthermore, these interventions do not exist in a vacuum. Awareness programs led by community mobilisers and teacher training have added value to girl-child education in these areas.

### **Current situation of education in refugee camps**

To increase quality and access to education in emergency situations or conflict zones, certain measures must be taken including but not limited to safe and secure infrastructure, access to and equitable distribution of learning materials and trained teachers. Strategies for supporting education in emergency situations like refugee camps depends largely on national and international governments as well as donors who are well placed to administer the education system and curriculums. In the case of refugee camps, these settlements are established as temporary settlements, often located in rural or peri-urban environments where local schools may have not the capacity to accommodate additional students (Sinclair 2007). Education activities must be established to provide a sense of normalcy and continuity of learning for children in these settings.

Furthermore, these challenges may persist if, like in the case of Kenya's camps, repatriation is delayed. Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps are home to approximately 523,009 refugees of largely Somali, South Sudanese and Burundian descent (UNHCR

2016). These camps were established in the early 1990s and in that time, these areas appear to function as urban dwellings in the making (Montclos and Kagwanja 2000) as businesses and livelihoods were established to help mitigate the effects of forced migration.

As the top management agency of refugee camps, the UNHCR has 97 education programs implemented by 200 international and national NGO's (Ahlen 2016). Due to the unpredictable state of affairs in these camps, the agency has only 2 education posts, one in Geneva and one in South Sudan (Ahlen 2016). This can lead to serious gaps in learning outcomes for those most affected by forced and voluntary migration – most notably for the girl-child. Early marriage and gender discrimination are some of the many factors preventing girls from educational opportunities once settled in the camps.

In these environments, girls and young women are disproportionately affected by the lack of quality and accessible education. The cultural and institutional barriers that existed prior to the establishments of the camps can be exacerbated as a result of an emergency or insecurity in a given area. The Turkana and Garissa County in which these camps are located are home to largely pastoral and indigenous communities, where an estimated 6% and 3% of the residents attended formal primary level education respectively (Exploring Kenya's Inequality 2013). It is in this context that the KEEP project was developed.

### **Theory of change**

KEEP's theory of change recognizes that marginalized girls face specific barriers in accessing quality education as a societal and cultural pressure in Turkana and Garissa inhibit girl-child learning and personal development. The project has identified demand side challenges, which include quality and adequate incentives for parents such as scholarship programs and distribution of free items such as sanitary wear as well as supply side issues such as trained teachers, classrooms and textbooks (KEEP Midline Report 2016). In doing so, the project seeks to focus on girl-friendly environments in the classrooms and at home as well as mobilizing community support for girl-child education. As of March 2016, the project has a total reach of 47,187 girls and boys

enrolled in grades 4-8 and forms 1-4 for high school in 89-targeted schools (Keep Midline Report 2016).

The objective of non-formal education in a humanitarian setting is to teach girls basic skills through literacy, numeracy and life skills (Sinclair 2007). Moreover, the project ultimately seeks to stabilize the learning environment of girls in both host and refugee communities by directly addressing challenges that hinder learning outcomes. Along with this, the project focuses on three indicators to track girls in these schools: attendance, retention, and performance. With these indicators, the project centers on the power of education and how it can serve as a tool of empowerment help these girls to achieve their educational outcomes by providing sufficient supplies and capacity building interventions that directly affect those learning outcomes. Due to the ever-changing nature of refugee camps, these interventions must be responsive and resilient to meet the needs of girls in order to mitigate any future challenges.

### Successful interventions

#### *Remedial Classes*

Among KEEP's many interventions, there are two that have presented the most successful change in girl's education as well as the potential for a sustainable framework that can proceed post-KEEP. The first is the remedial class model, which has greatly increased access to and quality of education in refugee communities. The National Remedial Association for Education has defined remedial classes as a supplementary lesson for those who cannot keep up with their classes (NARE 1977). Although some studies (Poongothai & Thiyagarajah, 2012) have highlighted the inefficiencies of the remedial class model. These classes have helped refugee girls in these camps through specific criteria for entry. The program targets girls in classes 4, 5 and 6 who are found to be at risk of dropping out due to poor academic performance, high absenteeism and those who showed a lack of interest were targeted and also viewed as at risk. These supplemental classes cover subjects and are held on weekends. The extra study time provides girls with the chance to study beyond the classroom and away from household pressures such as chores.

KEEP is the only project providing additional learning opportunities to girls in these grades in refugee camps. Remedial classes are gratis and solely available in the camps because the Kenyan government has deemed such programs illegal in the host communities. KEEP provides these classes on Saturdays in 20 of its schools in the camps. In the first phase of this intervention, these classes were targeting students with low marks of <150 out of 600. As popularity increased for this program the criteria in Kakuma was focused on those who were most marginalized such as heads of households, had a disability, and unaccompanied minors. In Dadaab, social norms dictated no such criteria could be implemented and equality of access to these courses was demanded. (KEEP Midline Report 2016) The cut off for attendance was <100 out of 600 but was later increased to manage high demands.

Other benefits of the program such as the provision of snacks and interaction with other girls have contributed to the overall popularity of the program. KEEP reports that 81.9% of primary caregivers that were interviewed during midline report claimed that more girls attended classes regularly compared the 64.8% from the baseline report (KEEP Midline Report 2016). 88% of girls enrolled in these classes made this same claim (KEEP Midline Report 2016).

There is evidence to suggest that remedial classes have assisted in improving the performance of girls in schools. Latest data showed that 61.1% of girls in primary remedial programs noted an improvement in performance between term 1 and term 3 (KEEP Midline 2016). Some evidence showed girls scores increasing from to 418 out of 600, which is directly attributed to the KEEP's combined programs for remedial classes and distribution of solar lamps (Effectiveness and Impact of Solar Lamps and Remedial Classes). There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that increased retention of girls in schools is due to remedial classes however difficulties in tracking girls on an individual level persists in these settings.

Furthermore, remedial teachers have also benefited from this intervention. As of July 2016, 124 teachers were trained in the remedial teaching of which 87% are males and 13% are women. An important key to the successful administration of education in emergency situations is to empower teachers from affected community through supplies and in-service training (Sinclair 2007). Through this training, KEEP has created an

effective network of teachers who have the ability to share and train other teachers with the strategies and lessons learned. (Aikman et al. 2005) Furthermore, this program has provided direct benefits to teachers who are able to complete the curriculums on time as well increased mobility to travel to these centers with the provision of bicycles.

### *Gender Responsive Pedagogy*

Eliminating gender barriers in schools is vital for girls to access quality education. These gendered perspectives affect not only their academic growth but also expectations placed on them and their opportunities to engage in various activities (Sanford 2008). A key strategy to implementation education in emergency settings must focus on education systems that explicitly eliminate gender bias and discrimination resulting from cultural attitudes, practices and economic status (UNESCO et al. 2016).

Improving gender equality in these regions should be integral to the implementation of education quality since it entails removing barriers to opportunity and outcome such as discriminatory laws, customs, practices and institutional processes (Aikman et al. 2005). Implementing such programs can prove to be challenging, as the established gender roles in these camps are socio-cultural extensions of their communities. Often, policies and practices that aim to support gender equality do not always pay sufficient attention to the complexities, negotiations and practice of gender relation (Grabska 2011). In the camps, these programs may seek to impose gender mainstreaming that plays into the power dynamics of donor and beneficiary. There is a need to go beyond the view of women as 'survivors and victims' and men as 'perpetrators of violence' in these environments' in order for NGOs and humanitarian agencies to maintain a 'do no harm' practice of gender-related programming and policy development (Grabska 2011).

With the KEEP project, teachers are trained in gender responsive pedagogy (GRP), a teacher-learner strategy that emphasizes gender equality in educational perceptions and learning outcomes (Aikman et al. 2005). This strategy is meant to improve girls overall performance and attendance in school by emphasizing a girl-friendly learning environment. This training is directly in line with KEEP's theory of change as it reinforced the notion that a girl who is in a gender friendly environment will

feel encouraged to attend classes, retain more information and improve her performance.

Implementation of GRP begins with selected teachers both in host and refugee schools, as well as principals who were recruited as gender responsive leaders (GRL). To date, 364 KEEP teachers have participated in GRP training. This training is held once a term. Pre-and post surveys of GRP suggest that teachers did not recognize learning difference between boys and girls until after the training was completed. One teacher at AIC Lokichoggio in Kakuma noted the portrayal of girls in learning materials, and how they reinforced gender biases. She attributes this awareness to GRP training citing “her training as a teacher is now complete”. At the midline report, the project highlights certain changes that suggest that GRP training has had a positive effect on class participation, distribution of supplies and interactions between boys and girl. Three-quarters of the girls surveyed identified ‘big improvements’ in the way teachers handled the classroom. During focal group discussions, some girls noted that they were treated equally or better than the boys and felt encouraged to maintain their attendance and improved performance.

#### *Other successful interventions*

Other notable interventions have aided in the success of KEEP in Kakuma and Dadaab. Namely, KEEP teachers who are hired by the project and are well versed in KEEP’s theory of change. These teachers attend supplementary training sessions, like GRP and meetings with education officers in their respective camps to discuss challenges and successes in their schools. The selection of KEEP teachers is based on past teaching history, leadership and connection to these communities. By hiring teachers that are familiar with the communities in which they work, the delivery, and acceptance of new ideas are softened by these teachers, who are viewed as leaders and understand the socio-cultural contexts of girls in these areas. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for a former KEEP beneficiary to become a KEEP teacher or remedial teacher.

In addition, the project employs 44 (17 in Kakuma; 27 in Dadaab) community mobilisers (CM) who are KEEP’s beneficiaries point of contact in host and refugee

schools. They are tasked to follow-up with attendance in school and participation in KEEP supported activities. Some CM's possess training in conflict mediation and social work skills. As such, they play the role of champion for KEEP beneficiaries in their respective communities by motivating the girls to proceed with their learning and education endeavors. These individuals work directly with all participants of the project including the parents/guardians of the beneficiaries, community leaders, teachers, and head education officers of KEEP. As the eyes and ears of KEEP on the ground, they provide invaluable support and learning to this project and its success.

#### Conclusion: A case for sustainability

Education for populations affected by emergency or conflict has a high impact, as it is the first step to recovery and rebuilding. It is important to note that although refugee camps are not permanent, long-term displacement like those found in Dadaab or Kakuma can have a negative and long-term effects on children's learning. Therefore, education in emergency situations must be better coordinated on national and international platforms in a comprehensive manner that reduces risk, mitigates unwanted disruptions and maintains education for early recovery (UNESCO 2016). KEEP project has made significant strides in both host and refugee communities in creating a girl-friendly learning environment. However, more work must be done in terms of sustainability of this impact to motivate an integral shift for all members of these communities. Notably, KEEP administers certain activities for men and boys with the help of the White Ribbon Foundation. However, this intervention has had the minimal statistical impact on capacity building and awareness. Furthermore, the project must work more closely with the county governments and the Ministry of Education to maintain their successful interventions such as GRP, Remedial, and trained teachers as well as maintaining KEEP's remedial centers to motivate these children in positive learning environments.

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