



Refugee Law Project



Faculty of Law, Makerere University

Update on the Education of Refugee Children in Uganda

A THREE-YEAR STUDY

In June 2003, the Refugee Law Project published Working Paper No. 9, “*Education of Refugees in Uganda: Relationships Between Setting and Access.*” This report related the findings from the first year of a longitudinal study that follows the same schools, teachers, pupils, and families over a three-year period. Four case studies form the base of this research: Bujubuli Primary School in Kyaka II refugee settlement, Kashojwa Primary School in Nakivale refugee settlement, Katwe Primary School in Kampala, and the Kampala Urban Refugee Children’s Education Centre (KURCEC) also in Kampala. A team of three researchers—Sarah Dryden-Peterson, Jacques Bwira, and Sylvia Bohibwa—is following twenty pupils and their families at each school, ten refugees and ten nationals.

This research has two aims. First, to determine the access refugee children have to education in each of the different case study settings. In this way, it addresses the question, *what forms of education best reach refugee children?* Second, and most important, the extension of this study over time examines the effects of different types of schools on the creation of stability among children and their social integration. In this way, it addresses the question, *what are the most effective educational situations in which to promote the well-being of refugee children?*

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bujubuli Primary School

The population of refugees in Kyaka II refugee settlement has tripled in the

past year, with new arrivals from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In addition, the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) has assumed the responsibilities of being implementing partner from Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). Last year, Kyaka II seemed like a rural area of Uganda that happened to host refugees. It now feels like a site of humanitarian work and aid delivery: 17 motorbikes ply the recently refurbished road, an overflow waiting area has been built for the health clinic, and the NGO presence is much expanded.

The effects of these changes in Kyaka II on Bujubuli Primary School have been substantial, both positive and negative.

1) Last year, classes ranged from 14 to 60 students; there are now, 150 students in each of three streams of P1, all of which study under trees. The infrastructure of the school—while more than adequate in the past—is no longer sufficient.

2) The refugee population of the school now far outnumbered that of the nationals; however, all but one of the 15 teachers are Ugandan nationals. Language has become a central issue; there are severe communication problems between teachers and recently arrived refugees, with some pupils demoted by as much as five class levels from their previous status in DRC.

3) Despite the tripling of school size, only three teachers have been added and only four out of 15 teachers are qualified as teachers. The Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS), working in collaboration with the District Inspector of Schools (DIS), has attempted to address this situation by recruiting newly-trained teachers from the teacher training college in Kyegegwa. These new teachers are highly motivated and are bringing new

and innovative techniques to their classes.

4) UNHCR has recently constructed a secondary school in the settlement. This development provides much expanded opportunity for education in Kyaka II and has been greeted with enthusiasm by teachers and refugee families alike. This school has helped to create a sense of hope among pupils and their families, and most individuals interviewed predict that many more P7 pupils will continue to secondary studies in the next year.

5) Teaching and learning at Bujubuli have been greatly affected by food insecurity. Most of the recent arrivals—the majority of pupils at the school—have not yet harvested, and families explain that there is not enough food in the World Food Programme (WFP) ration to pack food for children's lunches at school. As a result, lessons in the afternoon are ill-attended and less than productive.

Based on these observations at Bujubuli, we make the following recommendations:

- ? That temporary classrooms be erected immediately at Bujubuli Primary School to cater for the increased population of pupils;
- ? That refugee teachers, who speak the same languages as the pupils, be employed by UNHCR/URCS, to address both the teacher shortage and the issue of language;
- ? That the URCS and the DIS continue their collaboration to attract qualified teachers to Bujubuli Primary School;
- ? That teachers, URCS staff, and families capitalize on the excitement surrounding the new secondary school in Kyaka II and systematically encourage current P7 pupils and previous P7 leavers to attend this school;
- ? And that the WFP consider implementation of a feeding scheme at Bujubuli Primary School.

Kashojwa Primary School at Nakivale

Nakivale refugee settlement is in a state of flux. Voluntary repatriation is underway for Rwandese refugees, but very few have agreed to return home; in addition, some refugees who had gone back to Rwanda have since returned to Nakivale. There are also over 5,000 asylum seekers—Rwandese refugees who came to Uganda after being expelled from Tanzania—living in the settlement. Although they are not catered for in the UNHCR budget due to their legal status, they are accessing health and education services, and contributing to an overloading of the assistance structure. Land continues to be a contentious issue in the settlement and surrounding areas, with unresolved boundary disputes pending both in courts and between individuals on the ground.

Kashojwa Primary School is also in a state of flux.

1) There has been a substantial turnover of teachers. In particular, six senior teachers returned to Kenya before the beginning of this school year. The Headmaster and teachers alike say that their departure has created a "leadership vacuum." Indeed, a school day at Kashojwa feels chaotic, with several hundred pupils consistently not in their classrooms. Pupils spend valuable class time playing outside, wasting their own learning time and distracting other pupils from their studies.

2) There is a shortage of teachers at Kashojwa Primary School, contributing to a lack of control over pupils. The government ceiling for teachers posted to the school has not been reached. In addition, one teacher applied for a transfer in secret; and one teacher has not shown up for duty more than three times since he was posted to the school in the third term of last year.

3) Pupils attribute the decline in the standard of teaching—and specifically of English-language instruction—to the departure of the Kenyan teachers. P5 and P6 pupils cannot carry on a simple conversation in English; and the P4 class

has not had an English teacher for over three months. In a school in which children of eight nationalities study together, the lack of a common language is an immense barrier to learning.

4) There is a noticeable lack of opportunity for post-primary education in Nakivale settlement; with over 1800 pupils, Kashojwa Primary School is indeed the largest primary school in the county. However, there are several pupils repeating P7—despite having passed well last year—simply because they cannot access secondary school and chose not to remain at home. Many pupils simply leave school after P7.

Based on these observations at Kashojwa, we make the following recommendations:

- ? That URCS and the DIS work together to attract more teachers to Kashojwa Primary School, perhaps establishing a relationship with a local teacher training college as has been effective at Bujubuli Primary School;
- ? That the Kashojwa school administration, teachers, and URCS work together to establish a positive and calm school environment in which teaching and learning can take place, which can in turn help attract more teachers to the school;
- ? That the issue of English-language teaching be addressed seriously by the teaching staff of Kashojwa Primary School;
- ? And that the UNHCR consider constructing a secondary school in Nakivale refugee settlement.

Katwe Primary School

Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Kampala continues to be less than universal, as access to education for children in poverty—both refugees and nationals—is limited. City schools charge fees to cover costs such as water, electricity, and living stipends for teachers. Most refugees who live in Kampala are not on the urban

caseload of UNHCR and therefore do not receive assistance with food, accommodation, or school fees.

Katwe Primary School is a school that serves children living in poverty, including urban refugees. Changes at the school over the past year affect the education of refugee children in this setting.

1) The number of refugee pupils at Katwe is increasing. This increase may be a result of a lack of other opportunities for education for refugees in Kampala (see Kampala Urban Refugee Children's Education Centre, below), a growing urban refugee population, and/or a rise in the ability of more settled urban refugees to pay school fees.

2) A related factor is that the presence of refugees at Katwe Primary School is more tangible than last year. In serving this new population, teachers speak specifically of the need for language acquisition for pupils not from an English-language system. Located in an area that is home to people from all over Uganda, the school uses English as the 'local' language and as the sole medium of instruction. This immersion model is effective in the younger classes where the English language is taught explicitly, but difficult for older children who lack the basic language skills they need in order to access the complex content of lessons in subject areas.

3) Refugee families report that their children are marginalised by teachers at Katwe Primary School, a development they attribute to the growing population of refugees in the school and to language differences. While we were not able to independently confirm this sentiment, an 'us' vs. 'them' attitudes within the school will need to be carefully monitored and actively countered with proactive teaching that recognises and respects diversity.

4) Teachers at Katwe continue to exhibit creativity and innovation in their teaching. With classes of less than 50 pupils, participatory methods are possible and teachers plan carefully to ensure that their lessons include interactions between teachers and pupils as well as group

work. Teachers attribute these developments to EUPEK (Aga Khan Enhancement of Universal Primary Education in Kampala project).

Based on these observations at Katwe, we make the following recommendations:

- ? That Katwe Primary School consider offering remedial English-language lessons before school and after school each day to meet the needs of its growing refugee population;
- ? That Katwe Primary School make efforts to welcome a growing number of refugee children to the school, sensitising national pupils and reaching out into the urban refugee community in Katwe;
- ? And that despite the expiration of EUPEK, teachers at Katwe continue to engage in dialogue about their teaching practice and in the creation of didactic materials.

Kampala Urban Refugee Children's Education Centre (KURCEC)

As stated above, UPE in Kampala is not free in practice. For many children living in poverty in the city—refugees and nationals alike—education is thus out of reach. The Kampala Urban Refugee Children's Education Centre (KURCEC), a refugee-borne community-based organization, was set up to address this lack of access, providing free primary education. Started in 2001, KURCEC operated without interruption for three years through the commitment of a small group of volunteer teachers from DRC. In March 2004, the school was evicted from the church in which it operated and, since that time, no classes have been held.

The disruption in the provision of education at this self-help school has a number of consequences for the pupils of KURCEC, their families, and the education of refugee children in Kampala.

- 1) Access to education for urban refugees has been limited. While all of

the national pupils who previously attended KURCEC have enrolled in other local primary schools, two of the seven refugee pupils who remain in Kampala (two children have been resettled to the United States and one is living in a settlement in northern Uganda) are not in school.

2) Importantly, the disposition of these two children who are no longer in school has visibly changed; while they once exuded curiosity, these two boys now have vacant eyes and resigned attitudes. Their senses of hope for the future have all but disappeared.

3) The situation of the refugee children currently in school is precarious, with many having been repeatedly chased away from local government-aided and private schools over the past two terms for failure to pay school fees.

4) It is of note that five of the former KURCEC pupils—three nationals and two refugees—are now at Katwe Primary School, serving as an interesting link that will be explored in further analyses.

Based on these observations of KURCEC, we make the following recommendations:

- ? That the teachers and families of KURCEC be encouraged to re-open their school to continue to address the educational needs of refugee children in Kampala;
- ? That advocates for the education of refugee children—such as UNHCR, Inter-Aid, or local faith-based and community-based groups—provide logistical support to a refugee-borne school in this period of uncertainty.

Next Steps

Data collection on these four case studies will continue until August 2005. At that time we will hold community meetings to disseminate findings from the three-year study and offer training workshops to schools based on some of our recommendations. Any questions, ideas, or suggestions on this on-going work are welcomed. Sarah Dryden-Peterson can be contacted through email at sarah_dryden@post.harvard.edu.