



## GOOD PRACTICES FOR STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION IN KENYA

### INTRODUCTION

Community participation is critical to the effectiveness and sustainability of education programmes. As such, community members must be supported to participate “*actively, transparently and without discrimination*” in all stages of education responses (INEE Minimum Standards). Such practices help identify learners’ education needs, locally available resources, security concerns, and other information essential for the delivery of refugee of education.

Efforts to build community awareness and capacity through outreach and training are vital for strengthening education systems for the long term. While greater community engagement leads to improved education, improved education also, in turn, leads to stronger communities. As the UNHCR Global Education Strategy states: “*Educated refugees provide leadership in displacement and in rebuilding communities recovering from conflict. With quality education, refugees acquire the knowledge and skills essential to understanding and promoting gender equality and sustainable peaceful coexistence, among other areas of community development.*”

Over the past two decades, both of Kenya’s refugee camps, Kakuma (pop.125,000) and Dadaab (pop. 463,000), have seen growing community participation through parent associations, community mobilisers, local media, and other structures. Not only have these community structures strengthened refugee schools in numerous ways, but they have also proven to be an important tool for addressing cultural norms that marginalise certain groups of children and young people (for example, low parental/community support for girls’ education).<sup>1</sup>

### GOOD PRACTICES

#### 1. Strengthening parental engagement

Capacity building for School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) is an important tool for enhancing school governance – particularly with respect to leadership, financial management, and democratic decision-making (Global Education Strategy Objectives 1.5, 3.2).

In Kakuma and Dadaab, recent training workshops, exchange visits, and follow-up meetings for SMCs, PTAs, and Boards of Management (BoMs) have resulted in notable successes, such as resource mobilisation, teacher recruitment, and facility construction/maintenance.

In Kakuma, parents who have recently undergone SMC trainings delivered by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), expressed feeling more confident in their roles and responsibilities. The change in title from SMC to BoM following the training, has helped them self-identify as managers and guardians of the school, motivating them to become even more engaged with their work: *“with the [new] title of BoM...we have noticed that we have a management responsibility...we*



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*A SMC representative shares some of her school's recent successes with the group at a Kakuma-wide SMC meeting.*

*can contribute to the governance of the school and work with the head teacher – and all the teachers – to improve the quality of teaching in the school and to protect the environment of the school” (BoM member).*

SMC/PTA training is also an important vehicle for promoting gender equality and other aspects of community development. For example, recognising that *“a girl's success in school is enabled by having parents and a community that encourages her education”*,<sup>ii</sup> the Kenya Equity in Education Project (KEEP) recently provided training (with a gender focus) to 208 PTA members and Head Teachers from the Dadaab refugee camps and host community.<sup>iii</sup>

The workshops, delivered in October 2014, were all residential, allowing participants to explore a wide range of material over the course of three days. Topics included: PTA roles and responsibilities; legal and policy frameworks for education; girl child education (GCE); child rights; and school improvement plans. The trainers noted that a three day time period *“is required to allow for discussion and debate around complex issues of Islamic law, conventional law, and cultural beliefs”* in order to build support for GCE. Given that almost all participants were Somali, trainers found the inclusion of Islamic readings in the curriculum was essential for positively influencing participants' attitudes towards GCE.

*“The constant engagement of the participants in meaningful and lively discussions seemed to bear fruit; we saw attitudes and beliefs changing positively with some participants coming up with highly convincing ideas to help their colleagues realize the need to obey the law and engage in strategies to promote girls' education in their communities; to behave like responsible parents and offer advantage to their daughters to participate more effectively in education.” (KEEP PTA Trainers)*

As the majority of participants were illiterate, the training employed inclusive and participatory methods such as brainstorming, plenary discussions, debate, group work, role plays, and case studies. Importantly, pre-training questionnaires were verbally administered to participants and the responses were used to tailor the training content, building from existing strengths and addressing knowledge gaps. Overall, the workshops were a success, with post-training evaluations indicating an enhanced understanding of the training content and greater support for GEC.

In addition to training workshops, parents identify exchange visits to other schools as a good practice for strengthening parent associations. Agencies in both Kakuma and Dadaab have coordinated exchange visits for SMCs, PTAs and

BoMs, both at a local level between the refugee and host communities, as well as across the country between Kakuma and Dadaab.

Save the Children International (SCI) has coordinated three ‘exchange tours’ in Dadaab, whereby SMC members and refugee teachers from the camps are brought to the best performing schools in the host community (Garissa county). As guests, they are able to engage in classroom observation and interact with teachers and fellow SMC members at the host school. SCI selects host community schools that face many of the same challenges that are prevalent in the camps, but that also



offer a noteworthy education programme to learn from. One of the schools on the tour, for example, is overcrowded with more than 5,000 learners and yet has had success integrating children with special needs. The intent is to inspire refugee parents and teachers by showing them what can be achieved with limited resources. Following the tour, participants are required to develop their own action plans for implementing what they have learned. SCI monitors progress towards the action plans through follow-up support visits.

*SMC representatives from across Kakuma refugee camp come together at a meeting with LWF to share and learn from one another's experiences. Many highlighted the importance of exchange visits.*

## 2. Engaging men and boys

UNHCR believes that in “communities marked by gender inequality”, agencies should “take care to build broad support for programmes that empower women”.<sup>iv</sup> KEEP exemplifies this approach, by recruiting, training, and supporting a team of community mobilisers to build support for GCE in Kakuma and Dadaab. The mobilisers work within their own communities (refugee and host) to increase parental and community support for GCE through individual/group discussions and awareness-raising events.

Mobilisers receive a five-day training from Co-Exist Kenya, where they work with a consultant to: i) develop individual plans of action for community engagement, ii) acquire the specific communication skills needed for their target audience, and iii) identify entry points for initiating community-based activities. At first, communities were suspicious of the project and mobilisers struggled to find entry points for engaging men and boys. However, support visits from Co-Exist every three months have assisted mobilisers to practically apply the skills learned during the training and generate enhanced community dialogue.

The consultant continuously monitors and evaluates mobilisers’ progress, supporting them to revise or update their action plans as needed. A key learning has been the importance providing regular refresher trainings, as the competencies developed during the initial training are “*persistently being challenged by myriad factors on the ground*” such as the “*continuous subjection to unequal relations between women/girls and men/boys with roots in deeply*

*entrenched social, economic and political informal conventions” (Co-Exist consultant).*

*The needs of a community mobiliser are different in the refugee camp than in the host community; some are in very hostile communities in the camps, others are in mild environments in the host community. So I go to communities with the mobilisers, sit down with the elders, and demonstrate how one can positively engage with the elders, help [the mobilisers] gain new skills, then I give them assignments, come back later and check their progress. I am happy to see that their competencies have really improved. Now they are not just going to communities to convince them. The communities have been empowered to the point they can deliver joint programs with our mobilisers. – Co-Exist Consultant*

To increase community engagement, the project has moved towards a cluster approach, whereby mobilisers work together to form joint engagement strategies in partnership with the community. In addition to enhancing peer support and mentorship, this model benefits female mobilisers who often face challenges leading community discussions alone. Four clusters have been formed, and the participating community members have already planned eight outreach activities to commence in February 2015. All the activities are aimed at addressing community-level gender norms and stereotypes that negatively impact GCE.

*The consultant Wanjala Wafula (fourth from left) meets with a group of community leaders from the refugee and host communities around Dadaab. Through these meetings Wanjala strives “to convince men to be partners rather than perpetrators, and give children – including girls – the opportunity to get an education”. Initially the leaders opposed girls’ education; however after four meetings all of them now have at least one daughter enrolled in school and are actively speaking to other men about the importance of GCE.*



### 3. Community participation and engagement through film and radio

Through its work in Kakuma and Dadaab, FilmAid has found that mediums such as film and radio can facilitate meaningful community participation if used effectively. The field manager in Kakuma believes that, “*community engagement is the key to change [...] We are working with resilient people, and parents should play an active role in the education of their children and communities*”. FilmAid has learned that in order to effectively promote community engagement, film screenings should be accompanied by guided group discussions and the development of community-based action plans. Building from this, FilmAid also delivers targeted film-based workshops to raise awareness on specific issues, such as education. The workshops typically consist of six different screenings accompanied by several training modules, group discussions, and the development of personal action plans.

Like film, interactive radio programmes have been used in the camps to promote community engagement and participation on a range of issues. A new weekly radio broadcast, led by KEEP, has aired 21 episodes between August 2014 and January 2015 on different topics related to GCE. Prior to developing the broadcast, Farm Radio International (FRI) conducted a project scoping mission in 2013 to identify ways to optimise community engagement. From there, a committee (comprised of a primary school teacher, secondary school teacher,

mother, father, KEEP education officer and education counsellor, and Dadaab FM journalists) was formed to select the topics for each episode. The committee also plays an essential role in mobilising community members to create radio content. Past episodes have featured parents, religious and community leaders, head teachers, and local government officials (District Education Officers) as guest speakers. In addition, KEEP has worked closely with drama and debate clubs from primary and secondary schools to create radio dramas on issues children care about. One radio drama, for example, encouraged parents to allow girls and boys to walk to school together in groups to improve students' safety. A key learning from the project has been the importance of scheduling radio production around the school calendar (e.g. avoiding exams) to enable students and teachers to actively contribute.

Community listeners are also invited to call the radio programme and share their comments and ideas on air. A KEEP staff member notes that, "*listeners are calling in, appreciating the programme as it is touching real issues surrounding girls' education.*" Moreover, several questions are posed at the end of each episode and listeners are asked to text their responses (e.g. 1 for agree, 2 for disagree) to help gauge audience perspectives. This participatory listening activity has increased significantly since the first episode, and the analysis of responses is forthcoming.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

- [2015 UNHCR country operations profile – Kenya](#)
- [UNHCR Community-based Protection Paper](#)
- [Kenya FilmAid website](#)
- [Kenya Equity in Education Project video](#)
- [Co-Exist Kenya website](#)

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<sup>i</sup> See the documentation piece on Good Practice in Special Needs Education for examples of how community structures have helped improve access to quality education for children with special needs in Dadaab.

<sup>ii</sup> KEEP PTA training report

<sup>iii</sup> KEEP is funded by UK-Aid and implemented by the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and Windle Trust Kenya (WTK).

<sup>iv</sup> UNHCR Community-based Protection Paper