Educate A Child

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“Bridging tomorrow” Project

Innovative Financing Support for Education

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1. Organisational Background

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an independent, humanitarian non-governmental organisation established in 1946. NRC’s mission is to promote and protect the rights of people who are forced to flee their countries or their homes within their countries during crisis. In its role as a rights-based organisation, NRC takes action during situations of armed conflict or humanitarian crisis. Today NRC is organised as an independent organisation headquartered in Oslo, Norway.

NRC established a presence in Côte d’Ivoire in 2007. With a head office based in Abidjan, NRC runs two field offices in Western Côte d’Ivoire (Duékoué and Blolequin) in the areas most affected by the 2011 post-electoral crisis. In line with its mission, NRC primarily targets internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees in the region through a multi-sectoral approach in Education, ICLA (information, counselling and legal assistance), Shelter/WASH (reconstruction of homes, schools and sanitation), and Food Security. In a region with extremely fragile social cohesion, NRC works with all communities (Autochtones, Allochtones and Allogenes) in villages and rural settlements.

NRC has identified formal, non-formal and vocational education as key intervention areas in Côte d’Ivoire and supports children and youth affected by the conflict who are unable to achieve their right to a quality education. Since 2007, NRC has successfully integrated over 21,600 out of school children into formal schools through its accelerated education response “Bridging Class Programme” and reconnected over 2,300 overaged and out-of-school youth into productive activities through its vocational programme. NRC is part of the Education Cluster and works in close collaboration and coordination with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and other education stakeholders. NRC funds its education activities from bilateral donors as well as NRC’s internal funds.

1 Allochtones are Ivorians originally from other parts of the country. Allogenes are migrants who came from other countries within the region. Autochtones are indigenous populations. Autochtones primarily live in villages with small populations of migrants. Settlements are found outside the villages (often in forests) and are primarily inhabited by Allochtones and Allogenes.
2. Problem Statement

Education is a fundamental right for all children in all situations. Yet in the world today, 58 million primary school aged children are denied their right to education. Half of them, 28.5 million, live in conflict and crisis affected countries such as Côte d’Ivoire. Despite increased recognition of the important role that education may play for children and young people affected by crisis, education remains the most underfunded of all humanitarian sectors².

Access to education in Western Côte d’Ivoire has been deeply affected by the November 2010 election and the subsequent political and inter-ethnic conflict. Violence led to internal displacement of an estimated 500,000 to 700,000 people. By November 2011 approximately 140,000 students were confirmed dropouts for the 2010-2011 school year. At the peak of the crisis, one million children were out of school and 800,000 children lost between four and six months of schooling.³ The number of out of school children has risen sharply in the West, partly due to the forced closure of schools for up to 18 months. In Toulepleu, the 2010-2011 school year was officially cancelled, and the 2011-2012 school year only began in late January 2012. The protracted period outside of the classroom is an obstacle in itself for some children and in particular for older children, who can be denied access to lower grade levels and are at greater risk of being unable to return to formal education. Responding to the needs of these children led NRC to explore the possibility of providing a specific Accelerated Education Programme (AEP)⁴ suitable to the context and developed for this out-of-school population.

The “Bridging Tomorrow” project in Côte d’Ivoire and other AEP developed by NRC in the past⁵ have proved to be an effective approach to address the overwhelming numbers of out-of-school children and youth. Strong evidence exists across all of NRC’s AE programmes that its activities to date have provided access to education for children or youth who were overaged and unable to (re)enrol in the formal school system, or children affected by displacement who did not otherwise have access to the formal schooling system within their host communities. NRC has worked with government in Côte d’Ivoire to develop and approve a harmonised accelerated education approach that effectively creates pathways for children to re-enter the formal education system. The “Bridging Tomorrow” approach is outlined in the government’s medium-term action plan as a tried and tested way to get children into school. Therefore, the project has addressed a current gap in the government’s education strategy.

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³ Ministry of Education (MOE), Plan d’Action a Moyen Terme (PAMT) 2012-2014 (September 2011).
⁴ AEPs are flexible age-appropriate programmes that promote access to education in an accelerated timeframe for disadvantaged groups, over-age out-of-school children and youth who missed out or had their education interrupted due to poverty, violence, conflict and crisis. The goal of AEPs are to provide these learners with equivalent certified competencies as in the formal system, in an accelerated timeframe, with learners transitioning to mainstream education at some intermediary point, or completing an entire primary cycle within the programme. Definition taken from the INEE Education in Emergencies (EiE) Terminology Bank http://toolkit.ineesite.org/term-bank/en/terms/

http://educateachild.org
1. Innovative Education Financing through Livelihoods

3.1 Barriers to reach sustainable school reintegration for girls

During the first implementation year of the project in 2013, NRC carried out a participatory assessment within the communities actively implicating ten schools hosting the AE classes and identified some major issues that hindered access to education and affected retention of children after the transition process into formal schooling, particularly for girls. It was important to understand the reasons for this and identify strategies to increase girls’ access and retention in school, particularly after the reintegration process. This evaluation was conducted using focus group discussions helping NRC to identify clear barriers from a beneficiary perspective. Parents noted several reasons why girls stopped their schooling after reintegration into the formal school system including: early pregnancy, early marriage, household poverty and parental neglect of the importance of girls’ education. Family size and poverty levels in rural areas were high as well. Although education is officially free in Côte d’Ivoire, hidden costs such as uniform fees and informal school contributions make it difficult for the poorest families to enrol and keep their children in school. Parents shared that they often prefer to use their limited resources to educate boys instead of girls, which is viewed as a better investment for the future, while girls are kept at home to help take care of the household.

3.2 Mothers’ Clubs as livelihood solutions to increase community income and contribute to school functioning

In the second year of the project, NRC Education Programme together with the Food Security and Livelihoods Programme raised funds to develop a holistic strategy to support family household economies while enhancing schools’ annual budgets. Mothers’ clubs, comprised of students’ mothers, were set up and supported by NRC and partners to implement income generating activities. The purpose of the Mothers’ clubs is to address economic barriers to education, support school fundraising mechanisms and canteen programmes.

Money generated is shared into three parts: The first is kept as the takings of the clubs, the second is divided among the clubs’ members and the third is used to support the functioning of the school.

As it is assumed by the community in Côte d’Ivoire, women make better use of household resources than men, NRC purposely targeted mothers as members of the clubs to enhance their commitment to support school functioning. Women attending these clubs are functionally trained in literacy and numeracy and sensitised on the importance of girls’ education. A Mothers’ club is composed of at least 15 mothers of school children committed to initiating an income generating activity and investing part

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6 The “Bridging Tomorrow” project was designed for a three year period and began in October 2012. The first school year was held from October 2012 to June 2013, while the second was from October 2013 to June 2014.

7 The members of the Mothers’ club are not exclusively mothers of the children enrolled into the Bridging Classes project.
of the revenue in the functioning of their community school. The club is organised as an association with a board. Members sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Parent Teachers Association and the school. When relevant, an external stakeholder like an NGO may be part of the MoU.

In almost all targeted villages, the community members propose volunteer members to establish the club. Some have appointed an already existing women’s association to set up the club and have provided a free plot of land for their activities. The school director together with the PTA identifies the priorities of the school. Mothers’ clubs are provided with agricultural kits (tools and seeds) and trained on modern farming techniques. The support provided includes training on basic accounting and association management. This is complemented by a follow up of the activities and on-the-job training to enhance skills learned.

3.3 Major achievements

- Among the 60 Mothers’ clubs set up, 15 were established during the second school year and have provided support to host schools during this last school year of the project (2014-2015)
- Mothers’ clubs’ contributions vary from 16% to 25% of the annual budget of the schools
- Mothers’ clubs in 15 schools provided regular food rations for the canteen as well as teaching and learning materials such as chalk, notebooks and hygienic kits
- Mothers’ clubs rehabilitated the latrines and dug a well to provide water in one school
- More than 900 mothers have undergone literacy and numeracy trainings
- Mothers who have started literacy training are able to follow their children’s schooling, particularly girls
- In a context where only few women are involved in school decision-making, Mothers’ clubs are a tool to involve women in the management of schools and by the same token to advocate for the protection of girls.

NRC’s “Bridging Tomorrow” project is a successful education programme methodology that allows out-of-school children to follow a one-year accelerated programme and be reinserted into the formal system. By targeting villages and schools in the Western part of Côte d’Ivoire (Guékon, Cavally and Tonkpi regions), NRC is able to assist IDPs most affected by the 2011 crisis as well as vulnerable children at risk of dropping out due to the age limit. NRC staff work closely with parents, local communities and schools to identify and enrol out of school children, recruit teachers, and ensure the smooth transition of out-of-school children to the formal education system.
The project aims to ensure gender parity in AE classes, and provide support to girls to stay in school after classes end. As part of NRC’s sustainability strategy, National NGOs (NNGOs) are trained on the approach through the course of the project’s implementation.

The project provides quality education in an accelerated manner to out of school children who have missed years of school. Children complete the equivalent of two years of the national curriculum in a single year of 32 weeks\(^8\) and the majority of them are then directly reintegrated into the formal education system. NRC provides a child-centred, quality education. All teachers and students receive didactic and learning kits to assure that there are adequate materials for quality learning. Finally, NRC works with the Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) to ensure that the parents are also involved in school management and in the education of their children. The teachers receive continuous in service training and follow-up during the year. After children are reintegrated into the formal system, NRC follows their progress in subsequent years.

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\(^8\) NRC usually targets three different levels in primary school: The 1-2 school year is for children aged 10-11, the 3-4 school year targets the age of 12-13 years and the 5-6 school year targets 14-15 year old children, enabling them to sit for the exam before the age of 16.