

**ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOS
28 – 30 JUNE 2011, International Conference Center Geneva**

Background Paper
Side meeting: Distance Learning: A window of opportunity

Tuesday 28 June 2011, 13:00 - 14:00, Room 5

Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins

The Issue

The need for tertiary education amongst refugee populations is increasing. Though often thought of as transitory, refugee camps and refugee populations are increasingly static. Recent JRS data for example, suggests that as of 2009 the average stay in a refugee camp is 18 years. In that time a generation will pass away without either returning to its home or being resettled, while another will have been born and educated without ever seeing its homeland. Some never will.

Observers of this phenomenon write of its impact on the psychology of refugees – the sense of worthlessness, pointlessness and feelings of resentment and frustration that are often manifested in crime and domestic violence. Most of all, they write that the lives of refugees are simply a blank - that if there was life before, it is now over; that if there is a life to come, it can only begin when they are no longer refugees.

One of the guiding principles of this initiative is an acceptance of the physical situation of many refugees, but not of its psychological impact. This is not a resettlement program. It is unlikely to lead directly to repatriation or integration into the societies of countries in which refugees are currently located. Its potential to improve employment prospects is limited by the wider availability of employment and the prevailing political environments. What it can do however, is bring refugees into a wider community of academic study, to engage their minds and equip them with skills that can be applied today, within their refugee populations. It will not recreate a past that existed before becoming a refugee, nor bring closer a better future afterwards, but it will offer the possibility of a life worth living today.

The Model

In simple terms, the Program's model of delivery uses the internet to offer participants a choice between direct entry onto a credential offered through Jesuit Commons, or Community Leadership tracks that will equip them with the skills necessary to make a contribution to the communities in which they are currently located.

Project Duration

The project began in September 2010 and is funded through June 2014.

Outputs, outcomes and impacts

The partnership will produce three main outputs: 1) 5 course Certificates of Completions 2) A Diploma in Liberal Studies and 3) Community Service Learning Certificates.

Each COC will comprise a zero-credit bridge course to prepare students for successful study and 5, three credit courses from the JesuitNet catalogue. The zero credit bridge course will comprise an introduction to Jesuit education along with content to introduce writing for academic purposes, web search capability, word processing, library search, etc.

Initially, Certificates of Completion will be offered in themed majors suggested by the Learner Profiles completed by refugees during the Assessment Visits and subsequently refined by JRS staff locally. Completion of three Certificate of Completions lead to the award of a Diploma.

On the basis of assessment visits to Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi, Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya and Aleppo in Syria, the need for the following Community Leadership Tracks has emerged:

Counseling (Psycho-social). The need for community counselors was confirmed in both Dzaleka and Kakuma Camps. JRS presently provides training programs at both camps so the primary need is to enhance these programs and train additional refugees and/or staff as community counselors. An emerging need of high importance identified by JRS staff is for advanced counseling training in the area of trauma and suicide prevention.

Community health. During the Assessment Visit to Dzaleka both the Malawian Ministry of Health and JRS staff confirmed the need for community health workers. The camp's clinic director for example reported over 500 visits per day from refugees needing health care and medicine. Unfortunately a cholera outbreak at Kakuma during the Assessment Visit prevented the Team from assessing the need for community health workers there.

Education. The Assessment Visits to Dzaleka, Kakuma and Aleppo all confirmed the need for support in education, particularly in the training of primary and secondary teachers. In discussion, various stakeholders including the JRS, the World Lutheran Federation and the UN, all indicated their strong support for this track.

Partners

The Higher Education at the Margins Program is a partnership between The Jesuit Refugee Service, with its 29 years of supporting and educating refugee populations, and Jesuit Commons, a group of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (and others) committed to linking world-wide Jesuit educational resources with those populations affected by war, forced human migration and poverty throughout the world.

It does this primarily by mobilising voluntary efforts from the global network of universities, schools, churches and social service centres administered by Jesuits,

using the communications and social network tools now available through the internet.

Conceptually, Jesuit Commons seeks to create a both a real and a virtual meeting place for people and organizations to gather, learn from each other, and share resources. Consequently it is committed to designing a learning architecture in which this meeting place can be accessed beyond geographic boundaries. Some may simply pass through; others may stop and observe; still others may actively participate. All, however, will take what they need and contribute what they can to the benefit of everyone