

**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

**GLOBAL BORDER STUDIES: REINVENTING DISTANCE LEARNING FOR
REFUGEES ON THE THAILAND-BURMA BORDER**

World Education, Thailand

Who We Are

World Education is a Boston-based non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of the poor through economic and social development programs. World Education provides training and technical assistance in basic education and nonformal education for adults and children with special emphasis on literacy, vocational / life skills education, HIV& AIDS education, civil society development, microfinance / micro enterprise development, environmental education and natural resources management. Founded in 1951, World Education currently has programs in 26 countries with country programs and field offices in 24 countries.

World Education has worked with refugees and displaced people in Thailand since 1975, first in a program which prepared over 400,000 refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam to come to live in the United States, and since 1999, with displaced people of Burma including refugees and migrants.

What We Do on the Thailand-Burma Border

Since 1999, World Education has effectively trained, supported, and empowered Burmese refugee and migrant schools, communities, and community - based organizations which support education for displaced children. World Education has implemented programs and services for displaced people of Burma in eight provinces in Thailand. These programs have included more than ten ethnic minority groups of Burma. World Education has trained more than 13,000 teachers, almost 800 school directors, and 10,000 parents. Subgrants and technical assistance have been given to more than 20 community based organizations supporting education along the Thailand-Burma border. Teachers are trained in teaching methodology and skills so they can promote an active, student-centered approach and support the psychosocial needs of children who have experienced conflict.

World Education also prepares young adults to work effectively within their communities through post-secondary education and technical training programs. The Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE), with the support of World Education established the Institute of Higher Education (IHE) a system of higher education (post high school) in the 7 Karen refugee camps along the Thailand - Burma border. The goal of the IHE system is to offer quality higher education extending and enhancing the knowledge, skills and dispositions of refugee students who have already finished high school.

GBS on the Border

Global Border Studies (GBS) was founded in 2010 by World Education in collaboration with the KRCEE and Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) as a pilot project within the IHE systems to explore the feasibility of accredited online learning in a refugee camp setting.

Working with 14 young adults from Burma residing in Nu Po Refugee Camp, GBS offers students an opportunity to participate in internationally recognized educational programming that is relevant to their lives. GBS partners play a fundamental role in ensuring that a variety of interactive teaching and learning strategies are incorporated into the program, including group tutorials, student centered teaching, experiential learning and online discussions.

How It Works

At GBS students live, study and work together in a cross-cultural, English immersion environment. A full time staff of two on-site tutors, a general English teacher and an academic coordinator, and one online professor from Anglia Ruskin University, comprise the GBS faculty. Students are allocated one laptop each for research, documentation, homework and feedback on Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment), a virtual learning environment developed to help educators create on-line courses. Lessons, program development, and curriculum development, are all recorded on Moodle.

Core subjects in addition to general English skills, research and computer skills include:

Year 1 Human Development

Colonization to Conflict in Africa

Ethnic Conflict Case Studies -- Rwanda & Ireland

Year 2 Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation

Development Education

Sustainable Development and Environment

Academic coursework is followed by a one-year internship.

Issues the program has faced so far include: infrastructure, energy, and concern from the authorities about refugees having access to the internet.

What Makes GBS Special?

GBS is tailored for this specific community and context with an emphasis on sustainable, long-term outcomes. Traditionally, within a refugee context, higher education strategies are often employed to assist with immediate needs. GBS, however, is designed to give students the skills and knowledge they will need for the long-term future.

The broader academic content of GBS is delivered in a blended approach to ensure that the students have a deeper understanding and knowledge about global issues and solutions. An experiential approach is also integrated into the program to ensure that students have the chance to apply their knowledge and experience to local situations.

GBS delivers a unique skill set in the hope that young displaced people may return to Burma as future leaders to promote peace and reconciliation and assist in their country's development.