

Empowering Dzaleka Refugee Camp Youth through Education: An Intervention Method

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Context

The average refugee spends between 10-15 years in exile before they get a chance at being resettled (Xavier, 2019). It is important to note that this number varies for different areas, as some refugees have spent some 17-23 years depending on the conflict they fled. Resettlement is not even guaranteed for refugees with less than 1% of the 25.9 million refugee population being resettled each year.¹ Unfortunately, only about 2.5% get to be resettled from Dzaleka, and this is not even accounting for the fact that the population is growing, nor does it account for how long they must wait to get resettled. The uncertainty about their future has been associated with a depleted sense of hope among the refugee community, and one way this has been addressed is through education as a means to improve their prospects within refugee camps.

Dzaleka Refugee Camp has an estimated population of 41,000.² In Dzaleka, acquiring an education is one of the ways that parents feel their children may be able to rise above their circumstances, and not be confined to the lifestyle that exists for refugees in the camp. It is important to note that refugees in the camp only receive monthly food supplies with no cash assistance, leaving it up to refugees to find ways to generate any income they need. Access to education allows for refugees to receive practical training or expertise that would allow them to seek out jobs for income. There are many challenges that face the residents in Dzaleka, among them being the scarcity of opportunities and resources, including limited access to education.

In Dzaleka refugee camp, there is currently one Public School (Katudza Primary School) that is run by Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), a non-profit organization based in the camp. However, due to the schools limited capacity, in 2018, the school was only able to admit 150 students despite receiving over 4,000 enrollment requests. There are private schools that have been built in the camp, however, because of the limited employment/access to income generating ventures for most refugees in the camp, many parents are unable to afford the school fees/tuition required to enroll their children in these private schools.

While there is an absurd amount of school aged children who are not able to enroll in school, there is an increasing number of students who are dropping out of the private secondary schools due to their parents not being able to afford the school fees and the school supplies required for their children to attend school such as uniforms, notebooks, etc. The Emmanuel Foundation (EMMAF) is a community based non-profit organization in Dzaleka that has been running for 15 years, and I was able to work with them on a community needs assessment. We found that youth who are not enrolled in school are often engaging in risky behaviors such as alcohol and substance abuse, stealing, etc. We also identified an increasing trend of teenage pregnancies among youth that are either not enrolled in school or have dropped out.

Since there is no obligation for countries to get refugees out of camps, or to hire them for pay, refugees are left to look at education as the only other way they can escape the limited lifestyle in the camp. So, we started to look at how we can intervene in the increasing dropout rates, as well as providing access to education to those youth that are unable to be enrolled in public school or afford the private schools. Many refugee youth are losing their sense of purpose, dignity, and hope; there is an urgency to create a program that will not only increase free access to education to our youth, but also create a program that will empower our youth to understand and believe that they too can thrive and rise above their circumstances and be able to contribute to the well-being of their community.

Purpose

This is an intervention program that aims to empower youth through providing them with computing and leadership skills. Computing skills are valued in the camp, but not many people have access to the resources necessary for skill acquisition. Therefore, we will be providing our youth with skills that will allow them to be competitive applicants for positions within the camp—and we hope that this can empower them.

¹ UNHCR. (2019). Refugee statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>

² United Nation Country Team in Malawi. (2019). UNHCR registers over 41,000 people in congested dzaleka refugee camp.

Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/malawi/unhcr-registers-over41000-people-congesteddzaleka-refugee-camp>

Structure of Program/Curriculum

There will be three (3) main subject areas: General Computing, Leadership and Personal Development, and Microsoft. General Computing and Microsoft will be adapted from the Existing EMMAF adult ed program. Courses will run three (3) times a week, Monday through Friday. Each course/subject will be 70 minutes long. Our target number of students is 30, ages between 15-20. We will have 15 laptops. Computing and Leadership and Personal Development will occur at the same time with 15 students in each class. This will also allow a student per laptop for Computing. After a rotation between the 2 subjects, students will get a 30-minute break where we will provide snacks, then all students will be taught Microsoft together. This will help us improve their ability to work collaboratively.

We have 4 teachers: one administrative teacher, and a teacher per subject provided. Our teachers are all refugees. This has been done intentionally and strategic, as we would also like to allow them to have income-generating opportunities through this program. We believe empowerment is more effective when the members of the community are in every aspect of a program being implemented.

Intended Goals and Impact

1. Provide students with leadership skills, as well as social skills
 - a. Through interactive activities where students will workshop scenarios that will allow them to build some of these skills.
 - b. Group project (Microsoft) and individual projects (Computing and Leadership and Personal development).
2. Boost our students' self-esteem, sense of hope, dignity, and purpose
 - a. We have access to some psycho-social services provided within the camp that are willing to share their syllabus on how to boost student self-esteem.

Timeframe of first round/term

Phase 1	Publicity/Fundraising	January 2020-April 2020
Phase 2	Recruitment of students/Review of curriculum/Teacher sensitivity Training	May 2020-July 2020
Phase 3	Launching of Program	July 2020-August 2020
Phase 4	Evaluation of Program	August 2020-September 2020

*I will be in Malawi during Phase 3 and 4; the launching of the program and the evaluation.

Sustainability and Evaluations

As the timeline shows, this project is actively being worked on as we believe that it is urgent for the community. Our biggest barrier has been securing adequate funding, however the team—including myself—we are continuing to actively work to ensure that this project is ready to run by the beginning of June 2020. We plan on evaluating the program through surveying and students' type-written reflections. This will not only allow us to assess their computing skills, but we will be able to read how they feel about the program and how it has helped them. For our students who are under the age of 18, we will seek parental consent for their participation in the completion of surveys.

Why Dzaleka?

Dzaleka refugee camp is my community. My mother and I were resettled from this camp in March of 2013. Recently, I was fortunate enough to receive an opportunity that enabled me to do some research for my senior thesis in Dzaleka Refugee Camp, Malawi (November 30, 2019 to January 5, 2020). That is when I was able to meet the EMMAF who asked me to be a part of their organizing team for this project. I have experience working with this community and have gained their trust. I speak and understand two of the main languages spoken in the camp and I also have access to translators through EMMAF for the languages I do not understand; this alleviates the communication barriers that often hinder this work. I have been able to accomplish a lot through education and I would like to use my platform to be able to make it possible for other refugee youth to get the same opportunities that will allow them to contribute to the well-being of our community. There are so many restrictions for refugees in Malawi, and through the efforts of community members and nonprofit organizations they are able to advocate for better living conditions. This project is one way that we can reduce the problem of a lack of access of education in the camp and increase access to skills and hopefully a wider range of opportunities.