

## Chapter 3

# Improving Quality and Attainment in Refugee Schools: The Case of the Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal

Timothy Brown

### Summary<sup>1</sup>

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In the context of UNHCR's current funding crisis and the generally low standards of refugee education world-wide, a substantive case study of the Bhutanese refugee education programme in Nepal is presented. The Bhutanese example was chosen because of its comparatively high-quality education. Using the lessons learned from the Bhutanese case study and elsewhere, do-able solutions for improving the quality of education and the attainment of refugee students are sought which could be applicable to refugee situations in other parts of the developing world.

A conceptual framework is set up in which the various components of quality are examined – actors, tools, environment and outcomes. The actors are further divided into a pyramidal framework with the refugee community at the base, the pupils and teachers in the middle and the programme managers at the apex. Environment is isolated as a separate category because of the unique situation which refugees suffer. It is necessary to look at the broad picture – classroom, school, camp, programme, context – because recommendations are needed for the programme managers so that they can help to improve the quality of education for refugee children in the classroom and raise the educational attainments of refugees.

It is found that the strengths of the Bhutanese programme, such as positive attitudes, the importance given to the teacher and good organization, are often under the control of the various local actors involved, whereas the weaknesses, such as the refugee situation itself, decreasing funding and the lack of further education opportunities, are more likely to be beyond their control. This points a way to improving quality realistically – the local actors should focus on strengths rather than weaknesses and maximize the use of available resources.

It is suggested that actors in other refugee localities learn from the Bhutanese case study by building on such strengths as motivation and cooperation, teacher training and support, and cost-effective approaches. To achieve this end, recommendations for refugee education managers are proposed.

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<sup>1</sup> The author is indebted to all those friends and colleagues who have contributed to his experience and knowledge of refugee education during the eight years he has been working with UNHCR. Special thanks go to Brother Mike Foley, Myriam Houtart, Susanne Kindler-Adam, Helmut Langschwert, Sister Maureen Lohrey, Sister Lolín Menendez, Sarah Norton-Staal, Barry Sesnan, Robin Shawyer, Margaret Sinclair, Chris Talbot and Hans Thoolen. He is grateful to the Bhutanese Refugee Education Programme and Field Director Fr P. S. Amalraj for their assistance and cooperation during his field trip in Nepal, without which he could not have produced this paper. Most especially, he is grateful to all the refugees he has worked with, in both Uganda and Nepal, for their inspiring example.

In particular, it is suggested that UNHCR field offices should foster cooperation and motivation among all actors involved – ensuring that appropriate training is given to managers and teachers, monitoring the programme efficiently and providing opportunities for refugees to advance themselves through further education and participation in camp activities.

At headquarters level, it is suggested that UNHCR should encourage the development of effective reporting procedures, develop guidelines and training tools, and seek the collaboration of other partners who have expertise in education and resources of their own. Further research should be promoted on more specific issues of quality, especially at the classroom level, to find practical ways of dealing with the reality of enormous refugee schools and large classes in situations of stress and limited funding.



*Refugee children from Bhutan. Sanischare Camp, Nepal. UNHCR/12.1997/H.J. Davies*

## Prologue

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### *The generally low standards in refugee education*

This work was planned as part of a series of papers on refugee education. Sinclair (2001) has considered emergency education with special focus on early emergencies, which characterize the situation at the beginning of a refugee crisis. Naumowicz Gustafson (2000) has considered education for repatriation, which represents the situation at the end of a refugee crisis.

The present paper considers education in those indefinite situations in between, which can go on for many years and where “formal” schools are set up in the refugee camps or settlements. These schools are normally run by the refugees themselves on limited budgets, with the help of outside organizations often funded by UNHCR. Such chronic refugee situations can easily be forgotten by donors. The present study is restricted to developing countries (where governments can barely afford education for their own citizens, let alone for refugees). The quality of education given to refugees in these circumstances is often very deficient, with resulting poor standards achieved.

The results for the 1998 Burundian National Examination were received during the reporting period. Out of 1,233 students [from Tanzanian camps] only 46 pupils (3.7 per cent) passed with marks above 50 per cent. The general performance of the primary schools was very poor due to lack of textbooks and qualified teachers. Other problems reported were poor conditions of the schools, the environment and funding. (UNHCR, 1999)

Over the years, refugee enrolment and retention [in Balochistan, Pakistan] has taken on a pyramidal shape whereby only a few students (mainly boys) are to be found in the higher grades. Both quality and quantity are on diminishing scales, as most camp schools are unattractive to trained teachers, and conditions for economic survival of students are diminished. (UNHCR, 2000a)

Indeed, a review of refugee education activities by the UNHCR Inspection and Evaluation Service has concluded: “Many refugee schools encounter problems maintaining an acceptable level of performance.” (UNHCR, 1997: 15)

### *The lack of adequate funding*

In the last few years, UNHCR has been undergoing a financial crisis. Lack of adequate funding is a major reason for poor quality in refugee education. It can even lead to schools closing down.

A UNHCR official working in the Democratic Republic of Congo commented in December 2000:

Assistance provided to education is very much lower than the minimum standards recommended by UNHCR, due to limited funding. From the funding available, we hardly succeed to supply the programme with teaching and learning materials, uniforms and furniture. Nobody will believe that refugee children in Aru have never seen a globe of the earth.

Refugees International reported the impact of funding cuts on education for Liberian refugees in 2000:

Assistance for 100–120,000 Liberians remaining in Guinea will end in July when the schools close and organized repatriation ends. Unless the international community provides the funds to integrate Liberians into the Guinean school system, more than 10,000 Liberian children and adolescents will be without any educational prospects after next month (Refugees International, 2000).

Even in areas where the refugee education programmes have been fairly well resourced in the past, such as in Nepal and Uganda, they are beginning to feel the pinch.

A senior UNHCR official wrote concerning Nepal in May 2000:

On the issue of education, we were informed by UNHCR Sub-Office in Jhapa that CARITAS-Germany had stopped funding secondary education since the beginning of the year and that UNHCR was facing difficulties in financing it. This was presented to the High Commissioner as one of their programming concerns. Needless to say, the ongoing prioritization exercise has also an impact on the programme.

The Jesuit Refugee Service described similar problems for education in Uganda in November 2000:

It seems that the funding crisis that has affected and is actually affecting UNHCR and its partners is getting worse ... It seems that in the most optimistic way there will not be enough money to pay the teachers for the months of November and December.<sup>2</sup> This is very bad since the examinations of the primary pupils are at the end of this month and a possible teacher strike could create big problems for the exercise.

### *A poor prognosis*

The situation is not expected to get any better in 2001 because all UNHCR programmes have been told to cut their budgets by 20 per cent. UNHCR and NGO staff all over the world are reporting that many activities have been cut from their 2001 education budgets. This typically includes co-curricular activities, environmental education programmes, sports activities and special campaigns to boost girls' education, as well as the reduction in teaching staff.

For example, in Kenya, the UNHCR Community Services Officer has indicated the following negative consequences of the budget cuts: low-quality education due to lack of classroom supplies; non-completion of construction of classrooms; lack of teacher training; inadequate desks due to lack of resources; lack of sporting materials; laying-off of teachers (UNHCR, 2000b).

The problem of low funding has lately been compounded by UNHCR's new system of "unified budgets", which makes it difficult for a UNHCR country programme to absorb special earmarked funds. In each country of operation, the UNHCR Representative is supposed to stick to the ceiling of the overall budget, which is agreed with UNHCR Headquarters on a yearly basis. When the US government (through UNHCR's Refugee Children Unit) recently offered US\$1.8 million to bail out the Uganda education programme, UNHCR Uganda was unable to accommodate it. Acceptance would have meant that they would have had to reduce spending in other vital sectors (such as health and sanitation) to compensate.

<sup>2</sup> A UNHCR officer in Uganda later informed the author (January 2001) that the salary problem for the primary school teachers had been sorted out, although severe problems remained for refugee secondary education.

In response to the grave funding situation, the Sudanese refugee teachers in North Uganda wrote a memorandum (13 November 2000) to UNHCR. They asked the following questions. “Does UNHCR expect quality education if the staff reduction, scholastic materials and co-curricular activities are reduced from the budget? Is the teacher the least important person in the list of UNHCR supported staff? Without quality education, what does UNHCR think shall be the side effects on the refugee communities and the host country?”

### *Learning from the good practice of the Bhutanese refugees*

This paper is not, however, about lack of funding, which is only one cause of poor-quality education. Rather, it is about the way in which the Bhutanese programme in Nepal has succeeded in producing comparatively high-quality education for its refugees in spite of the ever-present financial constraints. It is hoped that the lessons learned from this good practice will help other refugee operations throughout the world to produce good-quality education programmes in situations of tight funding.

Why the Bhutanese? When Sadako Ogata, the then High Commissioner for Refugees, visited a Bhutanese refugee camp in early 2000, she was “very impressed and even thought that it was one of the best refugee camps in the world”. Susanne Kindler-Adam, UNHCR Education Officer, also went on mission to Nepal in 2000. She was “impressed by the quality and commitment of the Bhutanese refugees and CARITAS-Nepal to make the Bhutanese Refugee Education Programme a unique success story ... I would guess that, in fact, BREP is our best education programme world-wide” (Kindler-Adam, personal communication).

The author of this present report spent two weeks in eastern Nepal (in Sept-Oct 2000), visiting the Bhutanese schools. Formerly, he was in Uganda for about eight years as UNHCR Education Adviser. This work is a case study of the Bhutanese Refugee Education Programme in Nepal, enriched by reference to the experience of Uganda for further insights into the identification of sound management practice of refugee education programmes.

## Introduction

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### *Birth of a refugee school*

The following is an account of how the Sudanese refugee schools in Moyo district, north Uganda, were formed in the early 1990s. It is fairly typical of the formation of refugee schools elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

The refugee situation starts with a mass movement of people across a border due to gross violations of human rights, massive insecurity or war in their home country. When the refugees have reached safety in a new country, their first priority is to find shelter and enough food and water to survive. After these basic needs have been attended to and the initial shock of displacement has subsided, the refugees begin to turn their minds to the future. Education for their children then becomes a top priority.<sup>4</sup>

3 For other examples with details on the initial development of refugee schools, see: Smawfield (1998: 32–33) for Mozambican refugees in Malawi; Lange (1998: 8–9) for Liberian refugees in Guinea; McDonogh (1996: 8–9) for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

4 In a teachers’ memorandum to the Head of UNHCR Sub-Office Pakele dated 13 November 2000, the Sudanese refugees recommended that “UNHCR should consider education as a top priority and put more funds on it”. Note also that Sudanese are not alone in their strong desire for education: “Education has been a clear priority for both Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees in exile” (UNHCR/IRC, 2000: 1); “Education is high on the list of priorities for the [Burundian, Rwandan and Congolese] refugee community” (UNHCR, 2000c).



*An outdoor classroom for refugee women from Bhutan. Beldangi Camp, Nepal. UNHCR/12.1992/A. Hollmann*

Refugee leaders organize the children into age-groups and find suitable volunteers from the community to look after them. These volunteers are often young people themselves, who have not completed their own education. Suitable “classrooms” are identified, frequently outside under the shade of a big tree, and the volunteers start teaching the children. This is the beginning of a refugee school.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Sesnan (1990) describes a refugee school as a “series of shadows circulating around trees. The density of the children sitting on the ground is at its greatest when the shadow is at its smallest”.

As the refugee situation continues, the community starts to develop these rudimentary schools, often with the help of the surrounding host community and outside organizations such as UNHCR and NGOs. Refugees clear sites, gather building materials and offer free labour in the construction of temporary or semi-permanent classroom blocks. Teachers try to “beg, borrow or steal” basic textbooks and stationery for their lessons, while the leaders might raise funds from the community to buy essential materials and pay minimal incentives to the teachers. Teacher and parent committees manage the schools and evaluate their achievements.

### *Strengths and weaknesses*

The above account reveals major characteristics, good and bad, of a refugee school. It also hints at possible differences between schools inside and outside camps in developing countries. It is often found that the major strengths of a refugee school are the motivation, commitment and social organization of the entire refugee community. These strengths are frequently lacking in local schools outside the camps, which are often in the poorest and bleakest areas of an under-developed country.<sup>6</sup>

For their own self-esteem, refugees need to show to the rest of the world that they are not completely hopeless. They may have lost most things in life but knowledge and skills once acquired can never be taken away. Education is therefore a priceless commodity for refugees to cling on to. Indeed, it holds the future of their very existence – for the individual and the community as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

Many refugee parents are prepared to sacrifice their time, labour and even money to set up schools for their children. Refugee teachers are often willing to give their services for little or no pay. Refugee pupils can work extra hard under difficult circumstances because they thirst for education and realise that it is their only hope. They can even perform better than nationals in nearby local schools, as in Uganda and Nepal. Motivation is therefore a major driving force which should be harnessed, whenever possible, to improve the quality of education in refugee schools.

On the other hand, a great weakness in refugee camps can be the lack of trained, qualified and experienced teachers.<sup>8</sup> Volunteer “teachers” recruited at the beginning of a refugee emergency are “unleashed” on the children even though they are often under-educated, untrained and inexperienced. Their only qualifications are motivation and commitment.

A major job of UNHCR and NGO partners is to help refugees improve the quality of volunteer teachers by filling in gaps in their education and providing them with appropriate in-service training. This contrasts with the official situation in many developing and developed countries, where teachers should normally be qualified, trained and registered before they can start teaching.

6 National teachers in Nepal are “generally poorly motivated – a consequence of low salaries, limited career development and poor supervision and monitoring” (UN, 1999: 45). On the subject of poorly motivated local teachers, a Jesuit Refugee Service education manager noted in November 2000: “I would mention how unsatisfactory the education programme in Ndungu [northern Democratic Republic of Congo] turned out, mostly as a result of using local teachers for the education programme for Sudanese refugees. It seemed to be impossible to motivate these teachers to take a serious interest in the programme.”

7 “Our only hope is if our children can go to school. The children are our future” (Refugees International, 2000).

8 Even when qualified teachers are available, some of them can be attracted away from education by the relatively high salaries offered by NGOs for camp management in other sectors.

In this study, we will be considering how quality can be improved in a refugee school. The camp schools in eastern Nepal will provide a case study from which we hope to draw general conclusions applicable to other refugee situations throughout the world. Much research has already been done on the quality of education in developing countries (see, for example: UNICEF, 2000; Williams, 2001). However, little is officially known about educational quality and attainment in refugee camps. As Appadu and Retamal (1998: 57) have stated, “there is definitely a need for more research and case studies to be done in the area of refugee education”.

### *External constraints*

Clearly, quality ought to be improved if we increase the inputs and resources.<sup>9</sup> More books and desks, additional classrooms and facilities, lower pupil–teacher ratios and higher teachers’ salaries should all contribute to a higher standard of education. But UNHCR does not have unlimited resources at its disposal. In these days of economic constraint, UNHCR is struggling to find enough funds to cover its routine care and maintenance activities and the day-to-day necessities of refugee populations. In many country programmes, refugee education is severely under-funded, especially when refugees have other, life-sustaining, needs to be met.

In 1997 there was a comprehensive evaluation of refugee education (by the UNHCR Inspection and Evaluation Service), and various minimum standards were recommended as an outcome of the appraisal (UNHCR, 1997: Annex V). This was followed up in a global UNHCR workshop in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in which the recommendations were endorsed by Community Services and Education officers. There was an assumption that UNHCR would succeed in raising funds to cover the implementation of the recommendations in all refugee programmes throughout the world. Since that time, UNHCR has experienced a continual succession of donor cuts, a trend which shows no signs of reversal up to this day. These minimum standards therefore exist only on paper, and resourcing of refugee education programmes in some countries falls far below the recommendations (see the first section of this paper).

Besides, UNHCR should not be giving privileged treatment to refugees, in total disregard of their surrounding circumstances. A fundamental principle of UNHCR is that it should aim for parity when comparing standards of assistance to refugees with standards in their country of origin or country of asylum. Anything else would be unfair and likely to cause friction and resentment in the short and long terms. Disparities in educational standards can even give rise to a “pull factor”.<sup>10</sup>

### *Getting real*

The example of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal shows how comparatively high-quality education can be achieved at a relatively low cost to UNHCR. The cost-effectiveness is due to many reasons – not least, the participation of the refugees themselves, who are offered very low financial incentives. The teachers and headteachers are all refugees, as are most of the managers running the education programme.

9 Williams (2001) states, however: “While a minimum of inputs is certainly necessary for effective education, a high level of inputs ... does not necessarily mean higher quality measured in terms of outcomes or outputs, both of which require the effective use of inputs”.

10 In November 2000, Brother Mike Foley of JRS commented: “There is little doubt that educational opportunities are what attract many Sudanese to seek refuge in Uganda. Yet no one seems to be willing to officially admit this, probably because seeking education is not a legitimate reason for seeking/granting refugee status”.



It is hoped that the lessons learned from Nepal will help other refugee education programmes to improve in quality. In this study, we will not be so concerned with questions like “what are the minimum requirements?” or “how much more money do we need?” We will be more interested in questions like “what resources are actually available? or “how do we maximise the use of these existing resources?”

The refugee situation is not an ideal circumstance. We cannot expect refugee schools to be the best in the world. We hope they are only temporary. But however low the baseline is, improvements should always be sought and made. In many situations, quality can be increased substantially with only a small material input, such as the provision of one textbook to a teacher when there are no other books, as an extreme example.<sup>11</sup>

### *Contents of this paper*

In the next section, the methodology of the field work in Nepal is described in some detail and a conceptual framework is set up. The activities undertaken are specified together with the constraints found. The rationale behind the chosen framework will be explained. How the framework evolved during the course of the research will also be discussed.

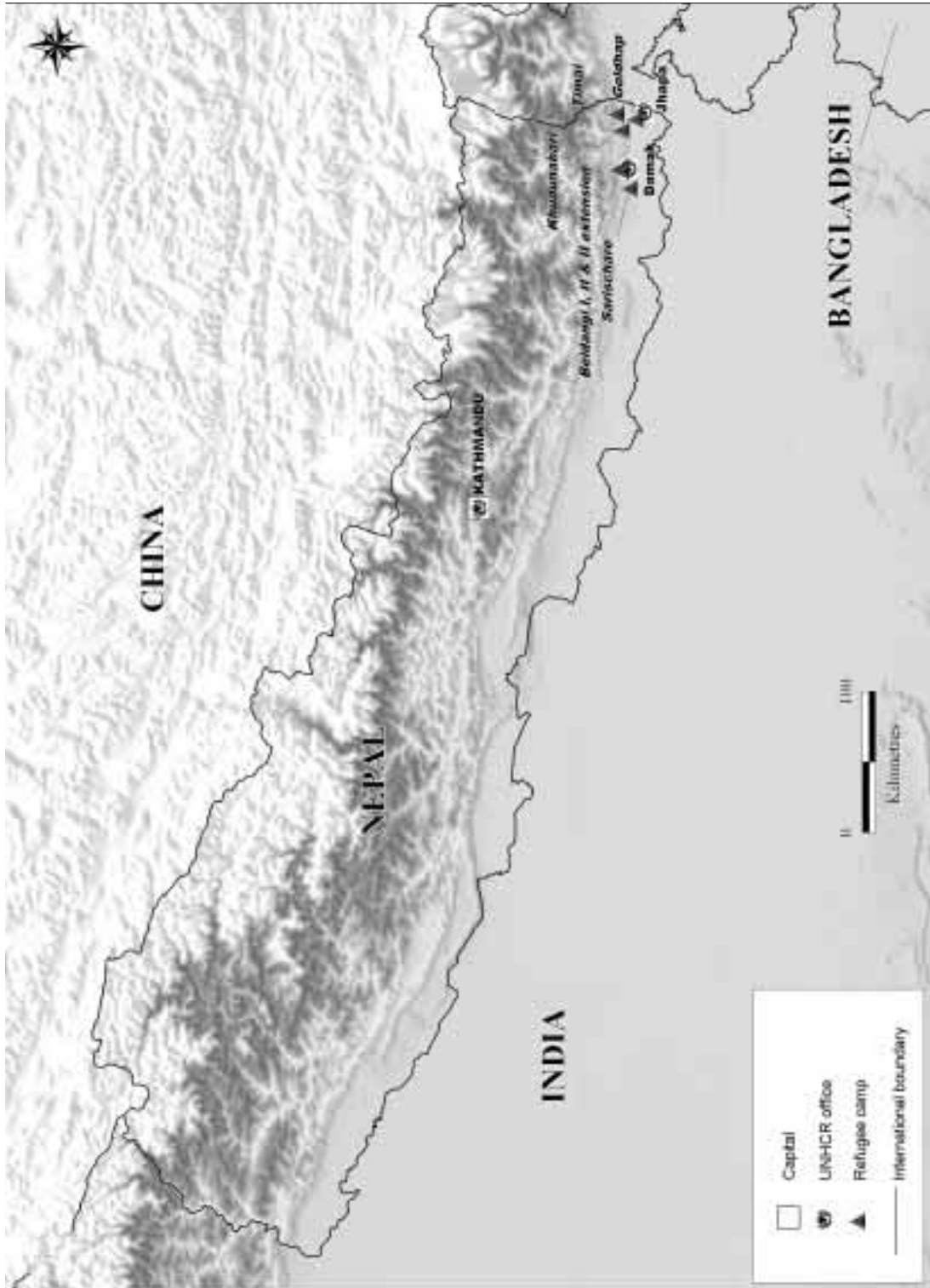
This is followed by a substantive case study of the education programme for the Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal. The study is divided into sections according to the adopted conceptual framework. The topics highlighted are on refugee background, resources and facilities, the early history of the programme, the present management structure, the refugee schools, the school curriculum and curriculum development, training of teachers and managers, teaching methods and assessment, monitoring and evaluation, and outcomes.

Next, the findings of the research are discussed and analysed. First the quality of the education programme is considered from the refugees’ perspective. Then the strengths and weaknesses of the Bhutanese refugee education programme are identified and discussed in the light of the conceptual framework, which gives some indications as to how the quality of other education programmes might be improved.

The study ends with a discussion of the priorities which managers of refugee education programmes worldwide might consider for improving the quality of their refugee schools. The paper concludes with specific recommendations for UNHCR Field Offices and UNHCR Headquarters.

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<sup>11</sup> Williams (2001) states that “improvements in quality need not necessarily be costly in financial terms”.



## Research methodology

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### *Conceptual framework*

The possible factors affecting quality of education and attainment in developing countries have been discussed in the literature. UNICEF (2000), for example, defines quality around the five dimensions of learners, environments, content, processes and outcomes. Heneveld and Craig (1995) propose a model of four groups of factors affecting school quality, as measured by student outcomes: child characteristics, supporting inputs, enabling conditions, teaching and learning process.

For analysis in a refugee context, the author has found it convenient and logical to group the factors in the following four categories: *actors, tools, environment and outcomes* (see Figure 1).

The rationale for the choice of this grouping is explained as follows. The **actors** are:

- Refugee community
- Refugee learners
- Refugee teachers
- Refugee school managers
- Programme managers (implementing NGOs and UNHCR)

The actors can be regarded as “change agents” who can make improvements in the quality of refugee education.

The **tools** are the “instruments” which the actors can use to bring about the desired changes in education quality. Commonly used tools can be summarized as:

- Curriculum and curriculum development
- Training of teachers and managers
- Teaching methods and assessment
- Monitoring and evaluation

The author defines **environment** here as the following:

- Refugee context (refugee history, future prospects)
- Camp background
- Available funding from international community
- Resources and facilities
- Host community (attitudes, government regulations and policy)<sup>12</sup>

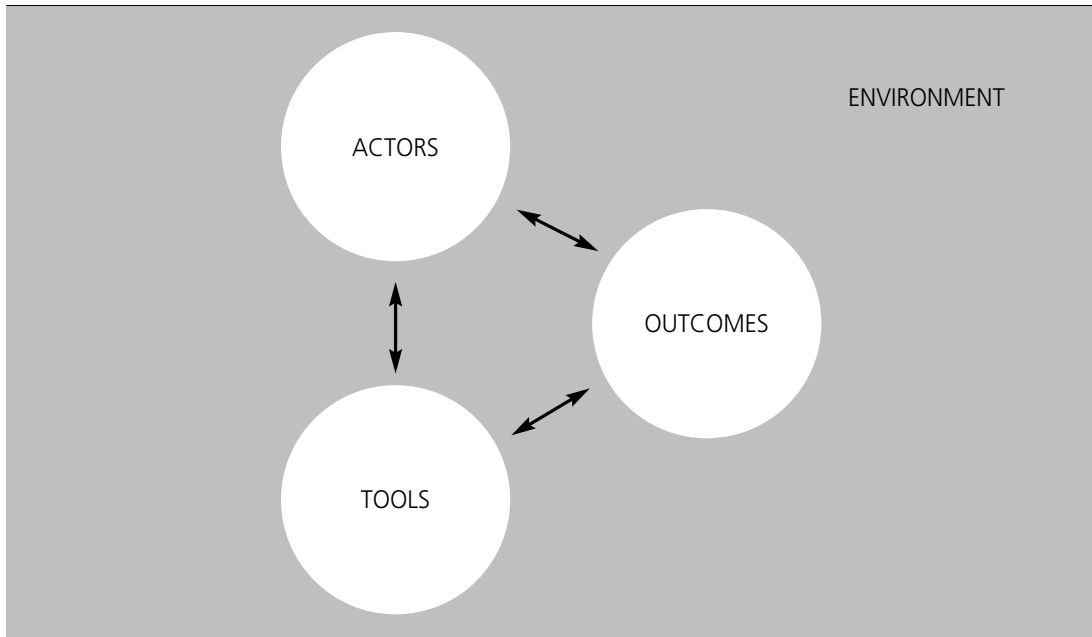
Refugees suffer a unique situation and therefore “environment” has been isolated as a separate category. An enabling environment provides the surroundings and circumstances in which positive changes in quality can take place.

Finally, the **outcomes** are attainments. They give an indication of the degree of quality achieved. Important examples of outcomes are:

- Examination results
- Literacy and numeracy levels
- Further education, employment and self-reliance
- Skills, attitudes and behaviour in the camps
- Enrolment and persistence at school, including gender balance

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<sup>12</sup> When refugees are being integrated into the host population, as in Uganda, it would be more relevant to categorize the host community as an “actor”. However, in most refugee situations the camps are separated from the local population, in which case the host community is probably better categorized as “environment”.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Refugee School Quality****Interviews<sup>13</sup>**

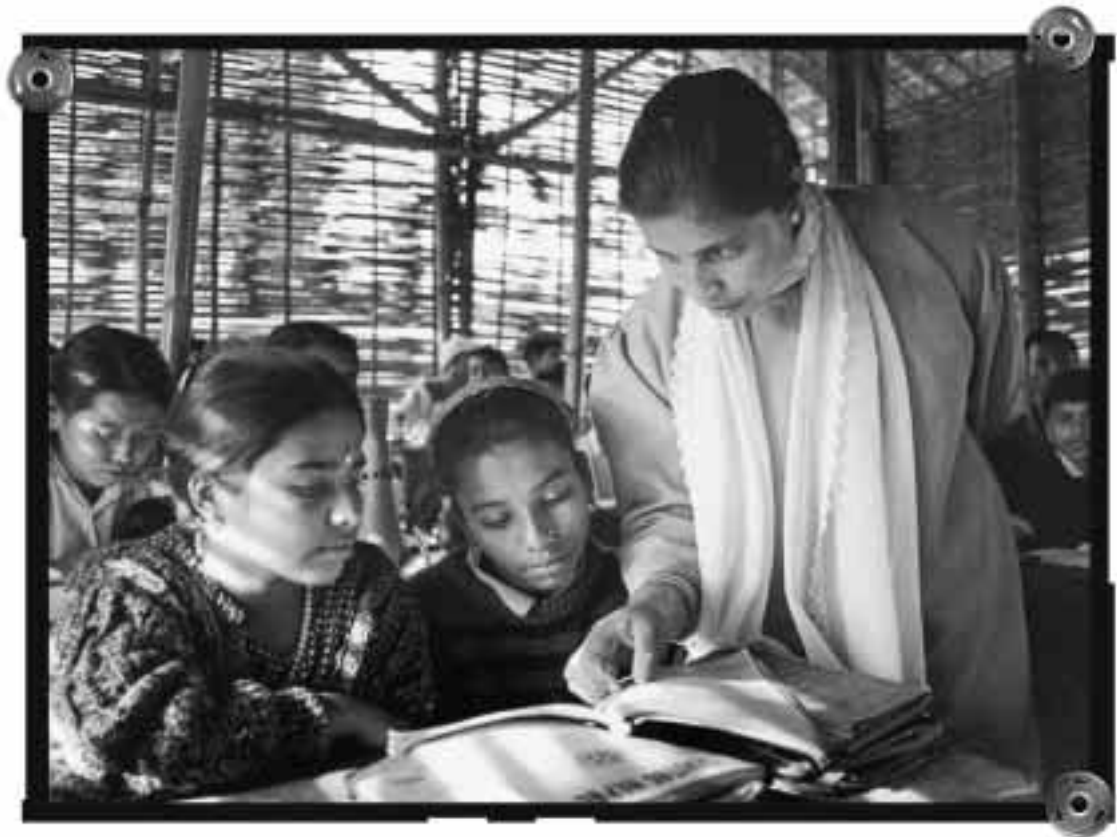
One objective of the research was to find out from the different actors their opinions on quality, since *they* are the beneficiaries and the ones responsible for making any changes. To guide the research, a set of preliminary questions for each type of actor was formulated. The author did not wish to pre-empt the answers with any of his own pre-conceived ideas. It was therefore important that the questions should not be “loaded” or closed, but should be open-ended as much as possible so that the interviewees could be given a free rein to their thoughts. The interviews were only semi-structured, so that the prepared questions were not rigidly adhered to. Some typical questions asked by the author for each of the actor groups are indicated below.

**Refugee community** – Why do you send your children to school? Are you happy with the school? How do parents contribute to their children’s education? Do you learn from your children? How does the community use the school for its activities?

**Learners** – Do you enjoy school? Why do you go to school? How do you find the standards? What are your problems? How can the school be improved? What do the boys do at school? What do the girls do? What do you do at home?

**Teachers** – What makes a good teacher? Why is school important? How much training and experience have you had? How do you assess your lessons? What are your problems? What problems do pupils have? What are the solutions?

<sup>13</sup> The appendix gives a list summarizing the categories of people interviewed and places visited by the author during the field work in Nepal.



*At the camp's secondary school, refugee children from Bhutan are taught both Buthanese and Nepalese. Sanischare Camp, Morgang District, Nepal. UNHCR/12.1997/H.J. Davies*

**School managers** – What do you understand by quality? What is the purpose of education? How is your school managed? What school records do you keep? How do you deal with disabled children? What problems does your school have?

**Programme managers** – What are the main strengths of your programme? How do you measure quality? How do you achieve cost-effectiveness? What improvements have you made? What are the gender issues and how do you deal with them?

Interviews in the field were carried out in English except for those with the parents, the Focal Person for Women and the Women's Group. In these cases, interviews were conducted in Nepalese, or a mixture of Nepalese and English, with the help of an interpreter. English was the medium of instruction in the schools and it was therefore widely spoken. When the need arose, it was never difficult to find an interpreter willing to assist.

Interviews were sometimes held individually, especially with the key informants, and at other times in groups. The groups could be formal or informal, depending on the circumstances. Sometimes, for example, the headteacher would arrange a formal meeting so that the author could meet all the staff together. But most of the time the author would talk with a small group of teachers informally.

### *Observations, documents and meetings*

In the camps, when the author visited the schools, his investigations included the headteacher's office, the staffroom, stores, the resource room, the library, the laboratory, classrooms, the school compound and latrines. He also looked round the camp to see the facilities and general environment. He entered a few refugee huts and visited one teacher's home for lunch.

The author tried to observe as many lessons as possible, sometimes two half-lessons in one period, usually in the presence of a resource teacher and/or an in-school resource teacher (defined in next section). During the lessons, the author would sit at the back of the class as inconspicuously as possible. He looked for indicators of quality such as evidence of lesson planning, use of teaching and learning aids, learner activity and assessment. After the lessons, he observed how the in-school resource teachers guided the teachers and how the resource teachers advised the in-school resource teachers.

Various school records were examined, such as registers, admission lists, school statistics, examination results, reports, inventories and school files. Documents were also collected from both UNHCR and CARITAS on such topics as camp school guidelines, job descriptions, monthly situation reports, sub-project monitoring reports, case studies, the country operation plan and briefing notes on the country programme.

At the CARITAS office in Damak, the author attended some of the regular staff meetings, such as for the office administrative staff, the education planners (coordinators and resource teachers) and the headteachers. These occasions provided a captive audience, and as such were sometimes also used by the author to hold his own mini-workshops in which he discussed his research progress and findings and asked for feedback.

Time was a major constraint.<sup>14</sup> If time had allowed, the author would have met staff of partner agencies operating in the camps to find out how their various activities affected the education programme. With more time, the author would also have been able to meet members of the surrounding Nepalese community and visit their schools, especially since many of the refugees were studying or teaching at these schools. These additional activities would have helped to build up a broader picture.

Another constraint was the effect of the author's presence on the outcomes. On visiting a school, the author was often treated like a distinguished visitor and this detracted from his objective of "merging into the scenery" and seeing the real situation.

### *Looking at the broad picture*

A large refugee education programme, such as that in Nepal, has many levels of organization and activities which are structured somewhat like a pyramid (see Figure 2), from UNHCR at the apex down to the refugee community at the base. Each level has its own actors who play a role in the delivery of quality education.

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<sup>14</sup> For various reasons beyond the control of the author, such as prior commitments of key field personnel and the occurrence of public holidays, the field research was limited to only 13 days.

At the apex, UNHCR is often responsible for raising funds from the donors and distributing them to implementing agencies. It plans, coordinates and monitors the performance of these agencies. The implementing agency for education in Nepal is CARITAS-Nepal, which is rather like a miniature Ministry of Education, because it is involved in many of the same operations as a ministry, using the funds provided by UNHCR. It procures books for the schools, pays teachers their salaries (incentives), oversees examinations, organizes training for the teachers and monitors standards.

Further down the pyramid there are many schools, each of which is managed by a headteacher with the assistance of deputies, senior teachers, subject heads and other staff. Near the bottom of the pyramid, at classroom level where the actual learning of the children takes place, some hundreds of refugee teachers are interacting with many thousands of refugee pupils in schools scattered over the whole refugee area. At the base of the pyramid is the refugee community, providing additional support to the schools.

**Figure 2: Pyramid of Levels in Refugee Education**



The main objective of this work is to find out how UNHCR and other programme managers can help to improve the quality of education for refugees in the classroom. It is therefore necessary to look at the system in its entirety, the whole pyramid, and examine the roles of each level and how they interact.

In view of the scope of the present work and the current scarcity of published information on refugee education overall, the author believes that the broad picture approach is justified in this case. Indeed, in the final section the author takes the pyramid as the fundamental framework on which to pin the discussion. In particular, recommendations are given for the actors at the top end of the pyramid which should benefit the actors at the bottom end in the delivery of quality education to refugees.

## Bhutanese refugee education programme in Nepal<sup>15</sup>

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The commitment and sacrifice of the Bhutanese refugee staff is inspiring and calls for admiration. The Bhutanese Refugee Education Programme stands as one of the models to be imitated and emulated. (UNHCR/CARITAS-Nepal, 1998)

In this section a case study of the Bhutanese Refugee Education Programme (BREP) is presented using the suggested conceptual framework. We start with “environment”, which describes the refugee context, the camp background, the attitudes of the host community and the resources and facilities. Next we consider the “actors”, both in the early history of the programme and at the present time. We continue with some “tools” of quality, namely: school curriculum and curriculum development, training of teachers and managers, teaching methods and assessment, and monitoring and evaluation. Finally, we discuss the “outcomes” of the Bhutanese programme.

### *Environment*<sup>16</sup>

The Bhutanese refugees began to arrive in eastern Nepal at the end of 1990. They are mostly of Nepalese ethnic origin and come from southern Bhutan. Many of them claim that they were compelled to leave their homeland due to the Bhutanese government’s introduction of discriminatory and sometimes persecutory measures against the Nepalese-speaking southerners. The refugees are desperately wanting to go back home as they wait and hope for a positive outcome to the ongoing negotiations between Nepal and Bhutan, which could pave the way for their repatriation. The refugee situation in Nepal has become long-drawn-out, however, with many refugees staying there for almost ten years.

**Refugee camps.** There are seven camps giving shelter to almost 100,000 refugees, about half of whom are located in Beldangi where there are three camps (I, II and II-Extension). The camps are situated on the plains of east Nepal, spanning two districts (Jhapa and Morang) which are among the most heavily populated in Nepal. The security is good, although hazards such as fires and floods are potential threats to the safety of the refugees due to the makeshift nature of their bamboo huts. No land is available to refugees for cultivation, apart from a small plot around each hut (in the fire prevention line) on which they grow a few vegetables for home consumption. Life in the camps is therefore not preparing the younger generation for a farming life back home. There is a danger that reliance on hand-outs and free food can lead to the dependency syndrome setting in.

Basic food rations provided by the World Food Programme are distributed through the refugee camp committees. The basic ration, which is assessed yearly, consists of rice, pulses, vegetable oil, sugar and salt. In addition, UNHCR provides vegetables to ensure that minimum dietary needs are met. Vulnerable groups, such as under-nourished expectant mothers and sick or severely malnourished children, are given supplementary food rations. No meals are provided at school. The health situation in the camps is generally satisfactory. Every two huts share one latrine. UNHCR has put emphasis on preventive health care and health

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15 Much of the background and factual information in this section is based on personal observation, corroborated by information from the following reports: UNHCR (2000d), UNHCR (2000e), UNHCR (2000f), UNHCR/CARITAS-Nepal (1998), CARITAS-Nepal (1999), CARITAS-Nepal/UNHCR (undated). Accuracy has been verified by refugees Bala Sharma and Loknath Pokhrel, education coordinators, who have been with BREP since its inception.

16 For the definition of “environment” see the explanation of the Conceptual framework in the previous section.





*Basic food rations of rice, pulses, vegetable oil, sugar and salt are provided by the World Food Programme. Refugees from Bhutan, Beldangi I Camp, Jhapa District, Nepal. UNHCR/12.1992/A. Hollmann*

education programmes. As a result, the rates for population growth, under-5 mortality and malnutrition are all significantly lower than the corresponding national figures for Nepal. Moreover, the incidence of common infections and diseases is not high in comparison with the local situation outside the camps.

**Host community.** The policy of the government in Nepal is that refugees should remain inside the camps. Both entrance to and exit from the camps require official permission from the government representatives (the camp supervisors). In practice, however, the camps are open, and the government estimates that an additional 15,000 Bhutanese are settled in Nepal outside the camps without UNHCR assistance. It is quite easy for the Nepalese-speaking refugees to mingle with the surrounding Nepalese population and vice versa. Indeed, some refugees go outside the camps to work for Nepalese citizens on farms or building sites. Because this is not officially allowed, the refugees are somewhat exploited by the citizens in that they receive wages below the national rates. Similarly, some refugee teachers, after receiving training and experience in the camp schools, are attracted to the private schools outside.

Although the private schools pay salaries less than the national rates, the refugees still receive more than the incentives they were getting in the camps. The educational standards of the refugee teachers are relatively high and so the private-school headteachers and parents are normally happy to accept them. However, problems do arise when citizens cannot find employment after jobs have been taken up by refugees. In some such cases, refugees have been arrested and imprisoned for a few days before being returned to the camps. Such occurrences are the main cause of tension between locals and refugees, otherwise their relations are generally harmonious. To help improve relations, UNHCR is assisting the local population with basic infrastructure such as schools, health posts and road maintenance under the Refugee-Affected Area Rehabilitation Programme.

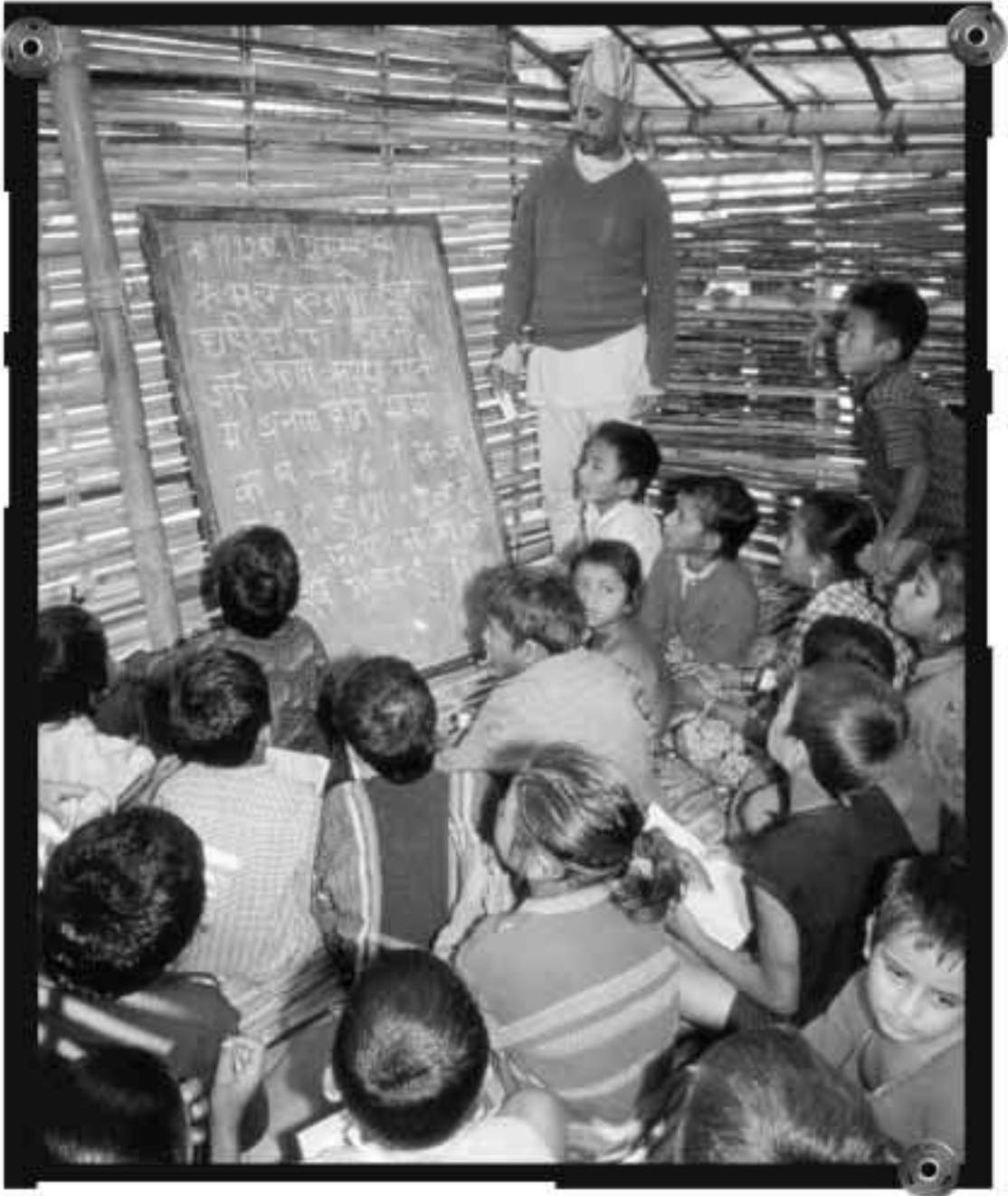
**Resources and facilities.** There is a total of nine main schools. In the big camps of Beldangi (I, II, II-Extension) and Sanischare, the schools are divided into sub-campus known as sectors or extensions, in addition to the main campus. The sector schools are for the infant classes (pre-primary up to Grade 3) and correspond to the administrative sectors of the camp. This ensures that the younger children do not have to walk far to school. The extension schools are normally for the Grade 4 children (sometimes grades 5 and 6) and relieve pressure on the main school, which is used for the higher classes. In Beldangi II there is also a special secondary school for grades 9 and 10 only, for all children in the Beldangi camps. In the other camps, these secondary grades (9–10) are incorporated into the respective main schools.

Most of the schoolrooms are temporary structures made of bamboo and grass. Many of the lower classes do not have desks and the children are sitting on jute mats which have been manufactured in the camps by vulnerable groups as income-generating activities. However, all classrooms are provided with a table and chair for the teacher. The blackboards are portable with an easel. Each school has a large open space where assemblies can take place.

Each main school has a headteacher's office, staffroom, store, resource centre, library, counselling room and laboratory. The store contains the classroom and office supplies sent by the central CARITAS office. The resource centre, where reference books and teaching aids are kept, is an office for the in-school resource teachers. Teachers meet here for preparation of their lessons and discussions with the in-school resource teachers. It is also a place for preparing teaching aids with materials found locally or sent by the central office. The libraries contain a few hundred textbooks and reference books. The school is supplied with limited amounts of manila paper and marker pens so that teachers can make their own visual aids. The counselling rooms are used by specialist teachers to counsel students and others with problems. These teachers have received special training to do this. The "laboratories" are basically stores where a few pieces of equipment and chemicals are kept, to be brought out by teachers for demonstration purposes only.

All pupils are supplied with textbooks and stationery, the amounts of which depend on their grade. Supplementary reading materials, however, are limited. In the higher grades (4 and above), the pupils receive individual copies of textbooks for each subject. Pupils can take these books home to do homework, but they must return the books in good condition at the end of the academic year. A book is expected to last for three years. If a pupil spoils a book, appropriate sanctions (such as fines) are applied. In the lower grades, only Nepalese textbooks are given. There are also workbooks for the pupils to fill in. Many of the books have been written and produced by the programme itself for pre-primary up to Grade 8, and there is constant updating and re-writing of materials, especially when there is a change in curriculum, as there

was recently in Nepal. Some of the textbooks used in Nepal schools, or in Bhutan, have also been modified and updated by the refugees. Moreover, teachers are provided with manuals and guides, produced by the office, to help them carry out their lessons effectively.



*A temporary school made of bamboo for Bhutanese children refugees. Sanskrit class, Timai Camp, Jhapa District, Nepal. UNHCR/12.1992/A. Hollmann*

**Actors<sup>17</sup>**

Many of the refugees are farmers, coming from a traditional rural background, but some of them were officials or civil servants with the government prior to their departure from Bhutan. When they first arrived, illiteracy was rife, particularly among the women and the older generation, but literacy has improved in the camps due to the efforts of the refugees themselves in non-formal adult education programmes. Almost half of the population are children under 18 years of age. There is not much evidence of traumatization among children although some refugees allege harsh treatment and disproportionate punishment by authorities prior to their departure from Bhutan.

The camps are well organized and maintained by the refugees themselves through the elected camp management committees with help from the government of Nepal, UNHCR and its implementing partners. There is good cooperation between agencies working in the camps. An inter-agency meeting takes place each month between the government, UNHCR and the partner agencies responsible for specific sector activities. Some agencies fund projects from their own resources for activities not covered by UNHCR. The cost-effectiveness of the programme is largely due to the high level of participation of the refugees. Around 1,700 refugees receive minimal “salaries”, or incentives, for work performed in the camps, mainly as teachers or health workers. Another 3,000 refugee workers are volunteers.

**Early history of the Bhutanese Refugee Education Programme.**<sup>18</sup> The Student Union of Bhutan (SUB) initiated the education programme in November 1991. There was a large influx of refugees the following year and as new camps were formed, SUB organized the education in each one. In the same year (1992), UNHCR and CARITAS-Nepal came in with funding to support the programme, at the request of the refugee community.

There were a few trained teachers among the refugees and, encouraged by UNHCR and SUB, they formed the Bhutanese Refugee Education Coordinating Centre (BRECC), which later became an independent refugee education body taking over the management of the schools. It was guided by an advisory committee and consisted of representatives from each camp including headteachers and refugee education specialists.

At this point, CARITAS-Nepal was very small and did not have the expertise to support BRECC professionally. Its role was merely of funder – paying teachers a token incentive and purchasing educational and building materials for the schools. In 1993, at the request of UNHCR, BRECC was effectively disbanded and became part of CARITAS, the large majority of whose staff remain refugees, albeit not at the top levels of Director and Assistant Director. Also in 1993, CARITAS agreed to take on five expatriate volunteers recruited by the Agency for Personnel Service Overseas (APSO). These Irish volunteers were education experts, one coordinator and four teacher trainers, and their secondment filled a gap in the CARITAS team. APSO was chosen because of its earlier successful experience in Bhutan, where it helped to introduce the New Approach to Primary Education (NAPE) programme, a pupil-centred methodology for the lower primary school.

In this venture of CARITAS in BREP there is the stamp of long experience and expertise of its partners of education. (Bhutanese refugee resource teacher)

17 For the definition of “actors” see the Conceptual framework in the previous section.

18 Much of the information in this section on the history of BREP has been obtained from McDonogh (1996).

During the next few years, the APSO personnel worked with the refugees on a curriculum for the lower primary school (pre-primary through to Grade 3), producing a number of manuals to be used by the teachers. Prescriptive lesson plans were written out so that they could be immediately used by the untrained teachers. The teacher trainers were known as resource teachers, and they spent much of their time visiting the schools, advising and supporting the refugee teachers.

The resource teachers also identified suitable Bhutanese teachers who had the potential to become resource teachers inside the schools. These refugee teachers were formally appointed as in-school resource teachers. The APSO resource teachers then worked mainly with the in-school resource teachers when they visited the schools, holding fortnightly meetings with them to discuss their work and any problems. This was the period during which the refugees gradually took over the responsibility for curriculum development and in-service training. More responsibility was given to the in-school resource teachers who were expected to guide and train the teachers independently, by planning and conducting their own workshops, for example. The in-school resource teachers concentrated on child-centred learning methods at the lower primary level, which is the most formative stage of a child's learning.

As there was also a growing need to cater for the higher levels, qualified resource teachers among refugees were identified and appointed. They took care of the upper primary and secondary levels and were responsible for curriculum development and in-service training. In addition, some in-school resource teachers were appointed for middle primary level.

The support from both UNHCR and CARITAS-Nepal has continued up to this day. The assistance of APSO ended in 1997 but the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has been providing CARITAS with expatriate volunteers on a continuing basis.

***Present management structure of the refugee education programme.*** At the UNHCR level, there are no staff dealing specifically with education. There used to be a Social Services officer but that post no longer exists. The programme section at UNHCR in Jhapa, under the head of Sub-Office, is presently responsible for all sectors of the programme, including education, and participates in the annual review for education. UNHCR staff are involved in the tender process in which school materials are purchased, and they monitor the financial accounts. A UNHCR officer visits schools on special occasions such as prize giving. Day-to-day monitoring is carried out by the two UNHCR field assistants, who are local staff otherwise known as project monitoring officers (PMOs). Their educational duties, which are a fraction of their total work, normally focus on hardware such as infrastructure, classrooms and school supplies. They attend meetings in the camps for sensitization of the community on topics such as drop-outs and parents' cooperation. They are sometimes called to the schools when there are specific problems to solve, such as disputes between parents and teachers.

At the implementing agency level, there are 41 staff members working at the CARITAS central office in Damak under BREP. These include six expatriate volunteers from India provided by the Jesuit Refugee Service. They are well-qualified education experts and two of them occupy the top two management positions – those of Field Director and Assistant Field Director. A few of the posts are held by Nepalese nationals, in particular the positions of Finance Officer and Personnel Officer. Most of the other staff of CARITAS are refugees. The refugee staff in Damak are paid on the same incentive scale as that operating in the camps but with an additional daily living allowance. The work of the office is organized in eight

sections: education, personnel, finance, logistics, procurement, technical, computer and scholarships. The management (section heads) meet every week and there is a meeting with all the headteachers once a month.

The biggest section of the central office is that of education, and it is spearheaded by the two education coordinators – the “lower” one for pre-primary to Grade 5 and the “upper” one for Grade 6 and above. The main functions of the coordinators are planning the programme for the whole year and supervising the implementation of the plans. Their work involves preparation of budgets, report writing, the finalization of books and examinations, attending meetings and the recruitment of teachers. Under the coordinators are several resource teachers who are responsible for curriculum development, the compilation of textbooks, teacher observation and training, and the supervision of examinations. The “lower” coordinator is supervising four general resource teachers and three specialist resource teachers, respectively for Nepalese (mother tongue), value education and special needs. The “upper” coordinator has six resource teachers, responsible for the main subjects of English (two), Dzongkha (the native language of Bhutan), mathematics, science and social studies. One of the main activities of the resource teachers is updating manuals, workbooks and textbooks.

The computer section is responsible for getting the in-house books ready for printing. It produces updated guidelines for the schools and any handouts needed for various workshops and training programmes. The office also procures commercial textbooks and school supplies through a tendering process and distributes the items to the schools. Due to theft in a camp school store, most of the classroom supplies are now stored in a central warehouse in Damak from where the materials are sent out to the schools on a monthly basis. The procurement section conducts regular checks at the schools to ascertain the quality and use of the materials.

**Refugee schools.** There are nine refugee schools with a total of 964 teachers, 138 non-teaching staff and 40,204 students (figures valid as of 31 August 2000). Of the teachers, 735 (76 per cent) are male and 229 (24 per cent) are female. Of the pupils, 21,034 (52 per cent) are male and 19,170 (48 per cent) are female. The average size of a school is more than 4,000, which is enormous; the school at Beldangi II has almost 8,000 pupils, spread into smaller sub-campuses.

Over 40 per cent of the refugee population are attending the camp schools, not to mention those refugees who are attending school outside the camps. This gives an overall gross enrolment ratio exceeding 100 per cent, indicating the refugees’ strong desire for education. The anomalous enrolment ratio is explained by the fact that there are many over-aged refugees attending school. The schools in southern Bhutan were closed down in 1990, so that when the refugees reached Nepal they rejoined school to catch up on their earlier missed education. At the lower level (pre-primary to Grade 5), CARITAS claim that the net enrolment is almost 100 per cent, implying that virtually all refugees of primary school age, girls and boys, are going to school. At the upper level (grades 6 to 10), the enrolment level is somewhat lower and there are more boys (8,344) attending than girls (6,077).

The overall pupil–teacher ratio is 42: 1, but in reality the classes are much bigger than this because teachers don’t teach all the time. They have free periods in which they plan and prepare their lessons and do corrections. (Each teacher is time-tabled for 32 periods per week.) Some of the specialist teachers, such as the in-school resource teachers, are given very few periods, if any at all. The number of pupils per class

therefore averages around 60 to 65. This has increased over the years from about 40, due to the constant reduction in funding and the increasing number of students. The author even observed a few lower classes with over 100 students, caused by a merging of two classes when one teacher was away sick.

Since the education in the camp schools has been recognized by the government of Nepal, they follow the academic calendar of the district education office from July to June. Children start school at the age of 5–6 years. There are 66 days per term with two month-long holidays per year and a few short holidays for religious and national festivals. The camp schools run from Monday to Friday with a half-day on Saturday. The lowest classes (pre-primary and Grade 1) operate on a shift system so that there can be two sessions per day, thus economising on classroom space. From grades 2 to 10, the number of lessons per day varies from seven to eight, each period lasting for 40 minutes. (A shift system operated formerly for the higher grades, but was unsuccessful because it was very tiring for the teachers.)

The schools are well organized, as evidenced by the extensive range of files kept in the headteachers' offices. Discipline is good and corporal punishment is officially banned. Each school has a headteacher, assistant head and those in charge of the sub-campuses. There are also seven in-school resource teachers – two each for the lower school, upper school and Nepalese language, and one for special needs. Moreover, staff from the central CARITAS office visit the schools regularly to encourage the teachers and give them advice. The schools have set up various committees to assist their functioning on various matters, including admission, discipline, welfare, maintenance and examinations.

### *Tools<sup>19</sup>*

***The school curriculum and curriculum development.*** The Bhutanese refugees are using English as the language of instruction in their schools, following the same pattern as in Bhutan.<sup>20</sup> This contrasts with the government schools in Nepal, which use the Nepalese language (only the private schools, reputedly better than the government schools, use English as a medium). The refugees are following a mixed system, combining elements of both Bhutanese and Nepalese curricula, so that they can be prepared for the eventuality either of returning back home or of settling in the host country. A generation of children have been born outside Bhutan, who need to learn about their home country.

In the lowest grades, from pre-primary to Grade 3, the refugees basically follow the Bhutanese syllabus (NAPE) plus Nepalese language. There are no subject teachers, except for Nepalese language, so that the children are taught by one class teacher for most of the time. The syllabus is child-centred and activity-based, and is meant to reflect Bhutanese traditional values and culture.

In the middle years (grades 4 to 8) the refugees are following a mixture of the Bhutanese and Nepalese curriculums. The refugees study the four core subjects of the Nepalese curriculum (English, Nepalese, mathematics and science), as prescribed by the Nepalese Ministry of Education, and in addition they take the optional subjects of English II, social studies, Dzongkha (the national language of Bhutan) and value education, covering environment and population. The teachers specialize in two or three subjects.

<sup>19</sup> See Conceptual framework in previous section for definition of "tools".

<sup>20</sup> There are three languages in the Bhutanese refugee picture. The mother tongue is Nepalese, which is also the national language of Nepal, the country of asylum. The national language in Bhutan, the country of origin, is Dzongkha. Yet the refugees prefer to study in English, as is done in Bhutan. They feel that an international language provides a better-quality education, which is therefore more motivating for them.



*Children learn both Bhutanese and Nepalese at the secondary school to be prepared for the eventuality of returning home. Sanischare Camp, Morang District, Nepal. UNHCR/12.1997/H.J. Davies*

The refugees feel that there is a need to strengthen their knowledge of Dzongkha, in particular, to prepare them for repatriation. Special workshops are conducted to expose the teachers to methods of teaching Dzongkha. The programme staff, the resource teachers and in-school resource teachers, have produced syllabuses and textbooks for all these optional subjects.

For the top years (grades 9 to 10), the refugees adhere completely to the Nepalese curriculum and sit the national School Leaving Certificate examination. Each teacher is responsible for between one and three subjects. CARITAS arranges for the translation into English of the relevant Nepalese-language school textbooks. The programme also provides supporting curricular material and teacher training notes.

The Bhutanese refugee education programme attaches great importance to those aspects of education learned outside the classroom – the “hidden curriculum”. Pupils do 10 minutes’ “social work” each day before assembly (and 30 minutes on Saturday mornings). The work involves cleaning the classrooms and keeping the school compound tidy. Students also take it in turns to make speeches during assembly. This gives them an opportunity to improve their confidence. It also instils positive feelings, both towards schoolwork and to their home country. There is a house system which implants a spirit of both cooperation and competition. Various games, sports, literary and cultural activities are organized in the schools. There are annual sports, and inter-class, inter-house and inter-school football and volleyball tournaments.



The schools also organize quizzes and debates, and have competitions in extempore speech, general knowledge, essay writing, singing and dancing. The refugee schools participate in athletics tournaments organized by the district education officer for all schools in the district. Many of the refugees win prizes and some are selected to represent the district in zonal athletics gatherings.

There has been continuous curriculum development in the refugee schools, with each section of the programme developing materials and corresponding teacher training notes. The refugees have recently added a new subject, value education, from Grade 4 upwards, with the purpose of making children aware of the values held by the Bhutanese community. There is a danger that the refugees may lose touch with their traditional culture when exposed to the negative effects of camp life. In these classes, the refugees learn about their responsibilities, respect for their elders and how to make a positive contribution to their community. They also learn how values can change for the better, for example the community's changing attitude towards the education of girls.<sup>21</sup> Teachers handling this new subject are given special orientation programmes.

The curriculum has become inclusive in the sense that children with special needs are now integrated into the classrooms. An objective of the programme is for disabled children to have equal educational opportunities, with full participation and the necessary support. There are 1,085 children with various disabilities in the camps, of whom about 30 per cent are hearing-impaired. These children are admitted into school at the same time as the normal children, although some flexibility in age is allowed. Only one type of disabled child is put in any one class and the children are normally seated in the front row for easy access to the teacher. Awareness programmes have been given to the community and all teachers. Each school has a special needs support teacher. The special needs support teachers receive training from the central office, after which they train the schoolteachers in how to deal with disabled children in their classes. The special needs support teacher also provides support and guidance to the disabled pupils. Where necessary, remedial classes are given to the disabled children after school hours. The special needs support teachers visit the homes to guide and train the parents so that they can assist their disabled children and monitor their progress. The students with special needs are encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities. Guidebooks have been written by CARITAS for teachers to help them to deal with children with special needs.<sup>22</sup> Contacts have been made with donors who have offered hearing aids or spectacles to the children after they have been tested physically.

In terms of personality development, some older children have themselves received training. In particular, class 10 students have benefited from a workshop on leadership skills. The objectives were to help the students learn about themselves, their peers and the environment, and to develop critical thinking. Moreover, the older girls (class 8 and 9) have been given self-awareness training to help them cope with the problems of growing up. An objective of this programme is a reduction in the number of early marriages and elopements during the girls' studies. Results so far have proved positive.

***Training of teachers and managers.*** Suitably qualified teachers are recruited from the refugee population. Ideally, they should already have teacher training certificates or degrees but in practice the majority of them have just come out of school with higher secondary (Grade 12) certificates or just school leaving certificates (Grade 10). Candidates are interviewed for suitability by a panel of staff from the central

<sup>21</sup> According to one informant, the community had previously considered that girls' education was a curse.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Meera (1999; undated).

office. During the interview, the candidate presents a “lesson” on a chosen subject to demonstrate his or her communication skills. The panel makes its selection according to this performance, also taking qualifications, work experience and community service into consideration.

There is an extensive system of in-service teacher training. The duration and frequency of the courses vary according to the category of training. Newly appointed teachers have a three-day workshop in which they are given the basics in lesson planning and delivery. This includes demonstration and practice lessons, after which they have some confidence to enter the classroom. All primary teachers have a meeting every week with the in-school resource teachers (on Saturday mornings), when they plan for the following week’s lessons. During the week, the in-school resource teachers observe the teachers and support them with further ongoing guidance and advice, especially those who are newly appointed. Workshops on particular subjects are arranged by the resource teachers, as and when necessary, taking place at the central office in Damak. Earlier, CARITAS used to give out certificates to all teachers attending workshops. Although these certificates are not recognized by the governments in either Nepal or Bhutan, they can help refugees to secure employment in the private schools in Nepal. As part of the measures to curtail the “brain-drain”, CARITAS has now stopped issuing certificates after workshops. However, they continue to award experience certificates to refugee teachers.

During the year, central workshops are arranged for office-based staff, in-school resource teachers, headteachers and sector in-charges, ranging from three to five days according to the availability of external facilitators. The topics are chosen to help these personnel to keep abreast of the latest ideas and become more effective.

The content of the various types of training obviously depends on the category of the trainee. The primary teachers are given basic classroom management and child psychology, for example. The in-school resource teachers and subject-based teachers are trained in subject matter and development of alternative learning resources. The headteachers receive training in counselling, alternative ways of disciplining students, children’s rights, and leadership and managerial skills, and the central office staff are trained in management, training of trainers and conflict resolution.

**Teaching methods and assessment.** Child-centred methods are encouraged during training, but teachers often find them difficult to carry out in the classroom. Traditionally in Bhutan, culture and religion have been strongly intertwined in the lives of these people, and education has assumed a kind of religious significance. The learning process is venerated, and the teachers, often called gurus, are respected like religious leaders. Schools are revered as temples, and as such are looked after and treasured by the community.<sup>23</sup> The culture tends to favour the “lecture method” of instruction by teachers,<sup>24</sup> and the author observed that the pupils listened to their teachers, respectfully and often unquestioningly, without much active participation, exacerbated by large class size and shortage of teaching materials.<sup>25</sup> As an illustration of this point, the author noticed a hand-written poster on a classroom wall which included the following sentence: “A good student is one who talks less in class. ”

23 On several occasions, the author was told by Bhutanese refugees (parents, teachers and pupils) that a school was like a temple.

24 The tendency towards “lecture method” has been noticed by the author in other developing countries, such as Sudan, Uganda and Kenya.

25 “The students are encouraged to ask questions and the system is building up gradually, though the pupils are very hesitant.” Personal communication with Bala Sharma and Loknath Pokhrel, the refugee education coordinators of BREP.

In the general context of this region of the world, educational process is assumed to be one of give and take – knowledge given by the guru and taken by the *shishya* (student/disciple). However, such a situation is not to be taken as absolute. In many concrete situations one can observe elements of the Western/modern/secular approach. (Bhutanese refugee resource teacher)

In Grade 4 and above, the pupils sit for examinations at the end of each term. In the lower classes, examinations are given at the end of each “block” of work. Although some assignments and tests are done throughout the term, they don’t carry any weight in the final assessment, except in Grade 8. Prizes are given to the highest-ranking pupils as well as to those who have excelled in general school life, such as school captains and winners of various literary, cultural and sports competitions. Students who fail to achieve an average of a pass over their three termly examinations have to repeat the year. They might do so more than once; disabled students are treated more leniently. Each school sets its own examinations, apart from the District Common Board Examinations (end of grades 5 and 8) and the National School Leaving Certificate Examinations (end of Grade 10). In the Common Board Examinations, the schools contribute their own internal assessment marks.

The district recognizes the education of the refugee pupils and allows them to sit for the Common Board Examinations. Moreover, CARITAS has been authorized to set additional papers especially for the refugees in the camps. This was achieved after much representation to the district authorities, to the great credit of the CARITAS management. The additional papers added for Grade 5 are in English II, Dzongkha and Bhutan social studies. The additional papers for Grade 8 are English II, Dzongkha, and Bhutan history, geography and value education. The rationale for introducing new papers is twofold: the refugees want to maintain their high standards of education and at the same time they want to preserve their identity with Bhutan. CARITAS is fully involved in these board examinations, which it has now taken on as an additional responsibility. CARITAS has created a separate examinations section in their programme, to deal specifically with matters such as liaising with the district education office. Functions of this section include registering students, paying their fees, setting the questions, distributing the stationery, supervising the examinations, evaluating the answer sheets and tabulating the results. CARITAS is one of the members of the district examination board.

The Grade 10 students have to sit for a qualifying (“sent-up”) examination, set by the district, before they can enter for the School Leaving Certificate, which is a national examination. The certificates obtained by the refugees at the grades 5, 8 and 10 levels are all officially recognized by the government of Nepal.

**Monitoring and evaluation.** The refugee programme monitors and assesses itself through regular meetings with its administrative and education staff, headteachers, sector in-charges, in-school resource teachers, special needs support teachers and store in-charges. Future plans, current problems and suggested solutions are considered in detail at these meetings. Every six months, to satisfy UNHCR’s monitoring requirements, each department writes a report, which is collated and presented for discussion at a general staff meeting. Before the end of the academic year there is a three-day review for all CARITAS staff to which UNHCR officials and outside experts are also invited. Achievements and non-achievements are thoroughly debated, and in the light of this, plans are made for the following year. The teachers are given the chance to make suggestions for curriculum changes, new courses, teacher training or any other improvement for the running of the schools. They make their opinions known to the in-school resource teachers who channel them to the appropriate authorities (headteachers or resource teachers).

### Outcomes<sup>26</sup>

In a recent monitoring report submitted by CARITAS to UNHCR (CARITAS-Nepal, 1999: 5–8), it was stated that over 90 per cent of the refugee students who sat the district and national examinations were successful. More specifically, the overall refugee pass rates for the official Grade 5, Grade 8 and Grade 10 examinations were 94.7 per cent, 96.6 per cent and 91.5 per cent respectively. It is clear that the Bhutanese refugees are maintaining an excellent academic standard.

Classroom tests and government examinations are not the only way that the programme measures attainment of the refugee students. Behaviour and attitudes are considered to be very important. When the author asked the headteachers how they measured children's attainment, they gave the following additional answers: vocabulary used in writing and speech; performance in debates and essay competitions; student participation in co-curricular activities and sports; discipline; attendance; confidence; behaviour towards the community; social participation; effort; help to other students; leadership roles. Teachers observe their pupils both inside and outside the classroom to obtain a broad picture of attainment.

**Table 1: Overall Student Attendance at Camp Schools, Grades 9 and 10.**

YEAR	GRADE 9	GRADE 10	TOTAL
1992	92	11	103
1993	119	59	178
1994	240	119	359
1995	356	221	577
1996	373	312	685
1997	436	346	782
1998	635	432	1,067
1999	1,085	583	1,668
2000	1,294	1,040	2,334

Source: Amalraj, 2000

**Table 2: Attendance by Girls at Camp Schools, Grades 9 and 10.**

YEAR	GRADE 9	GRADE 10	TOTAL
1995	93	44	137
1996	90	84	174
1997	120	108	228
1998	189	124	313
1999	369	170	539
2000	438	337	775

Source: Amalraj, 2000

<sup>26</sup> See Conceptual framework in previous section for definition of "outcomes".

Although the total refugee population has remained fairly constant since the influx of 1992, enrolment and persistence at school have been improving steadily during the period of the refugees' exile, as can be seen in Table 1, which covers the two highest grades in the camp schools. More specifically, the same report indicates that the enrolment and persistence of girls have also multiplied, as shown in Table 2.

Literacy levels have increased in the camps, as mentioned earlier. Some teachers and older students help the community by giving adult education classes at the schools in the evenings.

Although employment prospects are low, the education which refugees receive in the camp schools does give some boost to their chances. Many refugees who successfully complete their education in the camps start teaching in the refugee schools. Some move on to schools outside the camps.<sup>27</sup> The little money they earn is often used for further education.

The skills, attitudes and behaviour which refugees learn at school can contribute to the overall good management and wellbeing of the camps. This is an important outcome which a quality refugee education programme should achieve. "Already we have good administration in the camps. This will be better and best when more and more educated youth participate in camp management" (Amalraj, 2000).

The education the refugees receive is good because they achieve higher percentage results than the nationals. (Deputy Director of the Refugee Coordination Unit, Government of Nepal)

Most refugees were farmers and didn't know the value of education. But this is now improving. The school has played a role by bringing in parents for meetings and discussions. (Bhutanese refugee headteacher)

We know the value of education and we motivate our children to attend school. (Bhutanese refugee parent)

Quite a few of the teachers who have acquired some degree of competence of a few years' teaching and in-service training, are attracted by the offers from outside. This lure becomes all the more irresistible in the case of a people who have been languishing for years in the camps and thus rendered passive and bereft of hope of repatriation and brighter prospects. (Bhutanese refugee resource teacher).

There isn't much conflict in the camps. (Bhutanese refugee leader).

We are able to maintain the camp so well and so peacefully because of education in the camp schools. Managing 41,000 students has greatly contributed to the peaceful atmosphere of our seven camps. (Field Director, CARITAS-Nepal)

Education is an important "occupational therapy", keeping refugees busy and preventing anti-social activities. The level of crime and misbehaviour in the Bhutanese camps is very low. Time is a huge resource that the refugees possess as they wait in the camps for many years, hoping for their situation to end. It is important that this resource is harnessed for positive rather than negative use.

<sup>27</sup> It has been noted earlier that private schools in Nepal are frequently willing to accept Bhutanese refugee teachers in view of the relatively high educational standards of the refugees.

## Findings

Quality is a complex term, with multiple meanings reflecting the values and interpretations of different stakeholders. (Williams, 2001)

In this section, the author will first look at quality from the Bhutanese refugees' viewpoint. What do they consider to be quality education and has it been achieved in the Nepalese camps? The author will then go on to present his own findings, by identifying what he perceives as the main strengths and weaknesses of the Bhutanese refugee programme. Finally, these will be discussed in relation to the conceptual framework, throwing some light on how other refugee programmes might address quality education issues.

### *Refugees' perspective*

Many schools in Southern Bhutan were closed down in September 1990 before the refugees fled. The schooling of the students had therefore been seriously disrupted and from the beginning of their exile, the Bhutanese refugees have appreciated the importance of quality education, both for the individual and for the community. The Bhutanese refugees regard education as their only wealth in exile and their key to the future. It is the hope of almost every refugee that they will return to their homeland. "Quality education empowers people to contribute to the building of their nation and to enhance their dignity as individuals" (UNHCR/CARITAS-Nepal, 1999).

The education facilities provided by CARITAS are good. In Bhutan, we were deprived.  
(Bhutanese refugee headteacher)

We need to know our identity. Who are we, where are we and what are our responsibilities?  
(Bhutanese refugee leader)

We are happy with the schools because our children are benefiting. They will be able to serve the nation when they go back. (Bhutanese refugee parent)

Elopement has reduced. There is more awareness now. (Bhutanese refugee women's leader)

Girls are growing more confident, and some speak better than the boys during assembly.  
(Bhutanese refugee headteacher)

We learn how to talk to elders and respect them. (Bhutanese refugee student)

School is good because there are no disputes or misunderstandings among teachers and students.  
(Bhutanese refugee student)

Frequently the first thing that the Bhutanese refugees told the author was that they wanted to go home. Repatriation is their chief objective and this dream seems to dominate their thoughts. Education is regarded as an important weapon to help them prepare to go back home. They want to contribute to nation building, compete for leadership and fight for justice. They believe that education will help them do this. And education for repatriation does not just involve the drawing up of a syllabus similar to the one in

Bhutan. It is also a process of developing a desire in the pupils to go back to their homeland. Many of the children were born in the camps, and even the older ones are too young to remember what life was like in Bhutan before they fled. Education is therefore a chance for the children to know who they are and build their identity. Every morning during assembly, a few refugee pupils stand up on the raised-earth stage and speak to the other pupils and teachers. Their speeches not only urge the audience to work harder at school but they also instil patriotic feelings and the yearning to go home.

Education is not only a vehicle in which the values and behaviour of the community are passed on to the children. It is also an agent for bringing about positive change. Since they became refugees, the Bhutanese community has a better understanding of the value of girls' education and, as a result, almost all refugee girls are now going to school. The caste system has also grown to be less significant, helped by the fact that the refugees have become united in their suffering together in the camps. Young people are now beginning to be more open, and this should lead to more critical thinking and questioning in class in the future.

Generally, the interaction between the teachers and pupils was excellent, with each group showing respect for the other. This is an indicator of the quality of the Bhutanese refugee education programme.

The author also received negative comments from refugees concerning the quality of the education programme, including the following:

- Although student numbers are increasing, the facilities have decreased. (Bhutanese refugee parent)
- We lack furniture and have to share some books. We haven't had a geometry set for three years. (Bhutanese refugee student)
- Girls are poor at mathematics. (Bhutanese refugee female teacher)
- Computer education should be provided. Without it, we will not be able to compete with others. (Bhutanese refugee teacher)
- Our children receive only minimum help for grades 11 and 12. There is no scope after Grade 12. (Bhutanese refugee parent)

### ***Strengths of the Bhutanese refugee education programme***

The author identifies the following main strengths which have contributed to the quality of the programme.

***Refugee participation.*** The education programme was initiated by the refugees themselves and continues to be run predominantly by them. Clearly, among their greatest resources are the human resources provided by themselves. The parents provide their labour without charge in the construction and maintenance of the school buildings. Teachers provide their services for very low pay. Their participation promotes cost-effectiveness and sustainability. By having the responsibility of teaching their own children, the refugees are motivated to do a better job. Being refugees themselves, the teachers can more easily understand the problems of the refugee pupils. They can counsel the pupils and teach them more relevant subject matter. They realise that whatever is done now is an investment whose value will be evident after they repatriate. Moreover, the involvement of refugees in the schools ensures that there will be a cadre of educators and teachers who will be experienced and trained to continue or set up schools on repatriation.

**Motivation.** The refugee pupils, teachers and community are highly motivated and committed towards education. They understand the value of education and are always eager to learn. School enrolment is very high and absenteeism, among both teachers and pupils, is low. Any visitor to the camps during school hours will see few children outside school. Instead, inside any school, the visitor can't fail to be impressed by row after row of bamboo classrooms full of well-behaved children working hard and concentrating on their lessons. Many young teachers view their jobs as an opportunity to further their own knowledge and skills and they are therefore willing to handle different classes and subjects each year. On top of that, most teachers are studying for additional qualifications on their own, following distance education programmes from Nepal or India to further their careers. Parents also help. They construct new classrooms and facilities, and encourage their children to go to school, giving them space in their huts to do homework in the evenings. The refugees are united in their goal of education for repatriation.

**Cooperation.** There is a good spirit in the camps because the attitudes of the "actors" involved are very supportive towards the main objective of improving life for the refugees. Cooperation, sharing and teamwork are evident at all levels of the programme. The refugees themselves are willing to share their limited resources and learn from each other. At camp management level, the various agencies meet regularly, both formally and informally, to assist each other in solving their mutual problems. The health NGO might be asked to deal with the illness of a student, for example, or the construction NGO might be asked to repair school furniture. At local government level, the district education officer has rendered much assistance to the refugees, not least by giving official recognition to their examinations. The assistance is reciprocated by the CARITAS office, whenever possible, such as by lending vehicles to the district education officer during the busy examination periods.

**Orderliness.** The programme is well organized. Everywhere the author went, he found people working in an orderly manner – knowing what to do and getting on with it. Two extensive documents have been produced by the refugees to guide the running of the programme. One document (CARITAS-Nepal, 2000) on office procedure and personnel policy specifies detailed job descriptions of all central office posts, from field director down to office attendant. All sections have a section head and there are well-defined lines of duty. Organization is enhanced by meetings and training workshops for office administrators and school heads. These take place on a regular basis and are planned many months in advance. The other document (UNHCR/CARITAS-Nepal, 1999) comprises the camp school guidelines in which school rules and job descriptions have been well laid down, having been agreed by the refugees and camp management. This document includes procedures on disciplining students and teachers, admission of students, appointment of heads, school committees and examinations. The refugees themselves are organized and well disciplined. They understand the importance of rules, and are able and willing to carry out the procedures specified in the guidelines.

**Management.** Much of what the refugees have achieved has been due to the support and assistance received from the programme management. The support has taken many forms – financial, human resources, educational and moral. UNHCR has realised the importance of education since the very beginning of the emergency, and has continued to support the programme with necessary funds and guidance. CARITAS-Nepal has also been bringing in its expertise and has seconded volunteer staff who are highly qualified and motivated. Moreover, it has provided additional financial resources to improve the primary education programme (mainly funded by UNHCR) and has entirely funded the secondary education programme. The leadership of CARITAS has been promoting positive attitudes among the refugees,





*If given the opportunity, refugee women show a keen interest in acquiring new skills. The adult education classes held in this camp were immediately over-enrolled, despite the lack of facilities. Goldhap Camp, Jhapa District, Nepal. UNHCR/12.1992/A. Hollmann*

the host government, UNHCR and other NGOs. This has greatly helped to create an atmosphere of cooperation, trust and mutual support – an enabling environment for the smooth and successful management of the programme. At school level, programme management has ensured that the schools are administered by experienced, qualified and trained headteachers who have been a good influence on the teachers and have helped to promote stability and a quality education.

**Curriculum development.** The programme is always on the lookout for ways of improving the refugee curriculum, either by modification or the addition of new components. This ongoing curriculum development process is a major strength of the programme, since it allows the teaching/learning process in the schools to respond positively to the evolving circumstances and surrounding conditions, such as a change in the external Nepalese curriculum or the growing needs of the refugee community. This enables the curriculum to be more relevant. A number of additional subjects have been added recently, such as value education, leadership training and the environment, promoting a comprehensive and rounded curriculum. Moreover, the curriculum has become inclusive, children with disabilities having been encouraged to join school, their needs catered for with the help of special needs support teachers. All teachers are trained in dealing with disabled students and the rest of the pupils gain by sharing the class with their disabled colleagues, accepting them and learning from them in the broadest sense.

Children are doing well. Schools are there and they get materials. (Bhutanese refugee mother)

There is a need for in-school resource teachers because teachers are not qualified and they require constant help. (JRS resource teacher)

**Teacher training and support.** The ongoing curriculum development requires a constant provision of teacher training and support. The innovative system of resource teachers (resource teachers and in-school resource teachers), which was introduced early on in the programme, is a great strength which has permitted the continuation of a high level of quality. To have in-school resource teachers in all schools is an effective method of reaching all teachers. Teachers benefit from this support, since they have daily access to the advice and guidance of the in-school resource teachers, and on Saturday mornings they are given hints on planning lessons and developing teaching materials for the following week. Moreover, since many teachers are leaving the schools for more highly paid jobs or further education, they are constantly being replaced by young refugees who have mostly just finished school. The ongoing teacher training and support that is provided for these new, inexperienced teachers is essential for building up their confidence and providing them with the skills necessary for effective teaching.

**Examinations.** The examinations sat in the refugee schools are now recognized by the government of Nepal. This ensures that the students passing these examinations are considered to have attained a satisfactory level of achievement. The certificates acquired, moreover, provide satisfaction to the successful students in that their achievements have been duly recognized. This gives the student confidence and self-esteem, important for building up even higher achievements, which is a great motivating force for other students to follow. When examination results are officially certified, the qualifications become portable and can be used to obtain employment or further education in the host country, country of origin or in a third country of resettlement.

**Records and reporting.** Extensive records are kept in both the central office and the schools. Minutes are written for meetings. The records examined by the author seemed thorough, accurate and up-to-date, and he noted the large number of files kept in the headteachers' offices. Registers of attendance are scrutinised by the headteachers each day, and if any teacher is absent the head makes efforts to find a temporary replacement from the pool of unoccupied teachers. Examination results are compiled by each teacher and double checked by the in-school resource teachers before they are sent out to the parents. Each school sends a regular monthly situation report to the CARITAS central office. The reports include details on pupil enrolment and dropping out, teacher data, school events, training activities, problems, staff movements, stores and supplies, school construction and maintenance. The reports are consolidated by the computer section of the central office and sent off to UNHCR in the monthly situation report for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

**Textbooks.** Most of the primary school textbooks (and some of the higher-level books) given to the students are produced by the programme itself, and this ensures that the books are comparatively cost-effective and relevant. Indeed, it was estimated that the books produced in this way cost about two thirds of the price of a commercial book. It was claimed, moreover, that they contained fewer mistakes. The refugees are very creative in the ways in which they make books. They sometimes write their own materials; they compile materials from various sources; they do straight translations of commercial texts; or perform any combination of the three methods. All students are normally given individual copies of the main texts. This promotes quality, since children can take books home for their individual study. Many of the refugees

have a remarkable thirst for education and a desire to study on their own out of school. If students have books to take away, not only do they get the thrill of owning a book but they can also read it flexibly in their own time. This is especially important for girls who have to fit in many household chores as well. Another advantage of having a personal copy of a book is that, through reading it, students may be able to discover and compensate for any mistakes made by an incorrect or inexperienced teacher. (Of course, this does not apply to the younger children at the lower primary level.)

**Satellite schools.** The policy to decentralise the schools as they increase in size is one of the strengths of the programme. Where feasible, sector schools have been constructed for the lower classes (Pre-primary to Grade 3). This not only reduces the massive size of the main school but, more crucially, it gives importance to the lower primary classes whose children are at their most decisive time of development. The sector schools have their own teachers and head (sector in-charge). Previously, the lower classes were neglected and had large pupil-teacher ratios with few materials. Under the system of sector schools, more attention can be given to the individual pupils and the schools can be handled more easily. Moreover, pupils have shorter distances to walk to school and they are separated from the older students, making them less prone to bullying or harassment.

### ***Problems in the Bhutanese refugee education programme***

The author identifies the following main problems and weaknesses which have hindered the delivery of quality education.

**The refugee situation.** The protracted refugee situation has given the refugees an uncertain future. This can lead to frustration and a drop in motivation and morale, which might eventually result in poor performance by refugee teachers and pupils. Furthermore, the longer the refugees subsist on donated food and handouts, the greater the danger that the dependency syndrome could set in. Although the health and nutritional status of the refugees is generally satisfactory, congestion in the camps can lead to various health and social problems.

**Decreasing funding.** Due to the awareness campaigns in the camps and the increasing number of school-age children, the number of students enrolled in school has increased over the years. Coupled with diminishing funding, this has led to a deterioration of standards, evidenced in reduced quantities of classroom supplies, supplementary reading materials, furniture and science equipment. In particular, the average number of pupils per teacher has increased from 40 to about 65.

**Lack of opportunities for further education.** At present, UNHCR is funding the primary education programme in the camps (pre-primary to Grade 8) while CARITAS is funding the secondary education programme (grades 9 and 10). But for upper secondary education (grades 11 and 12) the refugees have to go outside the camps to study on nearby government or private campuses. CARITAS gives only limited support to these students. At university level, the situation is worse. It has been decided by UNHCR that there will be no new beneficiaries in the future and so the German-sponsored DAFI (Deutsche Akademische Flüchtlingsinitiative) programme in Nepal has been frozen.<sup>28</sup> This could have adverse effects on the motivation of the refugee community, particularly the students. The problems accumulate as the years go

<sup>28</sup> The decision was taken because UNHCR was expecting imminent repatriation of the Bhutanese refugees. The decision may have to be reviewed in the light of current circumstances.

by because of the successful primary education programme. More and more children are reaching secondary level, especially girls, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to accommodate them all at secondary school, and beyond, due to lack of funds.

**Low incentives.** People will always ask for higher salaries, and refugees are no exception. The Bhutanese refugees are paid a small incentive, ranging from about \$10–20 per month, depending on their position. They are not paid full salaries because they benefit from food and non-food items. However, the incentive rate has hardly risen over the last few years and falls well behind inflation. The teachers say that they need the extra money to buy decent clothes and set a good example to the pupils. If it were a fair world then the teachers would certainly receive a higher wage because they deserve it for the amount and quality of work they do. The unfortunate reality is that funds are not enough.

**Unrecognized teacher training.** Teachers are unable to obtain a recognized teacher qualification. Although refugee teachers work hard, gain valuable experience and receive a lot of non-formal training in the camps, they end up with no official qualification. The district education officer now recognizes the examinations sat by the refugee students but does not yet officially recognize the training received by the refugee teachers. CARITAS is presently trying to work out a solution to this problem.

**Teacher absenteeism.** Since most teachers are very motivated this is not a huge problem, but there are instances when teachers are unable to attend school for such reasons as ill- health or family problems. The headteacher tries to find other teachers to substitute but this is not always possible (due to limited capacity). In some cases, classes are merged to produce an enormous class of over 100 children. In other cases, the class is left without a teacher or, rarely, the children have to go home.

The standard has gone down. Trained teachers have left and class size has gone up to 65.  
(JRS resource teacher)

We need higher incentives to maintain our tidy look. It is important to be an exemplary figure.  
(Bhutanese refugee teacher)

Every year about one third of the teachers go away and their place is taken up by a new set of untrained teachers. It is becoming more and more difficult even to find people with the barest requirement of qualification/ability. (Bhutanese refugee resource teacher)

A girl's job is to cook and wash the plates. (Bhutanese refugee boy student)

Boys don't do any housework. (Bhutanese refugee girl student)

**Weakness in science.** Performance in science subjects is generally weak. The science laboratory in each refugee school is basically a cupboard containing a few chemicals and pieces of apparatus. There is no running water, gas or electricity in the schools. The few experiments performed are done by the teacher in front of the students. Lack of practical work is an obvious reason for poor performance. Another reason is the lack of qualified teachers. It is a vicious circle. Although many teachers are furthering their studies through distance education courses in Nepal and India, they are only pursuing arts courses because science courses require practical work and laboratory facilities.

**Temporary classroom structures.** The classrooms, being made of only of bamboo and grass, are in frequent need of repair, requiring funds and much labour. In particular, the roofs can leak during the rainy season, causing the children to suffer and sometimes preventing lessons from taking place at all. Moreover, the water can spoil the desks and mats, shortening their effective lives. Semi-permanent structures would probably be more cost-effective but the Nepalese government does not permit their use.

**Teacher turnover.** There is a high turnover of teachers, locally referred to as the “brain-drain”. Throughout the year many teachers leave to further their education or to seek higher-paid jobs in the private schools outside the camps. This has a doubly adverse effect in the refugee schools: there is a constant need to select and train new teachers; and learning is disrupted each time a teacher leaves – one class had five different teachers in a single year. This has been going on for many years, despite various attempts to halt it.

**Gender imbalance.** Although the number of girls persisting at school is increasing each year, they are not performing as well as the boys. The society tends to favour males, and the girls are often very shy. There are few female teachers, and no female headteachers or deputies. The author attended a special assembly in one of the schools and was asked to award prizes to the top performing students. There were about fifteen winners who were, embarrassingly, all boys.<sup>29</sup>

**Lower primary classes.** Many problems still exist in the lower primary classes. The untrained teachers find the new NAPE pupil-centred methods demanding, especially as the younger children are more difficult to handle. The classes tend to be bigger, and the teacher is required to spend a lot of time planning the lessons and preparing the materials for the children’s activities. Moreover, teaching in the lower primary classes is generally held in less esteem, and many teachers try to move up to the higher classes as soon as they can. Some classes are therefore faced with a continual change in young and inexperienced teachers.

### ***Analysis of strengths and weaknesses***

In the previous sections, the author has identified major strengths and weaknesses of the Bhutanese refugee education programme. Quality will be improved if we can build on these strengths and minimise the weaknesses.

In terms of the conceptual framework, the first five strengths enumerated can be classified under “actors” and the next four strengths under “tools”, while the last two strengths fall under “environment”. See Table 3.

On the other hand, the first eight problems or weaknesses can all be classified under “environment” and the next two problems under “actors”, while the final weakness (lower primary classes) fits better under “tools”, since it is mainly concerned with teaching methods. See Table 4.

In summary, it can be seen that the strengths of the Bhutanese Refugee Education Programme are mainly to be found in the actors and tools, whereas the weaknesses are mainly located in the environment. This is, perhaps, not surprising. Quality improvements require an “enabling” environment. A refugee situation would more honestly be described as a “disabling” one.

<sup>29</sup> During the presentation, the author asked the headteacher to identify the girl with the highest examination mark. An impromptu prize was awarded to her by the author.

**Table 3: Strengths of the BREP in Terms of the Conceptual Framework**

<b>Actors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugee participation</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Cooperation</li> <li>• Orderliness</li> <li>• Management</li> </ul>
<b>Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum development</li> <li>• Teacher training and support</li> <li>• Examinations</li> <li>• Records and reporting (monitoring)</li> </ul>
<b>Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbooks</li> <li>• Satellite schools</li> </ul>

**Table 4: Weaknesses of BREP in Terms of the Conceptual Framework**

<b>Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugee situation</li> <li>• Decreasing funding</li> <li>• Lack of opportunities for further education</li> <li>• Low incentives</li> <li>• Unrecognized teacher training</li> <li>• Teacher absenteeism</li> <li>• Weakness in science</li> <li>• Temporary classroom structures</li> </ul>
<b>Actors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher turnover</li> <li>• Gender imbalance</li> </ul>
<b>Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower primary classes (teaching methods)</li> </ul>

This points a way to improving quality. We should build on the strengths, which focus on the actors and tools. And we should minimise the weaknesses, which focus on the environment. But parts of the refugee environment can be impossible or difficult to change. For example, refugee history cannot be altered. Rape and torture cannot be undone. Moreover, the laws of the host country, the prospects of refugee repatriation or the amount of funds donated by the international community are well beyond the control of the actors in our simple pyramid of refugees and programme managers.<sup>30</sup>

Williams (2001) states that “Because of the multiple meanings, there is not a single way to improve quality”. In the final section, we will be focusing on those ways which are realistic and under the control

<sup>30</sup> Weaknesses can be difficult to overcome when operating on a tight budget with little room to manoeuvre. Some of the problems in the Bhutanese programme are simply due to lack of resources, where the only obvious way to solve them is with an injection of funds.

of the actors in our pyramid. In particular, the author suggests recommendations for the programme managers (at the top end of the pyramid) which, if implemented, would ultimately benefit the refugees (at the base) in the delivery of quality education.

## Priorities and recommendations

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There are many factors which can influence the quality of education. Although much research has been done elsewhere on quality in developing countries, which should have general relevance to refugees, it is the intention in this work to highlight and focus on those factors which are specifically relevant to the management of longer-term refugee situations. The author has found it important to look at the whole picture – schools, camps, programme, context – and not just what goes on in the classroom. The broad picture approach is necessary because the major objective of this research is to come up with some practical recommendations for UNHCR and other programme managers which will have an impact on refugee children and the refugee community as a whole.

In this final section we will be considering what lessons can be learned from Nepal. In particular, how did the Bhutanese Refugee Education Programme achieve and maintain good quality? How did it improve and overcome its problems? And what additional steps could be taken to improve it further? We will also make recommendations as to how the quality of refugee education can be improved generally, for the wider refugee world.

### *Priorities*

The main strengths of the Bhutanese programme as perceived by the author are summarized in the following three qualities:<sup>31</sup>

- Positive attitudes
- Recognition of the importance of the teacher
- Good organization

Cooperation and motivation have been persistently promoted and developed for advancing the refugee education cause. Ongoing teacher training and support have greatly contributed to the continued success of the programme. Sound management and cost-effectiveness through stringent monitoring and sheer thrift have enabled the Bhutanese refugee education programme to achieve outstanding results with a minimum of inputs.<sup>32</sup> These are strengths which can be further built on to maintain and improve the quality of the programme even when financial inputs and other resources are diminishing.

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31 The same three qualities were found to be important in the education programme for the Sudanese refugees in Uganda (see Introduction, above).

32 Using data supplied by the BREP Field Director, the author calculated that the primary education programme which CARITAS currently implements costs UNHCR only \$12 per pupil per year. This is indeed value for money. It is a remarkably small amount considering the quality of the education provided. About 41 per cent of the budget goes into teachers' incentives (an ordinary teacher is paid about \$13 per month), 18 per cent on books (an average book costs about \$1) and 16 per cent on classroom supplies.

In the following paragraphs we shall be considering three important factors in more detail: motivating refugees, training refugee teachers and finding cost-effective approaches. There are general recommendations for programme managers or implementing partners. The section ends with specific suggestions for UNHCR's possible role in linking the various factors and coordinating improvements in the quality of education given to refugees.

### *Motivating refugees*<sup>33</sup>

It is the commitment, determination and self-sacrifice of the [Bhutanese] refugee staff that has made the quality education possible. (Amalraj, 2000)

After the initial trauma of displacement has passed, refugees want to get on with their lives and build some kind of future. We have seen that refugees can be highly motivated, enabling them to achieve many objectives in spite of the odds.<sup>34</sup> However, this intrinsic motivation cannot always be guaranteed. Indeed, as the refugee situation shows no signs of ending, refugees can become frustrated and start to lose hope. Their motivation and morale will almost certainly drop. An important function of programme managers is to provide "extrinsic" motivation to the refugees which will reinforce or raise the refugees' own "intrinsic" motivation.

There are various ways of motivating people (Everard and Morris, 1990: 31). Important elements for refugees can be summarized as *responsibility, achievement, recognition and advancement*. Refugees should be encouraged to participate fully in their education programmes, including the planning, monitoring and evaluation phases. If they are given this responsibility, they can often rise to the challenge. A sense of achievement can be very satisfying especially when working against the odds. It can motivate refugees to carry on achieving more. Satisfaction can be enhanced when achievements are recognized by others. It is therefore very important for programme managers and outsiders to recognize and duly acknowledge the accomplishments of the refugees. Refugees also need to satisfy their hopes that there can be a future. They would like advancement and personal development during their time in the camps.

In the case of teachers, refugees should be given responsibility to plan and assess their own lessons, and make suggestions for improving the programme such as changes to the curriculum. They need continued training and support, and their achievements should be recognized, for example, by provision of a certificate. Recognition by their fellow teachers can be encouraged by displaying evidence of good performance, such as putting teacher-made artefacts in the school resource centre. This might also encourage the other teachers to make their own aids. It is important that teachers are also respected by the larger community, and efforts should be made, if necessary, to sensitise the community to the value of education.

33 When the author recently asked Brother Mike Foley of JRS what he considered to be the most important factors contributing to the quality of refugee education, his reply was "teacher training and teacher motivation". By "motivation", he meant salaries or "incentives". Although the author entirely agrees that this is a very crucial issue, the monetary aspect of "motivation" is deliberately avoided in this section, in line with the spirit of the present research, where low cost solutions are being sought. (Teacher incentives normally constitute the major part of any UNHCR education budget.) In the same vein, however, the following statement is taken from a report by Ethel Nhleko, Senior Community Services Officer, UNHCR, Kigoma, Tanzania (Nhleko, 2000: 9): "Secondary school teachers should be paid incentives in order to boost their morale which will lead to improved performance."

34 It has been reported in Guinea that, in the normal situation, the Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees were de-traumatized and highly motivated to undertake school projects, whereas in the new emergency situation, the refugees became re-traumatized and unmotivated (UNHCR/IRC, 2000: 3).



Teachers also need to advance in their professional development. Training should be provided as well as opportunities for career development within the school. Successful teachers can be rewarded with senior positions such as subject heads. It is important to have gender balance among the teachers. Senior female teachers, such as a female headteacher, provide powerful role models for getting more girls to perform well at school. Teachers should be helped, wherever possible, to pursue distance education courses to further their own education (“earn and learn”). Teachers who provide good service over a long period of time should be rewarded for their loyalty by promotion to the next level on the refugee incentive scale, that is, seniority should be recognized as a legitimate qualification.

It is also important to provide good working conditions for the teachers. They should be provided with tables and chairs in both staffroom and classroom. Tea provided during the day is an added bonus for keeping up spirits and welcoming visitors. Refugees appreciate outside visitors; they want to learn from them and at the same time they want the visitor to learn about their plight and perhaps spread the information to the wider world.

Refugee pupils should be motivated at school in the same ways as other children. Lessons should be varied; children need to be challenged; teachers should be competent; there should be regular work with prompt feedback; praise; work should be displayed in classroom; counselling should be available when needed; there should be a loving and caring atmosphere in the classroom; the environment should be clean and safe; special care should be provided for children with disabilities; there should be cooperative group work; tests and examinations should take place; house spirit and rivalry should be fostered in inter-house competitions; there should be co-curricular activities, art, music and sports. Refugee children often have greater needs than ordinary children because of the trauma they have been through. But there is clearly much scope for a good refugee programme to motivate refugee children using the above-mentioned methods.

On special school occasions, prizes can be awarded to children in front of their parents.<sup>35</sup> This is a good opportunity to motivate the whole community. The monetary value of the prize may be minuscule, but that doesn’t matter, since the honour of winning it is more important. Prizes should be awarded to the best girl students, not only to the boys, because this will encourage more girls to improve and will send appropriate gender messages to the boys and community at large. Refugee girls frequently perform less well at school simply because they are given additional household duties at home. Several Bhutanese boys told the author that “household duties are a girl’s job”.

We have seen that the Sudanese and Bhutanese refugee communities have played an immense role in both the establishment and on-going management of the refugee education programmes in Uganda and Nepal respectively. The Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea provide another example: “The programme’s history is an inspiring example of success, particularly through well-supported refugee community self-help efforts” (UNHCR/IRC, 2000: 1). In Tanzania, moreover, “the refugee communities have persuaded primary school teachers, social workers and other refugees working for different NGOs to give up some of their incentives in order to pay post-primary school teachers” (UNHCR, 2000c). Sharing incentives is a shining example of refugee cooperation.

35 “14 December has been declared as an Education Day. The programme of activities will include prize-giving to refugees who will be selected by the committee as best student, best teacher, best headteacher” (Ethel Nhleko, UNHCR Tanzania, 8 December 2000, personal communication).

But community support cannot always be guaranteed. It may need to be cultivated, as illustrated in the following example from Pakistan.

The main challenge will be to request a reasonable community participation without affecting the quality of education that greatly contributed to the improved access and retention ratios during the last years. Therefore a cautious approach will be necessary as in the case of Balochistan, a province which is already disadvantaged, where to convince and motivate refugees regarding the importance of education took a long time. Asking the community to pay for their children's fees, when they are already paying a huge amount to manage their water supply schemes as well as for health services (fees and drugs), could have an adverse effect, as the drop-out rates in higher grades are already high due to the poor economic situation. But it does not mean no community participation. Participation of the community could be obtained to repair schools and provide labour. This can be achieved through a higher level of community mobilization and outreach programmes. (Van De Castelee, 2000)

Girls get motivated by female teachers. (Bhutanese refugee female teacher)

The newly selected teachers are given at first some sort of a hurried basic training at the beginning of the academic year. Later they are sustained through follow-up and supervision by the in-school resource teachers who in turn are trained by the office-based resource teachers. This built-in revival/renewal system of BREP is at the very core of the educational programme. (Bhutanese refugee resource teacher)

### *Training refugee teachers*

The teacher is the most important element for quality education in refugee schools (Sister Carmel Louis, JRS resource teacher, Damak, Nepal, September 2000).

The same is true in Uganda. In the chapter on quality of education in *Education in the refugee-affected areas of Northern Uganda* (Sesnan, Brown and Kabba, 1995: 37–43), the section on teachers is the first and by far the largest.

Other refugee programmes have also found teachers to be the most important factor for quality. At an inter-regional education coordination meeting in Ngara, Tanzania (UNHCR, 2000g), strategies to improve education quality were discussed. Nine problems were highlighted of which four were concerned with lack of resources (classrooms, furniture, water and teaching materials). The other five problems were all related to teachers (lack of skill using new book, difficulties in teaching French and mathematics, lack of discipline among some teachers, poor attendance of female teachers during pregnancy and heavy workload of teachers).

Moreover, in the Somali refugee education programme in Yemen, the following lesson has been learned: "The experience of this programme confirms that although various teaching aids and physical school facilities are of great value, well-trained, dedicated and hard-working teachers are much more important to the success of an education programme" (Gezelius, 1998: 117).

The training and support of refugee teachers is therefore of paramount importance for quality education. "It is important in all cases to build in-service teacher training into refugee school programmes" (Sinclair, 1998: 268).



*One of the income generating schemes run by the British aid agency, OXFAM, is to produce chalk for Nepalese schools. Goldhap Camp, Jhapa District, Nepal. UNHCR/12.1997/H.J. Davies*

In a project concept note submitted to the Refugee Education Trust, Robin Shawyer stated:

The quality of primary and secondary education available to refugees in east Africa and the Horn is often poor, in large part because of the lack of qualified teachers. Many primary and secondary school teachers in schools attended by refugees need access to training to improve their performance, to reduce the high turnover of teachers, to motivate teachers and students and to develop the skills within the refugee community to meet the continuing educational needs. The lack of trained teachers has an effect on the capacity of the community to develop the skills to become self-reliant (Shawyer, 2000).

The importance of teacher training for refugees in east Africa and the Horn has been further confirmed by Sarah Norton-Staal, the Senior Regional Adviser for Refugee Children (7 August 2000, personal communication):

I understand that suggestions for proposals are rather urgently requested. I would like to propose, under the priority category of Education, "Enhancing quality of education through teacher training" as a possible project. I feel that this has been recognized as a critical need in our area. Lack of female teachers is often noted as a problem and thus females could also be targeted in a teacher training programme. Training of teachers is a critical issue for repatriation and successful reintegration.

Teacher training is an effective way of harnessing existing resources efficiently. Trained teachers should be able to communicate their knowledge in child-friendly ways and make maximum use of standard resources such as textbooks and blackboards. They should also know how to be creative and make innovative teaching aids out of locally available materials. Many refugees are recruited into teaching straight from school. They are young and inexperienced. Training is essential if education quality is to be achieved.

Training of refugee teachers can be classified into three categories. First, full-time training in an official institution leads to a recognized qualification. The disadvantages of this method are that it is the most expensive and that the refugee might be away from the camp school for a long period (two years) with no guarantee of return after graduation. Second is distance education, in which the refugee teacher studies for a recognized qualification partly through correspondence. It takes longer but allows the refugee to stay teaching in the camp schools, receiving incentives, throughout the training period. This is probably the most appropriate method, although it demands a lot of the refugee teacher. Third is non-formal training, the usual form of training in a refugee camp, organized by the implementing agency, normally in the camp schools. It doesn't normally lead to any recognized qualification but it is very effective because it is cheap and can cover all the teachers, giving them relevant information and skills on the spot.<sup>36</sup> Workshops lasting from half a day to a couple of weeks (during the school holidays) can be given on specific topics according to needs. The content of the training varies for each workshop, but the initial ones normally include the basics such as lesson planning, the use of the blackboard and other resources, and classroom management. Many refugee teachers have had a deficient education themselves, so that it is also important to include lesson subject matter in the training seminars as well.

Although the blackboard is probably the most important teaching aid, teachers should be taught how to make and use their own visual aids. Moreover, tangible objects are normally more effective in lessons than drawings, so that teachers should be encouraged to make them, using locally available materials.<sup>37</sup> The use of teaching aids can help to make lessons more interesting; teachers need to be taught how to keep children active and interested. Children themselves can also be used as "teaching aids" by the teacher.

Refugee teachers in developing countries often follow the traditional system of teaching, when they tend to lecture and have little interaction with the pupils. They often ask rhetorical questions like "Do you understand?" after which the class replies "Yes, sir!" in chorus. Children should be encouraged to both answer and ask questions. Teachers should be trained in questioning techniques so that the pupils can participate more fully in the lessons and be encouraged to think more critically.

In Nepal, the in-school resource teachers gave advice to the Bhutanese teachers after they had observed a lesson. The author was present on some occasions and was impressed by the expertise of the in-school resource teachers as they critically analysed the lessons. They would first enumerate the positive points and then go on to any negative points. But one essential aspect was usually missing. The teachers themselves were not asked first to assess their own lessons. For sustainability, it is important that teachers reflect on their lessons, trying to identify what went right and wrong, and thinking how they might improve next time. Although it is difficult for inexperienced teachers, if they don't acquire this habit they will never be

36 In Guinea, however, the teacher training that IRC gives to Liberian refugees is officially recognized in Liberia (Nordstrand, 2000: 8). UNHCR should advocate this good practice in other places.

37 The author observed one refugee teacher drawing stones on the blackboard. It would have been better to use real stones, perhaps collected by the children themselves.

able to improve on their own. The in-school resource teachers should therefore encourage a teacher to speak *first* in the after-analysis of a lesson. Refugee teachers can be made less dependent on the advice of the in-school resource teachers by appropriate training in self-evaluation skills. One way of encouraging this is for teachers to insert a “remarks” column in their lesson plans which they fill up with their own comments after each lesson. Another way is for teachers to give a practice lesson to their peers in micro-teaching sessions, after which there is critical analysis among the fellow teachers in a group discussion.<sup>38</sup>

### *Finding cost-effective approaches*

In the preceding sections we have seen that motivation and teacher training are excellent ways of improving quality which do not necessarily need a large input of funds. In this section we will be considering other cost-effective approaches which have been used, or might be used, in the Bhutanese refugee programme. The author suggests that they might be tried in other refugee programmes world-wide, so that money saved might then be used to improve quality in other ways, such as buying more books or paying more teachers.

***In-school resource teachers.*** Refugee participation brings down the costs, especially when all the teacher trainers (in-school resource teachers) are refugees. The system of in-school resource teachers is an economical and sustainable way of providing regular training to the teachers, especially those most in need of it. In cases where classes are merged due to the absence of a teacher, one teacher may have to deal with a class of over 100 pupils. This could be an opportunity for an in-school resource teacher to step in and take over the teaching of the big class, the other teacher assisting and observing.

***Screening new teachers.*** High teacher turnover is wasteful in terms of the loss of investment in training and the need to start selection and training all over again. Initial teacher interviews should include screening for motivation. Where possible, older teachers should be appointed, especially women, since they are likely to have families and be more settled.

***In-kind incentives.*** To combat low financial incentives, teachers could be paid a contribution in-kind. In particular, they could be helped with further studies through distance education programmes. Examples of assistance include provision of a book allowance, granting of examination leave or a contribution towards their tuition fees. An extended programme would ensure that the teacher stays in school over a number of years, while a better-educated teacher benefits the whole class. The offer of clothes could be another help, if the camp receives a bulk donation.

***Certificates.*** A certificate is just a piece of paper and is very cheap to produce. Yet, because of what it represents, it can have an enormous effect on the recipient, in terms of self-esteem, motivation and hope for the future regarding job prospects. Efforts should be made in getting the education of refugee students and the training of refugee teachers recognized by the host government. If these efforts are unsuccessful, the programme managers should take the initiative and award their own certificates, for example, to teachers attending training workshops and for teachers with long-serving experience.<sup>39</sup>

38 For more information on self-evaluation, see “Some problems in refugee teacher education and how to overcome them”, presented by the author at the International Conference on Education and Training for Refugees and Displaced People in Kampala (Brown, 1995).

39 “All the pupils who have passed the national and the inter-regional examination will be awarded UNHCR/UNICEF certificates on 14 December 2000 which has been declared an Education Day in the Tanzania camps, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of UNHCR” (Nhleko, 2000: 9).

**Books produced in-house.** Textbooks actually produced by the programme management can be cheaper and more appropriate than books produced elsewhere. They are heavily used if all the children have their own copies which they can take home. Books should be budgeted to be replaced every three years, but management should always be on the lookout for cost-cutting measures. If some pages of a book are spoiled, the good pages can be kept and combined with the good pages from another spoiled book to make a composite “new” book. When books have finally “died” the paper might be recycled, either in the camp dispensaries for wrapping up medicine or by being sold off to a local paper factory.

The character and success (whatever be the norms to gauge them) of a refugee education programme depend to a large extent on the implementing agency. (Bhutanese refugee resource teacher)

**Camp-manufactured items.** Various education-related items might be made in the camps and their use should be encouraged, since they would be cheap and appropriate. Their purchase would also benefit the camp economy. Examples are chalk, school bags, whose use can prolong the life of the books, and jute mats, to prevent children sitting on the bare floor where there aren’t classroom desks.

**Sharing resources.** Resources should be shared wherever possible so that maximum use can be obtained from them. Supplementary reading materials and reference books such as dictionaries and atlases are not distributed individually, and must be shared; cooperation of the teachers and pupils is a necessary prerequisite. Teachers are also encouraged to share the teaching aids they make, and good examples of teaching aids should be kept in the school resource centres. Operating a shift system (morning/afternoon) is another way of sharing resources. Although it is not an ideal situation, shifts can work adequately for infant classes which have a shorter day.

**High-impact items.** To reduce costs, programmes should look for items which are relatively inexpensive but can have a big impact on the quality of education. Blackboard paint is a prime example of this: the quality of a blackboard can greatly contribute to the quality of a lesson, and the application of a coat of blackboard paint can often make a big difference. Newspapers can also have a big impact on refugee motivation and learning. Supplying two or three different newspapers to each school is a cheap way of providing relevant and politically balanced information to refugees. Newspapers also make excellent teaching aids and can have many other uses. Another high-impact example might be a metal trunk to protect valuables from thieves and rats.<sup>40</sup> A further example is a megaphone. Assemblies often take place outside, with enormous numbers of children; use of a megaphone could help many more to hear the proceedings clearly.

**Sensitization.** Parents may need to be made aware of the importance of education for their children. In particular, there should be awareness programmes to sensitize refugees on the importance of looking after books and materials. Items should be used properly, handled with care and adequately stored. Waste-reducing and recycling methods should be applied wherever possible. If items are not well looked after and are spoiled because of children’s negligence, appropriate punishments or sanctions should be administered.

<sup>40</sup> When an in-school resource teacher from Beldangi II camp was showing the author some demonstration models of teaching aids which had been produced by the teachers, some of the aids were discovered to have been destroyed by rats.

**Monitoring and evaluation.** Strict monitoring and thorough record keeping are necessary to hold the programme on track. Corruption, theft and misuse of materials are common in developing countries, especially in chaotic refugee situations where people may be trying to take advantage and turn a quick profit. The situation can be kept in check by close monitoring and necessary follow-up action. Longer-term evaluation is also necessary to ensure that funds are being used in the most cost-effective ways.

### **Recommendations for UNHCR field offices**

**Selection of implementing partner.** In view of the importance of education and the fact that a substantial portion of UNHCR's budget is often devoted to the education sector, UNHCR should try to appoint an implementing partner which is a specialist in education and has its own independent source of funds. This will ensure that due priority is given to education with the necessary expertise and backup. *Volunteer* international staff would be an added advantage because they are cost-effective and are likely to be more motivated, strengthening the refugees' own motivation.

**Monitoring visits to schools.** UNHCR field staff should visit schools regularly, but mainly on a random basis to avoid schools making "preparations" for the visit which could hide the true picture. The visits need not be lengthy, but long enough to talk to the headteacher and a few other teachers and students. Some records can be checked and classrooms visited. Quality aspects should be monitored as well as the facilities (school buildings). Although the main purpose of the visit would be for routine monitoring (which should be done in a friendly and non-threatening manner), the field staff should show interest in the school, encouraging the refugees and boosting their morale at every opportunity.

**Speech days.** UNHCR officers should also visit schools, when invited, on special occasions such as prize-giving days and school celebrations. In their speeches to the whole assembly, which would include parents, they should not forget to recognize and congratulate the excellent hard work and achievements of the refugee community, in particular the teachers and pupils. They should further use this opportunity to sensitize the community on the importance of education and to convey any other vital educational messages.

**Training of UNHCR staff.** There are very few UNHCR staff who are specialists in education, and most education monitoring which takes place concentrates on fiscal matters and hardware. The generalist staff should receive some training in education so that they are able to plan and monitor the 'soft' quality aspects of an education programme. This will ensure that the relatively substantial funds allocated to the education sector are used for maximum benefit and are not wasted.

**Training of refugee teachers.** Teacher incentives, school supplies and textbooks usually take up the lion's share of a UNHCR education budget, and the teacher training component can easily be neglected. Non-formal training is not expensive. UNHCR should ensure that appropriate refugee training is included in the annual education plans and budgets of the implementing agencies.

**Incentives for refugee teachers.** For motivating the refugees, UNHCR should have some kind of graduated incentive scale for the teachers so that those with more qualifications and experience are paid at a higher rate. In particular, the extra work done by heads and teachers with special responsibilities should be recognized.

**Headteachers.** For the successful running of a school, it is important that the headteachers of the refugee schools are qualified and experienced and have the appropriate leadership qualities. Headteachers or their representatives should be invited to attend general management meetings in the camps, especially when education is on the agenda. UNHCR staff should also try to attend crucial school meetings when requested by the headteacher.

**Opportunities for further studies.** UNHCR should advocate more scholarship places for further studies, since this would motivate refugees still in school. UNHCR should ensure that a balanced quota of girls are awarded scholarships so that they can carry on with their education and become role models for other girls. Sensitization programmes on gender issues should be continued in the camps.

**Inter-agency cooperation.** UNHCR should encourage cooperation with all partner agencies so that relevant resources can be shared. In particular, collaboration with the district education officer should be sought. UNHCR could pay a monthly incentive in recognition of the extra workload caused by the presence of the refugees, a move which might ensure cooperation when needed.<sup>41</sup>

**Certificates.** By contacts and advocacy with the host government, UNHCR should help its implementing agency to get refugee examination results officially recognized. If the host government does not endorse the refugee certificates, UNHCR and implementing partners might consider doing it themselves, in conjunction with other organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO, where possible.

### **Recommendations for UNHCR Headquarters**

**Advocacy for more education funding.** In long-term refugee situations, when refugee schools get established, refugee education can fall between two stools, with neither humanitarian nor development donors taking responsibility. UNHCR should advocate more funds so that education programmes can be adequately resourced. UNHCR, with support from UNICEF and UNESCO, might approach development donors, such as the World Bank and governments of developed countries, trying to convince them of the need and of their responsibility to donate to longer-term refugee education.

**Education database.** Donors are more likely to part with their funds if they can be given hard evidence of the shortage of teachers, classrooms and materials in the refugee camps. It would therefore be useful if UNHCR headquarters could improve the existing reporting procedures for collecting and saving the most essential information and education statistics from country programmes world-wide. This would also promote a uniformity of standards and could help Headquarters identify where the greatest educational needs are. With assistance from the field, a more effective reporting format should be developed and, to ensure sustainability, incorporated into the general UNHCR programming procedures.

**Roster of specialist NGOs.** UNHCR should keep a roster of specialist NGOs who would be willing to implement education programmes in various parts of the world. These NGOs would preferably have access to resources of their own. UNHCR field offices tend to choose implementing partners who are already on the ground but have no specific expertise in education. The roster would allow a wider choice for the field offices.

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<sup>41</sup> Wherever possible, UNHCR should provide assistance to the host population so that positive attitudes of the host community towards the refugees would be promoted.



**Voluntary organizations.** UNHCR should also foster close relationships with voluntary organizations, and encourage the recruitment of volunteers, which can be a very cost-effective mechanism. Many volunteers would welcome the challenge of serving in a far away place, and refugees are often motivated by the presence of foreign experts.

**Education guidelines.** The standards of UNHCR education programmes across the world vary. This is partly due to the fact that budget allocations are decided by the particular UNHCR country offices. Some UNHCR offices may attach more importance than others to education, depending on the attitudes of the individual staff members. In these cases, relatively more funds may be allocated to education programmes. But education should not be left to the whims of particular individuals. UNHCR headquarters should sensitize its field offices to the importance of education by issuing circulars, guidelines and training materials. In particular, the current education guidelines (UNHCR, 1995) should be updated.

**Development of training tools.** There are very few specialist education officers on UNHCR's staff. Most education programmes are currently monitored by other specialist staff, such as community services officers, or general staff, such as field officers and programme officers. Headquarters should therefore consider producing a straightforward tool to help the field staff monitor their education programmes. This tool could be in the form of simple guidance notes and an indicator checklist, and would be initially developed with assistance from the field, based on the experiences and recommendations of ongoing programmes. Guidance tools should be given to implementing partner staff as well, especially as many of these agencies are managing multi-sectoral programmes and may have no particular expertise, or even experience, in running education programmes.

**Inter-agency collaboration on certification.** UNHCR should actively collaborate with other agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO to find ways of solving the certification problem, which is common in many situations of emergency and crisis throughout the world.<sup>42</sup>

**Further research.** UNHCR should continue to promote research in vital aspects of refugee education and best practices, establishing links with universities and other key personnel and institutions. The present paper has dealt with the broad picture of refugee education. Further detailed research on specific issues of quality, especially at the classroom level, might lead to fruitful results. Refugee camps are characterized by massive concentrations of people. This congestion often leads to over-sized schools and other problems. Research is needed to find cost-effective approaches and the best ways of dealing with the reality of enormous schools and large classes, in situations of stress and limited resources. The divide between the ivory towers of academia and the real world of refugees also needs to be bridged. UNHCR could encourage the involvement of practitioners from the field and refugee scholars themselves in identifying and carrying out appropriate research projects in refugee education.

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42 "An issue that is connected to quality is that of certification, both of pupils and of teachers. Without proper certificates, how can serious training be done?" (Sister Lolin Menendez, JRS, 21 September 2000, personal communication).

## Conclusion

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Although UNHCR is experiencing a financial crisis, with drastic consequences for refugee education, improvements in the quality of education in refugee schools are achievable and need not cost much money. Lessons learned from the refugee programme in Nepal and elsewhere have shown that the following factors are important for quality education: positive attitudes such as motivation and cooperation; teacher training and support; and cost-effective approaches. Managers of refugee education programmes throughout the world are advised to address these factors and learn from the Bhutanese case study in their efforts to find affordable and economical solutions for improving the quality of refugee education in their own localities.

## Appendix

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The following list summarizes the categories of people interviewed and the places visited in Nepal, including those people whom the author contacted while in Geneva prior to his field trip.

- UNHCR Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland: many officers, including those on the Nepal Desk, staff members formerly serving in Nepal, officers in the Education, Community Services and Refugee Children units, and other experts.
- UNHCR Branch Office, Kathmandu, Nepal: Representative, Deputy Representative and Protection Officer.
- UNHCR Sub-Office, Jhapa, Nepal: Head of Sub-Office, Programme Assistant and Programme Monitoring Officers.
- Representatives of the government of Nepal in Jhapa: District Education Officer, Deputy Director of the Refugee Coordination Unit, Beldangi I Camp Supervisor.
- CARITAS Office, Damak: Field Director, Assistant Field Director, Education Coordinators, Resource Teachers, Procurement Officer and other staff.
- Refugee schools in Beldangi (I, II and II-Extension), Sanischare, Goldhap, Timai and Khudunabari: headteachers, assistant heads, extension and sector in-charges, in-school resource teachers, special needs support teachers, store in-charges, counsellors, teachers and pupils.
- Refugee leaders: camp secretaries and Beldangi I Focal Person for Women.
- Refugee community: parents, women's group, students and vocational training group for the disabled in Beldangi I.
- Local community: headteacher and teachers of Siddhartha Boarding Higher Secondary School, programme coordinator of vocational training centre.

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