

Refugees place a very high value on education. They ask that their children be allowed to attend school. Increasing numbers of refugee children are now receiving primary schooling but too few of them have access to secondary education. If refugee children and refugee youth are to become truly self-reliant and equipped to rebuild their societies, they need to continue with their education.

For many years, refugee communities in developing countries have tried hard to run self-help secondary schools. Host communities have also made efforts to admit refugee teenagers into their schools. However, both refugee and host communities face numerous problems. Refugee schools can hardly find qualified teachers since many refugees are unable to complete their own education. Host schools often lack capacity to admit large numbers of refugees.

Consultations within and outside UNHCR made it clear that there was an urgent need for an independent organisation that would focus on providing quality post-primary education to the largest number of refugee children. In December 2000, the independent Refugee Education Trust (RET) was established by the former High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, as a legacy of the 50th anniversary of UNHCR.

The mission of RET is to provide quality post-primary education to the largest possible number of refugee and displaced children and young people, pursuing regional peace and development, and countering child soldier enrolment and sexual abuse.

Currently, developing countries are hosting some 1.5 million refugee teenagers. In 2000, only 50,000 of them, a mere 3%, attended school beyond primary. The first goal of RET is to double this figure before 2006. RET also intends to raise the quality of schooling and ensure access for girls to education.

RET collects proposals from operational partners in the field, selects and links the best ones into the RET country programmes, submits those to public and private donors for funding and co-ordinates them in the field, monitors, evaluates, audits and reports.

Sources:

- Refugee Education Trust (2002) Post-Primary Education for Refugee and Displaced Children: Access, Quality, Equity: Activity Report May 2001-2002. RET, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Mid-Year Progress Report 2002. UNHCR, Geneva

### Post-primary Refugee Education is important because it:

- Prepares the younger generation for later professional life, giving them general and professional skills
- Turns refugee children into an asset for their home and host countries
- Keeps children constructively occupied during the daytime, thus countering child soldier recruitment, early motherhood and child prostitution
- Encourages primary school enrolment and the completion of primary education
- Includes peace education and promotes regional peace and development
- Includes health education and AIDS prevention
- Trains teachers, managers, trainers and highly skilled staff, enabling them to help with the rehabilitation of their home country on their return
- Eases the pressure which causes economic migration, by increasing their access to jobs
- Facilitates integration of those who, nevertheless, finally take the hazardous step of migrating to a developed country

### RET's role and added value is :

- Implementing and co-ordinating relevant Post-primary Education (PPE) programmes and projects, carried out by reliable partners
- Raising and allocating funds for PPE
- Advocacy and awareness
- Research and development

In its mandate, RET considers not only refugees but also internally displaced persons and returnees. RET understands that it should stay with its beneficiaries, students, teachers and NGOs, even after they return to their homes during the post-conflict period, until stability is restored and the development agencies and NGOs take over.



UNHCR / L. Taylor