



ZOOMING IN:

ACCELERATED EDUCATION AS AN OPTION FOR A BETTER FUTURE

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

NRC

NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL

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* Technical Vocational Education and Training.

** Ministry of Education.



INTRODUCTION

Refugees and internally displaced children and youth frequently miss substantial amounts of schooling. With each missed semester or school year there is a greater risk that they will be unable to return to formal education, and greater risks to their protection as a result. Responding to the needs of these children and youth has increasingly led governments and agencies to explore the possibility of providing accelerated education responses. Such responses can support children and youth to attain formal schooling equivalencies and can provide ports of re-entry into continued formal schooling at appropriate grade levels. Addressing the needs of overaged children with targeted age-appropriate programming increases learning and protection for all children and youth in both the formal school system and Accelerated Programmes¹.

In line with its mission, NRC considers education to be one of the essential pillars of humanitarian assistance and a fundamental right of the child. Thus, an Accelerated Education (AE) Programme is one option to explore for groups of children and youth outside of the formal school system, giving them a chance to complete their primary education.

The potential for employing an Accelerated Education response in the Central African Republic (CAR) is of interest to the government as well as international and domestic donors for various reasons. The key motivation driving this interest is that an accelerated response has the ability to meet the educational needs of Central African children and youth who have missed out or had their education interrupted during the conflict, and can be modelled and implemented across the entire

country. NRC has over 15 years of experience implementing various forms of AE programming in a number of contexts including Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Liberia and South Sudan. In many countries the accelerated response has been adopted as part of national strategic education plans as a solution for the integration or reintegration of children and young people who find themselves outside of the education system.

In October 2015, NRC commissioned an independent feasibility study to ascertain the accelerated education needs of the population, assess the feasibility of an NRC AE response for 2016 and provide recommendations to all relevant AE stakeholders (including the Ministry of Education (MoE), Education Cluster and newly-formed Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG) set up in country.

¹ INEE Terminology Bank.

Based on the feasibility study, we advise the NRC to implement the following recommendations:

- Advocate towards the CAR MoE to implement an AE Programme and advocate towards donors and partners to secure funding for a minimum of three years;
- Pilot an AE Programme that integrates with other NRC Programmes;
- Strengthen coordination efforts with education stakeholders for the qualitative and quantitative improvement of the CAR education system.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out over a total period of seven weeks with a three-week field mission from November 8th to 28th, 2015, in Bangui and in the prefecture of Mambere Kadei. Information was collected through a set of tools and approaches including key informant interviews and focus group guides, an observation grid, a review of available education data and a review of secondary source documents such as reports and strategic documents from the Ministry of National Education, cluster reports and NGO reports.

In total, eight schools were visited and 154 external stakeholders interviewed during this feasibility study. They included enrolled students (9-18 year-olds in classes CE1 to CM2); overaged and out-of-school children (aged 9-20 years); representatives of parents, teachers, and primary school directors; education authorities at central, regional and local levels; and civil society organizations. Among the 154 people interviewed, 90 are children and young people (51 girls and 39 boys). Among the 90 children, 58 are students regularly enrolled in school.

A limitation of the study is that we had to rely on 2011-2012 Ministry of Education data in the absence of updated statistics. Population projections were used to estimate the number of children and young people in need of schooling. Moreover, lack of local school data over several years made it particularly difficult to analyze the evolution of the situation in schools.

EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The education sector in CAR has suffered greatly as a result of the crisis affecting the country since late 2012. Children – particularly girls - have been denied access to schooling due to displacement, closure of schools and lack of access by pupils and teachers due to high-level insecurity. The advent of the crisis not only halted the slow progress of education indicators, but also set back years of advancements within the CAR education system and exacerbated the situation of children and young people outside of school. The subsequent humanitarian crisis of 2013-2014 led to what can be described as a “lost school year”. Children and youth missed months of schooling, particularly in rural areas which have been most affected by the violence and displacement. As children get older, it becomes more difficult for them to return to school.

The net enrollment rate in primary school before the crisis in 2012 was 67% (60% girls, 73% boys),² which already denotes a wide disparity in access to education based on geography, gender and age. The quality of education is poor and results in high repetition rates, nearly 23% on average in the primary cycle. There also remains a considerable number of unqualified teachers in the Central African education system (nearly 40% in 2012). On average, each child entering primary education will repeat at least two school years before completing the primary cycle. The completion rate was slightly above 40% in 2012, which means that out of 10 children who enter CI only 4 managed to complete the primary cycle. Although shown in all secondary data from official sources, the analysis of data collected from the schools visited during the study highlights the extent of the dropouts in the CAR. It was estimated that more than 420,000 children and youth aged between 6-15 years were out of the school system in 2012 (prior to the crisis). This estimate should be strongly revised upwards in 2015.

In the CAR, a whole segment of the school-age population lays outside the school system with little or no chance of reintegration unless something is done specifically for them.

² Ministry of Education, “Education Statistics Yearbook” 2012-2013.



CHALLENGES

1 WEAK BASIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

With the support of international partners, the government launched a back-to-school campaign in 2014-2015 including Catch-Up³ classes as a solution to salvage the remainder of the school year. A study conducted by the Education Cluster in 2015⁴ revealed an improved situation since July 2014 when 45% of schools in the country were non-operational. A substantial increase in the number of children in schools has been observed since 2014. In April 2015, 83% of schools were open nationally and the number of registered students in all schools increased by nearly 31% compared with the 2014-2015 school year. While this development is positive, it should not be interpreted as a return to normality, given that the enrollment rate was particularly low in 2014-2015 following high levels of insecurity and population displacement. The loss of time and the interruption of educational services remain significant.

³ INEE Terminology Bank.

⁴ Cluster Education in CAR, "Survey on the state of education in Central African Republic," April 2015.

⁵ Ministry of Education, "Progress Report of the project to support the education sector," February 2013.

The massive return of children in most schools visited during the study masks other important problems, such as the lack of capacity in schools to welcome and teach children according to accepted standards.

The basic education system in the CAR is characterized by: (i) a lack of teachers - the nationwide pupil-teacher ratio was 1:89.⁵ In addition, it was estimated in 2012 that 40% of teachers were parent-teachers. These are lay persons recruited by the community to address the lack of formal teachers in schools. Most are untrained and unqualified for the work required; (ii) the lack of infrastructure: schools are overcrowded, buildings and classrooms are in short supply and the ratio of pupils per class was 1:87 in primary schools nationwide in 2012 and reached 1:200 in the schools visited during the study; (iii) non-compliance with the norms stated in the "Instructions and official curricula of primary school" (released in September 2009). These instructions state that the number of teaching hours for the school year should be 900



2 COST OF EDUCATION AND FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE COUNTRY

hours, with normal school hours extending from 7:30 to 12:00 and from 14:00 to 17:30. These norms are not respected and classes are only held on a half-day (double shift). In some schools visited, instead of 900 hours of instruction, children will receive just 325 hours during the school year 2015-2016 due to the double shift system.

The low level of governmental support for the education sector (12% of the annual state budget in 2011),⁶ the lack of schools, poor performance of schools, overcrowding in classrooms, the lack of teachers, and the low number of actual hours of instruction are all reasons given by parents and education stakeholders as causes of the poor quality of education, non-enrollment or drop-outs in all schools visited.

Although primary education is officially free in the CAR, parents must pay annual fees for the schooling of children. Some fees are official and recognized by the authorities and others are unauthorized and imposed on parents, as observed in the schools visited. The average cost to parents, per child per year, is \$5 USD, which must be added to the cost of uniforms and school supplies (supplies and textbooks).

According to the data gathered, the causes of dropout and non-enrollment of children and youth are largely linked to high levels of household poverty.

⁶ Ministry of Education, "Report of the education sector, first Joint Sector Review," May 2012.

3 SECONDARY AND TVET SYSTEM

Given the lack of space in secondary education, the government has instituted an entrance exam in order to limit the number of children and young people. The competition has created a bottleneck, which is partly to blame for the large repetition rate in CM2.

While vocational training is supposed to offer opportunities for youth, in CAR, only five vocational training centers are operational (including one in Bangui). The sub-sectors of Technical Education and Vocational Training are not organized and have suffered for years from the lack of clear and coherent policies and development strategy. Due to shortages in the skilled labor market in the CAR, some companies have resorted to recruiting foreign labor to meet their needs, thus worsening unemployment and underemployment, especially among young graduates. Discussions are ongoing within the government to develop a system of supervision, support and monitoring of human resources that the country needs to in order to boost employment.

4 ID AND BIRTH CERTIFICATES

During the field study, it was observed that the vast majority of children have no civil documentation, for some because their births were never reported by parents and for others because they lost their documents during the crisis.

Although there is currently an effort on the part of the Government to facilitate these children's inclusion in the final primary education examination, it is obvious that this is a problem that must be addressed by relevant organizations and structures.

5 LACK OF TRAINED TEACHERS

The CAR government is not able to provide enough qualified teachers for all schools. In the primary education system in CAR, 40% of teachers nationwide in 2012 are "parent-teachers" and in 50% of schools visited during the study.

As the government failed to replace all "parent-teachers" with qualified teachers, support for the strengthening of "parent-teachers" capacities should be considered.

6 COMMUNITY DISENGAGEMENT FROM EDUCATION AND HOUSEHOLD POVERTY (ILLITERATE PARENTS)

A large number of out-of-school children and youth interviewed for the study come from single-parent households, situations of divorce, and households that have suffered the death of a father, mother or both parents. The decision to enroll children in school depends on households, including the characteristics of its head. In the study, it was observed that the level of schooling of the head of household often determines whether or not children will be enrolled in school.

With a literacy rate of about 56%, CAR remains one of the least literate countries in the world. We can assume that the low level of literacy of the population (especially the parents) contributes to the non-schooling of children.



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MOVING FORWARD

No government strategy has yet to be implemented for the return of overaged and out-of-school children and youth into the education system. The government, in its "Transition Plan," has stated its objective of bringing the primary education system to the level it was in 2013 by 2017, particularly with regard to access. According to the authorities interviewed, the development of a national education system report is scheduled for 2016; the strategic plan that will follow will incorporate reflections on a possible alternative education strategy for the return of out-of-school over-aged children and youth.

In light of the context described above, we recommend that NRC implements a pilot Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) in a few schools in the NRC intervention area by initially targeting two categories of children (with parity between girls and boys): (i) children and youth who are over-aged and have dropped out at the CE2 or CM1 levels, in order to allow them to complete the primary cycle; (ii) children 9 years and older enrolled in CI (first class of

primary cycle) to decongest the first classes of the primary cycle. The approach proposed is "Bridging classes"⁷ with condensed curricula to enable children and youth to catch up as quickly as possible and finish the primary cycle in a shorter time so as to integrate them into secondary school or basic vocational training.

However, it is recommended to secure funding for a minimum period of three years to begin the implementation of the AEP, in order to ensure a real impact.

Meeting the strong education demand observed and finding strategies to reduce the barriers to education are prerequisites to the implementation of the AEP. The success of the AEP depends greatly on the ability to implement a holistic project taking into account both qualitative and quantitative improvement of the current education system, as well as fighting against barriers to schooling. The action on these two levels remains the only logical way to ensure the success of the AEP.

⁷ Refer to short-term targeted interventions to facilitate out-of-school children and youth's re-entry into the education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NRC AND THE ACCELERATED EDUCATION WORKING GROUP (AEWG)

ADVOCACY TOWARDS THE MOE

Advocate for the government to: (i) integrate an Accelerated Education Programme in the transition plan of the education sector as a solution for the integration / reintegration of children and youth in the Central African Republic education system, both in primary and secondary education or vocational training; (ii) respect the school calendar, timetables and schedules as recommended in the "Official instructions of primary education" from September 2009.

ADVOCACY TOWARDS DONORS AND PARTNERS

Advocate towards donors for increased funding of the Accelerated Education Programme to integrate / reintegrate children and youth in the education system and to promote the development of qualified manpower for the nation.

STRENGTHEN COORDINATION EFFORTS FOR THE QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE IMPROVEMENT OF THE CAR EDUCATION SYSTEM

Coordinate with education stakeholders to: (i) provide a holistic response to the needs of children and youth; (ii) provide a rapid and appropriate response to the lack of teachers in schools of intervention to limit the double shift and allow a return of the established number of hours of instruction, as recommended within the curricula; (iii) continue support to authorities to strengthen the capacities of parent-teachers in the Regional Educational Centre and their progressive integration into public service; (iv) systematically recruit qualified teachers to support the formal education system and the Accelerated Education Programme; (v) conduct a detailed study in at least 10% of schools in the intervention zones to identify the ages of the children at each level of primary education in order to have a better understanding of the phenomenon of over-aged children in school. The same study can also allow for a better understanding of the factors pushing children out of school.

PILOT AN AE PROGRAMME

Establish a pilot phase of the AE Programme, in consultation with education authorities at national and regional levels, in a few schools in the NRC intervention area by initially targeting two categories of children (with parity between girls and boys): (i) children and youth who are over-aged and have dropped out at the CE2 or CM1 levels, in order to allow them to complete the primary cycle in one school year and either enter secondary education or vocational training; (ii) children 9 years and older enrolled in CI (first class of the primary cycle) to decongest the first classes of the primary cycle and reintegrate into CE1.

LINK TO TVET⁸ SYSTEM

Expand vocational training programs such as Youth Education Pack (YEP)⁹ for over-aged and out-of-school youth to enable them with life skills, functional literacy in French, and professional qualifications.

SYNERGY WITH OTHER NRC PROGRAMMES

In consultation with the NRC ICLA Programme, raise awareness and train communities, Parents' Associations (APE), and parents on: (i) the protection of child rights, the importance of the education of children, particularly girls, and collaboration to identify strategies to mitigate the causes of drop-outs; and (ii) the systematic reporting of births. The ICLA Programme should also work with authorities to bring civil registration centers closer to the communities, in compliance with the law.

In consultation with the Food Security Programme, develop economic recovery activities in NRC-supported schools to support income generation as a means of reducing the financial burden on parents.

⁸ Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

⁹ The YEP is a one-year programme with three equally important components, literacy/numeracy, life skills and skills training.



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