

ABOUT THE PROJECTS:

Borderless Higher Education for Refugees

WATCH THE VIDEO: <http://youtu.be/23HryI3UCjw>

Young men and women, many of whom have spent their whole lives in the world's largest refugee camps, Dadaab, will have the opportunity to earn teaching credentials and university degrees in situ through a new project led by York University.

The Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) project, which is on track to start taking students in Summer 2013, will help uncertified teachers in the Dadaab refugee camps and locals in Dadaab town in Kenya to improve their teaching skills and earn certificates, diplomas and one of a variety of degrees. They will take online and onsite courses while they continue to teach elementary and secondary students in the Dadaab camps and the surrounding area.

The goal of the BHER project is to enhance the life chances of vulnerable youth who are refugees – mainly from Somalia, but also from Ethiopia, Sudan and other countries – by training their teachers first. By building educational and teaching capacity in Dadaab, and improving all levels of education for both male and female children and youths, the project will prepare youths to be contributing members of society and to promote education and social inclusion in their home country if repatriation becomes possible.

“We think that young people in volatile situations such as refugee camps need as much access to knowledge as other young people, not less. Bringing higher education to this massive long-term camp will open doors that our Canadian and Kenyan students can already access, and it is a right that many people in the camps and the surrounding area have repeatedly asked for,” said Anthropology Professor Wenona Giles, of York University's Centre for Refugee Studies.

“Higher education for refugees in the Dadaab camps should have an immense impact. We are talking about young people who want to be educated to assist in the rebuilding of Somalia, who are faced daily with camp violence, urgent medical and housing needs, human rights violations,” said Giles. “Their parents see education as one of the best gifts they can give their children. We also think that the professors, teaching assistants and students from all the BHER consortium universities will learn a great deal from engaging in the courses that are shared with the Dadaab student community.”

York University has provided leadership to the overall development of the project, including agreement to cost recovery only, rather than tuition fees. All other participating universities have now followed suit. The project would have been prohibitively expensive without the commitments of these universities and would not likely have proceeded, says Faculty of Education Professor Don Diplo, of York's Centre for Refugee Studies.

“The BHER project is about creating new knowledge and insight into the experiences of forced migration from within the experience – this is one of the things that higher education enables and one of the hopes that we have for the project,” said Dippo.

Over five years, 1,000 refugee and local youth in Dadaab will be given higher education knowledge and skills to contribute productively to society, whether in Dadaab, when they can return to Somalia, or elsewhere in the world. Engaging about 400 teachers as students in online and onsite university degree programs will improve learning opportunities for the more than 18,000 elementary and secondary school pupils in Dadaab.

Implementing a Multi-Sector Employment Strategy for Women and Men with Disabilities

This project, led by Professor Marcia Rioux, a Professor in the School Health Policy & Management at York University and Director of the York Institute for Health Research, builds on the work of the ongoing Disability Rights Promotion International (DPRI) project, which is in its eleventh year. Funded by a number of public and private funders including the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Disability Rights Fund (DRF), the Canadian government and others, the DRPI project has been instrumental in developing a monitoring system to address disability discrimination globally. It continues to lead knowledge mobilization and knowledge transfer initiatives to protect and monitor the rights of persons with disabilities worldwide.

In Bangladesh, India and Nepal, there are 208 million persons with disabilities, using World Health Organization projections (2011), the majority of whom live in conditions of poverty and isolation. Almost 10 per cent of GDP is lost in low-income nations by excluding persons with disabilities from the workforce.

DPRI has surveyed the key barriers to inclusion faced by persons with disabilities in India, interviewing people with disabilities and auditing disability-related laws, policies and programs.

The new CIDA-funded project will target three sectors in these countries – the food processing industry, the hospitality industry, and entrepreneurship and self-employment – because these are sectors that proportionally employ a more significant number of persons with disabilities. Past experience has shown that programs and services must be highly targeted to be successful and to meet employers’ needs.

Focused on increasing the productivity of women and men with disabilities and encouraging employers to make workplaces more accessible, the project has strong support from grassroots organizations in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. There will also be

formal partnerships with local groups such as employers and employers' associations, to help facilitate the project and provide work placements for persons with disabilities.

Women and men with disabilities will take part in employment workshops, build skills in identifying employment and entrepreneurial opportunities both within and outside their communities, apply for jobs in the private sector, and participate in job interviews.

“We want to develop knowledge and awareness of disability rights generally, and reduce stigma in these countries and in communities,” said Rioux. “The success of this program will be evaluated partly by following those who maintain jobs after work placements, to track employment tenure and changes in incomes. We want this project to become a model for addressing poverty through economic integration of people with disabilities in other countries and regions as well.”

By focusing on employment of persons with disabilities, this project will help to achieve some of the goals of the UN's 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified by more than 100 countries including Canada, which calls on countries to prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities in job-related matters, promote self-employment, employ persons with disabilities in the public sector, and promote their employment in the private sector.