



Empowering Children as Peacebuilders (ECAP) Project

Introduction to the ECaP Project

The Kakuma Empowering Children as Peacebuilders (ECaP) project was implemented by World Vision in Kakuma and Kalobeyei Settlements, targeting schools within the refugee camps and in the host communities. The project aimed at contributing to protection of children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence through empowerment of children as peace builders. To achieve this, the project undertook a number of activities including the formation of peace clubs in primary and secondary schools targeting boys and girls aged 12 - 17 years.

Stakeholders such as school patrons, Board of Management Members (BOM), guardians and caregivers were sensitized regarding the Peace Clubs to better equip them to support the children in the peace clubs. The ECaP project promoted literacy among the beneficiary schools which was achieved through the construction of classrooms and ablution blocks in target schools, thus improving the capacity to enroll additional students.

Overall, the ECaP project was successful in empowering children to be peacebuilders. The members of the peace clubs have made first attempts at resolving potential conflicts at the school level through the Child Response Mechanisms (CRM) committees. Some schools which benefited from the construction of classrooms reported an increase in enrolment rates, retention and inclusion of children with disabilities. Improved examination performance, pupils' discipline and positive peer solidarity were also reported. The caregivers and BOM members have embraced the project and recommend the expansion of the ECaP project to include more schools in the region and beyond, while the peace club patrons and members recommended the inclusion of more members in the peace clubs.

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Project **Context**

Kakuma and Kalobeyei are situated in Turkana West Subcounty in Turkana County in the North-Western region of Kenya. Kakuma refugee camp was established in early 1992 following the arrival of the “lost boys” of Sudan. Kakuma and Kalobeyei are home to over 200,000 refugees . In Kakuma, the refugees live inside the camp while the host community lives in the outskirts of the camp and Kakuma town. The town hosts the Turkana west county National government offices, UNHCR, Refugee Affairs Secretariat and other humanitarian services in Kakuma and Kalobeyei.

Kalobeyei Ward hosts local and refugee communities. The Kalobeyei Settlement was established in 2012 and provides opportunities for refugees and host communities to practice livelihood, promote peaceful cohesion and trade. Kalobeyei hosts refugees from over 10 different countries that have crossed the Kenyan borders to seek protection and humanitarian assistance. Refugees and the host community share services such as water facilities, education and food services.

Peace, Conflict and **Education**

All children have the right to education. However, Turkana County faces diverse challenges which jeopardizes children’s access to education and attendant benefits. Low enrolment levels, low completion rates and poor infrastructural development in primary and secondary schools are common . A 2017 UNHCR report indicated that Kakuma had a Net Enrolment Rate of 57.3 and 6.1 percent in primary school and secondary school levels respectively. Only 24% of female students were enrolled in secondary schools at the time .

Findings from a household level survey carried out in Kakuma in October 2020 indicated that 19% of the households with female children said they do not send them to school because of security concerns . Further, 27% of the households in the survey said that the safety and security situation in Kakuma camps was either poor or very poor. Research indicates that the main causes of conflicts between the refugee and host communities in Kakuma are for economic, social and competition reasons. Economically, host communities find refugee communities privileged to receive aid from refugee aid agencies around the world, while socially the host communities are outnumbered by refugees thus feeling they would be overpowered in case of violent conflicts . Refugee and host communities compete over limited resources such as land, firewood, and water.

These conditions intensify conflict and make it hard for communities in Kakuma and Kalobeyei to focus on development. Insecurity limits access to education for many affected children, exposing them to risks such as forced and early marriages for girls and gender based violence. Engaging in crimes, child labour as well as alcohol abuse are also common .

Interventions that are aimed at alleviating these challenges in these fragile contexts are critical. Positioning the ECaP project on creating environments where children are the custodians of peaceful coexistence among and between the refugee and host communities addresses the core challenges.

Boys and girls as drivers of peace in Kakuma and Kalobeyei

Evidence from the implementation area indicates that rolling out of the Peace Road curriculum has been central to developing a peacebuilding mechanism in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. This has led to strengthening vulnerable boys and girls life skills and building child to child accountability mechanisms. This has resulted in individual and collective efficacy among children which is necessary for action.

Building the capacity of teachers as Peace Club facilitators has enabled them to successfully facilitate club meetings and community engagement, making them effective sites for peacebuilding.

Peace clubs have been established in 41 schools providing spaces for at least 1435 members to get training in the 'Peace Road' curriculum. Trained children have taken up roles as peace ambassadors, spreading the peace messages to their fellow students in the school setting, their parents at the family level and to the community at large through participation in social activities like community clean ups.

Peace Club members are empowered to engage with their communities to enhance cohesiveness and peaceful coexistence within the refugee communities and in the interaction between refugee and host communities. In local integrated schools serving students from refugee and host communities, implementation of the peace curriculum has led to improved harmonious co-existence.



When there is conflict in the community, it is not spilling over to schools as it used to happen before. Pupils are empowered to make their decisions on how to relate with each other

According to one headteacher

As envisaged in the project, the young peacebuilders are increasingly participating in child protection and peace building issues at the community level. Parents, caregivers, faith leaders and other adult stakeholders recognize and value the importance of young people's participation in peacebuilding initiatives.



Most teachers for example indicated that they had full confidence in the students to handle potential conflict scenarios before intervening. "Initially all conflict issues were handled by the administration but now they solve their own conflicts through CRMs" Peace Club Patron, Nakalale Primary School.

"There used to be divisions by nationality especially during playtime, now all the children play together regardless of nationality...whenever there is a conflict, the peace club members help resolve it and the game continues..." Caregiver, Kalobeyi Settlement Primary School

Children who have gone through the peace curriculum have taken up leadership positions in the community and spaces such as the church peacekeeping committees contributing positive ideas towards peaceful co-existence in the community and acting as drivers of change.

"In the community, they (peace club members) are helpful to their parents and they counsel them regarding peacekeeping. They give counselling in the community too...The peace club members have become leaders in the community for example they are choir masters in their churches and chair ladies/chair men of youth groups" Peace Club Patron, Kalobeyi Settlement Primary School

Other young learners, having internalised positive ideas of peaceful co-existence are reported to be correcting their parents as regards peaceful co-existence. Relatedly, parents are listening to the children and embracing the ideas which are beneficial to the community.

Children are also reaching out to their peers in their village through diplomatic and reconciliation skills.

"Sometimes my daughter hears me quarreling with the neighbours and she tells me that is not right. She tells me to solve issues peacefully and I listen" Caregiver, Kalobeyi Primary School.

According to one **BOM member from Pokotom Secondary School**, *"... the children are very disciplined at home. ...They also have no conflicts. If they disagree they apologise to each other and make up. They also correct us as parents when we are wrong"*.

These findings are consistent with recent ideas that there is a transformative power in children and families as agents of change for peace . Cultivating ideas of change for peace through children provide an avenue to speaking to peers, family and eventually, the community as a whole .

Improved Education outcomes

While Kakuma and Kolobeyi face challenges in fragile contexts, there are strong indications that ECaP and other initiatives are positively contributing to education achievements. Educators point to improvements in enrolment, attendance and retention of children in project areas, enabling them to better focus on education.

Teachers' and BOM capacity building activities have improved the school's environment. Some teachers reported increased motivation and improved relationships with students.

In schools such as St. Kizito Kalobeyi Primary school, there's successive improved performance in the national examinations. In 2020, the school produced the best student in Turkana West sub county and second best student in the Turkana County. The candidate was admitted to a national school and won a competitive scholarship. **The school average score out of 500 improved from 282.7 and 309 in 2018 and 2019 to 319 in 2020.**

The peace club members developed empathy and in some instances conducted outreaches to out-of-school children in their communities, encouraging them to enroll into schools. In Nakalale primary school, the peace club members convinced a physically challenged student to enroll into the school, and volunteer to push his wheelchair to and from school as well as helping him get around the school compound.



Tackling **Negative Practices**



Reduction in incidents of forced and early marriage has been noted. Forced and early marriage are negative cultural practices that affect young girls in the refugee context such as Kakuma and Kalobeyei. Some of the proxy indicators of forced and early marriage are young girls who reach puberty suddenly being withdrawn from school.

Educators reported that the ECaP project interventions have contributed to a sustained number of students in schools. **In St. Kizito Kalobeyei Primary School, the enrollment ratio between girls and boys is about 50:50.** Given the challenges in this context, these numbers are impressive as they mirror the national statistics on girls and boys enrollment which are also at 50:50.

Lessons learned

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A number of lessons can be deduced from the ECaP project. One, to address challenges that are centred on conflict, fragility and vulnerability including refugee contexts, interventions that do more than simply save children's lives are likely to be effective.

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Fourth, working with diverse stakeholders in the project context and building trusted relationships improves the chances of success.

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Secondly, adopting approaches that will catalyse children's development by building practical skills and knowledge as well as competencies can contribute to building a generation of peace and reconciliation.

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Fifth, projects that appreciate the complexity of children, their agency and extended place in the community beyond traditional views can achieve wide reaching change.

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Third, designing projects that are informed by strong evidence on the context is likely to lead to response and impactful programming.

Recommendations



There is a need to expand similar programming in fragile contexts such as Marsabit, Lamu, Baringo to protect children.



Secondly, the project scope should be expanded to cover more schools in both the host and refugee contexts, as currently only a small percentage of the students are benefitting from the project.



Third, there is a need to lobby for the Peace Road curriculum to be incorporated into the official school curriculum especially in fragile contexts to mainstream peacebuilding.



Fourth, there is a need to build a sustained psycho-social support programmatic component to address the current needs emerging from conflict induced experiences, including caregivers. Similarly, components that address identity and other psycho-social issues can be helpful.



Lastly, there is a need for increased efforts to build the capacities of various stakeholders including education, legal and security sectors to support child protection and active participation in the society.