

Key Lessons from Competency Based Curriculum Enhancements in Refugee-Hosting Garissa County in Kenya



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Educational challenges for children in refugee camps are extensive. From the scarcity of essential resources which limit their ability to engage fully in learning, to overcrowded classrooms, making it difficult to address individual needs. The learners also bear the psychological impact of displacement, which in most cases, impedes concentration and emotional stability. Language barriers add to the difficulties, especially for those needing to learn unfamiliar languages such as English and Kiswahili which are used for instruction and communication within the Kenyan context.

The need for more trained teachers further compromises the quality of education, and the transient nature of camp life disrupts educational continuity, leading to learning gaps. For older students, limited access to advanced learning restricts their potential for further education or career development.

Some of the challenges mentioned above contribute to worrying statistics shared in a new UNHCR (2023) report that indicates that over half of the world's 14.8 million school-aged refugee children are missing out on formal education, a situation threatening their future prospects and global development targets. The 2023 UNHCR Refugee Education Report, based on data from over 70 refugee-hosting nations, reveals that by the end of 2022, the population of school-aged refugees had risen by nearly 50%, reaching 14.8 million, primarily driven by the Ukraine crisis. As a result, approximately 51%—over 7 million children—remain unenrolled in school.



While the wars in the global north have exacerbated the problem, it has been further aggravated by persistent political conflict in African countries such as South Sudan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, from where the influx of migrants to Kenya, coupled with school-going children, emanates. Overcoming these barriers requires specialized support for learners and teachers to create supportive learning environments.

The TeachWell project, a strategic collaboration between Kenya's Ministry of Education and a consortium of partners—the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Research Triangle Institute International (RTI), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Film-Aid Kenya, and the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)—is making strides in Garissa and Dadaab, which host the largest refugee populations in Kenya. This initiative aims to enhance refugee teachers' competences in teaching the competence-based curriculum, through inculcating teaching methodologies such as learning through play (LtP), universal design for learning (UDL), social-emotional learning (SEL) as well as mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS).

The recent monitoring visit offered invaluable insights into how Teachwell's interventions have fostered educational progress in these communities.

- The strengthening of partnerships between the TeachWell Consortium, the Ministry of Education, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and local educational stakeholders. This collaboration has facilitated the successful implementation of Teacher Learning Circles (TLCs) across schools in the Dadaab clusters, enabling teachers to share effective practices for addressing challenges like learner absenteeism and limited resources.

- Teachwell's emphasis on SEL and LtP has allowed teachers to engage learners with interactive and emotionally supportive methods, especially in literacy and numeracy, despite large classroom sizes.
- The need for more clarity and practical guidance on MHPSS and SEL strategies was highlighted as an area for further support.
- TeachWell has effectively contributed to disaster preparedness and response, particularly in schools impacted by flooding. This demonstrates the importance of proactive measures and targeted interventions in ensuring education continuity during crises.
- Support for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure, including water tanks and latrines, was noted as crucial to maintaining a safe and conducive learning environment. At schools like Kazuko Girls and Hyuga Girls Primary, the provision of water tanks and additional toilets was appreciated.
- The need for disability-friendly facilities and better-quality standards was underscored. Observations revealed that while significant support was provided, more robust coordination with quality and public works departments is needed to ensure WASH facilities meet the intended standards and are usable for all students and staff.
- Teachers and headteachers emphasized the need for more training materials, better support for digital tools like the M-Shule platform, and praised the Teacher Continuous Capacity Development components of the TeachWell project led by the Research Triangle Institute International and the Lutheran World Federation.
- Logistical challenges such as power outages and distance to training facilities limit teachers' access to these resources, affecting the uptake and application of enhancements in daily lessons.
- Film-Aid Kenya has played a vital role in community mobilization, addressing cultural dynamics and traditional educational practices that often compete with formal schooling, particularly in lower primary grades.

Further, the African Population and Health Research Centre's ongoing research agenda under TeachWell highlights the importance of a structured learning agenda. By capturing and analyzing these lessons, the intervention can be refined and scaled to achieve greater impact.

Finally, feedback from the monitoring visit suggests prioritizing weekend or early-year training sessions to increase teacher participation, given that many teachers travel outside the counties during breaks. By addressing these localized challenges, TeachWell continues to pave the way for a holistic and adaptive model that aligns with Kenya's CBC goals while addressing the specific needs of Garissa and Dadaab's refugee-hosting communities.

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