

How this fits with the Ugandan education system?

YARID's training program supports improvement in the functioning of the Ugandan education system. Ugandan teachers are often faced with numerous challenges associated with having refugee children in their classes. These challenges include misunderstanding due to language barriers, differences in age among classmates of the same level, cultural differences and a lack of understanding about the refugee experience among teachers and peers. While it is beneficial to incorporate interventions that assist teachers in overcoming these barriers, it is also equally important to consider the perspective of the refugee children, addressing the crucial need for assistance in the assimilation process. One of the biggest obstacles involved with policy is that bridging classes for refugee students are often considered by the Ugandan government and its partners to be special treatment, as their legal commitment is to provide education to refugees at the same level as nationals. In order for reconciliation classes to gain acceptance and become incorporated into the Ugandan education system, the Ugandan government must realize that education cannot be provided to refugees at the same level as nationals without the support of these integration trainings. Refugee students are forced to overcome countless obstacles in assimilating into an unfamiliar country, needing to become accustomed all at once to new cultures, new languages and entirely new systems altogether, therefore providing this support and training is the only way for refugees to obtain access to equal education.

The national schools will benefit from this program as well: in our meeting with national teachers, they explained their challenges with working with refugee students, and a program which better supported them and prepared them for the classroom would allow the national teachers to better do their jobs and reach every student.

For example, how are children assessed before they are incorporated into formal education?

Currently, many schools require students to partake an assessment that determines their level of education for proper class placement. We will work with Ugandan primary schools in order to synchronize our course materials with the learning standards that students must reach before attending formal schooling in Uganda. Basic education standards will be followed strictly, while simultaneously incorporating extra support through periodical assessments relating to behavior and attitude to monitor progress. Upon completion of our bridging classes, students will be given a mock assessment appropriate to their determined level, based upon the criteria currently in place within the standard Ugandan entry examination guidelines, to effectively prepare them for their placement test when applying to attend a formal school.

There are two main assessment phases (and one continuous assessment process) in this idea:

1. The first assessment comes when the parent and child first visit YARID's office: we have to make a determination about the eligibility and the needs of the student for the mainstreaming program. Some of the things we have to determine: What are the student's language skills? Does the student need a full English language course first, before starting mainstreaming? Does the student need any separate counseling? What was the highest level of education obtained in his/her country of origin and where would he/she fit into the Ugandan education system? What are the child's interests? Any gender specific needs the teacher and mentor need to be aware of? What is the situation of the parents? What skills do they have and what training will be most useful? Are they able to carry out any saving on their own?
2. The second assessment comes towards the end of the six-month mainstreaming course, to determine if the child is ready for mainstream schooling. They will be given an exam and an interview to assess their language and literacy/numeracy skills but also their social skills.
3. Thirdly, given the role of the mentor and the three-person team structure of the mainstreaming program, students' progress in the mainstreaming program and after in the formal schooling will be consistently monitored and assessed. Overall, the program will be periodically evaluated for improvements at the end of each mainstreaming cycle and will obtain feedback from all community members involved.

All of these and more dimensions will be considered, and is currently being developed into a semi-standardized process by the teacher, assistant, mentor, and potentially, parents.

How might you align your criteria with that of the Ugandan school system?

We will use the Ugandan curriculum, collaborating with experienced Ugandan school teachers in our planning and execution process, using the material incorporated within existing entry examinations and standards. With the national teachers, we will map out learning objectives in basic subjects including speaking, listening, reading and writing. We will organize and align these lessons with topical objectives to familiarize students with other social and systematic aspects of Ugandan schools, to prevent the shock and stress that often is associated with entering an unfamiliar environment.