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EDUCATION FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs) THROUGH OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL)

It is estimated that there are 26 million Internally Displaced Persons worldwide of which 13.5 million are children. An Internally Displaced Person is someone who is forced to flee his or her home but who remains within his or her country's border. It is very difficult to get accurate figures for internally displaced persons because populations are not constant. IDPs may be returning home while others are fleeing. In some cases, they periodically return to IDP camps to take advantage of humanitarian aid. They are often referred to as refugees although they do not fall within the current legal definition of a refugee. The word 'refugee' has an authoritative definition under the 1951 refugee Convention, there is no legal definition of internally displaced persons. However, United Nations report reflects the following definition:

Internally displaced people are people or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or home-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

Thus, the Internally Displaced Persons have not crossed a border to find safety. Though the refugee and Internally Displaced Persons may have fled for similar reasons but Internally Displaced Persons stay within their own country and remain under the protection of its government even if that government is the reason for their displacement. As a result, these people are among the most vulnerable in the world. The largest IDP population is found in Syria, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Sudan and Azerbaijan. On the other hand refugee is defining as a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, prosecution or natural disaster. The concerns of refugees are human rights and safety but not economic advantage. They leave behind their homes, belongings, family members and friends. The journey to safety is panicky and many refugees risk their lives in search of protection. They cannot return unless the situation that forced them to leave improves. Therefore, there is clear difference between Internally Displaced Persons and

refugees. There is another category of such population, who are called '**migrants**'. The term migrant is defined as one "who moves either temporarily or permanently from one place, area or country of residence to another." They make a conscious choice to leave their country to seek a better life elsewhere. Before they decide to leave their country, migrants can seek information about their new home, learn the language and explore employment opportunities. They plan their travel, take their belongings with them and say good bye to the important people in their lives. They are free to return home at any time if things do not work out as they had hoped. There are various reasons for migration such as those who move toward or seek a better life, generally known as economic migrants and people who move for family reason or to study. There is an another term that is, '**Asylum Seeker**'. An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for asylum and is waiting for a decision on their claim. In other words in the United Kingdom an asylum seeker is someone who has asked the government for refugee status and is waiting to hear the outcome of their application. If there asylum application is unsuccessful and the individual has no other claim for protection, he/she may voluntarily return to their country of origin or may be forcible returned.

There are various causes of displacement. These causes are divided into two broad categories first category is Natural Emergencies which includes floods, droughts, fires, landslides, earth tremors or earthquakes, storm surges, coastal erosion, cyclones, and epidemics of diseases or pests.

The second category is manmade emergencies which include industrial explosions or other accidents that release industrial toxins into the environment, fires, transport accidents, or from ethnic, national or international conflicts.

In most of the cases the Internally Displaced Persons prefer to return to their place of origin but while waiting for that situation they encounter with many problems. The immediate requirement of Internally Displaced Persons is food, clothes, security and safety. Another most important requirement for Internally Displaced Person is education and vocational training for their children and themselves.

Education can be a tool for protection and for introducing tolerance, peace and conflict resolution between opposing communities for developing notions of intercultural understanding and dialogue for active peace-keeping operations. Education is essential to prepare Internally Displaced Persons for life, for employment and for democratic citizenship while waiting for normalization of situation of returning back. Their educational requirement

must be fulfilled for each eventuality and at all appropriate levels. Education for IDPs is essential both as a human right enshrined in international law and as a component of the peace building process. Displacement is a crucial time of transition and vulnerability not just for children but for youth and adults as well. The failure to incorporate youth and adult education as a standard component during displacement is a detrimental omission in the effort to secure sustainable peace and initiate long term development.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON

There are many barriers in learning or imparting education to Internally Displaced Persons. Some of the barriers are given below:-

a) Cultural Differences

Cultural differences that cause difficulties in assimilation and also lead to prejudice against Internally Displaced Persons. A cultural difference is one of deterrent in receiving equal educational opportunities. The students of Internally Displaced Persons who struggle with cultural adjustment often fail to form connections and make friends in educational institutions which affect their academic achievement. The IDPs also face problem of discrimination on the basis of cultural differences in educational sphere. In some instances, IDPs are sent to segregated schools or denied access to public schools based on their race or ethnicity.

b) Language difference

Language difference is another common barrier to educational success. The children of Internally Displaced Persons speak a language other than the region's dominant language, struggle with basic comprehension and literacy which affects success in schools.

c) Lack of Information & documentation

Most of the parents of Internally Displaced Person are unfamiliar with the structure of the local public education system. The displaced person often focuses their energy on livelihood. They do not have time to explore educational options for their children. Also, some of the schools require official documents during the registration process. The IDPs flee their communities with limited documents or they do not get time to collect documentation before departing.

d) Psychological difficulties

Trauma and other psychological difficulties are common among Internally Displaced Persons who are forced into migratory status due to political, social or religious turmoil. Adjustment to

a new culture, language and home is also psychological strain on migrant families. Another factor for contributing to depression among Internally Displaced Persons is discrimination by the local educational institution or local people.

e) Residential Dislocation

Many difficulties arise due to the movement of displaced students from one educational institution to another. The children of Internally Displaced Persons often adjust to new curricula, testing requirements and different system of credit accumulation.

f) Living Conditions

The Internally Displaced Persons often live in substandard, crowded condition and in temporary housing in comparison to other children. This density of people in a small poorly lit and sparsely furnished space is not conducive for studying. The IDPs accommodations lack fresh drinking water or sanitation facilities, which increases student's risk of getting sick.

g) Cost

The cost of schooling can also prevent equal access to education. The Internally Displaced Persons especially farm working family, have low socio economic status and cannot afford to pay extra fees for schooling. Often the children of IDPs work to supplement their parent's income. For IDP families who have lost their primary source of income, even nominal fees can be prohibitive.

The 'handbook for the protection of Internally Displaced Persons' published by UNHCR states that "peer-to-peer violence, corporal punishment, sexual abuse or exploitation, lack of qualified staff, and inadequate monitoring and supervision within the education system, can discourage children and adolescents from attending school and contribute to high drop out rates".

PROVISION OF EDUCATION TO IDPS

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that 'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Education shall be directed to the full development of Human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Education is everyone's lifeline to the future. It is vital for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) particularly because women and children needs of education constitute two thirds of the IDPs populations. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) presence can be a social irritant. It leads to crime for example drug trafficking, prostitution, theft and even creates threats to security in the region. Thus, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) needs to be creatively engaged to impart values of tolerance, understanding, etc. The need of IDPs education therefore, is obvious. Wherever there is the possibility of accommodating children of IDPs in local schools, very often many IDPs do not make use of them because of language and cultural differences as has been stated earlier. In the Western countries, the educational needs of IDPs are met in many ways. Young IDPs of school going age are automatically accepted into local schools. They easily mix up with the local population. They are usually scattered all over the country, making the burden of providing education manageable for community. Contrary to it, in the African and Asian countries, IDPs come in such a large numbers that they are kept in separate makeshift camps away from the general population.

The education of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), as any other need, is the responsibility of the government. In cases where the appropriate authorities are not in a position to fulfill this responsibility, the UNHCR endeavors to identify other sources of assistance. Where these are not available, or are insufficient, UNHCR may, within the policy limits set out essential educational assistance to eligible and needy IDPs. Efforts are made to make Primary education available to all the children of IDPs. Educational assistance at post-primary levels, i.e lower secondary, higher secondary and tertiary levels, as well as assistance for apprenticeship and non- formal education, are provided as part of the search for a durable solution for the IDPs group or IDPs concerned.

Education must also be relevant to the particular needs and situation of IDPs. It should support IDPs maintaining their own language and culture. The language of the instruction, particularly for primary education, requires careful consideration. Given that children learn better and more quickly in their mother tongue, it is strongly recommended to use it as the primary medium of instruction, particularly in the early grades. When prospects for local integration or resettlement justify learning a second language, it can be introduced initially as a subject and gradually become the medium of instruction.

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Traditional education is unsuitable for IDPs troubled, and tense state of mind. They cannot meet the requirements of the conventional education system. Therefore, distance education could be a better means to impart education for IDPs. If the conventional system is promoted to provide meaningful and effective education to them, the following conditions would have to be fulfilled.

- There should be sufficient qualified teachers at each level.
- There should be adequate number of classrooms.
- There should be libraries with enough books.
- There should be other essential teaching resources, etc.

Distance education, therefore, is a possible solution, because it is an approach that can be implemented quickly. It has multifarious advantages. Distance education is a method of imparting education to students without direct contact with teachers. Face-to face lecturing is not possible for IDPs who are always scattered. The communications among them are made through the printed and electronic media. It can reach in every dispersed location of IDPs where schools are not available. Distance education is relatively less expensive method of education which is easily accessible for IDPs in the developing countries. The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), an open learning institution which was set up by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India in 1989, is providing education to several displaced persons in the country. In India about 1,50,000 Kashmiri Pandits from Jammu and Kashmir have been internally displaced due to the aggressive and violent separatist movement. Many adivasis (tribals) in the states of India where the violence between the Naxals and the Indian state has been rising are forced by circumstances to move to the neighbouring states both for saving their lives and for employment. Similarly in 1984, the Sudan Open Learning (SOLU) was set up to provide secondary level courses to IDPs. Likewise the Namibian Extension Unit (NEU) at Lusaka and South African Extension Unit at Dar-es-salaam provides education to IDPs through distance education. Besides, the International Extension College (IEC) works with governments and universities in Third World countries to provide formation, consultancy and training for distance teaching.

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has several flexibilities and openness which facilitates the IDPs to continue or pursue their studies. Some of the innovative features of the National

Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) which is the largest Open Schooling system in the world are given below:

- a) **No Upper Age Limit:** Although the National Institute of Open Schooling has a lower age limit of 14 years for entry into its Secondary course, there is no upper age limit. Thus, more than 30 percent of NIOS learners are over the age of 20, and some learners are older than 50 years.
- b) **No Rigid Entry Qualifications:** The National Institute of Open Schooling expects a minimum level of competences for entry into its courses. Any student who has competency to read & write and has obtained education up to upper primary level, can enroll for the Secondary course. To cater to the needs of diverse groups of learners, NIOS offers Online Admissions throughout the year.
- c) **Choice of Subjects:** Students may choose from a given list of subjects according to their individual interests, without restriction. Many subjects and combination of subjects are offered in the Secondary and Senior Secondary courses including regional languages. The National Institute of Open Schooling is offering more than 150 vocational and life enrichment courses, which students may combine with academic courses.
- d) **Self-pacing:** Students are free to study at their own pace and have up to five years to complete a course of five subjects. Students may study one or more subjects at a time, and postpone studying for a while if necessary, without seeking permission.
- e) **Quality Learning Material:** Students are provided with semi-programmed interactive self-study learning materials, which have been developed by a team comprised of some of the best teachers and writers available. The learning materials are written in simple language and are presented attractively, with access devices and built-in feedback to help the student.
- f) **Media Support:** Learning is supported, by audio-video programmes Muktaavidya Vani and other ICT for the selected difficult topics. These support materials are developed by the National Institute of Open Schooling.
- g) **Personal Contact Programmes:** The National Institute of Open Schooling provides contact sessions, during which students can ask questions and seek guidance in their studies. Students can also view or listen to audio-video programmes or carry out practical assignments.
- h) **Choice in Taking Examination Time:** In order to make independent study more meaningful, the National Institute of Open Schooling allows students to take

examinations when they are ready. Examinations are held twice a year and students are free to choose not only which examinations, but credits are accumulated on computer, and, when sufficient credits have been obtained, a certificate is provided. In addition to two public examinations conducted in a year, there is a provision of On-Demand Examination System (ODES) in which NIOS learners may appear any time as per their choice.

- i) **Credit Transfer:** NIOS has introduced the scheme of transfer of credits through which learners who have cleared one or two subject from CBSE or State Education Board and have not qualified in the course can seek admission in NIOS and take the remaining subjects in the Secondary/ Senior Secondary programmes.

In addition to above, NIOS provides freedom to take part admission and facility of continuous assessment to improve progress through Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA) and Personal Contact Programmes (PCPs). However, NIOS has been more direct link with its learners. The study material is sent by post directly to each learners at the address given by them. He/ She can also communicate directly with NIOS via the Learner Support Centre (LSC) for providing prompt and direct support. It is such an Open Learning Institution which encourages flexibility and freedom to learn. About Ninteen Lakh learners are on roll of NIOS pursuing their Secondary, Senior Secondary and Vocational Education courses. Due to these flexibilities most of the displaced persons in India are being benefitted and continuing their education.

Conclusion

The displaced persons have also educational rights which can be fulfilled through Open and distance learning. ODL has immense potential to educate the masses especially IDPs. Though most of them are already getting school education with the help of government as well as international agencies including UNHCR and UNESCO, but given the resource crunch the host countries are facing problem. In such a situation, the Open and Distance Learning is most viable means of getting Education for displaced people. The educators of ODL may design their courses and services provided to the learners, keeping in view the needs and requirements of Internally Displaced Persons.

Keywords:

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees, migrants, asylum seeker, UNHCR, UDHR.

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Dr. Tharkeshwar Nath Giri is a distance educator with specialization in International Relations. He has obtained doctorate degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has been contributing in Open and Distance Learning for 22 years. He was involved in development of curriculum and self learning materials for Secondary and Senior Secondary courses and has designed, authored and edited courses. Dr. Giri has presented a dozen of papers in National and International Conferences and has contributed Articles on Open Learning and Human Rights. He is also author of two books.