

PART IV SPECIAL GROUPS

This section introduces materials specifically concerned with refugees women and youth. In the process, some of major issues and problems faced by these groups are highlighted.

SECTION 1: REFUGEES

Introduction

The last ten years have witnessed an increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons as more and more people, for political or religious reasons or on account of being displaced by wars, have sought asylum elsewhere. There are currently about ten million refugees in the world of whom most are in the third world. In view of the large numbers, language and cultural differences, and difficulties in integration with the host community, entrepreneurship development programmes are set up in some countries exclusively or primarily for refugees as a means of providing employment and income. The problem of employment and the need for special entrepreneurship development programmes are acute, as most developing countries do not have enough jobs for their own nationals. Typically, such programmes have been established with support from the UN agencies, with UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) and numerous voluntary agencies playing a key role, and with inputs also from the host country.

Research currently being conducted by the Enterprise Development Centre at the Cranfield School of Management, funded by the Overseas Development Administration, suggests that small-scale locally based programmes, providing assistance to refugees in one camp or an otherwise restricted area, are more likely to succeed than programmes which are organised on a regional or national basis. It is also important to avoid discriminating between refugees and other business people, who may live in the same area at a similar or even lower level of income.

Programmes

Entrepreneurship programmes for refugees have the basic contents of training materials and design of many other programmes. It may be useful, however, to stress a few important factors.

Firstly, there is the need to make a distinction for training purposes between refugees (or other disadvantaged groups) with skills and those without. (In many cases, it may be necessary to precede such programmes with literacy education.)

Secondly, and allied with the point just made, the kind of skills (or vocational) training which is provided and the businesses which the members of the group are assisted to establish should, as far as possible, be demand-led.

Thirdly, attempts ought to be made to find market niches in existing or new markets. Direct competition with local people should be avoided if at all possible, and markets or market segments should be sought which are presently uncatered for (providing, of course, that they are economically viable).

Fourthly, instead of sole proprietorships, it might be best in many cases to organise members of the group into co-operatives, for reasons to do with resource constraints, organisational requirements, market conditions and sheer numbers of people. As with many other forms of enterprise development, however, it is vital that such groupings should be genuinely initiated by their members, with effective leadership, rather than by being imposed by any outside institution. The record of co-operative as opposed to individual enterprise is a poor one; refugees, like any particular oppressed group, are more likely to work together effectively than many others, but they will only do this if the initiative for co-operation is their own.

Finally, role models, with whom the trainees can identify, are an invaluable resource for entrepreneurship programmes for disadvantaged groups, as indeed for any group, and should be used whenever possible.

FURTHER READING ON REFUGEES AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Austin, V. 1982 Small enterprise development programme for refugees in Lesotho, Lesotho, ILO.

Talago, J. and M. Chu. 1984. Entrepreneurship training for refugees: a training guide. Washington, D.C., Office of Refugee Resettlement (DHHS).