

Life skills are essential for peace in displacement contexts

Supporting the implementation of the Kenyan CBC curriculum in forced displacement in Kenya

Executive summary

As youth in many African countries are forcibly displaced due to conflict and crises they take this experience into the communities they find themselves in hosting countries. Having had their lives impacted by conflicts that failed to be resolved peacefully, they have been able to acquire skills and competencies they could use to ensure peaceful coexistence in their new communities. The AHEEN SEL Skills for Peace project demonstrates that when forcibly displaced youth are engaged in developing comprehensive life skills through their regular curricula they will apply these both to their own advancement as well as to that of the communities they join. The AHEEN SEL Skills for Peace project departs from traditional peace education approaches in that it first identified the skills and competencies required of each individual for peaceful coexistence and then designed curricula and activities for learners to successfully acquire them. Using a bottom-up approach that focused on understanding what peace means to displaced youth the model can be readily transferred to other contexts. The model can also be adapted successfully to different age groups, both in and out of school or university, as well as to community groups.

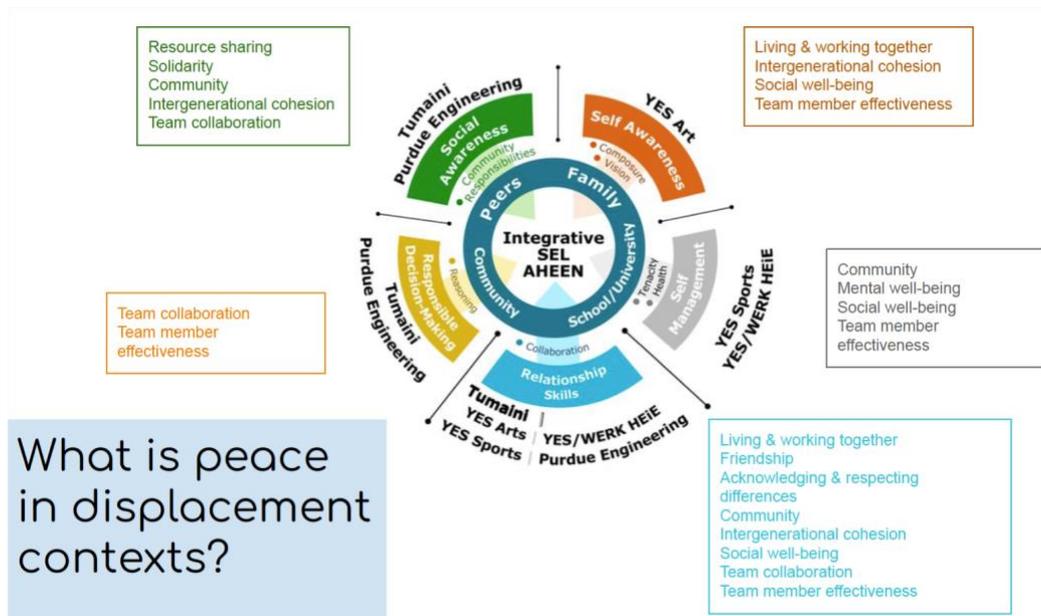
Purpose of this applied research project

- The problem we wanted to solve
 - The AHEEN SEL Skills for Peace model is designed to address the development of specific life skills that support peaceful coexistence in fragile contexts.
- The causes of the problem and its effects on displaced youth and their communities
 - Fragile contexts in which displaced youth find themselves in lack positive experiences when it comes to peaceful coexistence. The lack of these is precisely what led to forced displacement.
- The problem affects displaced communities in different ways
 - Forcibly displaced youth don't know how to resolve disputes and conflicts peacefully as the only model they have experienced is one where violence and force were used to settle conflicts. There are numerous and repeated and protracted conflicts and crises on the African continent, which affect civilians of all ages and force them to flee and seek protection either within their own country as IDPs or crossing the border to become refugees.
- Why it is important to solve this problem and who will benefit?
 - 2023 records over **110 million forcibly displaced globally**. Of these, at least **36 million** are refugees, **78% are hosted** in developing countries. All of them could potentially benefit from the AHEEN SEL Skills for Peace model, given its adaptability to different contexts, languages, cultures and age brackets.
- Why is it important to solve this problem now?
 - The constant increase in number and scale of armed conflict has led to significant increase in the number of forcibly displaced around the world. These numbers will

further increase with the arrival of a new category of displaced, the climate refugees. The scale of the problem is such that agile solutions are required now.

Summary of the research

- **Country/countries**
 - This applied research project was implemented in Kenya.
- **Research context**
 - The implementation sites were two large refugee camps in Kenya, Kakuma/Kalobeyi and Dadaab.
- **Research aim**
 - The aim of the applied research was to develop proof-of-concept for a novel approach for strengthening peaceful coexistence in fragile contexts. Using a participatory action research approach the project ensured that conceptual input was authentic and produced by the very groups who needed to acquire relevant skills.
- **Participant groups**
 - AHEEN Higher education students in Kakuma/Kalobeyi and Dadaab, refugee-led organisations who are members of AHEEN
- **Research activities**
 - Refugee researchers first explored the concept/construct of peace and what it meant in their context



- The result was then verified through program implementation among refugee students in higher education in emergencies

AHEEN SEL for peace – highlights

Verification of PEACE as a concept/construct among AHEEN students through program implementation

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SPORTS



APPLIED ARTS



Verification of PEACE as a concept/construct among AHEEN students through program implementation

LOCALISED ENGINEERING



- Implementation was accompanied by Monitoring and Evaluation in Kakuma/Kalobeyei and Dadaab refugee camps
- The research team then constructed a large-scale survey among the program participants at the end of the implementation period.

Findings

- The skills sets and competencies identified in the model and allocated to the 3 components of the Integrative SEL wheel were assessed in a final survey that combined both cross-sectional and retrospective approaches as we had not administered a base-line survey.
- The return rate was 80% (sample size: 29) in the anonymous on-line survey. 30% also submitted a sample media file with their reflections on peace.
- On all the skill sets and competencies we found largely significant changes in behaviour indicating increased expertise on part of respondents in skills and competencies that promote peaceful coexistence. These changes were already visible when respondents compared their past behaviour and experiences (prior to program start) and present (at the end of the program), and became even more pronounced as participants anticipated their future behaviour.
- A qualitative analysis of free responses also revealed respondents' regular use of terms such as team collaboration, togetherness, joint decision-making, helping others, being motivated to do the best they can and eagerness to learn more.

Policy Advice

- Life skills are a life-line for those who have been forcibly displaced
- Life-skills are best acquired through exposure to subjects and meaningful authentic activities that are embedded in school and community life and make a proven contribution to living together peacefully
- Each displaced community has its own, culturally determined vision of peace. Leveraging their knowledge and culturally meaningful activities is essential to developing the skills to resolve conflict peacefully
- Youth thrive on engaging activities that are meaningful in their context and offer a vision and the relevant skills they need for building their future. While some forcibly displaced students may need psycho-social support, the emphasis should be on acquiring social-emotional skills – rather than dwelling on the past, youth should be motivated to build skills for the future.
- The new Kenyan CBC is an ideal vehicle to deliver on this approach, and not just in displacement contexts: Teacher professional development (TPD) should focus on a comprehensive SEL approach, weaving SEL skill acquisition into subject-matter teaching rather than reserving a separate subject in the curriculum for life-skill development. Teachers and other educators learn to leverage resources in their context and use these to build meaningful engagement with students and the wider education community.
- The DEPA project provides concrete sample syllabi based on scientific evidence and a proof-of-concept implementation in refugee contexts.

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Funding

The DEPA project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) through the Global Challenges Research (GCRF) Fund. Grant reference number AH/T008121/1.

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