

Country: Eritrea

Programme Area: Education 2005-2010

What is the aim of the programme area?

To improve the quality of education at the elementary, junior and vocational schools in targeted disadvantaged areas of the six regions of Eritrea by 2010. This will be by supporting partner organisations to develop quantity and quality of human resources as well as implement targeted education development strategies.

Why is VSO working in this particular programme area and region?

Eritrea remains one of the poorest countries in the world; in the UN's Human Development Index (2006) Eritrea is ranked 157 out of 177 countries and considered a country of 'low human development'. More than half of the population lives on less than US\$1 per day and about one third lives in extreme poverty. This situation has been exacerbated by the recent border conflict with Ethiopia (1998-2000) and the continued uncertainty over the border's demarcation.

Through working in Education VSO's programme in Eritrea is able to contribute to the Eritrean government's Education Sector Development Programme. In the 12 years that VSO has been working in Eritrea the programme has build up of a lot of experience through a capacity-building and training approach.

Key beneficiaries and partners

The Programme Office works in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MoE) at strategic level, at placement level VSO works with zoba (region) and sub-zoba staff within the MoE, the Curriculum Office, PRC coordinators, teachers, and the head teachers (school directors). The main beneficiaries of the programme are therefore the children of Eritrea, the students in the Elementary and Junior secondary schools who benefit directly through the work of the teachers and indirectly through the work of the teacher trainers. The teachers and other staff are also beneficiaries.

Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes

The Strategic Objectives to achieve the overall aim are:

- Strengthen English language teaching in elementary and junior schools by supporting distance learning programmes, an English Language Teachers Network and developing English language resources within the school environment.
- Develop the capacity of national teachers to deliver quality instruction through learner-centred teaching with improved coordination of teacher development institutions and development of Pedagogic Resource Centres (PRCs).
- Strengthen the vocational and IT training capacity of institutions coordinated by the MOE.
- Develop practical industry-specific syllabus and the teaching capacity of vocational schools to match this.

To address gender challenges the programme will support development of girls' education in regions with a wide gender gap in education, encourage female teachers' recruitment and training and initiatives to increase female enrolments through PTA work.

HIV & AIDS is a mainstreaming theme however this is within the context that Eritrea has a very low prevalence rate of 3% and the government has run a successful awareness campaign so the level of awareness in schools is reasonably good.

Current programme activities

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

- A number of long term volunteers (currently about 13) work as **English teachers** in Junior schools to implement interactive teaching approaches in the classroom and work with the other teachers in the school on the practical aspects of using interactive teaching techniques. English teaching volunteers also help their colleagues to improve their English language and teaching methodology. Some volunteers have been involved in developing school-based libraries and language clubs and labs.
- **Methodology trainer** volunteers (currently about 16 in total) run a number of workshops for teachers working in their respective sub-zobas, aimed at introducing learner centred teaching methodologies. As well as providing workshops the volunteers worked with teachers individually in their school on various ways to improve the effectiveness of their work. The majority of these volunteers work with PRC coordinators to develop the resources in the PRC and in zoba centres for professional development.
- Two long-term volunteers are based in the Adult and Media Education department of the Ministry of Education as Radio Programme Facilitators. These volunteers broadcast programmes which are aimed at teachers and students to help increase their English language capacity and discuss different teaching methodologies.
- Technical volunteers: are engaged in technical and vocational training and they have revised and developed the syllabus in their technical area. These volunteers worked closely with their colleagues to share technical and advisory support.
- IT volunteers: work closely with the MoE in Asmara and other major towns to support the MoE five year “ICT in Education” strategy which also involves strengthening the MOE’s ICT infrastructures. Volunteers also work in schools with teachers to increase the use of ICT in school administration, and to help local IT trainers to deliver the training in a better way.

Workshops, training & conferences

- Workshops are regularly arranged for volunteers and their partners, to discuss and clarify expectations around VSO's work and the roles of the volunteers.

Partner exchange visits/study tours

- Members of the programme office team, senior MoE officials and a volunteer took part in a LINKS exchange visit to South Africa.

What makes VSO’s work in this programme area special?

What underlies the importance of VSO Eritrea's work is the context, the need from VSO's partners and beneficiaries and the fact that VSO is one of few INGOs who are working successfully in Eritrea.

The implementation of this programme has brought with it a major shift in the work of the programme from one of service delivery to real partnership. This partnership exists at all levels of the programme from the programme managers right through to the volunteers. It is through these relationships which have been built and developed and through the delivery of the programme that VSO Eritrea can achieve real change and positively affect the lives of their beneficiaries.