

Programme Area Summary

Country: Guyana

Programme Area: Education 2005-2009

What is the aim of the programme area?

The aim of the programme area is that disadvantaged children have a relevant, equitable and basic quality education.

Why is VSO working in that particular Programme Area and region?

Despite its resource wealth, Guyana is one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere and currently ranks 103rd out of 177 in the UNDP's Human Development Index. The highest incidence of poverty is in the sparsely populated rural and hinterland areas, which are predominantly inhabited by Amerindians (indigenous people) and have the lowest education attainment in the country. The Education sector in Guyana faces a number of challenges including the ongoing migration of skilled teachers, and inability of the education system to respond adequately to the needs of children with disabilities or learning difficulties. Though the education system was decentralised in the 1980s to try to achieve more relevant and context specific teaching, there is a lack of capacity at the different levels of the ministry of education including the regional education departments to plan, implement and review basic education delivery, and within communities a lack of involvement by parents and communities in children's education. Levels of functional literacy and numeracy are extremely low, and a lack of awareness about the issues facing people with disabilities means that disabled children and children with learning difficulties are most disadvantaged.

Key beneficiaries and partners

Beneficiaries

Primary-aged children in target regions, particularly those who are not currently fully included in the education system. Direct beneficiaries will be the staff working at the partner organisations.

Key partners

The Ministry of Education,

The Cyril Potter College of Education

National Centre for Education and Resource Development

Regional Education Departments in regions 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10

Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes?

- Enhanced capacity of teachers to deliver relevant and inclusive education
- Enhanced management capacity of regional and other education organisations towards effective delivery of education programmes
- Strengthened capacity of teachers, parents and other education stakeholders to participate actively in policy formulation, management and implementation of basic education programmes

Current programme activities:

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

- The main focus is on Special Education Needs (SEN), Early childhood Education (ECE), Literacy and Numeracy, Curriculum/Educational Resource Development, Teacher Training, Education Management, Psychosocial Support, Advocacy.
- Currently there are a total of 14 volunteers (12 long term and 2 short term) working with the National Centre for Educational Resource Development, Cyril Potter College of Education (Teachers Training College), Guyana Teachers Union, and EveryChild Guyana, Departments of Education Regions 6 & 7.

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- During the 2007-2009 volunteers will be placed at the Ministry of Education and Department of Education Regions 1 & 9.
- For the Ministry of Education, VSO intends to place a highly experienced volunteer in this placement to assist the Ministry in developing its five-year strategic plan in which it intends to mainstream SEN.

Workshops, Training and Conferences

- Literacy (including phonics) workshops for teachers.
- Workshops on developing, testing and use of educational resource materials.
- Training workshops in Literacy, SEN, and ECE for teachers.
- Training for Education Managers
- Training workshops on advocacy.
- Public fora on television and via other forms of media on issues relating to inclusive education.
- Training in the use of theatre for teaching concepts to community leaders

Support to national volunteering (NV)

- Phonics training for local volunteers involved in literacy programme, planning the national volunteer teachers programme, documentation of best practices on NV, sensitisation workshops for organisations that want to be involved in disability work.

Research

- Research on the use of Jolly Phonics approach to teaching Literacy. This Research was conducted by a VSO volunteer with teachers in Region 6.

Advocacy and Global Education

- Valuing teachers' research carried out in 2004 in collaboration with the Guyana Teachers Union. The research addressed underlying problems surrounding teacher's motivations and status.
- VSO worked with NGOs involved in education to conduct a number of activities under the Global Campaign for Education theme "Every Child Needs a Teacher". This campaign, the first of its kind in Guyana involved teachers, students, education officials and parents.

Partner exchange visits/study tours

- As part of the "Talking teachers" campaign in 2006, Coretta MacDonald, General Secretary of the Guyana Teacher's Union came to the UK along with teachers from Mozambique and Nepal to do a series of talks to highlight the challenges faced by teachers in developing countries.

Providing grants and/or equipment for partners

- VSO provide small grants to partners to procure education reference books, equipment and to conduct training workshops.
- Development of publications or other materials for training or communication:
- "Working with a VSO volunteer" a document written for partners to prepare them for the arrival of a volunteer. Includes advice on how to deal with difficult professional and interpersonal situations.

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

The aim of VSO's work in this area is to address the issue of the delivery of quality education and to promote inclusive education with specific emphasis on the disadvantaged children. This requires working at the policy level with the Ministry of Education, at the teacher training level with the Cyril Potter College of Education, at the curriculum development and educational resource level with the National Centre for Educational Resource Development and the Regional levels as well. Additionally, VSO has been working with its partners at the civil society and community levels to improve opportunities for disadvantaged people to access education. This represents a real and exciting shift for

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VSO Guyana, which has previously been involved in service-delivery (teaching). VSO is using volunteer professionals working with local partners at all levels of the education system to achieve programme results. This results-oriented nature of the VSO programme, its partnership approach, and its specific areas of focus make it unique and distinct from other international volunteer organisations working in Guyana. Generally, VSO gets high commendations from partners on its approach and the work of its volunteers.