

Report on Distribution of Books for Sudanese refugees in Eastern Chad

Donation by 'Books for Africa'

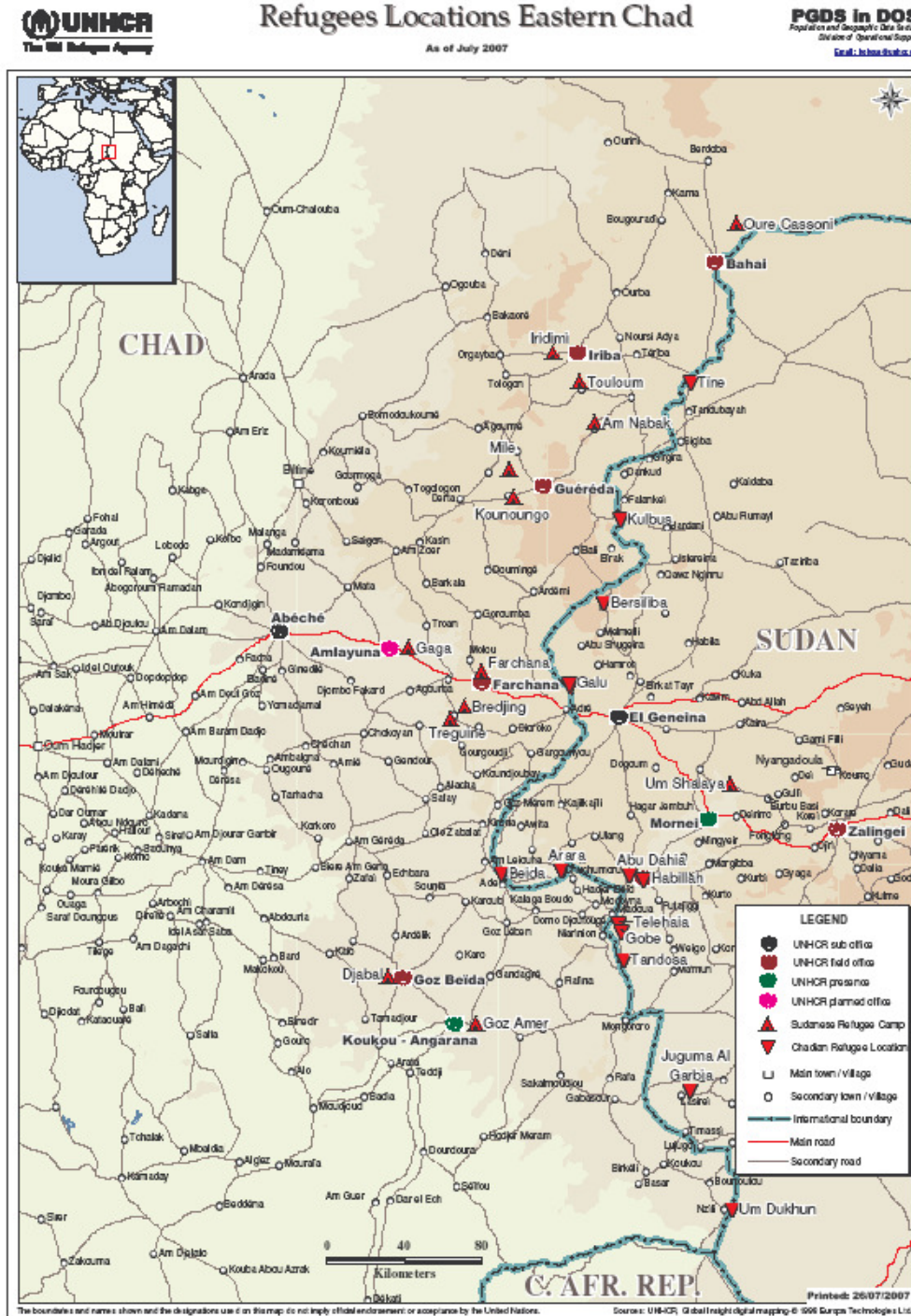


"Our youth club is beginning to look like a real library"

**UNHCR S.O. Abéché
June 2008**

General Context

Between January 2004 and May 2005, UNHCR established 12 refugee camps in the border region between Chad and the Sudan for Sudanese refugees fleeing armed conflict in West Darfur. These camps host some 250,000 registered Sudanese refugees¹ and UNHCR and its partners, including various UN agencies and NGOs, work together to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to them, from family shelters to latrines, clinics, schools, wells and other vital infrastructure.



¹ 243,116 as at 31 May 2008

Chad has long been plagued by insecurity caused by road bandits, tension between its nomadic and sedentary (agricultural) population, cross-border raids and, since end-2005, incursions and attacks by armed militias; insecurity which led to significant movements of population within the country and culminated in some 180,000 Chadians being left internally displaced in the southern part of eastern Chad. A chain of violence and a deteriorating security environment which has also led to the temporary withdrawal of humanitarian staff within the region on more than one occasion since mid-2006, affecting UNHCR operations, causing disruption in the camps and often coupled with government decreed states of emergency and national curfews.

In eastern Chad UNHCR has a Sub-Office in the regional town of Abéché with Field Offices near the twelve camps in Bahai, Iriba, Guereda, Farchana (plus Field Unit in Amleyouna), Goz Beida and Koukou-Angarana. Working in close coordination, these offices – together with the Country Office in N’Djamena – battle daily with the logistical challenges of this landlocked country. Challenges that include long distances over dirt track roads (the main N’Djamena / Abéché route is 900 kms of which only 100 kms is tarmac); an inordinately lengthy time frame for receiving items procured internationally (Douala in Cameroon is the nearest serviceable international harbour); an aging fleet of trucks regularly punished by the rough terrain over which they are driven; a rainy season (June - September) which greatly hampers access to camps, sites and Field offices due to swollen wadis, waterlogged airstrips and impassable muddy roads; and the need to travel in convoy under armed escort due to an ever increasing risk of armed highway robbery.

Beneficiaries

Refugees in eastern Chad come from the Darfur region (west Sudan) and are mainly Muslim nomads from the Zaghawa and Massalit tribes. They reside in areas of eastern Chad within similar ethnic groups: Zaghawa in the north-east and Massalit in the south-east; the former tend to be semi – nomadic herdsmen whilst the latter are farmers. The refugee population is characterized by the presence of more women (58%) than men (imbalance most noticeable among the adults) as well as children under the age of 18 (61%).

Overview of camp population:

Field Office / Unit	Camp	Opened	Registered Population as at 31 May 2008
Bahai	Ouré Cassoni	July 2004	26,927
Farchana	Farchana	January 2004	20,250
	Bredjing	June 2004	30,591
	Treguine	October 2004	16,152
Amleyouna	Gaga	May 2005	19,366
Goz Beida	Djabal	June 2004	15,915
Koukou-A.	Goz Amir	April 2004	20,364
Guereda	Kounoungou	February 2004	17,959
	Mile	May 2004	16,711
Iriba	Touloum	February 2004	23,622
	Am Nabak	February 2004	16,701
	Iridimi	March 2004	18,558
Total			243,116

Distribution of the books



"Now we can really start to become men of science"

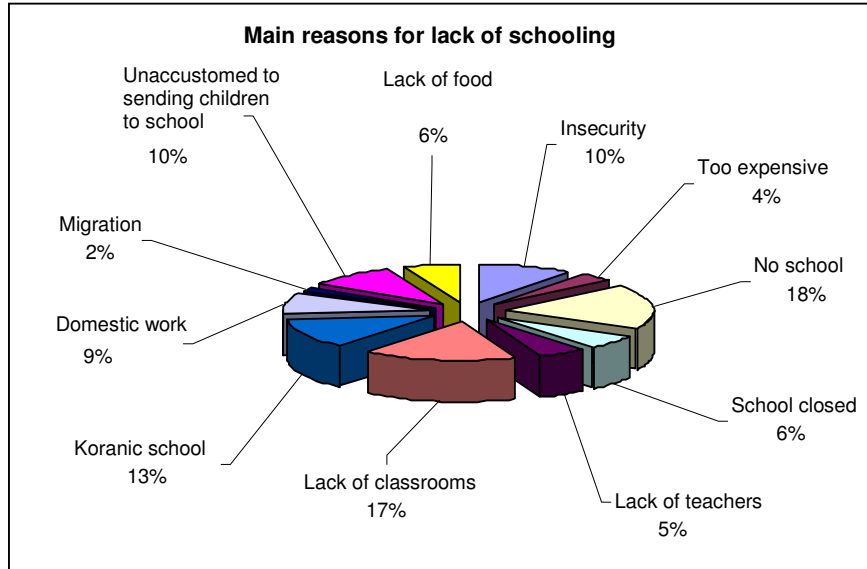
In December 2007 / January 2008, UNHCR sent 157 cartons of books, donated by Books for Africa, out to all twelve camps for distribution by its partners, i.e. International Rescue Committee, CARE, Refugee Education Trust, SECADEV, Christian Outreach Relief and Development (CORD), and CCF, to communal establishments such as English clubs, youth clubs, school libraries, and cultural centres. Libraries are especially important as they have the potential to impact on the most number of people, and they can be used by everyone in the community, young or old, in school or not, with interests as diverse as its collection.

English is a language many wish to learn – it is viewed as a “road to freedom” by refugees from Darfur – and in Djabal camp teachers provide lessons outside of school hours to over 1,600 refugees. Several books were given to these teachers to help them with their lessons. There is also an English club in Djabal camp with some 60 members and along with a donation of books, UNHCR provided them with plastic sheeting to protect their television and mats to sit on while watching English films.



But it is not just children who study. Many teachers are not teachers by profession, they just happen to have a slightly better educational standard than others in their camps, so they have been 'nominated' to teach. A constant concern is the need to 'keep ahead' of their pupils and therefore they continue their own studying after school hours. Meeting to discuss what they have read and work out information gleaned from books that is maybe not clear to them through these self-help sessions, teachers are able to increase the level of their own education and knowledge. Topics which demand a lot of work are mathematics, Arabic and science.

Impact



Education – for all ages – is an area which is very weak and needs to be improved. The seven-year primary programme (for refugee children from 6 – 14 years) is carried out in Arabic and follows the Sudanese curriculum. The programme comprises mathematics, history, geography, biology, Islamic studies, Arabic and English and, since 2005, an eighth year has been included and successful students receive a diploma signed by UNICEF and the Chadian Ministry of Education. As part of the education strategy, UNICEF and CARE distribute scholastic material each year to the refugee schools.

The Sudanese curriculum is taught to facilitate the reintegration of children once conditions for a safe and dignified return to Darfur are met. However, the number of qualified trained teachers for primary schools is limited and there is a lack of basic materials (desks, chairs, didactic material and textbooks²). These are just some of the constraints encountered in trying to bring education to Darfuri children in the camps in eastern Chad (see above for others). Nevertheless, children (many who might not have had such an opportunity in Darfur) and their elders realize study is a way of transforming their exile into an opportunity that will change their lives.



Reading instead of listening to the meeting!

UNHCR and its sister agencies also see education as an important element of protection: for boys who are often targeted for recruitment into armed forces, and for girls who are frequently forced into early marriage and have to assume the main responsibility for domestic chores.

Through the work of various partners with UNHCR, some refugees also have the opportunity of following Life Skill studies - including literacy and numeracy using the Sudanese curriculum for adult learners; secondary education through distance learning implemented in conjunction with the International University of Africa; and language courses (French and English being popular).

² depending on the grade, students have to share their books, sometimes one book between three, but often one book between ten pupils

When planning activities / assistance in the refugee camps, it is important to include the people for whom the work is intended: the refugees. But not just the leaders. UNHCR and its partners discuss with all sections of the community – with the women, teachers, heads of household (male or female, young or old), parents, and youth – to understand what they need. In connection with the distribution of these books, UNHCR and its partners were informed that many of the donated English books were at a level that was rather high for the refugees. The people asked for books aimed more at primary and secondary level. And they were somewhat bemused by books on Windows 98! These discussions led to the suggestion that future shipments of books might consist of 65% primary and secondary level material, with the remainder covering post-secondary and general subjects and, as one refugee said, “*There is a great need*” for English-Arabic and French-Arabic dictionaries.



‘Books for Africa’s generous donation will help these children in their quest for education.

On their behalf, UNHCR thanks you