

Background Note for the UN General Assembly: Education in Emergencies

Why Education in Emergencies?

Education is critical for all children, but it is especially urgent for the tens of millions of children affected by emergencies, whether they be caused by man or natural disasters. Armed conflict and natural disasters can have a significantly damaged educational efforts and deny learners the transformative effects of quality education.

In emergency situations, quality education provides physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection, which can sustain lives and even save them. Yet, for millions of children affected by disaster and crisis, the right to education remains an unfulfilled promise:

- Worldwide, approximately 75 million children are out of school; more than half of them are living in conflict-affected states. Millions more are living in situations affected by natural disasters.
- In conflict zones, 20 million girls are out of school, and girls account for only 30% of the refugees enrolled in secondary school.
- In the coming decade, the world faces a shortfall of 18 million primary school teachers in the coming decade and the areas that most need education personnel are countries affected by emergencies and disasters

All people have a right to education, and those affected by emergencies are no exception, even during conflict and natural disasters. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) articulates the right to education without discrimination. It also declares three other rights. Primary education should be free and compulsory. Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational training, should be made available and accessible to all by every means appropriate. Finally, the higher levels of education should be accessible to all on the basis of merit. Since then, many international treaties have reaffirmed these rights, including the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951); the Geneva Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949); the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989).

Moreover, the Jomtien Declaration (1990); the World Education Forum Framework for Action (2000) promoting Education for All (EFA); the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000); and the Guiding Principles in Internal Displacement (1998) have reaffirmed, and in some cases extended, the right to education to which states had already committed through the human rights conventions. These declarations pay specific attention to education in crisis situations, including those that produce displaced populations such as refugees and internally displaced persons; they stress early childhood education, learning programmes for all young people and adults, and improved quality in existing education programmes. Education is an enabling right; it permits people to exercise other fundamental rights and thus provides a platform from which other Millennium Development Goals can be achieved.

Education sustains life by offering safe spaces for learning and by making it possible to identify and support seriously affected individuals, particularly children and youth. Education mitigates the psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters by providing a sense of normalcy, stability, structure and hope for the future. Quality education can save lives by providing physical protection from the dangers and exploitation of a crisis environment. When a child is in a safe learning environment, he or she is less likely to be sexually or economically exploited or exposed to other risks, such as recruitment into a fighting group or organized crime. In addition, education can convey life-saving information to strengthen critical survival skills and coping mechanisms, such as how to avoid landmines, how to protect oneself against sexual abuse, how to prevent HIV/AIDS, and how to access health care and food.

Historically, education was seen as part of longer-term development work rather than a necessary intervention in emergency response; humanitarian relief typically entailed providing food, shelter, water and sanitation and healthcare. However, a growing body of evidence on education's life-saving and life-sustaining

role has resulted in a change in beliefs, with education now being included in the planning and provision of humanitarian relief. This is critical because coordination and close collaboration between education and other emergency sectors are essential for an effective response that addresses children's rights and holistic needs. An inter-sectoral approach to education is even more vital in emergency contexts than in normal situations. Schools can act as an entry point for those providing protection, nutrition and health care. In an emergency, such an approach calls for close coordination between specialists in education, protection, health and psychosocial issues to establish safe, child friendly spaces where children can learn, play, regain a sense of normalcy, and access vital services such as health or nutrition.

Challenges and Strategic Opportunities

The Need for a Safe and Protective Educational Environment

Indiscriminate or direct attacks on school facilities or children attending school are common around the world despite the fact that schools are protected under a range of international conventions and International Humanitarian Law. Students, teachers and administrative staff become targets of intimidation, recruitment and indoctrination, and school premises are often damaged, destroyed or occupied – by fighting forces in conflict contexts, or by other hazards. They may also be used as shelters when people are displaced. The number of reported assassinations, bombings and burnings of schools and academic staff and buildings has risen dramatically in the past three years. More actions must be taken to reduce the incidence of education-related attacks and to end impunity for persons and armed groups that attack schools, students, teachers and humanitarian aid workers. States should criminalize attacks on schools as war crimes in accordance with article 8(2)(b)(ix) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and prosecute offenders accordingly.

In addition to criminalizing attacks, other measures are needed to ensure that schools are zones of peace. For example, it is critical that both boys and girls, especially adolescents, as well as their parents and community members, work together to identify barriers to safe access and to plan and implement actions to address them. Where necessary, humanitarian and development organizations can facilitate alternatives to the formal education system; for example home-based schools can help to keep children safe. In addition, States should support organizations that work with communities, including children, to advocate for protection for the people and resources involved in education, and to assist children's groups in speaking and acting on these issues; a useful action is establishing schools as zones of peace.

Moreover, in order for students and teachers to access education during emergencies, schools – and the routes to and from them – must be free from attack, including forced recruitment, kidnapping, and sexual violence. Member States should make it a priority to facilitate safe travel or transport, especially for students vulnerable to these abuses and for teachers who are targeted.

Progress has been made in monitoring and reporting on the six grave violations of the rights of children affected by armed conflict, including attacks on schools and violation of the right to education, through UN Security Council Resolution 1612. In addition to its work to release and rehabilitate child soldiers, the Security Council Working Group now seeks to monitor attacks against schools and hospitals and other violations of international law. The work of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education and the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict can contribute to strengthening reporting and follow-up actions regarding attacks on schools, students and teachers as well as the lack of access to quality education caused by war and insecurity. The Special Rapporteur and the Special Representative must coordinate their actions to enable a full review by the Security Council and the General Assembly on safe access to education that meets the internationally accepted *INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crisis and Early Reconstruction*.

In addition to being unsafe in schools due to attacks, tens of thousands of students and teachers have died at their school desks in schools that are unsafe, built in harms way, or not built to withstand expected and recurring natural hazards. Member States must undertake policies to ensure that every new school is a safe school; they must regulate and monitor school construction to assure compliance with international building codes and standards for disaster-resilience, while using locally available materials. In order to avert future

catastrophes, Member States must also develop plans to replace and retrofit existing school buildings that are unsafe, minimizing risks from building contents and non-structural building elements. They can take some very simple measures: making sure that classroom doors open to the outside, that exits are not obstructed, and that fire safety equipment is always available. Such measures are important in building a culture of school safety. School disaster management requires a process of assessment and planning, and of developing physical protection and response capacity development, that must be guided by policy and implemented at the local school level by the people who stand to be most seriously affected.

Inclusive Education in Emergences

Crises have serious and varied impacts on the lives of women, girls, boys and men. For girls, schools are often far from their homes, and thus, not accessible, especially for girls with disabilities. Women and girls may only be able to travel very short distances without male companions. So even if all-girls schools have been established, they may be too far for them to attend. Often schools are staffed exclusively by male teachers. Minimal or non-existent sanitation facilities can result in low attendance and high drop-out rates among adolescent girls who are menstruating. In some instances, being in school, or travelling to and from school, places girls at considerable risk of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation. These factors affect girls' enrolment and attendance, as does the fact that families often rely on girls to do household chores, care for siblings and generate family income, barring them from attending school. In emergency situations, the presence of educational facilities and opportunities contributes immensely to a range of short- and long-term issues that are critically important for boys and girls, including safety against sexual and gender-based violence and teaching the value of respecting women, girls, boys and men equally in society. When authorities seize this window of opportunity to provide gender-responsive education during emergencies, they can bring about long-term changes in educational systems and begin to more equitably share opportunities between women, girls, boys and men.

In emergency situations, adolescents and young people have even fewer opportunities to attend school. Relevant knowledge and productive skills are critical for their protection and development—and critical for the future of their communities and countries. Without opportunities to learn, young people are left idle and frustrated, and are more likely to be involved in dangerous activities that put them—and sometimes their communities—at risk. Creative, appropriate education programs are required, such as second-chance and accelerated learning programs. Young people also need vocational skills and job training programs that are market-driven and lead to sustainable employment opportunities. Life skills education is essential, including training in communication skills, financial literacy, HIV/AIDS awareness, leadership development and conflict mediation. Member States must make a commitment to appropriate, quality and relevant learning opportunities for young people, including high-quality secondary education for all, backed by funding and political will.

Refugees deserve special consideration within emergency education as they fall under the responsibility of Member States different from their own. Refugees retain their full right to education, and Member States should accord to refugees the same treatment they accord to nationals. Educational institutions should establish supportive systems for recognizing foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, for remitting fees and charges, and for awarding scholarships; in any event, their systems should be at least as favorable for refugees as for aliens. To assure that refugees reach their full potential, home and host countries should, whenever possible, take an active role in ensuring that children's education is continued and relevant, especially as they make the transition into reintegration, or if they remain in protracted situations.

Prevention, Preparedness, Response

In order for States to meet their obligations on the right to education in emergencies, they must focus on education preparedness, policy and funding. States should ensure that their national policies recognize the right to education in emergencies. Moreover, all States should develop an Education in Emergency preparedness plans as a part of their general education plans, including plans and structures for continuity at all levels – from early childhood education through to secondary and tertiary education -- and through different phases of an emergency. Here specific strategies are needed to ensure safe access for groups that are often discriminated against, such as girls and disabled children. Recognizing that the education sector can provide

continuity across all stages of the continuum from risk reduction to relief to development, States should include education as part of their humanitarian policy and response while linking with longer-term development and disaster prevention policy and aid. Member States should also develop relevant interventions to ensure that displaced children have access to national systems and are integrated into them.

Even when education is included in humanitarian response, the funding levels allocated to education fall far below what is required. Despite recent positive developments following funding from donors such as the Dutch, British, Canadian, Swedish and Norwegian governments, there is still a huge financing gap for education in emergencies and early reconstruction. For instance, in 2008 education represented 4.6% of all humanitarian needs, but represented only 3.2% of all humanitarian funding. The creation of an Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC) Education Cluster enhances predictability, quality, partnership and coordination. Now States have to match this initiative, given the enormous resources needed to provide education in times of crisis. The first step is for Member States to increase their financing of policies and programmes that promote quality education in emergencies, including fee-free primary schooling.

Moreover, funding mechanisms and innovative approaches must continue to adapt to ensure adequate and equitably financed quality education for the long term. To accompany this shift donors must change their focus beyond primary education in emergencies, because post-primary education plays a vital role in consolidating and enhancing knowledge. In line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), States and development partners should increase their long-term predictable and effective aid and ensure that it is used for education in countries affected by emergencies and experiencing conditions of fragility. These funds should reach the most marginalized groups within these countries. Coherent and effective donor partnerships through the OECD/DAC and Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI) seeking to provide funding for fragile states and post-crisis countries should be supported. Moreover, States should use more flexible, timely and innovative mechanisms such as the proposed Education Transition Fund to develop individual, organizational and institutional capacities to strengthen weak government structures.

In emergency settings, a lack of coordination between the government, community and a myriad of non-governmental actors often obstructs access to and the continuation of quality education along the continuum between relief and development. The inclusion of education within the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) cluster initiative is a significant achievement because it indicates that the international community has recognized the critical role that education plays in humanitarian response. Co-led by UNICEF and the Save the Children Alliance, the cluster represents a groundbreaking commitment to more predictable responses, and to preparedness, policy and coordination within the field of education in emergencies. The work of the IASC Education Cluster strengthens the capacity and preparedness of humanitarian personnel and government authorities to plan, coordinate and manage quality educational programmes in emergencies. The education cluster is a key mechanism for supporting States in determining educational needs in emergency situations and responding to them in a coordinated way.

Coordination is increasing among all the actors involved in education in emergencies, and they are delimiting their responsibilities and sharing examples of best practices. Recognition of this progress has resulted in the creation of qualitative standards and indicators which, among other effects, are broadening the legal and political framework in which these actors are expected to operate. The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) developed its *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*; this harmonized framework of principles and paths of action enables participants to coordinate their action and accountability as they prepare for and establish safe, quality educational activities to be used during emergencies and continued through to recovery. States are encouraged to draw on the resources of INEE and other frameworks such as the FTI Progressive Framework and to encourage the IASC Education Cluster to promote the implementation of these education standards. Doing so will help guarantee a scaffold of technical knowledge, tools and good practices with which to address capacity gaps and bring actors together at country and global levels. States can also support efforts to share knowledge and data on equity in education, led by the IASC Education Cluster, to help ensure that capacity is strengthened and that policy development, planning and implementation are both coordinated and improved.

Similarly, disaster risk reduction requires coordination and capacity-building. The Hyogo Framework for Action has established five global priorities and recommends that multi-stakeholder National Platforms for disaster risk reduction are designated as coordinating mechanisms. Education sector concerns for both safe school infrastructure, as well as for school disaster management and integration of disaster prevention education into school curricula, calls for Member States to set up and support an Education Task Force co-led by Ministries of Education and highest level disaster management authorities. Professional and labor associations should appoint their representatives to this Task Force, as should parent and student associations, and other civic society organizations that can contribute to school safety.

In emergency situations, teachers not only enable children to continue learning; they also provide life-saving information and serve as a source of reassurance and normalcy for children and the wider community. Yet the world faces a shortfall of 18 million teachers in the coming decade and the areas that most desperately need teachers are in fragile states. In response to these issues, Member States must increase their investment in teacher training, and in support and supervision for both male and female teachers; they must also ensure that teachers are compensated appropriately.

In addition, proactive measures to prevent disasters and emergencies must be promoted during normal times. This implies teaching disaster prevention, peace education and conflict resolution through both formal curricula and through informal education, drawing upon good practices in community-based and child-led experiential learning. This also means training the faculties of pedagogic institutions, providing in-service training to teachers, and encouraging schools and communities to work together on strategies for risk reduction and prevention.

Moreover, education systems must be transparent and accountable for the children, and their parents and communities that are affected by conflict and disasters. Children and communities make important contributions to wider forms of accountability in disaster-prone countries and conflict-affected fragile states. States and other international partners should support the participation of children so they can voice their views about what they learn, and how they learn and are empowered by the relevant content of education and an active learning process. Participation can enhance children's psychosocial well-being; children who are encouraged to engage in family, school and community can gain the tools to protect themselves and participate in the decisions and events affecting their lives. Moreover, non-governmental actors play a critical role and should continue to represent those without a voice to ensure accountability for quality education in emergency and post-crisis settings.

Education as an Opportunity to Build Back Better for a Peaceful, Prosperous Society

Quality education contributes directly to the social, economic and political stability of societies, helping to reduce the risk of violent conflict by enhancing social cohesion and supporting conflict resolution and peace building. While the chances of long-term peace building increase significantly if a conflict-affected population is educated, the opposite is also true. Inequitable access to social and economic opportunity, including education, is often a cause of conflict and its reform is necessary for sustainable peace. Therefore, crises offer an opportunity to rebuild improved education systems and work with governments and communities towards social transformation by creating more equitable educational systems and structures. These new situations can allow formerly excluded groups, like young children, girls, adolescents, disabled children, refugees and internally displaced people, to attend school, thus improving access to education *and* the quality.

In particular, studies show that educating girls and women is one of the most effective investments a country can make, even in emergency situations. It gives them the tools they need to better protect themselves against HIV/AIDS, and gender-based and general violence; it also improves maternal and child health, improves their own children's access to education, and promotes economic growth. For example, research has shown that an additional year of school for girls can reduce infant mortality by 5 to 10 percent, and that reducing the gender gap in education increases per capita income growth.

Crises also provide an opportunity to teach all members of a community new skills and values, such as the importance of inclusive education and participation, as well as peace, tolerance, conflict resolution, human rights, environmental conservation and disaster prevention. During emergencies, it is imperative that education in emergencies be appropriate and relevant. Children need basic literacy and numeracy skills, but also curricula that are relevant to their needs and that encourages critical thinking. They particularly need competent, well-trained and supported teachers. Attention to curricula is important if the education system is to avoid reproducing materials that may have contributed to divisions, and thus lead to conflict; it can also help to prevent, mitigate and respond to future disasters. Studies show that increased levels of high quality primary and secondary education in a country reduce conflict: across societies, every additional year of formal schooling for males reduces by 20% the risk of their becoming involved in conflict. Moreover, as the Hyogo Framework for Action: *Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* (2005), points out, education can build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels by teaching about hazards in both formal and non-formal learning, by promoting schools as centres for community disaster risk reduction, by empowering children as leaders, and by protecting schools.

Education plays a critical role in building sustainable social cohesion and stability and should be a cornerstone of peace processes; in fact education should be included as a part of peace agreements. Peace processes offer an important opportunity to improve the education system to help foster peace and mitigate future disasters. Moreover, the negotiation process provides education actors with a critical space in which to discuss sector-specific issues, including funding, addressing the root causes of tensions and inequities within the education system, and how educators can support the peace and reconciliation process.

With the average conflict lasting 10 years and families remaining in internally displaced person (IDP) camps for an average of 17 years, the failure to prioritize education in humanitarian response renders entire generations uneducated, developmentally disadvantaged, and unprepared to contribute to their society's recovery. Education unleashes innovation and entrepreneurial skills that are important for economic activity and job creation -- elements critical for stability during times of reconstruction and for longer-term sustainable development. This is also true of refugees and internally displaced people; if they receive a quality education while in exile, they are more likely to develop the skills they need to make use of the existing economic, social, and political systems upon returning home.

Conclusion

Given the critical importance of education in emergencies and these urgent challenges and strategic opportunities, and building upon recent recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education on the subject of education in emergencies, several actions are crucial for the United Nations General Assembly to consider:

- Member States should honour their obligation to fully ensure the right to education for every child within their jurisdiction, without any discrimination, throughout all stages of emergency situations, including the phases of emergency preparedness and reconstruction.
- Member States should include education as an integral component of the humanitarian relief response and in their humanitarian policies, adopting education as a relief measure and prioritizing sustained attention to and funding for it within basic relief assistance through to recovery. In this process, it is necessary to develop well-defined and gender-sensitive targets to measure equity as well as indicators and monitoring tools.
- Member States should increase the financing of policies and programmes that promote quality education in emergencies, including fee-free primary schooling.

The right to education will not be upheld and the Millennium Development Goals will not be met unless all States increase and sustain their commitment to quality education in emergencies.

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