

FOCUS

Education in Emergencies

Every year a girl attends school is an investment in her future; nobody can take from her what she learns. So, too, for every boy.

Quality education is the right of every child and the need of every nation seeking to improve the prospects of its people. Ensuring that all children realize their right to education translates into significant progress for a country committed to meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Aside from any specific time-bound goal, building strong education systems is a proven path to progress.

Yet the right to an education is deeply threatened in times of crisis.

Emergencies can arrive without warning and leave devastating consequences in minutes. They can also be slow to gather pace, extremely protracted or even unacknowledged. However they unfold, such crises can create lasting trauma and leave children extremely vulnerable.

In times of crisis, education is an effective means to help re-establish normalcy in children's lives while enabling them to learn essential life skills. Quality education can also lead to the realization of other rights, including the right to health care, nutrition and protection.



DID YOU KNOW...

- In 2006, approximately 93 million school-age children around the world were out of school; of these, nearly 60 million were in 33 conflict-affected countries and territories.
- Although 10 of these 33 countries and territories are on track to achieve universal primary education by 2015, another 19 have shown no progress at all.
- In conflict-affected countries and territories, 31.3 million of those children not attending primary school in 2006 were girls.
- During a crisis, the constraints on girls' education – most notably the lack of physical security – usually intensify. In such situations, girls face the threat of sexual violence, including rape, sexual exploitation and abuse, prostitution, trafficking and forced pregnancy.
- More than 50 per cent of children who die in earthquakes each year die inside their school building.

UNDERLYING ISSUES

A priority of humanitarian response during armed conflict or natural disaster is securing the safety of affected children and providing for their basic needs. Restoring quality education is an integral part of this response. What's more, the need to restore education may provide an opportunity to 'build back better', which in turn can help countries accelerate their progress towards the international education goals, including universal completion of primary schooling. It might also be the first step towards getting countries back on the path to sustainable development.

Helping countries restore normalcy to children and adolescents affected by emergencies is part of the process of rebuilding

communities, institutions, systems and individual lives in emergency and post-crisis situations. Restoring quality education in countries that have emerged from conflict can be one of the first dividends of peace, and can provide children and their families with hope.

In essence, ensuring education continuity after crises can be cause for social transformation. It can bring together formerly opposing parties around the issue of safeguarding the rights and well-being of all children, paving the way to a better future. Making sure that children affected by emergencies receive an education can help turn a crisis into the opportunity for a better life.

Almost two thirds of children not attending primary school are living in conflict-affected countries and territories (2006)

Source: UNICEF, *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review*, 2009.

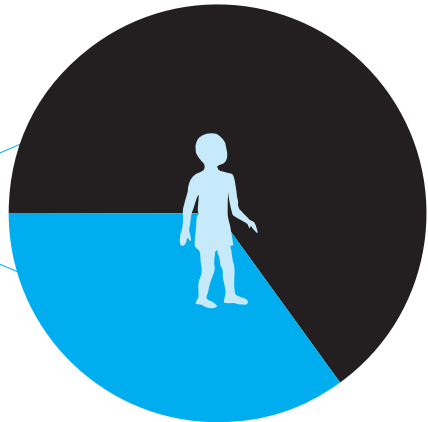
Percentage of children not attending primary school

33 conflict-affected countries and territories

65%

Rest of the world

35%



ACTIONS

Above all, **protect educational facilities from attack during war.** Insist that government or non-state entities involved in conflicts do not target educational facilities.

Rebuild education systems to be better than before in countries affected by emergencies and those in transition. An investment in the education sector is an investment in development. Building the education sector back better is not only good for children, it also inspires society to rediscover itself.

Set up safe, temporary learning spaces with minimal infrastructure within the first six to eight weeks. Provide basic facilities and appropriate basic education, early learning and recreational materials. Provide supplies for quality learning and other basic needs. The learning setting should foster children's participation in structured recreational and educational activities and enable access to basic health and nutrition services.

Establish such community services as water supply and sanitation around schools, where appropriate. Ensure that the drinking water supply is safe, and protect the privacy, dignity and security of women and girls. These are core commitments for children in emergencies.

Reintegrate teachers and children by providing teaching and learning materials and organizing semi-structured recreational activities. If qualified teachers are unavailable, recruit additional teachers among community members.

Enrich emergency school curricula with survival messages and life skills education that promote health and safety, human rights, citizenship and peace.

Beyond the initial response, **re-establish or sustain primary education.** Curriculum documentation and accompanying materials may be lost or may have large sections that are no longer acceptable or relevant. If so, work with the local ministry of education to develop new, appropriate curriculum materials.

For child refugees likely to be repatriated and for internally displaced persons, **work with country or place of origin to formally recognize education undertaken away from home.** Refugees who will be integrated into the host country should benefit from similar efforts.

SPOTLIGHT

ON ACHIEVING RESULTS

Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone have launched the 'Learning Along Borders' initiative, through which governments build high-quality, child-friendly schools in border communities for the purpose of stabilizing fragile communities and preventing conflict.

In **Haiti**, more than 100,000 children received special support from the Ministry of Education and other partners after an economic crisis in April 2008 and a series of four hurricanes in September of the same year. In one region, material assistance (textbooks, uniforms, teaching and learning materials and, in some cases, shoes) was combined with collectively defined school quality improvement projects that were carried out in exchange for fee exemption for all students.

In **Indonesia**, more than 160 child-friendly schools have been completed, fully equipped and furnished; 250 more schools are under construction in the tsunami-affected areas of Aceh and Nias; and 2,214 young children aged 2–6 years old now have access to quality early learning and play centres.

In **Southern Sudan**, a two-decade civil conflict that ended in 2005 left no piped water, no paved roads and little health care or education. By 2007, the 'Go to School' initiative, launched the previous year, had brought more than 1.2 million children into classrooms.

For more information, see:

Emergency Field Handbook: A guide for UNICEF staff, UNICEF, 2005.

Education in Emergencies: A resource tool kit, UNICEF, 2006. UNICEF's comprehensive capacity-building package for education in emergencies field practitioners.

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and United Nations Children's Fund, *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and conflict in a changing world*, OSRSG-CAAC and UNICEF, New York, April 2009.

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