



Education in emergencies

Policy brief 2009

Each year around three-quarters of a million children are caught up in emergencies – violent conflict or natural disasters like floods, earthquakes and hurricanes. In an emergency, people’s homes are often destroyed, their lives disrupted or they are forced to flee, which means that millions of children miss out on education. In the case of protracted emergencies, children may go for years without attending school.

Education – a right to be upheld in all circumstances

In 2008 alone, more than 2 million children were caught up in emergencies as a result of natural disasters or conflict-related crises. Cyclones and earthquakes disrupted the education of more than a million children in Myanmar (Burma), China and Bangladesh. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gaza and Sri Lanka, hundreds of thousands of children had their education interrupted as fresh waves of conflict prevented them from going to school. This is in addition to the 40 million children who live in fragile states and countries affected by conflict who do not have the chance to go to school.¹

Yet a quality education is a fundamental human right, regardless of who you are or where you live. Children in disasters and protracted humanitarian crises have the same rights as all other children. But education has often been considered secondary to other needs such as food, sanitation, water and shelter. Despite the challenges of continuing to provide education in an emergency, governments, as primary duty-bearers, are entrusted to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education in all circumstances. They must take every possible measure to uphold this right, allocating additional funds and developing systems and policies to ensure a quality education for all children. While some governments lack the political will necessary to make education a right for all, many are willing to fulfil their obligation, but lack the effective systems and human and financial resources to do so.

The obligation to ensure children’s right to education during an emergency does not end with individual governments. The international community – including bilateral and multilateral donors and United Nations (UN) agencies – also has an obligation to ensure that children’s right to education is universally fulfilled. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education has noted that: “States have the primary responsibility in law for guaranteeing education, even if they lack the capacity needed to do so. This is why, since the international community’s legal

undertakings have been conceived to fully meet people's needs, these undertakings include the provision of educational cooperation, as provided for in article 28, paragraph 3, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child."²

Whenever an emergency strikes, the world's humanitarian response system acts quickly to support those people affected by the crisis and to protect their human rights. Yet education is not an integral part of every humanitarian response and, as a result, children affected by conflict or natural disasters miss out on weeks, months or years of schooling. With the average conflict lasting 10 years, and children and families who end up living in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) staying there for an average of 17 years, this gap in humanitarian response is not only a short-term violation of children's rights, but also does long-term damage to the opportunities of an entire generation.

Why education in emergencies?

Education is a fundamental human right that cannot simply be ignored or put on hold until more favourable conditions prevail. It also provides substantial benefits, both immediate and longer term, in an emergency context.

The benefits of education in emergencies

In the immediate aftermath of an emergency, education can:

- help protect children from death or bodily harm
- provide lifesaving information on the dangers of unexploded ordnance, as well as simple messages on health and hygiene
- make children less vulnerable to being recruited into armed groups or being trafficked
- reduce the effects of trauma and offer children a sense of normality, structure and hope for the future.

In the longer term, education can:

- be a critical ingredient in the reconstruction of post-conflict societies
- promote conflict resolution, tolerance and respect for human rights
- increase children's earning potential, enabling them to keep their families healthier and improving their ability to break out of the poverty cycle
- play a key role in helping reduce the impacts of future natural disasters by including disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies in the national curriculum.³

In the midst of a crisis and in its aftermath, children's lives are disrupted as they and their families try to cope with the ongoing dangers and rapidly changing situations the emergency brings. They may also be exposed to more extreme suffering – physical injury, bereavement, separation from their families, and displacement. In such contexts children need protection, a sense of security and an everyday routine to help them overcome the psychological trauma they have experienced. Education can provide this.

Perhaps most importantly, Save the Children's experience confirms that education is what children and their families want and ask for during and after emergencies. The humanitarian community must be accountable to affected populations by meeting their need for education.

Progress in delivering education in emergencies

In recent years there has been growing awareness that education in emergencies can protect children as well as contribute to recovery and development. This awareness is reflected in some key developments in policy and practice:

- In 2003 and 2004, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)⁴ developed the Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction.⁵
- In November 2006, the Global Education Cluster, co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children, was formed to strengthen preparedness, coordination and technical capacity within the education sector in order to respond to humanitarian emergencies.
- In November 2008, the Sphere Project, which was created to improve the quality and accountability of disaster response, announced a companionship agreement with INEE, demonstrating its commitment to education in emergencies.
- In March 2009, the UN General Assembly held a debate to highlight the crucial role of education in emergency and post-crisis situations.

This greater recognition of the role of education in emergencies has also resulted in increased funding. There has been an increase in total humanitarian aid for education, with the overall amount received in 2008 (\$235 million) more than double that received in 2006 (\$112m).⁶ This is partly due to advocacy efforts, including Save the Children's Rewrite the Future Campaign, as well as the emergence of pooled funding mechanisms such as the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). CERF recently revised its guidelines to integrate education into its humanitarian strategy, resulting in an increase in its education funding from \$1.1m in 2006 to \$6.8m in 2008.

Despite these promising steps, the international community can and must do much more to support education in emergencies.

What we're calling for

Education to be an immediate and integral part of humanitarian response

Children in disasters and protracted humanitarian crises have the same rights as all other children. Despite this, education has often been considered secondary to other needs such as food, sanitation, water and shelter. A false hierarchy of rights has emerged where education is considered a lower priority, despite its proven benefits for protection and development. In the last few years, humanitarian relief has become more sophisticated, with increased emphasis on recovery and the promotion of human dignity. This approach should always include education, and all donors must include education as part of their humanitarian policy and response. At the moment, only five donors do so (Canada, Denmark, Japan, Norway and Sweden). On average, from 2005 to 2008, only Denmark has met the minimum target of allocating 4.2%⁷ of humanitarian aid to education.

Adequate funding for education in emergencies

Despite recent increases, funding for education in emergencies is still well below what is needed. The Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) – the humanitarian sector's main tool for coordination, strategic planning and programming – manages fundraising for UN agencies and

NGOs during emergencies. In 2008, education funding requirements were \$334m but it only received \$162m,⁸ meaning just 48% of humanitarian need for education was met. This is lower than average: combining all sectors, 70% of overall humanitarian need was met in 2008.⁹

Better coordination and integration of emergency response with long-term development programming

Humanitarian aid for education plays an essential role in rapid-onset emergencies, enabling education to be included in the immediate response and helping to build local capacity. It also facilitates the rebuilding of education systems once the emergency is over, helping communities make the transition from emergency response to long-term recovery. NGOs and others responding to crisis should ensure a consistent approach to education funding as the situation moves from an emergency to a recovery and development context. All those involved in the response should ensure they coordinate their activities in education and other sectors.

Ensure the Global Education Cluster is adequately funded and resourced

The Global Education Cluster, co-led by Save the Children and UNICEF, was not initially included as part of the humanitarian reform agenda's cluster approach. However, it was approved at the end of 2006 in recognition of the importance of consistent, reliable and accountable educational programming in emergencies. At a global level, the Cluster will broaden understanding of the role of education in humanitarian response, coordinate the work of all the different agencies involved, support emergency preparedness plans, and enhance the capacity of emergency response staff. At a national level, the Cluster works to establish networks of agencies on the ground that can provide a coordinated response to emergency situations and ensures collaboration with other clusters, such as protection. The Education Cluster needs to be adequately supported and funded so that those working on education in emergencies have the necessary skills and that the Cluster has the resources required to fulfil its key role.

References

¹ Save the Children (2009) *Last in Line, Last in School 2009: Donor trends in meeting education needs in countries affected by conflict and emergencies*, London: Save the Children

² UN General Assembly (2008) 'Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development: Right to education in emergency situations', Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, V Muñoz A/HRC/8/10, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/135/33/PDF/G0813533.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed 23 March 2009

³ Nicaragua, for example, has DRR as part of its national education plan. In Myanmar (Burma), the Education Cluster and its members have also supported the Ministry of Education in developing a DRR strategy for schools.

⁴ The INEE is a global network of NGOs, donors, UN agencies and researchers working within a humanitarian and development framework to ensure the right to education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction

⁵ INEE, *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*, 2004, www.ineesite.org/index.php/post/inee_handbook/ accessed 23 March 2009

⁶ Data from <http://ocha.unog.ch/fts/> accessed 11 February 2009

⁷ As recommended by Save the Children. This figure is based on the Consolidated Appeals Process – in 2006, 4.2% of humanitarian funds requested were for the education sector, and so this represents the minimum needs for education in emergencies in that year

⁸ In the 2008 CAP education represented 4.6% of all humanitarian needs, but received only 3.2% of all humanitarian funding.

⁹ All humanitarian data is from <http://ocha.unog.ch/fts/> accessed 11 February 2009