CLOSING THE GAP

Adolescent Girls' Access to Education in Conflict-Affected Settings

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INTRODUCTION

Today, 62 million girls around the world are not in school,[1] and at least 20 million of them live in conflict-affected and fragile settings as refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), or otherwise vulnerable populations.[2] For policymakers and practitioners alike, understanding and being able to address this nexus between girls' education and fragile settings is crucial. Crises deepen gender inequities – four of the five countries that currently have the largest gender gaps in education also experience high levels of conflict.[3] An increasing consensus exists on the value of education for displaced girls. However, the challenges to providing quality educational opportunities remain significant. Within this context, educating displaced *adolescent*[4] girls is particularly challenging, but is imperative for long-term stability and prosperity.

Since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, significant progress has been made in increasing girls' primary school enrollment, but secondary school enrollment remains limited. Fewer than one in three girls in Sub-Saharan Africa and less than half of girls in South Asia are currently enrolled in secondary school.[5] Of at least 14 million refugee and internally displaced children between the ages of 3 and 15, only one in two attend primary school and one in four attend the lower secondary school grades.[6] When crises strike, adolescent girls are acutely vulnerable. In these settings, girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school as compared to their male peers.[7]

While these challenges are increasingly well documented, little is known and even less is shared regarding evidence-based solutions. This brief highlights the organizations and institutions driving innovation in this space, and demonstrates possible pathways and successful strategies for confronting components of this global challenge. With the solutions featured in this brief, engaged organizations can leverage their unique capacities to let the 62 million girls who are not in school learn.

Why it matters

Educating girls is the world's single best development investment. Ensuring access to quality and consistent education for girls across the globe is crucial to:

- preventing early or forced marriage;[8]
- lowering maternal and neonatal mortality;[9]
- spurring a woman's financial independence;[10]
- reducing fertility rates;[11]
- creating smaller, more sustainable families;[12]
- improving health and nutrition outcomes for families;[13]
- shrinking rates of HIV/AIDS and malaria;[14]

- opening opportunities for women's political leadership;[15]
- increasing children's educational attainment levels;[16]
- building familial resilience vis-à-vis natural disasters and climate change;[17] and
- boosting national economic growth.[18]

When it comes to promoting sustainable development and fostering viable security, educated girls are force multipliers. The prevalence of today's crises makes this call to action even more urgent. More people are displaced today than at any other point in recorded history,[19] with the average term of displacement lasting 17 years.[20] Although there is a dearth of sound sex-disaggregated data on adolescents, global displacement estimates combined with population demographic data for crisis-affected areas indicate adolescent girls comprise a significant portion of the displaced.[21] Emergency response and development experts need to craft and deploy long-term strategies for educating adolescent girls.

Despite this apparent need, crisis response does not distinguish adolescent girls as a unique population with distinct needs and requiring specific services. As this brief explains, adolescent girls are consistently treated either as women or children.[22] They are neither, yet they tend to carry the burdens of both. This further inhibits their ability to obtain a meaningful education. Moreover, the programs that target youth tend to be more beneficial to males. These programs fail to account for the unique vulnerabilities adolescent girls face, such as increased care-giving responsibilities and heightened personal insecurity when traveling to access such programming, to name a few.[23] A multitude of other reasons, which research expounds on in detail, leaves adolescent girls virtually invisible in humanitarian assistance agendas and outreach.

Importantly, however, crisis also offers opportunity. The convergence of the increasing prevalence of humanitarian crises and the compounding societal benefits of educating girls offers timely openings to build more resilient societies out of the ashes of violence and upheaval. Nowhere is this convergence more vital than in the education of displaced adolescent girls.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

To access education, displaced adolescent girls must overcome several interrelated challenges:
- transition and disruption;
- host country, camp, and emergency response capacity gaps;
- financial support for families;
- personal insecurity; and
- social norms.

While these challenges vary in degree based on context, organizations seeking to facilitate adolescent girls' education must address these issues to deliver effective programming. The sections that follow explore the organizations initiating innovative solutions in this space.

Addressing the Challenges of Transition

All displaced adolescents face the crisis of catching up or making up for lost time. By virtue of their uprooted status, these youths confront transitions that disrupt their access to education. For any given period of time – while in flight, awaiting resettlement/access to a camp, and in search of the next viable resting place – they are not in school. Limited re-entry pathways, foreign language barriers, unpredictable enrollment regulations, bullying, discrimination, social and economic exclusion, and more[24] allow few opportunities to restart an education; even fewer quality opportunities exist. When and if they do settle, they must transition into "foreign" or "temporary" educational spaces, which hamper their educational experience. Moreover, structured formal education may never be available to these young people. Instead, adolescents may need to become adept in a tradable skill to survive. Even in the best circumstances, generations of adolescents miss critical learning opportunities that are not only central to their individual development, but bear significant social and economic consequences for the societies from which they hail.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have launched several initiatives to ease the transition back into school for adolescents. In 2012, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) implemented "catch-up" courses in Kigeme, Rwanda to better integrate Congolese refugee children and adolescents into the Rwandan school system. By the end of the year, nearly 2,800 students had been registered in these "catch-up" courses.[25] The following year, ADRA completed orientation programs for 952 refugee students, allowing them to enroll in Rwandan secondary schools.[26] In Lebanon, the government, in coordination with NGOs such as Save the Children, developed accelerated learning programs on Arabic, French, and mathematics for Syrian children who have been out of school for two or more years. Save the Children has offered "catch-up" courses to 11,000 children in Bekaa, Akkar, and Tripoli.[27] In Azraq refugee camp in Jordan, Relief International has reached over 5,100 Syrian boys and girls with remedial education on Arabic, English, mathematics, and science.[28] These tailored curricula successfully matriculate displaced adolescents into classrooms. However, these organizations do not provide data on student reintegration into secondary schools, nor do they disaggregate their statistics by sex. More robust sex- and age-disaggregated data would shed light on the composition of these accelerated learning programs, and thus facilitate improved access for adolescent girls.

Distance learning also helps fill the educational gap for uprooted adolescents. Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) partnered to launch an accredited and degree-giving online learning center in 2010, specifically targeting refugees in both urban and camp settings.[29] This center has become a collaborative global partnership, known as the Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC:HEM) initiative. Currently, it has learning sites that serve refugees and IDPs living in Malawi, Kenya, Chad, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Jordan, and Myanmar (in partnership with St. Aloysius

Gonzaga English Language Institute), offering both diplomas and certificates, and which to date have matriculated over 3,000 students.[30] JC:HEM also had a learning site in Syria, but it closed in 2012 due to the war.[31] Sex-disaggregated data indicates JC:HEM is successfully reaching adolescent girls (its student population is 46 percent female across years and courses).[32] Adding to this, the mere fact that they provide sex-focused data suggests a commitment to gender equitable education. JC:HEM also found that one of the greatest barriers female students face is more limited foreign language training in comparison to their male peers. In response, JC:HEM encourages female students to participate in its language classes to prepare them for admission to other programs.[33] During the first five years of operation, JC:HEM's English language program had a 60 percent female student body.[34] These efforts show gender-sensitive progress. From its 2010 pilot program up through its 2015 admitted cohort, the JC:HEM Diploma program's female student population has risen from 14 percent to 36 percent.[35] JRS plans to expand the Diploma program to at least 10 more sites with a target of 1,000 students for each academic year.[36]

Information and communication technology offers the possibility of strengthening both existing schools and emerging distance learning centers. The Open Source Educational Management Information System (OpenEMIS), developed by UNESCO, is a tool designed to collect and report data on education systems from multiple sources, and is customized to fit the implementation needs of specific country contexts.[37] OpenEMIS Refugees, a module for tracking education data in emergencies, has been used in Jordan to collect data on the thousands of displaced children attending Jordanian schools.[38] The data is disaggregated by sex and age,[39] among other indicators – a step forward in distinguishing and addressing the unique needs of adolescent girls.

Addressing Capacity

Current levels of funding cannot meet the needs of the displaced. This makes it all the more challenging to secure additional commitments to create and sustain new programming dedicated to adolescent girls. With over 59 million people displaced worldwide, [40] humanitarian assistance providers simply cannot keep pace with current displacement rates. Currently, donors only contribute 50-60 percent of projected requirements annually,[41] with education accounting for only two percent of humanitarian aid[42] provided to conflict-affected and fragile states. Without renewed and enduring commitments from donors, new programming designed to serve adolescent girls simply will not be initiated. Adding to this, humanitarian and development strategies, budgets, and operations are currently siloed, but their operating environments and end goals are increasingly shared. This funding gap is especially pertinent for education, which straddles both crisis relief and post-crisis reconstruction. With protracted crisis situations as the new normal, "relief" and "recovery" must expand so development partners can complement and supplement the work of humanitarian actors.[43]

There has been progress on recognizing the need for better funding streams for education in

emergency settings. Organizations such as the Global Partnership for Education, the International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), and The World Bank Group increasingly devote their resources and convening power to raise the issue of education financing on the global stage. Recognizing the divide between humanitarian and development funding for education, United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education Gordon Brown last year called for a new global emergency education fund to reach children in conflict and natural disaster settings.[44] The Oslo Summit on Education for Development, hosted by the Norwegian government in July 2015, heeded this call. The Summit concluded with the formation of the Commission on the Financing of Global Education Opportunities,[45] which will produce a report on financing education in emergencies for the Secretary-General by September 2016. The Technical Strategy Group, co-chaired by the United Kingdom and Canada, oversees this process, with support from organizations such as INEE and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). INEE recently confirmed the launch of an "Education Crisis Platform" at the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016.[46] This platform should kick-start the process of creating this special fund by generating political and financial commitments from participating governments and institutions.

Even when funding is available, however, service delivery remains problematic due to security, access, and infrastructure gaps. Refugees and IDPs previously gathered in rural camp settings. The camp setting concentrated the displaced in a way that made service provision easier. Today, these populations are scattered. An estimated two-thirds of refugees live outside the traditional refugee camp setting; urban IDP figures are estimated to be even higher.[47] With the displaced dispersed amongst the local population, relief workers find it increasingly challenging to target them for service provision. At the same time, targeting aid to refugees can result in flared tensions with host communities, who may feel relatively deprived.

School overcrowding poses particular problems in the urban context. As UNHCR revealed, adolescent refugee girls cannot register for local schools in Jordan because the schools are full. Of the 23 Syrian refugee girls ages 12-17 who participated in a focus group, only four were able to register for school. Others were turned away for lack of space.[48] With financial support from international donors including the United States,[49] Jordan instituted double shifts, erected prefabricated classrooms, and initiated school refurbishments in 96 public schools to meet this capacity gap.[50] As of December 2015, 145,458 Syrian refugee children are enrolled in the Jordanian public school system. An additional 43,610 receive nontraditional educational support.[51] Reportedly, roughly an even number[52] of boys and girls have matriculated, although the age range of the enrolled refugees is difficult to ascertain.

Addressing Financial Support for Families

With many upfront and hidden costs to sending a child to school, families in crisis suffer from financial constraints that disadvantage adolescent girls. When parents must prioritize whom to educate based on available resources, they often privilege boys. This "son preference" is

also culturally dictated – educating the son is seen as an investment, whereas educating the daughter is seen as a burden.[53] Either because they fear for their daughters' safety and purity or because they are simply buckling under the weight of feeding the whole family, families in crisis frequently cope by marrying their daughters off when they are still children. Moreover, social upheaval and the corresponding spike in gender-based violence spur families to protect the most vulnerable. Again, the outcome is often the increased prevalence of child marriage.[54] For instance, in Jordan, the rate of child marriage among Syrian refugee girls has risen from 8.3 percent in 2011 to 25 percent in 2013.[55] Husbands and in-laws usually insist that child brides remain at home to fulfill household duties,[56] making child marriage and secondary education generally mutually exclusive activities.[57]

Reducing or eliminating fees associated with access to learning can help even the playing field. For Syrian refugees, this occurs at the governmental and multilateral level – Jordan has waived tuition for Syrian refugee students,[58] and, in Lebanon, 200,000 Syrian children ages 3-14 now should be able to receive an education due to a $94 million commitment from UNICEF, UNHCR, The World Bank, and bilateral donors.[59] In other settings, individual scholarships can target the financial insecurity of displaced families. Such is the case for the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) and Berhane Hawen. Although CAMFED does not expressly target displaced girls, it does serve girls living in conflict and fragile settings, and, as such, has initiated innovative solutions that may be applied to a humanitarian context. CAMFED has provided 198,310 girls[60] with secondary school scholarships in Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. These scholarships include not only school fees, but also uniforms, shoes, and stationery.[61] Of that number, a staggering 90 percent of scholarship recipients have completed school.[62] Financial support appears most effective when tied to community engagement efforts. In Ethiopia, the Berhane Hawen program in the Amhara region took a multi-pronged approach to reducing child marriage, including scholarships, hosting community meetings to discuss the status of girls, and developing female mentors for the girls from within their communities.[63] The program targeted 11,000 adolescent girls and has helped 7,200 adolescent girls attend school and complete educational programming.[64]

Besides traditional scholarships, vouchers and unconventional stipends can effectively offset the cost families must bear to send their adolescent girls to school.[65] In Colombia, the government instituted a voucher program to open schooling for displaced students. Voucher winners – randomly assigned by lottery – were, ultimately, 10 percent more likely to complete eighth grade than non-recipients.[66] This program had a larger impact on girls than boys; it was female voucher winners who had a statistically significant increase in additional years of schooling.[67] In Kenya, Investing in Children and their Societies (ICS) provides school uniforms through a lottery system. When evaluated, the program showed that uniforms reduced rates of student absenteeism by 43 percent.[68] The evaluation also revealed that uniforms had a larger impact in reducing girls' absenteeism than boys, although this finding was not statistically significant.[69] In Jordan, school uniforms are a necessity that organizations like the Collateral Repair Project (CRP) provide to refugee families who cannot meet this cost.[70]

The influx of cash into family incomes can even incentivize families to support adolescent girls' education. The following interventions have been initiated in a development context, but their successes hold potential value for programs that serve displaced girls. The government of Haryana, India created a conditional cash transfer to incentivize girls' education, whereupon mothers received payment if their daughters remained unmarried until 18 years of age.[71] Although there is no data on graduation rates for this program, girls in families eligible for the cash transfer attained higher levels of education and dropped out with less frequency compared to girls who were not possible beneficiaries.[72] A different conditional cash transfer program in Brazil, Bolsa Familia, had similar results. The government initiative led to a 9.2 percent increase in school attendance among girls ages 15-17.[73]

Addressing Personal Insecurity

In some cases, both adolescent boys and girls face threats to their personal safety en route to and from school in urban and camp settings alike, as well as within the school environment from both classmates and teachers.[74] They are the prime targets for child soldier recruitment[75] and trafficking,[76] and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).[77] Transportation can be a key point of intervention. In Jordan, urban refugees cannot afford the transportation required to get to and from school sites.[78] In Lebanon, many students walk to school because they cannot pay for transport. In these instances, girls, in particular, are at daily risk of abuse and assault.[79] Inside the classroom, JRS MENA reports that some Syrian refugee children attending public schools in host countries face bullying and discrimination from classmates and teachers.[80] Boys are expressly vulnerable, but reported instances of these vulnerabilities are rare: "parents are often reluctant to report cases, wanting to keep a low profile in a foreign country."[81] Discrimination from teachers can also deter refugee students from attending school. UNHCR reports that in Lebanon, some teachers separate Syrian children from Lebanese children in classrooms, and some Lebanese parents try to prevent their children from associating with Syrian children.[82] In Kenya, Somali refugee children endure prejudicial attitudes from their teachers and other students.[83]

Refugees and aid organizations respond to these challenges in innovative ways. In Mafraq, Jordan, those with the means carpool, and in Ramtha, UNICEF instituted busing.[84] Palestinian refugees living in a Lebanese refugee camp created a "walking bus" to ensure safe passage for adolescent girls to and from school.[85] In the Bekaa Valley, the NGO Iqra runs a "classroom in a bus" for special needs students. This mobile learning center runs two-hour reading and writing workshops for 14 students at a time and up to 42 children a day, although evaluation metrics for the mobile classroom do not disaggregate services by sex.[86] In camp settings, peacekeepers should be utilized as a protective tool. However, they must receive a clear protection mandate to serve as part of the solution – the earlier authorities institute such a mandate, the more effective it will be.[87] That said, recent allegations of peacekeeper abuses[88] limit political will to institute such mandates and challenge their corresponding effectiveness.

Addressing Social Norms

As a group, adolescent girls also confront cultural barriers to education. Displacement compounds these challenges (many of which have been discussed in preceding sections of this brief). They face:

- social isolation at the onset of puberty;
- limited knowledge about sexual health, needs, maturation, and menstruation;
- strict and confining expectations of roles and opportunities because of sex and age;
- disproportionate burdens of household work and care-giving;
- withdrawal from, and lack of safety in, public spaces;
- school drop-out, limited life and/or vocational skills;
- sexual and gender-based violence;
- harmful traditional practices, e.g., early/forced marriage, female genital cutting; and
- migration for work, and limited opportunities to earn and save income.[89]

By virtue of the cultural norms that surround pubescence, adolescent girls face unique challenges in accessing education. Because of inadequate sanitary conditions and lack of private toilets, girls often drop out of school on a monthly basis when they menstruate.[90] Moreover, when girls begin menstruating, their families become increasingly concerned with their security outside the home. These fears keep girls out of the classroom, inside the home, isolated from their peers, and beyond the reach of service providers.[91]

Moreover, service provision for this population is particularly challenging because the concept of adolescence simply does not exist in many places.[92] This omission is expressly acute for females. Girls are deemed women when they begin to menstruate, and thus must assume responsibilities similar to their mothers while also juggling the pressures of school, if they are allowed to continue attending.[93] For some girls living in refugee camps, this may be their first opportunity to access a secondary school education.[94] This should present an opportunity to seize. However, they, and their families, are ill equipped to manage that opportunity alongside their pre-existing familial responsibilities.

Various innovations seek to make schools more comfortable spaces for adolescent girls and young mothers. Though the relationship between menstruation and school absence has recently come under some scrutiny, schools must construct bathrooms that create some semblance of privacy to help keep girls in school.[95] Providing sanitary napkins may also play an important role in this regard.[96] An Oxfam program that addressed water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) needs in 208 schools in Pakistan saw an increase in adolescent girls' enrollment in the schools in which it worked.[97] Similar programs should be erected elsewhere.

Girl clubs and safe spaces do a great deal in establishing girl-friendly spaces in the school environment.[98] In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, the Haiti Adolescent Girls Network created safe spaces for teenage girls, where they receive support from peers and mentors.[99] In Uganda, Pader Girls Academy (PGA) offers both educational and vocational classes to

adolescent girls, young mothers, and survivors of sexual violence.[100] Because caring for children and siblings often bars this population from pursuing secondary education, PGA provides nursery care alongside its educational services.[101] Similarly, in Kenya, Heshima Kenya supports the care of 50 young children in a school nursery, so mothers can simultaneously attend school on site.[102] BRAC, a Bangladeshi NGO that now operates internationally, establishes clubs that target girls ages 13-21. These clubs seek to prevent early pregnancy by providing life skills and financial literacy training, sexual health and family planning education, and a safe social space. As of 2015, 50,000 girls had joined more than 1,200 BRAC girls' clubs in Uganda.[103] A surprising finding of these clubs is that girls who previously dropped out of school were eight percent more likely to want to re-enroll compared to girls in communities without similar clubs.[104]

Alternative education spaces can benefit adolescent girls as well. A USAID initiative with the Afghan Ministry of Education developed community-based education programs to provide education outside the classroom setting. In fragile environments, students gathered in homes, mosques, and community centers to provide a safer and community-supported approach to education. From 2006-2011, the Afghan program reached 105,000 students who were previously out of school, 65 percent of whom were girls, although many beneficiaries were not yet adolescents.[105]

Conclusion

Enabling every girl's education during displacement is a multi-faceted challenge. Yet, educating this demographic is critical to creating a more stable and secure environment out of crisis. Organizations and institutions across the world have been and continue to design and implement innovative solutions to meet this challenge. Only through increased resources, priority-setting, synergy, and coordination can these efforts scale to the degree where the 62 million girls, who are currently not in school, can play active and meaningful roles in shaping the lives of their families, their communities, and their societies, as well as their own. To let girls learn is to move societies from protracted crisis to promising opportunity. The world cannot afford to miss this moment.

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