

**Education in Emergencies:**  
**Benefits, Best Practices, and Partnerships**

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**Abstract**

*In recent years the provision of education in emergencies has gained a marked rise in international support. This brief highlights reasons for the shift, advances in best practices in the field, and one of the key partnerships advancing this field: Between the Sphere Project and the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies.*

**(Key words: emergency education, INEE, Sphere Project)**

## **Abbreviations:**

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| DDR    | Disaster Risk Reduction                           |
| IHL    | International Humanitarian Law                    |
| EFA    | Education for All                                 |
| IHRL   | International Human Rights Law                    |
| INEE   | Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies |
| IRC    | International Rescue Committee                    |
| MDG    | UN Millennium Development Goal                    |
| NGO    | Non-Governmental Organization                     |
| UDHR   | Universal Declaration of Human Rights             |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund                    |

## **Introduction:**

*I have seen how one year of school changes a child and how years of school transform that child's future. I have watched as the power of education saved families from being poor, babies from dying and young girls from lives of servitude. And I have lived long enough to see a generation of children, armed with education, lift up a nation.*

~Graça Machel, Mozambican politician and humanitarian

The right to an education for all is meant to help ensure a life of dignity and is enshrined in numerous international documents and conventions such as the UDHR, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Covenant of Economic, Cultural, and Social Rights. Yet while this fundamental right applies to all, regardless of circumstance, it has often been considered of secondary importance in both natural and human-caused emergencies. However, in recent years this trend has begun to shift. In 2004 the INEE released the *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies*; in 2006 the Global Education Cluster was formed to strengthen preparedness, coordination and technical capacity in educational emergency response; and in 2008 the Sphere Project announced a companionship agreement with the INEE. (Save the Children, 2009) Through these efforts, among others, integrating education into all stages of emergency response has become a higher priority for both aid agencies and donors. This brief highlights several

reasons for this shift in mindset and practice first by outlining the tangible benefits of incorporating education into emergency response, and second by giving special attention to the significance of the work conducted by the INEE, the Sphere Project, including implications of their recent collaboration.

### **Why Education in Emergencies?**

Education in emergencies saves lives. Conflict and disaster destroy normalcy and upend the lives of those affected – this is especially true in the case of children. Young people caught in emergency situations are thrown into unfamiliar and hostile realities – often without the safety nets they once enjoyed such as school and family. Quality educational initiatives employed at the outset of an emergency can mitigate these circumstances and provide much needed survival skills to understand the dangers of a new environment. These include initiatives to teach landmine awareness, living and surviving in refugee camps, basic health and hygiene information, how to protect oneself from sexual abuse, and the provision of psychological support. (Nicolai, 2006) Education also protects the lives of children through the creation of a safe space. As noted in their 2004 Minimum Standards Handbook, the INEE states that “quality education saves lives by providing physical protection from the dangers and exploitation of a crisis environment. When a learner 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 armed forces or organized crime.” (INEE, 2004)

Education in emergencies promotes developmental skills. Susan Nicolai (emergency education officer, Save the Children Alliance) asserts that although basic survival skills are an essential component of emergency education, “individual and social development skills are equally important [and] having at least one constant in a daily life full of change can help

children continue growing both individually and socially.” (Nicolai, 2006) As Nicolai simply states, education in emergency helps children “learn to be.” The importance of this skill set cannot and should not be underestimated in situations where youth are exposed to prolonged periods of psychological distress and/or violence.

Education in emergencies can enhance development and stability. In their 2009 *Re-Write the Future* policy brief, Save the Children states that in the longer term education can be a critical ingredient in the reconstruction of post-conflict post-disaster societies, promote conflict resolution, tolerance and respect for human rights, increase children’s earning potential, and play a central role in reducing the impacts of future disasters by incorporating DDR strategies into national curricula. (Save the Children, 2009) This sentiment is echoed and supported by the INEE findings that a “quality education contributes directly to the social, economic, and political stability of societies...and education reform, which can start soon after an emergency, is necessary to help ensure the protection of education systems and set conflict-affected societies on paths to sustainable peace and development.” (INEE, 2004) Peter Buckland, a senior education specialist, further underscores education’s role in stabilizing conflict when he states that “[w]hile education does not cause wars, nor end them, every education system has the potential either to exacerbate or mitigate the conditions that contribute to violent conflict.” (Buckland, 2006)

Education in emergencies can provide core academic skills. While situational demands will most likely push these programs further along the emergency response continuum, they simply cannot be ignored. A brief look at the numbers of children affected by disaster confirms this point. According to the Save the Children Alliance, more than half of the estimated 72 million children out of school live in conflict affected states, millions more in areas hit by natural

disaster, and on average these children spend eight years in displacement. (Sphere Project and INEE, 2009) These statistics not only portray the magnitude of the problem, both in number of youth affected and the duration of these negative ramifications, but also highlight the futility of pursuing the MDG of universal primary education without seriously addressing the need for education in emergency situations. Allowing generations to go uneducated until a crisis is resolved is not a viable option if the international community is to meet its collective EFA commitments. Furthermore, this lack of education can lead to continued unrest and an exacerbation or reoccurrence of hostilities in conflict zones.

People negatively affected by natural disasters and conflict ask for emergency education. Sphere Project, INEE, and Save the Children reports all confirm that during times of crisis education is a high priority. (Sphere, 2004; INEE 2004; Save the Children, 2009) Schools are often at the heart of a community and education is viewed as the key to providing a better life through increasing each person's ability to participate fully in the life of their society – economically, socially and politically. (INEE, 2004) Without this societal element people can quickly lose hope in a brighter future. The IRC report *Educating Children in Emergency Settings* speaks to this. “Despite the folklore of our work, these crises are more often not life-or-death situations. Rather the predominant experience is a hopeless and purposeless existence.” (Sphere Project and INEE, 2009) This sentiment can be witnessed in refugee camps and conflict zones around the world.

### **Education and Humanitarian Assistance:**

#### ***The Sphere Project***

Founded in 1997 by a consortium of humanitarian NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Sphere Project features a handbook, a broad process of collaboration,

and an expression of commitment to quality and accountability in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. A universal set of minimum standards in emergency response addresses five key sectors of concern: water supply and sanitation, nutrition, food aid, shelter, and health services. (Sphere Project, 2004) Underpinning these standards are two core concepts, namely, “that all possible steps should be taken to alleviate human suffering arising out of calamity and conflict, and second, that those affected by disaster have a right to life with dignity and therefore a right to assistance.” (Sphere Project, 2004)

In 2000 the Sphere group issued the first edition of its handbook. This manual was updated in 2004 to reflect changes in the field of humanitarian assistance and a new version was set for release in April, 2011. All of these documents are grounded in the organization’s Humanitarian Charter as well as the “principles and provisions of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, refugee law and the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*.” (Sphere Project, 2004) They are not intended to be a step-by-step guide to disaster response, but rather, to provide an operational framework in which aid agencies can adapt best practices to fit the context of a particular emergency and provide mechanisms by which their actions and results can be measured.

How these standards translate into tangible outcomes is a two-fold process. First, the standards are qualitatively defined to be applicable to nearly any disaster setting. Second, the standard is reinforced by a qualitatively or quantitatively measured key indicator which functions as a tool to measure the impact of processes used and programs implemented. (Sphere Project, 2004) Through this approach the Sphere standards on one hand can complement a universalistic framework and on the other hand be locally relevant. This is of great importance when working

on cross-cutting issues such as refugee protection, as well as when assessing and identifying vulnerable groups in specific emergency contexts.

### **INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies:**

From its inchoate visualization at the 2000 World Education Forum’s Strategy Session on Education in Emergencies, the INEE quickly grew into a “global network of NGOs, UN agencies, donors, practitioners, researchers and individuals from affected populations working together to ensure the right to education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction.” (INEE, 2004) By 2004 this network, which included over 2,250 individuals from more than 50 countries, released a set of standard minimum guidelines for the implementation of education in emergency situations. The foundation of which is a rights-based approach resting solidly on the large corpus of IHRL, IHL, and refugee law, as well as the Sphere Project’s Humanitarian Charter. The underlying premise of this method is that while some prioritization must occur during a crisis, “human rights in emergencies are the same as human rights at all times and in all situations; they do not disappear, cannot be diluted, or put on hold.” (INEE, 2011) This includes the right to an education.

Additionally the INEE standards, like the Sphere Standards, are meant to be applied universally, and were designed to be flexible enough to accommodate the multitude of complex emergency situations that can and do arise, while at the same time providing a framework for producing tangible results and accountability measures. In order to accomplish this each standard is divided into three separate but interrelated implementation guidelines.

- 1) **Minimum Standards:** These are the qualitative in nature and specify the minimum levels to be attained in the provision of education response.
- 2) **Key Indicators:** These are “signals” that show whether the standard has been attained. They provide a way of measuring and communicating the impact or result of programs, as well as the process or methods used. These may be qualitative or quantitative.

- 3) **Guidance Notes:** These include specific points to consider when applying the standard and indicators in different situations, guidance on tackling practical difficulties, and advice on priority issues. They may also include critical issues relating to the standard or indicators, and describe dilemmas, controversies or gaps in current knowledge. (INEE, 2004)

This sequencing is aimed at facilitating project success by allowing the practitioner to apply a set of best practices within a local context to gauge the vulnerability of affected populations as well as understand the capacity that each of these groups has in the implementation of educational interventions. Furthermore, and of significance, the INEE standards “constitute the first global tool to define a minimum level of educational quality in order to provide assistance that reflects and reinforces the right to a life of dignity.” (Sphere Project and INEE, 2009)

### **The Sphere Project and INEE Collaboration:**

Through the brief descriptions provided here the importance of education in emergencies as well as the similar missions and methods of Sphere and the INEE become clear. Thus, it seems that collaboration between those representing these two frameworks is an idea whose time has come. The formal partnership language reads.

The INEE Minimum Standards present a global framework for coordinated action to enhance the quality of educational preparedness and response, to increase access to safe and relevant learning opportunities, and to promote partnerships for inter-sectoral linkages with health and hygiene, water and sanitation, food aid/nutrition and shelter. The use of the INEE Minimum Standards as a companion to the Sphere Project’s Minimum Standards in Disaster Response will help ensure these linkages are made at the outset of an emergency through multi-sectoral needs assessments, followed by joint planning and holistic response. (Sphere Project and INEE, 2009)

The overall statement, while not including emergency education as a distinct chapter within the Sphere Handbook, clearly identifies education’s salient role in short-term and long-term crisis responses of both organizations. This realization is important for a variety of reasons. One provides the impetus for increased pressure on donors to fund longer-term educational projects and not just the “relief-bubbles.” A second is that by integrating education into all

phases of emergency response, humanitarian organizations will be providing an often neglected, yet community prioritized intervention. A third, by no means less important, indicates that such collaboration will lead to positive results for those affected by natural disasters and conflicts.

If development is the process by which vulnerabilities are reduced and capacities increased, as Anderson and Woodrow (1998) posit, then the partnership between the INEE and Sphere should be seen as a positive step forward. To highlight this statement, comparing the linkages between two of the standards demonstrates how joint planning and using the standards in tandem should achieve both these aims and deliver a more holistic set of programs aimed at relieving suffering.

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|---|---|
| <p><b>INEE Analysis Standard 1: Initial Assessment</b><br/> A timely education assessment of the emergency situation is conducted in a holistic and participatory manner.</p>                         | <p><b>Sphere Common Standard 2: Initial Assessment</b><br/> Assessments provide an understanding of the disaster situation and a clear analysis of threats to life, dignity, health and livelihood to determine, in consultation with relevant authorities, whether an external response is required, and if so, the nature of the response.</p>                                |
| <p><b>INEE Analysis Standard 2: Response Strategy</b><br/> A framework for an education response is developed, including a clear description of the problem and a documented strategy for action.</p> | <p><b>Sphere Common Standard 3: Response</b><br/> A humanitarian response is required in situations where the relevant authorities are unable or unwilling to respond to the protection and assistance needs of the population on the territory over which they have control, and when assessment and analysis indicate that these needs are unmet. (Sphere and INEE, 2009)</p> |

While this partnership obviously necessitates a great deal of further research and continued refinement, it is already producing results. Projects that combine education and shelter, education and water/sanitation, education and health, education and nutrition, and education and protection are creating positive outcomes in the lives of those affected by crisis. This partnership is the culmination of a shift in attitudes and priorities in the field of

humanitarianism, and while it is certain that this collaboration brings with it the inherent difficulties of preserving and protecting education during emergencies, the research indicates that the rewards justify the risks.

To paraphrase Nelson Mandela, “it will be the youth who make the future. It will be them, not us who will fix our wrongs and carry forward all that is right with this world.”

(Mandela, 2000) However, for this to be possible, a large degree of responsibility rests on the collective obligation of those working to alleviate suffering and provide aid to ensure those affected by crisis are provided with the opportunities they require to rebuild what was lost.

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