

December 2006

Education in Darfur: A critical component of humanitarian response

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children



Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289
tel. 212.551.3115
fax. 212.551.3180
wcrwc@womenscommission.org
www.womenscommission.org

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Printed in the United States of America
ISBN: 1-58030-055-3

Mission Statement

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children works to improve the lives and defend the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and youth. We advocate for their inclusion and participation in programs of humanitarian assistance and protection. We provide technical expertise and policy advice to donors and organizations that work with refugees and the displaced. We make recommendations to policy makers based on rigorous research and information gathered on fact-finding missions. We join with refugee women, children and youth to ensure that their voices are heard from the community level to the highest levels of governments and international organizations. We do this in the conviction that their empowerment is the surest route to the greater well-being of all forcibly displaced people.

Acknowledgments

Megan McKenna, senior coordinator, media and communications, and Jenny Perlman Robinson, senior coordinator, education in emergencies, researched and authored this report. It was edited and designed by Diana Quick, director of communications, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children wishes to express its thanks to the International Rescue Committee offices in Khartoum and North and South Darfur, without whose invaluable help the mission would not have been possible, particularly the Child and Youth Protection Development Unit and Sara Abdelhameed; UNICEF; Save the Children Alliance, in particular Save the Children UK and Save the Children USA; UNFPA-Nyala; and Hilary Nasin, intern, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

The Women's Commission also wishes to thank an anonymous donor, the Ford Foundation and the Starfish Foundation for their funding support.

© Photographs by Megan McKenna

Children in Darfur face many challenges in receiving an education: too few teachers, overcrowded classrooms and limited or no supplies, among others. Youth face even more difficult barriers: secondary schools do not exist in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, leaving young people in the camps with nothing to do and little hope for the future. The ever-worsening security situation in Darfur only makes matters worse. In addition, the crisis, which is nearly four years old, is still viewed by the international community as an “emergency,” which means that funding for education is not seen as a priority. This report outlines findings on education from missions taken by the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children in November 2005 and June 2006, and recommends actions the international community can take to ensure that the children and young people of Darfur have a chance to learn while displaced from their homes and communities.

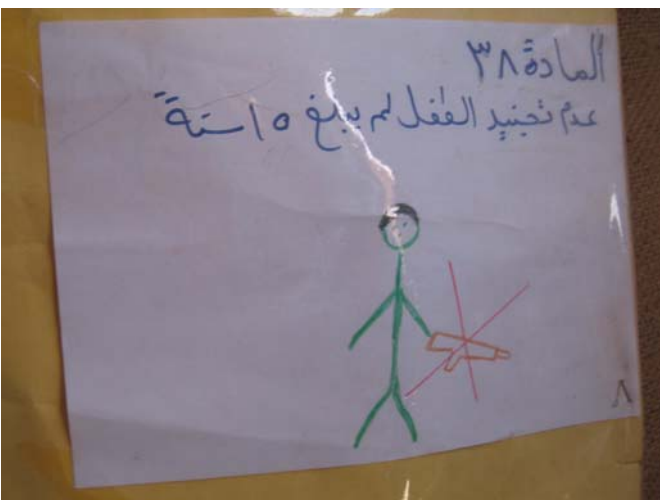


Many girls are in school for the first time in the IDP camps. A teacher in a camp said, “If a girl is not educated, she will have no future.”

Why Education in Emergencies?

For far too long, education has not been considered a priority issue in humanitarian emergencies. Children and youth traumatized by conflict and displacement have missed the opportunity for the structure, stability and sense of normalcy that schooling provides. Schools can be places where life-saving information—such as landmine awareness and HIV/AIDS prevention—is taught, and investing in education enhances peace, eases the return home and furthers the reconciliation process. Because so many “emergencies” are now multi-year, protracted crises, it is even more critical to ensure that education is fully integrated into the humanitarian response and coordinated with a longer-term development process.

Darfur is particularly illustrative of this need. The conflict there is now nearly four years old, yet the Women’s Commission found on missions to Darfur in November 2005 and June 2006 that support for quality and appropriate education for displaced children and youth in Darfur is significantly lacking. The observations and recommendations detailed below are based on meetings with representatives from the Government of Sudan, UN agencies, international and local nongovernmental organizations and teachers, headmasters, students and community leaders.



Displaced children and youth around the world say education is what they need most. It gives them hope for the future and helps them heal from trauma. This drawing is by an IDP child from a camp in north Darfur.

Recent History

The conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan began in February 2003 when two loosely allied rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army and the Justice and Equality Movement, launched an uprising against the Government of Sudan, accusing it of neglecting the impoverished region. The government, in turn, armed proxy, or stand-in, militias known as “Janjaweed” (roughly translated as “devils on horseback”) to suppress the rebellion. The Janjaweed are accused of conducting a campaign of rape, looting and murder to clear civilians from areas considered disloyal to the Sudanese government. The government denies this, saying the militias are merely outlaws. Local disputes are also fueling the war, with people fighting over dwindling resources, such as arable land.¹

The result is one of the world’s most serious ongoing human rights and humanitarian emergencies.

Some analysts suggest that more than 300,000 civilians have been killed by government forces, proxy militias and rebel groups, or have died from disease or malnutrition since the violence began.² The majority of the victims are from the Fur, Zaghawa, Masaalit and other African tribes.

The violence has also led to one of the world’s largest displaced crises. More than 2 million people have been forced to flee their homes and villages. An estimated 1.8 million people now live in more than 100 camps inside Sudan, with another 250,000 in refugee camps across the border in Chad. According to UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund, more than 1 million of the displaced are children under 18, with 320,000 aged five and under.³ Between 70 and 80 percent of the population in the camps are women and children; many of the women are heads of household, having lost or been separated from male family members.⁴

Deteriorating Security

Since the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan and one faction of the rebel groups on May 5, 2006, the security situation has deteriorated significantly, with infighting among rebel groups adding a new layer of complexity to the conflict.⁵ To make matters worse, the Government of Sudan has launched a military offensive against groups that have not signed the agreement. Overall, the failing peace agreement has generated more violence than peace.

The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), which arrived in Darfur in June 2004 to monitor and report on a cease-fire agreement signed the previous month by the Government of Sudan and rebel groups, is also in jeopardy. From the start, AMIS has been under-resourced and under-staffed—rendering it incapable of fulfilling even its original mandate, never mind the additional tasks required by the Darfur Peace Agreement.⁶ Displaced populations increasingly view AMIS as ineffective in preventing attacks. For those who oppose the peace agreement, AMIS’s role in promoting the peace agreement further decreases its credibility.⁷

The marked increase in violence and insecurity has significantly limited access to the displaced populations by humanitarian groups; it is now at an all-time low. The civilian population continues to be attacked and has little or no protection from the fighting forces.



Women and children are the most at-risk population in Darfur; gender-based violence is widespread.

It is estimated that 80 to 90 percent of all villages in Darfur have been destroyed and 5,000 people are still dying every month.⁸ The death toll is expected to dramatically increase unless there is a rapid, large-scale multinational intervention to protect the people of Darfur.

On August 31, 2006, the United Nations Security Council approved a UN peacekeeping force of 17,500 troops and 3,000 police for Darfur. The resolution “invites” the consent of the Government of Sudan for its deployment, however. The Government of Sudan strongly opposes plans for a UN force on its territory. Meanwhile, AMIS’s mandate was extended to December 31, 2006 and expanded to include the protection of civilians. On September 19, 2006, President Bush appointed Andrew S. Natsios as Presidential Special Envoy to lead US efforts to address the ongoing conflict in Darfur.



Without school or skills training, adolescents in the IDP camps have nothing to do and are becoming increasingly frustrated and hopeless for the future.

The Unmet Education Needs of Children and Youth in Darfur

An estimated 28 percent of school-aged children⁹ are now in school in Darfur.¹⁰ While the presence of humanitarian organizations and contributions from the local community have ensured that more children—especially girls—are in school today than ever before, there are still hundreds of thousands of children who do not have access to any primary schools. And the schools that do exist are severely overcrowded and lack infrastructure, appropriately trained and compensated teachers and basic supplies.

The situation is even more dire for displaced young people living in camps who have no access to secondary schools. Many donors and relief organizations consider secondary school a luxury when funding for primary school is already tight. As a result, the only chance these youth have to attend school is if they can afford transportation to the nearest town. And, once there, they must also pay school fees. Very few, if any, IDPs can afford these costs.

Without access to secondary school or vocational training, thousands of displaced teens sit idle in camps all day long—without any constructive activities to fill their time. As is the case anywhere in the world, these youth—with growing frustration and little hope for the future—can become a source of violence and insecurity. They are vulnerable to exploitation and more likely to become involved in delinquent activities and violence.

Youth centers, where young men and women can learn basic literacy and math, as well as income generating skills, are essential, but very few exist in Darfur. These centers, such as those run by the International Rescue Committee and CHF International, are often the first opportunity young people have had to go to school. A 17-year-old girl the Women's Commission interviewed had never been to school before because her village did not have one. "Coming here and learning makes me feel very good," she said. "I hope that the center will continue so that I can encourage others to come and learn."

The Need to Address the Recurring Issue of Teacher Compensation

As in other displaced situations, the Women's Commission continuously heard that teachers' salaries were the most contentious issue—too little to live on and not always paid regularly. One teacher said, "Isn't it ironic that I teach other people's children and can't afford to send my own children to school?" The salaries are paid by the Ministry of Education, which receives less than two percent of the national budget. Some teachers were leaving to work for NGOs; even an NGO driver's salary is more than a teacher's salary.

Addressing Who Should Pay Teachers and How

Building on findings from field visits to Darfur, the Women's Commission is helping to organize a series of roundtables to address the issue of teacher compensation in fragile states, situations of displacement and post-conflict return. The roundtables, which are being held in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children Alliance, on behalf of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, are bringing together representatives from conflict-affected communities and government ministries, teachers, field staff from INGOs and local NGOs, UN agencies, donors and experts from other civil service sectors. They are providing a forum to discuss challenges to adequately compensating teachers in various settings, share good practices and lessons learned, and identify common themes to set the agenda for future work in this area. The roundtables will culminate in the development of draft guidelines on teacher compensation to be vetted and tested in the field. The Women's Commission will work with donor agencies, governments, NGOs and affected communities to gather input to strengthen these guidelines and advocate for their implementation. The first roundtable was held in October 2006 at the World Bank and a follow-up event is planned for early 2007. More information, including a summary of the first discussion, is available at www.womenscommission.org.



Adult literacy classes are very popular in the IDP camps in which they are offered and are often the first chance women have had to learn. These classes not only help women learn to read and write, but also convince them of the importance of education for their daughters.

A volunteer teacher, like the ones above, said, “These children are our brothers and sisters. Some of them didn’t go to school for 3 years because of the war. It is important for them to learn now.”

“Education serves many purposes,” another volunteer teacher said. “Education helps people know their rights, their duties and their roles in society. When there are problems, he doesn’t have to resort to violence to solve them. He can negotiate to solve the problem.”

The result is too few teachers and overcrowded classrooms—sometimes as many as 100 children per class. UNICEF has been training volunteer teachers who live in the camps, but the Ministry of Education refuses to hire them, claiming that all teachers must be trained by the Ministry of Education in order to be considered qualified to teach. The government prefers to hire Ministry of Education teachers and deploy them to camps; these teachers, however, often have a hard time getting to the IDP camps each day and say they do not have enough money to pay for transportation or to buy food in the camps. Recently, the Ministry of Education has agreed to hire some of the volunteer teachers that UNICEF has trained in north Darfur. This is a positive step that should be replicated throughout the region. Without developing creative ways to adequately address the shortage of teachers and payment of salaries, educational quality will continue to suffer and result in low retention and completion rates for children in Darfur.

Traditionally, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) within villages have helped teachers to address the needs and gaps in the schools when the government does not. The PTA system continues in the IDP camps, but most IDPs have few resources with which to help it and the schools. International organizations have been supporting education in the camps, but they cannot continue to do so indefinitely.

“Education is very important in developing a country or a human being. If you develop a human being, you develop a nation. Education is essential for us as women because we are facing many constraints, many problems, and we are living in a society where men are dominant. We feel that as we are human beings, we should contribute in the development of our country and our lives. So that’s why we think education is a very essential and very important tool in changing any society.”

Member of a local teachers’ consortium, Khartoum

A Call for Additional Funding for Education

Traditional humanitarian assistance donors do not view education as life-saving and vital in the emergency stage of a conflict. This is apparent in the funding allocation of humanitarian assistance for education. The US Agency for International Development allocated 1 percent of its overall assistance in Sudan to education in fiscal year 2005.¹¹ As of August 2006, only 1.3 percent of global humanitarian contributions went toward education.¹² In Darfur, however, the “emergency” has gone on for more than three years and the international community is missing opportunities to provide Darfur’s children and youth with their basic human right to education. As one UNICEF official told the Women’s Commission, “Education is a continuous process and one day lost cannot be recovered.”



“We always wanted to be educated, but because of our circumstances, we didn’t find chances to learn,” a female volunteer teacher said. “So, it’s important to help the coming generation get a chance to learn and get an education. Education is important to raise the living standards and improve conditions.”

An IDP girl at a camp that didn’t have a school was learning to read and write at the youth center. She said, “I love learning. I want to be a doctor or a teacher to help my people.”

Kalma Camp in south Darfur is one of the largest camps for internally displaced people in the world. Overcrowding is rampant and tensions are high.

Where there is funding for education programs, it is often unpredictable or suffers from a lack of coordination, resulting in programs that are forced to stop prematurely or are inconsistent with other education interventions. And although there is increasing awareness among donors of the protective elements of education and the pitfalls of the long lag time before development actors enter, the policy of not providing sufficient funding for education in emergencies remains.

“I think education is very important to changing a society. If we want to build a new Sudan our first issue we work on is education. It’s the key to changing anything in the society because it changes the new generation.”
Member of a local teachers’ consortium, Khartoum

Initial Assessment of Education Concerns for Southern Sudanese

The Women’s Commission also visited displaced camps and settlements around Khartoum where an estimated 1.8 million people live, the majority of them southern Sudanese. These people, many of whom have lived in camps for more than 20 years, face similar challenges with few opportunities to attend school, earn an income or prepare for a return home.

There are four official government-recognized IDP camps in Khartoum, but there are many more unofficial “settlements” where IDPs have lived for years. The government camps receive limited services from the government, but the unofficial camps receive little, if any, assistance. Approximately 48 percent of children of school age are not attending school in the Khartoum camps. Teachers are scarce because they are paid so little, if at all. Many leave schools to find better paying jobs. The Khartoum camps are required to use the Ministry of Education curriculum, which is Islamic based and taught in Arabic; English is not taught until at least grade 4. However, the language of education in South Sudan is English and most southern Sudanese are Christian and Animist. This means that the education the southern Sudanese children are receiving will not prepare them for returning home and they will have difficulty integrating into southern Sudanese schools. In addition, the Government of Sudan has in recent years bulldozed sections of camps, including schools, without building new ones.

The Women’s Commission conducted an in-depth mission to South Sudan in November 2006 to look at gaps in the provision of education, particularly around preparations for return, and linkages to livelihood activities.

Recommendations

The responsibility to provide quality education for all children and youth in Darfur ultimately rests with the Government of Sudan, and the international community should continue to press the Government of Sudan to meet those obligations. At the same time, the humanitarian community is playing a critical role in giving desperately needed assistance to the people of Darfur. Aid groups should provide additional education programming, however, and donors should allocate more resources for these services.

- The international community—particularly the United States, China, the Arab League, Russia and the African Union—should pressure the Government of Sudan to immediately accept an international force with the mandate and resources to ensure that civilians are protected and that humanitarian assistance can be delivered safely to those in dire need.
- The US government and other donors should ensure the highest funding level possible for humanitarian assistance in Darfur, including formal and non-formal education programs inside and outside of camps.
- The Government of Sudan, the UN and NGOs should establish more programming for youth, including vocational training and accelerated learning programs designed in collaboration with young women and men. Youth centers, where young men and women can learn basic literacy and math, are also essential. Often these centers are the first opportunity young people have to go to school.
- UNICEF and other donors should continue to encourage the Ministry of Education to recruit, hire and adequately compensate more teachers, beginning with the trained volunteer teachers living in the camps. A priority should be placed on hiring more female teachers and headmasters, which helps to increase girls' enrollment and retention in school.
- Donors, UN, NGOs and representatives from affected communities should come together to address the challenges of teacher compensation and develop coordinated interim strategies, such as pooling resources to establish a transitional fund to support teachers.
- US citizens should write their member of Congress to ask that they support more funding for education in emergency situations worldwide. See www.womenscommission.org for actions to take.

Notes

¹ <http://savedarfur.org/go.php?q=situationInDarfur.html>

² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4268733.stm>

³ <http://www.unicef.org/childalert/darfur/Child%20Alert%20Darfur.pdf>

⁴ http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/Td_ed2.pdf

⁵ <http://www.savedarfur.org/pages/background>

⁶ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Deepening Crisis in Darfur Two Months After the Darfur Peace Agreement: An assessment." 9 August 2006. <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2006/ohchr-sdn-09aug.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ International Crisis Group. "Crisis in Darfur." <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3060&l=1#C2>

⁹ UNICEF. "Child Alert: Darfur." December 2005. <http://www.unicef.org/childalert/darfur/Child%20Alert%20Darfur.pdf>

¹⁰ USAID. Sudan: Monthly Update. August 2006. http://www.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/countries/sudan/docs/sudan_monthly0806.pdf#search=%22USAID.%20Sudan%3A%20Monthly%20Update.%20August%202006.%22

¹¹ UN OCHA. Global Humanitarian Contributions in 2006. As of 05-September-2006.

http://ocha.unog.ch/fts/reports/daily/ocha_R16_Y2006__06082818.pdf

¹² Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Sudan: [http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/\(httpEnvelopes\)/5D39DF4137DEDC47802570B8005AAE78?OpenDocument](http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/(httpEnvelopes)/5D39DF4137DEDC47802570B8005AAE78?OpenDocument)