

Education during humanitarian emergencies: The situation of displaced children and youth in Darfur, Sudan

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Problem: Lack of empirical evidence

More than 39 million children and youth who are affected by armed conflict do not have access to education (Save the Children 2007). While there are no statistics on the total numbers of displaced children and youth out of school worldwide, the Global Survey on Education in Emergencies, a landmark document released by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children in 2004, estimates that more than 27 million displaced children and youth are not in school as a result of the ten situations that have produced the greatest number of uprooted persons (WCRWC 2004). With an increase in the average duration of refugee displacement from nine years in the early 1990s to 17 years today, whole generations of children have little chance to recoup in later years the potential educational investment lost during their years living in the midst of a humanitarian emergency (UNHCR 2005).

Education has long been neglected in emergency relief efforts. Historically, it has been viewed as a development activity, having little to contribute to the basic survival and security of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Since the late 1990s, however, international organizations providing humanitarian assistance have been making the case that education in crisis situations is a vital component of basic protection. This growing interest and commitment found expression when a global network of organizations and individuals—the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)—published *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction* (2004), providing guidelines to practitioners in the field. More recently, this issue has been given heightened attention with the launching of the Educational Partnership for Children of Conflict at the third annual meeting



of the Clinton Global Initiative in New York in September 2007. However, without empirical evidence documenting the critical benefits of education during emergencies, most donors who provide funds for humanitarian disasters do not consider education an essential component of relief efforts. As a result, funding for education is typically a much lower priority in humanitarian emergencies than funding for other basic needs, such as food and shelter.

Aim: Provide empirical evidence of the protective role of education

The Population Council, in collaboration with the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, has launched a two-year research and advocacy project to identify how education can improve the well-being and protection of displaced children and youth. The objective is to use both qualitative and quantitative methods in a number of IDP camps in Darfur, in order to:

- Describe educational environments in a range of settings in Darfur and assess these environments with reference to the INEE Minimum Standards;
- Describe the current circumstances of 10–14-year-old children in the IDP camps and how these relate to the educational conditions actually observed, as well as the changes that have occurred since the beginning of the conflict; and
- Assess the extent to which children who attend schools or non-formal educational programs in the IDP camps actually experience the protective benefits assumed to exist if, and when, schools meet the INEE Minimum Standards.

How: Two-year quantitative and qualitative study in Darfur

The first phase of data collection will involve 24 IDP camps/settlements in North and West Darfur. Basic information on the educational service environment will be gathered, using:

- Community maps, with information on schooling opportunities and humanitarian services; and
- Complete school censuses, with information on physical facilities and staffing.

The next two phases of data collection will take place in six of the locations previously visited. More in-depth information will be gathered using qualitative and quantitative methods, including:

- In-depth interviews with community informants such as teachers and religious leaders, parents, and children;
- Structured questionnaires administered to a random sample of parents and their 10–14-year-olds, focusing on educational experiences; and
- Return visits to formal and nonformal educational facilities serving children who were interviewed.

Data collection is scheduled to begin in April 2008. Each phase of the research will be undertaken by interviewers recruited from the major towns in Darfur, with leadership and training provided by Sudanese social scientists with PhDs in demography and anthropology.

Outcome: Improved well-being of displaced children and youth

The findings from this research study can help to improve the well-being of displaced children and youth by increasing our understanding of educational conditions during emergencies, in particular those aspects that are known to be most beneficial to



the protection and education of children and youth. The Population Council will collaborate with the Women's Commission to produce a report that documents the protective elements of education and offers targeted recommendations for appropriate policies and programs that the United Nations, international and local agencies, and governments should implement. The report will identify measures that make and keep schools safe, as well as factors that lead to insecurity and protection concerns in schools that need to be addressed. The report will be disseminated widely in the humanitarian community, potentially having a beneficial impact in emergency settings beyond Sudan. Detailed research findings will also be disseminated to humanitarian agencies working in Darfur, to encourage action to meet immediate educational needs.

Additional resources are sought to supplement the initial investment made by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more information, contact Cynthia Lloyd, Senior Associate, Population Council, at clloyd@popcouncil.org.

References

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