

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

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More than 39 million children and youth who live in conflict-affected fragile states do not have access to education (Save the Children 2007). While there are no complete 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 conflicts 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 quality 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. However, without empirical evidence documenting the critical benefits of education during emergencies, education is not prioritized as 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: Identify relationship between education and children's well-being

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 may or may not 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:

- Document 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 boys and girls in the IDP camps, assess how they relate to the educational conditions observed, and determine/note any changes for this age group that have occurred since the beginning of the conflict; and
- Assess the extent to which girls and boys who attend schools or non-formal educational programs in the IDP camps actually experience the protective benefits assumed to exist when schools meet the INEE Minimum Standards.

In the analysis of schooling experiences, differences between boys and girls will be a focus of attention so that policy and program recommendations can be tailored to their specific problems and needs.

How: Two-year quantitative and qualitative study in Darfur

The first phase of data collection will involve visits to roughly 20 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 a sub-sample of the locations previously visited. More 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 Ph.D.s in demography and anthropology.

Outcome: Recommendations for improved educational policies and programs to support the needs 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.

Next steps

While initial resources for this project have been generously provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, funds are greatly needed to move this project forward. For more information, contact Cynthia B. Lloyd, Senior Associate, Population Council, at clloyd@popcouncil.org.

References and related resources

- Educational Partnership for Children of Conflict—launched by the Clinton Global Initiative. <http://commitments.clinton-globalinitiative.org/projects.htm?mode=view&rid=210269>.
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