

# Education in Emergencies

## A critical component of humanitarian response

By Jenny Perlman Robinson and Megan McKenna

**E**ducation has long been recognized as vital in the development of nations, particularly after conflict, but it is rarely seen as a priority in humanitarian emergencies, where food, water and shelter are traditionally considered most critical.

This view is changing, however. Education is increasingly being seen as a necessary component of emergency response. Schools can be places where life-saving information—such as landmine awareness and HIV/AIDS prevention—is taught, and where children traumatized by conflict can enjoy the structure, stability and sense of normalcy that schooling provides. 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 provides a vivid example of the unaddressed education needs of children in conflict-affected areas. The crisis is now three years old, yet the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children found on missions to Darfur in June 2006 and November 2005 that support for quality and appropriate education for displaced children and youth in Darfur continues to be significantly lacking.

While the presence of the international community has created more opportunities for children, especially girls, to attend primary school, these schools remain severely overcrowded—as many as 100 children per class—and lack infrastructure, appropriately trained and compensated teachers and basic supplies. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of children still do not have access to any primary schooling. As a UNICEF staff member reminded us, “Education is a continuous process; one day lost can not be recovered.”

Darfur also provides an example of the even greater barriers adolescents face to access education in emergencies. In the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Darfur, no secondary schools exist. Many donors and relief organizations consider secondary school a luxury where 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.

Once there, they must still pay school fees, which very few, if any, internally displaced people can afford.

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



Photo: courtesy of Megan McKenna/  
Women's Commission

are vulnerable to exploitation and more likely to become involved in delinquent activities and violence.

Teacher shortages and teacher compensation are challenges in emergency and chronic crises around the world. The Women's Commission found that pattern repeated in Darfur. Teachers' salaries are often not enough to live on and are not always paid regularly. A teacher in Darfur said, "Isn't it ironic that I teach other people's children and can't afford to send my own children to school?" To ensure quality education for the displaced, governments and the humanitarian community must develop creative ways to address the teacher compensation issue.

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction (INEE), a global network that includes the Women's Commission and InterAction members International Rescue Committee, Save the Children and CARE USA, is working to ensure the right to education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction. INEE has developed the Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction (MSEE) and is holding worldwide trainings to promote the implementation of the INEE Minimum Standards in multiple settings.

While these standards and trainings are key to establishing quality education in emergency settings worldwide, they cannot be implemented without adequate resources. The U.S. government and other donors should ensure the highest level of funding possible for education in emergencies, including Darfur, for formal and non-formal education programs, both inside and outside of camp settings. The children of Darfur, and of other emergencies worldwide, deserve no less.

.....  
*Jenny Perlman Robinson is Senior Coordinator, Education in Emergencies, and Megan McKenna is Senior Coordinator, Media and Communications, at the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.*

# EDUCATION & INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

.....  
**MORE ONLINE MATERIALS**

## Perspectives Magazine: Learning the Future

From the slums of Calcutta to the outskirts of Kabul, more children than ever are getting the opportunity to go to school. But are they getting the education they need to thrive in today's globalized world? The latest edition of OneWorld's Perspectives magazine examines the status of education worldwide, describing the challenges we face and highlighting some of the most promising and innovative initiatives. Find out what governments can be doing, what civil society groups are doing, and what you can do. // [us.oneworld.net](http://us.oneworld.net)

## Early Childhood Development Group (ECD Group)

Website of a diverse consortium of international agencies, donors, NGOs and foundations involved in programming, research, policy-advocacy, monitoring and evaluation for young children (0-8) at risk. // <http://ecdgroup.com>

## The Global Campaign for Education

GCE is a group of organizations, activists and teachers from over 180 countries who believe that education is a basic human right, and that free, quality basic education for every girl, boy, man and woman is not only an essential right, but an achievable goal. They mobilize public pressure on governments and the international community to fulfill their promises to provide free, compulsory public basic education for all people. // [www.campaignforeducation.org](http://www.campaignforeducation.org)

## The Journal of Education for International Development

An online journal that disseminates research and the discussion of policy and development programs to an international community of development practitioners. // [www.equip123.net/JEID](http://www.equip123.net/JEID)

## UNESCO Education for All

UNESCO's clearinghouse for reports, news, and upcoming Education for All meetings and conferences // [www.unesco.org/education/efa](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa)  
Searchable statistics database // [www.uis.unesco.org](http://www.uis.unesco.org)

## United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)

The goal of the United Nations ten year Girls' Education Initiative is to mount a sustained campaign to improve the quality and availability of girls' education through a collaborative partnership of different entities within and outside the United Nations system. The Initiative is designed to contribute to the elimination of gender discrimination and gender disparity in education systems through action at global, national, district and community levels. // [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

.....  
**BOOKS & PUBLICATIONS**

## A Millennium Learning Goal: Measuring Real Progress in Education

By: Deon Filmer, Amer Hasan, Lant Pritchett, Center for Global Development Working Paper, August 2006 // [www.cgdev.org](http://www.cgdev.org)

## What Works in Girls' Education

By: Barbara Herz and Gene B. Sperling, Council on Foreign Relations Press, April 2004. [http://www.cfr.org/publication/6947/what\\_works\\_in\\_girls\\_education.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/6947/what_works_in_girls_education.html)