

Falling Through the Cracks: Millions Missing Out on Education in Emergencies

Mary, 16, lives in Freetown, Sierra Leone. She says she never went to school growing up. “I wanted to go,” she says, “but any time I told my parents this, they discouraged me, saying that school is only for males. They had money for fees, but I still could not go, and instead, I usually did housework and cooking. I often felt left out of social activities, especially because I could not go to any education programs. One day, a friend advised me to attend an adult literacy class offered by FAWE [Forum for African Women Educationalists]. At first, I was not happy to be there, but as time went on, I believed I could make it because I was actually learning to read and write. Now, I am very happy, and I wish that education could be spread through my community, irrespective of age or sex.”¹

Since 1999, the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children (Women's Commission) has partnered with youth groups in Kosovo, northern Uganda and Sierra Leone in participatory research studies to determine the needs and aspirations of adolescents in situations of violent conflict. Data from all three studies indicated the deep and immediate need adolescents feel for education in all forms: primary, secondary, tertiary, informal and non-formal.² Given this information, the Women’s Commission, in conjunction with the Mellon Foundation, developed the first international survey on education in emergencies. The “Global Survey on Education in Emergencies,” released in February 2004, presents the overall international situation of education in emergency situations, as well as 11 country-specific case studies.

According to the report, more than 27 million children and adolescents who are affected by armed conflict do not have access to education. This is particularly true during the initial phases of an emergency; however, it is also the case in situations of long-term conflict and displacement. When children do not have access to education, the daily

¹ Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Precious Resources: Adolescents in the Reconstruction of Sierra Leone*. New York. 2002.

² Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Making the Choice for a Better Life: Promoting the Protection and Capacity of Kosovo's Youth*. 2001; *Against All Odds: Surviving the War on Adolescents. Promoting the Protection and Capacity of Ugandan and Sudanese Adolescents in Northern Uganda*. 2001; *Precious Resources: Adolescents in the Reconstruction of Sierra Leone*. 2002.

structure and routine that are important factors in the healthy development of children disappear. The safe space that a school can provide is no longer available. Children do not learn the literacy, numeracy and life-skills necessary to increase self-esteem and, in the near or distant future, participate fully in the workforce. This leaves them without jobs and countries without skilled workers. The number of girls in school, already fewer than boys after grade one, drops precipitously in situations of armed conflict.

The Women's Commission will undertake an advocacy campaign on education in emergencies, to raise awareness of the lack of educational opportunities for children and adolescents in situations of violent conflict, to increase education lines in humanitarian aid budgets and to make sure that adolescents, girls in particular, have access to all types of education.

This article presents options for advocacy and research on a wider scale, based on existing literature and interviews; it is by no means a complete list of possibilities, but a place to begin for individuals and organizations who would like to become involved in advocacy work.

Education in Emergency: Some Definitions

The term "emergency" holds different meanings for different organizations and people. Emergency has most often been defined as a natural disaster, such as typhoons or floods, or a situation of violent conflict, both of which can cause displacement of people. There are three main groups of people in emergency situations that need education: refugees, IDPs and people within their own communities whose lives have been disrupted by conflict, disaster or other emergency.³ Currently, refugees in camps have the greatest access to education; relief organizations are often present and education is beginning to make inroads into relief programs. Urban refugees often live "hidden" lives, keeping low profiles to avoid deportation. Little in the way of education exists for them. IDPs are also in extremely vulnerable situations regarding provision of education.⁴ Governments, particularly in situations of violent conflict, may not be in a position to provide relief, including education, or may believe they have reason to withhold relief due to the

³ Sinclair, Margaret, *Planning Education in and After Emergencies*, UNESCO: Paris, 2002.

⁴ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, New York, 2004.

political position of the IDP community. They may use lack of relief as a weapon of war, as seen in Darfur, Sudan.

Within these three groups, there are sub-groups that are particularly liable to lack of access to education in emergencies: adolescents at the age to attend secondary education; girls of all ages; HIV-positive children and adolescents; and those with disabilities.⁵

Needs:

- Development of universal minimum standards for education in emergencies.⁶
- Expansion of the definition of “emergency situation.”
- Provision of education for IDPs, and rural and urban refugee populations.
- Educational opportunities for the most vulnerable.

Coordination Between Relief Organizations

Education has been an area that has fallen through the cracks in emergency situations, often due to organizational mandates and the way in which education is conceptualized.

Education, historically, has been viewed as a development activity, having little to contribute to the basic security and health needs of refugees and IDPs.⁷

UNHCR provides relief, including education to refugees, and in some cases UNICEF provides relief to IDPs. There is some flexibility in mandate in emergency situations, and terms of agreement between UNICEF, UNHCR and UNESCO have been drafted.”⁸

Needs:

- Clarity of definition of and international mandate for education as necessary in emergencies.
- Advocacy with donor agencies, governments and NGOs about the need for education in emergency situations.
- Coordination of donor governments and organizations around education⁹; INEE Minimum Standards will provide an excellent foundation.

⁵ DfID, Quality and Access to Education for Refugee and Internally Displaced Children – Assuring a More Secure Future. Unpublished report. 2004.

⁶ International Network for Education in Emergencies, *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction: A commitment to access, quality and accountability*. 2004. <http://www.ineesite.org/standards/default.asp>

⁷ Pigozzi

⁸ See Pigozzi, page 8.

- Partnerships between donor organizations and NGOs for service delivery.¹⁰
- To view education not solely as a “quick fix” during emergencies, but within a continuum of learning.

Gender

After grade 1, girls’ enrollment in school drops and continues to decrease throughout primary and secondary levels. This trend is exacerbated in situations of violent conflict, although many of the reasons are the same. Cultural norms may dictate that boys should attend school, and that the role of a girl is to remain home and help with domestic chores. There may be a predominance of male teachers, leaving girls without role models and subjecting them to situations in which male teachers may demand sex for good grades. In conflict situations, girls may not be able to get to and from the educational site safely and consequently may stay home; it has been shown that the effect of conflict on mobility of girls and boys is very different; boys tend to be more mobile, and girls less. There may be no separate latrines for girls and no sanitary supplies. Classrooms may be age- and gender-integrated and young girls may be seated next to adolescent men, creating a potentially uncomfortable situation for both of them.¹¹

Needs:

- Early childhood education to help get girls in school and increase retention through primary school.
- Separate classrooms in some situations.
- Age-appropriate classrooms (this is necessary for boys as well as girls).
- Safety to, in and from school setting; this can be through parental or adult escorts, or security forces trained in gender-based violence and violence against children.
- Ample, separate latrines for girls and boys.
- Available sanitary supplies.
- Gender equity in access and enrollment, gender incentives such as foodstuffs in exchange for attendance, and gender-friendly curriculum and settings.

⁹ Pigozzi

¹⁰ DfID

¹¹ Sinclair, M., and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Global Survey of Education in Emergencies*.

Geography

Rural dwellers, whether IDPs or people living in conflict zones, may have great distances to travel to attend school, causing school to interfere with other duties. In other situations, educational opportunities do not exist at all. Urban refugees or IDPs are often invisible because they fear for their safety or fear deportation; programs, either formal or informal, have not been developed because populations have not been identified.

Those with the greatest possibility of access to education in situations of violent conflict are those living in refugee camps due to the influx of aid from the outside and the concentrated nature of the situation.

Needs:

- Access to education, whether formal or non-formal, for rural refugees and IDPs or those living in conflict zones.
- Provision of education for urban refugees and IDPs.

Community Involvement

Social and cultural structures may be deeply rent in refugee and IDP situations, as well as in communities that are directly involved in violent conflict but remain “at home.”

Livelihoods, roles, routines and decision-making may be altered or lost, causing people to engage in activities or behaviors that may not have been prevalent prior to the emergency. During emergencies, children and adolescents who have not had access to education may be more prone to involvement in illegal activities to generate income for themselves and their families. Community involvement in education is critically important, to make sure schools are established and are considered safe spaces. Work may need to be undertaken with communities to raise awareness of the importance of educating girls.¹²

The creation of an education center within a community can give “structure and purpose to a community and assure institutional care for kids, which is a basic need.”¹³ Education

¹² Sinclair, M.

¹³ Sommers, Marc, *Children, Education and War: Reaching education for all (EFA) objectives in countries affected by conflict*. Working Paper. The World Bank: Washington, DC, 2002.

can act as a stabilizing force for dislocated or undermined communities both during and after conflict.

Needs:

- Use existing educational resources and structures to maintain roles and provide stability in emergency situations.¹⁴
- Community partnering when creating educational structures and curriculum to include and support inclusive, well-functioning local educational programs.
- Inclusion of children and youth in determining educational programming.

Orientation to Emergency Education and Curriculum Development

Two main schools of thought have developed around education in emergencies: the “phase-based” approach and the “child-centered” approach. Phase-based is a temporal framework grounded in three phases of an emergency: before, during and after. Phase-based education includes formal and non-formal education, life skills and recreational programs. Any of these types of education can take place during any of the phases of an emergency depending on need.¹⁵

The child-centered approach begins with a needs assessment in consultation with the victims of an emergency and incorporates existing institutions into its plan. Community awareness is part of this approach, with a focus on getting children, particularly girls, back into school. Education focuses on the community as a whole, not solely primary education and young children; literacy and life skills and vocational programs for adolescents and adults and early childhood education are included.¹⁶

In situations of emergency, most educational criteria and programs focus on primary education; however, this is not sufficient. Literacy and numeracy training, although these are critically important, need to be presented alongside other information. Life skills, for example, gender-based violence training and assistance, safety concerns such as mine awareness, and health concerns regarding HIV/AIDS, potable water and procurement of food should be included. Peace education and conflict resolutions skills are taught in an

¹⁴ Pigozzi

¹⁵ Nicolai, Susan and Triplehorn, Carl, *The Role of Education in Protecting Children in Conflict*. Overseas Development Institute: London. 2003.

¹⁶ Nicolai and Triplehorn.

attempt to reduce current violence and prevent post-conflict recurrence. Psychosocial issues, such as acknowledgement of grief and loss and help for victims of gender-based violence, should have a place in the curriculum. Current literature indicates the need for indigenous curricula in the home language of the population, unless this promotes hatred or division, so that education can be seamless upon repatriation. Classes in planning for and transitioning to post-conflict situations should be developed and taught.¹⁷

Secondary education is sorely neglected in current education strategies and programs. When it is considered, the focus is usually on scholarships or technical training; although scholarships and technical training should be included as a component of education in emergencies, formal secondary education should also be offered.¹⁸

Needs:

- Variety of models of education for emergency situations that have been empirically tested for success.¹⁹
- Education for all ages; given that primary education is currently cited as the main area for action, advocacy needs to be undertaken in areas of early childhood, secondary and adult education.
- Broad-spectrum curricula that include life skills, psychosocial resources, health, safety, gender-based violence and advocacy information.
- Secondary and technical training to be directed toward the formal or informal job market, and should include programs attractive to both adolescent boys and girls.
- Field-level monitoring of education programs.
- Education and curricula need to be developed for children and adolescents in long-term refugee situations, such as the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Teachers

A fundamental reason for lack of education in emergency situations is lack of trained teachers able to conduct classes in the language of the students. Teachers have been targets during situations of conflict; they can be seen as educating a population another

¹⁷ Payne, Lina and Fraser, Erika. *Quality and Access to Education for Refugee and Internally Displaced Children (including young adults)*. Social Development Direct: UK. 2004.

¹⁸ Payne and Fraser.

¹⁹ Pigozzi; Sommers.

group does not want educated, as teaching material the group does not condone or killed as a warning to a community.²⁰

Teachers often are not paid during situations of emergency, or are paid substantially less than prior to the conflict. There may not be enough women teachers to conduct classes, leaving girls without educational possibilities and role models. Teachers may also be hired even though they do not have qualifications to teach.²¹

Needs:

- Inclusion of existing teachers in program development and teaching.
- Pay for teachers during emergencies.
- Greater numbers of female teachers.
- Teacher training programs, including training in gender-based violence and human rights.

Material and Structural Needs

Educational facilities in situations of conflict may not exist or have educational materials available. In addition, basic amenities to maintain the health and well-being of students, e.g., potable water, food and sanitation, should be available.²²

Needs:

- Latrines.
- Meals during school hours.
- Potable water.
- Safe space in which to hold classes.
- Educational materials in the language of the population.

Potential Drawbacks to Education in Emergencies

There are many factors that can influence whether education in an emergency situation contributes to the overall health of the community and toward a peace process, or whether it will be viewed and act as a divisive force. Education can divide communities if

²⁰ Women's Commission, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*.

²¹ Women's Commission, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*.

²² Women's Commission, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*.

some children/adolescents have access (child soldiers, refugees) and others do not (remaining community), if the curriculum is such that it favors one group over another or if teachers are teaching hatred for the opposing group. Schools may be segregated by local authorities or national governments to ensure the inferior education of one side or another, guaranteeing less opportunity for job competition or political participation.²³ Schools can be targets for recruitment by armed groups or governments, or may be sites for bombings while students are in classes.²⁴ On a more positive note, refugee and IDP camps can be places where, given the disruption of social structures, girls may attend school for the first time; however, in some instances, refugee/IDP situations create a more conservative culture and may reduce the possibility of girls attending classes.

Needs:

- Holistic assessment of the community/camp including all parties to provide an education system that works for all.
- Equitably distributed resources to all parts of the community.
- Inclusion of the community/camp in programs for refugees, IDPs and child soldiers so that all benefit.

Research Needs

Given that education in emergencies is an emerging field within humanitarian work, much information is needed. The following areas are suggestions for studies to gain that information.

- Evaluative studies of current education programs, including assessing how education can provide learners physical, cognitive and psychosocial protection.
- The lives of children and adolescents who are not in school, particularly those in rural areas and urban areas to determine creative school delivery.²⁵
- Male and female youth and adolescents surveyed to determine what they need from education programs and ways to create programs that will attract them.²⁶

²³ Sommers.

²⁴ Nicolai, Triplehorn.

²⁵ Sommers.

²⁶ Sommers.

- Reasons for girls attending or not attending school need to be gathered so that salient interventions can be developed.²⁷
- Need to understand how education or vocational training can improve the life chances for children and adolescents in vulnerable situations.²⁸
- Evaluation of peace education and conflict resolution programs.²⁹
- Need to determine viable educational and vocational innovations, e.g., computers, micro-credit, participatory methods for research and educational development.³⁰
- Need for information on how changing circumstances can prevent school attendance even when it is available, e.g., landmines, lack of money for uniforms, books, school fees, lack of safety for children—rape and kidnapping, need for kids to work to provide money for family, etc.³¹

Conclusion

Unless support to education in emergencies increases, many of the 27 million children and youth affected by conflict who are not getting an education will never go to school or learn vocational and other skills they need to survive and thrive.³² The international community has committed that all children everywhere have the right to complete primary education of good quality. While this article by no means provides a comprehensive list of educational needs and research topics for children and adolescents in situations of violent conflict, it is offered as a place to start.

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²⁷ Sommers.

²⁸ DfID.

²⁹ DfID.

³⁰ Sommers.

³¹ Pigozzi.

³² Women's Commission, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*.