



Education in Emergencies: A Precondition to Meeting the Millennium Development Goals

The Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies, International Rescue Committee, International Save the Children Alliance and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children welcome the Secretary-General's report "In Larger Freedom: Toward development, security and human rights for all". We share the view of the Secretary-General that development, peace and human rights are inextricably linked and believe that education is a precondition for progress on each of the interrelated goals. Indeed, none of the goals and recommendations put forth in the Secretary-General's report – freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom to live in dignity – can be accomplished without an increased and sustained effort to ensure quality and relevant education in emergencies for conflict-affected populations, including refugees, returnees and internally displaced people.

Education is a basic human right;¹ in emergencies, chronic crises and early reconstruction it can save lives through the dissemination of key survival messages, including landmine awareness, HIV/AIDS prevention, and basic hygiene and health care. Education supplies essential life and cognitive skills that give children hope for a better future and enable the peaceful recovery of a war-torn society. Without the skills that a basic education can provide, societies lack an educated workforce, which is essential for post-conflict reconstruction that can tackle poverty and create sustainable development. Quality education in emergency situations can provide structure and stability for children and adolescents who are traumatized by conflict and displacement. Furthermore, attending school can lessen the chance that a child will be recruited into or join a fighting group, be sexually or economically exploited or exposed to other risks. For girls, this is particularly important given that they more often are subject to rape and other forms of gender-based violence.

The Millennium Declaration, adopted by 189 governments in 2000, pledged: "To ensure that, by [2015], children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education." However, these goals will not be met without immediate action to ensure access for all children and adolescents to quality and relevant education in emergency situations.

In areas affected by emergencies, both conflict and natural disasters, the Millennium Development education goals are the furthest from being met. According to UNESCO, half of the estimated 104 million out-of-school children live in countries affected by or recovering from conflict.² These children, whether refugees, internally displaced persons, or those who have not

¹ This right is articulated in various international humanitarian and human rights instruments, including the Geneva Conventions, which apply in times of war, as well as the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many regional rights instruments.

² http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=38521&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

been forced to relocate but have had their social structure disrupted, are denied their right to education.

RECOMMENDATIONS³

In order to meet the Millennium Development Goals, the international community must prioritize quality education in emergency response in the following ways:

All local and international actors must ensure access to education, especially for girls

Girls' education is the best single investment a country can make. Girls' school attendance improves their chances of breaking the cycle of poverty and becoming mothers who raise healthier children and sending their own children – boys and girls – to school. However, 76 out of 128 countries are currently not on track to meet goal #3 on getting equal numbers of girls and boys into school by 2005.⁴ To reach the education and gender equality goals, countries must enroll all school-aged children and keep them in school. Education providers must assess the particular needs of vulnerable groups with special needs, such as the disabled, adolescent girls, children associated with fighting forces, teenage mothers, etc., to ensure that they benefit from education opportunities. Educational interventions should focus not only on providing formal and non-formal educational services, but also on addressing the obstacles, such as discrimination, school fees and language barriers, that exclude certain groups.

Donors must ensure adequate funding for education at the onset of an emergency and throughout the post-conflict reconstruction phase

Lack of funding for education in emergency situations is a key barrier to ensuring quality education in the development phase. Traditionally, education has been seen as a long-term development activity and not as a humanitarian priority. The result is that education falls through the cracks in emergency situations and there is no solid foundation upon which to reconstruct the education system in the in the post-conflict and disaster reconstruction phases. Long-term funding must be committed for education in emergencies through to reconstruction and development.

All local and international actors must ensure that all individuals have access to QUALITY and APPROPRIATE education opportunities

Quality and appropriate education in emergencies can provide a safe, protective environment, so that learners are able to improve not only their cognitive skills, but also prevent a cycle of violence. Quality and appropriate education includes a multitude of elements, including 1) a safe learning environment, 2) competent and well-trained teachers who are knowledgeable in the subject matter, 3) adequate materials for teaching and learning, 4) participatory methods of instruction and 5) reasonable class sizes. Curricula should be relevant to the present and anticipated future needs of the learners, including information on peace education, civic education, mine awareness, HIV/AIDS, human rights and the environment. Supplementary life skills education should be available for children who are not in school, their parents, the elderly and marginalized groups.

³ Recommendations are based on the INEE's Minimum Standards on Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction.

⁴ Save the Children. State of the World's Mothers 2005.

http://www.savethechildren.org/mothers/report_2005/images/SOWM_2005.pdf

Humanitarian organizations, governments and community members must improve their coordination around education

In emergency situations, there is often a lack of coordination, with education programs being conducted independently by different stakeholders. Inter-agency coordination mechanisms are needed at settlement/community, district, national and regional levels, and they must be inclusive and transparent. Such mechanisms are essential for conducting needs assessments, developing standardized approaches, and sharing resources and information between all actors and stakeholders. In addition, education should be coordinated within the larger initial humanitarian response of food, shelter, health, and water and sanitation interventions.

The international community must promote and implement the Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction

The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies' (INEE) first ever set of global Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies provide a universal framework for improving the development of appropriate and quality education programs through all stages of an emergency. INEE encourages all organizations and individuals to be involved in the promotion and implementation of the minimum standards: www.ineesite.org/standards/default.asp.

In order to accomplish these recommendations and make progress on each of the MDGs, a first step is to ensure broad based civil society participation in the MDG +5 Summit in September as well as to follow the Secretary-General's recommendation that the UN General Assembly should establish mechanisms to engage fully and systematically with civil society.⁵

For more information, please visit the Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies www.ineesite.org; International Rescue Committee www.theIRC.org; International Save the Children Alliance www.savethechildren.net; and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children www.womenscommission.org.

⁵ <http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/report-largerfreedom.pdf>