

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 Refugee Commission 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 (Women's Refugee Commission 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, policymakers, and donors in the field. However, without empirical evidence documenting the current environment for education provided during emergencies as well as its protective benefits for children, education is not prioritized as an essential component of



relief efforts. Currently, only six bilateral donors include education as part of their humanitarian response plans (UN press release 2009). 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.

In 2007, the Women's Refugee Commission and the Population Council collaborated on a research project in the Darfur region of Sudan to provide evidence on the role of education in conflict. Darfur has been significantly affected by displacement from ongoing conflict. By the end of 2008, the conflict in Sudan had internally displaced roughly 1.3 million people in North and West Darfur. With 26 percent of the Sudanese population in the age range of 5–14, an estimated 338,000 of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in these two regions are of primary school age and therefore in need of education.



Project description

The Population Council and the Women's Refugee Commission launched a research project to identify the link between education and children's protection and well-being in Darfur, Sudan. The objective was to document the educational environment in a range of internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Darfur, describe the circumstances of primary-school-age children within and across diverse settings, and assess how these circumstances relate to educational conditions observed. The research also aimed to assess the extent to which children in IDP communities experienced the protective benefits of educational programs that are assumed to exist. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence was gathered to guide policies and programs in addressing the needs of children in conflict settings. The project received guidance from a 13-member international advisory group, comprised of practitioners, policymakers, and donors who work on these issues in conflict-affected areas.

The quantitative study consisted of a survey of basic educational services and facilities in a randomly selected sample of IDP communities in North and West Darfur. For reasons of security, the survey did not cover IDP communities in South Darfur. The survey was designed to provide a more accurate picture of the state of educational services for displaced children of primary school age (6–14 year olds) residing in formal and non-formal settlements in the Dar-

fur region. The study also aimed to identify gaps in school coverage and access for girls and boys, and highlight issues that affect the quality of education, such as facilities, class size, and teacher training and availability. A sample of 17 out of 68 IDP communities in North and West Darfur was selected. Based on the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2008) population estimates for October 2008, the ten selected study communities in West Darfur covered approximately 25 percent of the displaced population estimated to be living in the state, while the sample of seven communities in North Darfur covered roughly 30 percent of the state's displaced population. The IDP communities sampled differed from one another according to many characteristics, including year of initial displacement of the resident population, the ethnic diversity of the settlement, the overall population size, the number of new arrivals, and the extent to which the displaced population had access to educational opportunities available to the host population. Communities also differed in terms of the presence of NGOs, access to external resources as a result of proximity to a town or capital city, the number of formal and non-formal schools in relation to the school-age population, and other facilities, in particular health facilities. Basic information on the educational service environment was gathered, using community maps, with information on formal and non-formal schooling opportunities and humanitarian services; and primary school censuses, with information on physical facilities and staffing.

Findings of the quantitative study were published in a report entitled *Schooling and Conflict in Darfur: A Snapshot of Basic Education Services for Displaced Children* (Lloyd et al. 2010). The main findings were:

- Eighty-one primary schools were found to be serving the displaced population in the 17 communities visited, with at least one school available for boys and girls in every IDP community. However, only 45 of these schools (56 percent) provided instruction in all eight required grades.
- Girls and boys had equal access to primary school, yet displaced girls comprised 44 percent of IDP enrollment in primary schools in the 17 communities visited.
- Access to water and sanitation was lacking at many schools. Less than half of schools had school feeding programs.
- Shortages of teachers were common, ranging from as few as ten to as many as 70 teachers. While 55 percent of all primary school teachers were female, the distribution of female teachers ranged from 10 percent in some communities to 70 percent in others.



- Half of all teachers lacked qualifications, the percentage of teachers with certificates ranging from 9 percent to 87 percent (with a mean of 47 percent).

The report also presented recommendations and highlighted some of the challenges of conducting the research in a conflict setting.

The qualitative study was conducted subsequently in a sub-sample of the locations previously visited. This qualitative phase was completed in seven communities in North Darfur, using in-depth interviews with key informants, including teachers, community and religious leaders, parents, and children. The goal was to document community experiences of conflict and displacement and ascertain their perspectives on education and its protective role in displaced settings. Analysis showed that all those interviewed, regardless of sex, age, or position, valued the protective role of education for children and adolescents and the security it provides in their current setting and for a better future for their communities. The majority of interviewees noted gaps such as poor infrastructure, lack of toilets and water in some schools, and shortages of teachers and textbooks. Parents also complained about the high school fees.



Achievement, outcomes, and impact

Staff from the Population Council and the Women's Refugee Commission were invited to various forums, where they highlighted the need for increased attention to and support for the educational needs of children and young people in Darfur. Contacts included research and learning networks such as the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, the Columbia University–led Care and Protection of Children in Crisis, the UN Graca Machel +10 Year Strategic Review of the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, and the National Academy of Sciences.

In April 2009, the Women's Refugee Commission organized a panel session on "Researching Education and Protection in Humanitarian Emergencies" at the INEE Global Consultation in Istanbul, Turkey. The event brought together 250 practitioners, researchers, and policymakers from national and international NGOs, UN agencies, multilateral institutions, government agencies, teachers' unions, and academic institutions. The Population Council was invited to discuss the research project, which included initial findings and the challenges and lessons learned in conducting research in a conflict environment.

This project has made a significant contribution to the dialogue on education and the protection of children in conflict. It also demonstrated that despite challenges, research is possible in conflict settings and is necessary to ensure that programs take into account the specific circumstances within the conflict setting.

References and related resources

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