



ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE Human Rights Council

ISSUE Access to Education in Conflict and Post-conflict Conditions

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Introduction

Education is a basic building block of every society. In spite of that, children and education systems are often on the front line of violent conflict. In particular, educational facilities were attacked in at least 31 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America in the 3 years leading up to 2010. Many view the issue as one of the never ending, connecting it to the conflict theory, which states that our world revolves around fights and disagreements instead of peaceful cooperation. In low income and lower middle-income countries, the conditions regarding conflicts are more severe. The average length of conflict episodes in these areas is about 12 years and 28 million children of primary school age are out of school here, which is 42% of the world total. They end up being vulnerable to unemployment, poverty, early marriage, and pregnancy.

Furthermore, in many countries, armed conflict continues to destroy not just school infrastructure, but also the hopes and ambitions of a whole generation of children. Education is not only a right, but a passport to human development that opens doors and expands opportunities and freedoms. There are several crucial functions of it, and we cannot let children miss out on them. They are by-products of going to school rather than a direct effect of it, like childcare, keeping the young out of the military and labour force, socialization and the establishment of fundamental relationships and learning norms, values, and skills that are key for functioning in society. All of these are known as the hidden curriculum. In addition, identification and support of brighter and more motivated or educationally challenged students is paramount for them to receive a fulfilling preparation for a later stage in their schooling and their whole life in general.

Definition of Key Terms

International Rescue Committee (IRC): it responds to the worst humanitarian crises of the world and it helps people to survive and rebuild their lives.

OOSC: out of school children

IDP: internally displaced person

Conflict theory: it was at first developed by Karl Marx and it recognises that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources. It says that social order is maintained by domination and power, not by consensus and conformity.

The Safe Schools Declaration: it describes a set of commitments to strengthen the protection of education from attack, to restrict usage of schools and universities for military purposes and strives to ensure the continuity of safe schooling during an armed conflict. It was opened for countries to endorse at the First International Conference on Safe Schools in Oslo, Norway, in May 2015. Since then, 3 more conferences were held. By today, 111 States have endorsed it.

EFA: Education for All Movement

ICRC: The International Committee of Red Cross

General Overview

According to the report of the Save the Children initiative, about 1 in 6 underaged people were living in a conflict zone in 2021. Africa had the highest overall number by 180 million, followed by Asia with 152 million, and the Americas with 64 million juveniles. Given that armed conflicts are a source of poverty, inequality and economic stagnation and that they vary in duration, intensity and localization, educational systems are affected in different ways; therefore, how conflicts affect the educations systems is a question which brings about a lengthy and thorough answer. Namely, it hinders the opening and maintenance of schools, threatens the security of children while travelling to and attending classes, and increases teacher absenteeism; moreover, the trends for most countries indicate that juveniles who give a halt to their education in the wake of a conflict, in most cases do not resume it later.

Several of both state and non-state parties involved in armed conflicts view civilians and civilian infrastructure as targets, without disregarding schools and schoolchildren, in clear violation of international law. Nevertheless, even if teaching is made possible, in conflict-affected areas or refugee and IDP camps, access to proper education can be limited due to the destruction and damage done to schools and educational infrastructure. For example, as a result of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 50% of its schools required reconstruction and rehabilitation and 58% of primary schools in Mozambique were destroyed or closed on the grounds of its long civil war. In addition, the death or displacement of teachers and students increases their absenteeism as well. As an example, more than two-thirds of teachers in primary and secondary schools were victims of such cases in the Rwandan genocide.

Another influential factor is that the quality of teachers may not be satisfying. The presence of undertrained or unqualified professors, poor record keeping, corruption and lack of transparency in education governance - salaries are often paid to 'ghost' teachers - do not necessarily enhance the education of the war-affected youth. Not to mention the perspective of girls living in areas rich of conflicts. Besides the increased likelihood for their involvement in the military, the workforce or marriage, what decreases the number of occasions of them making an appearance is that they may be kept from school by their parents in fear of violence. Furthermore, there are few initiatives that contribute to direct aspects of the issue. For instance, one hardly can find a project, the work of which is connected to the prevention of recruitment of young people into the army or criminal activity. Juveniles often are seen as a threat to stability and lack the appreciation of them being an important source of development.

The legacy of conflict is without fail visible and the conditions which follow it are no improvement. It is reckoned by some that the key to resolving the issue lies in observing failure; in particular, that of provision, peacebuilding, and reconstruction. Countless people grow to be disadvantaged: they become poorer, homeless, orphans, soldiers, refugees, IDPs, lose their loved ones, suffer severe injuries, develop PTSD or another psychological distress, go through rape or different form of assault and violence and are deprived from their basic human rights. Additionally, the political situation has a great influence as well. During times of the cessation of a conflict, education systems must be rebuilt in conditions where the authority and the administration are weakened, compromised or inexperienced. The society is in disarray, more are favouring to opposing than supporting the governments, and financial and professional sources are constrained and unpredictable. However, it is probable to occur that new political authorities are more likely to seek education reform to distance themselves from the previous regime.

Major Parties Involved

Some examples of where the presence of the issue peaks are **Sierra Leone, Angola, Mozambique, Kosovo, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan** and **Iraq**.

The situation is hazardous, solely in **sub-Saharan Africa** 10 million children drop out of primary school every year as a result of local conflicts.

According to UNESCO, the first two years of the **Syria** crisis erased all the country's educational progress since the start of the 21st century.

The fact, that the **Democratic Republic of Congo** has been torn by conflicts on many different levels had a great negative impact on the situation of local education.

Timeline of Events

In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that "Everyone has the right to education."

The World Conference on Education for All was held in 1990.

The First International Conference on Safe Schools was held in Oslo, Norway and the Safe Schools Declaration was accepted by 111 nations in May 2015.

The ICRC adopted the Framework for Access to Education, which outlines the general criteria to respond reactively or preventively to the disruption of education in armed conflict and other situations of violence, in 2017.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The nations of our world fight these problems in unity. To be precise, the 4th point of the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN is "Ensuring Inclusive, Equitable, and Quality Education and the Promotion of Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All". Furthermore, the actively working Education for All movement, launched at the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 by UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank, initiates global commitment to provide proper basic schooling for all children, youth and adults. Moreover, UNESCO is contributing to the re-establishment of education through providing teaching and

learning materials and building or rehabilitating 100 schools in four governorates, enrolling 30,000 OOSC in accelerated and accredited programs. Last, but not least, it is recognised in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights that “Everyone has the right to education.”

It is worth to highlight that several initiatives are currently approaching the issue directly; for instance, gender parity in primary enrolment has improved significantly in the regions where greater gender gaps were present. Developed countries make an enormous impact in the progression of such a method. As an example, Ireland supports education for refugee children in Jordan and hosts communities through UNICEF, who have recently introduced an Online Learning Programme to equip vulnerable youth and adolescents with 21st century skills. On top of that, UNRWA has also developed a self-learning programme covering basic skills and core subject concepts for children who cannot regularly access school. What is more, the Safe Schools Declaration was opened in 2015, which is an inter-governmental political agreement dedicated to protecting education in armed conflict.

Possible Solutions

The issue ought to be observed from differing aspects, for instance the situation of those who would re-enter education, the need for psychosocial support, carrying out vocational training and further types of specialised education, children and teachers being in the army, the presence of violence, sexual assaults, financial barriers, refugees, orphans, and the politicisation of institutions. Furthermore, there is an urgent demand for change in the humanitarian mindset and a need to recognize the vital role of education during conflict-related emergencies, such as but not limited to the upbringing of following generations and centralising societies around development, control and knowledge. To highlight an example, currently 21 developing countries are spending more on army tools than on primary schools; if they were to cut military spending by 10%, they could put 9.5 million more children into education.

Additionally, we could implement our useful experiences from the pandemic by introducing online education when it is necessary and possible. The use of technology would broaden access to knowledge; however, it cannot be a substitute for face-to-face contact and interactions with teachers and classmates. On top of that, governments, committees and NGOs should be stimulated more to focus on the issue and strengthen the systems that monitor and report on human rights violations affecting education.

Not to mention that parents, teachers, local and international authorities and other stakeholders should be encouraged to initiate and participate in capacity building, to coordinate between communities, and to contribute to the process of education reconstruction. It must be ensured that external support builds on and does not compete with the efforts of local communities and authorities that are already active in provision of support. In addition, efficiency is paramount, therefore it is crucial to pay attention to specific aspects, such as geographical influence or that the number of secondary school drop-outs is higher.

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