

Repositioning Education in Humanitarian Crises & with IDPs - Radhika Coomaraswamy - Sp. Rep. of the Secretary General for Children & Armed Conflict

The basic attitude is that if you have a humanitarian crisis, the immediate response is usually about food, shelter, water sanitation and if possible health issues. But emergency programs should also include education for children because it is a fundamental right and because it helps the situation. Children need safety and routine. This can prevent them from being recruited into armed groups. It is known that refugee camps and camps for internally displaced people are one of the main recruiting grounds because kids drift away and have nothing to do. Former child soldiers have also testified how going back to school has helped them to build trust and regain a sense of humanity. It is important to advance the notion of schools as zones of peace that all parties respect and where kids can feel secure.

http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=59103&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Interview with Radhika Coomaraswamy Children in Armed Conflict...

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, she recently spoke with *EduInfo* in New York about attacks on schools and other grave violations against children.

Radhika Coomaraswamy was appointed to her position by the UN Secretary-General and serves as a moral voice and independent advocate for the rights and protection of children affected by armed conflict.

A lawyer and internationally known human rights advocate, Ms Coomaraswamy previously served as Chairperson of the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission, Director of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Sri Lanka and Special Reporter on Violence against Women. Ms Coomaraswamy has published widely in the fields of constitutional law, the status of women and ethnic studies, and is the recipient of many awards.

Attacks on schools are among the grave violations covered in the Secretary-General's annual report published last month. Are we witnessing an escalation of such attacks?

Our Report covers six grave violations of international humanitarian law, of which attacks on schools and hospitals are one. The increasing number of incidents of violence directed against schools, teachers and girls going to school is an alarming new development. We are very concerned about attacks on schools by aerial bombardment, the direct targeting of schools, teachers and students, or the use of schools for military activities. These attacks represent a violation of international humanitarian law and perpetrators must be held accountable for such actions.

In terms of grave violations against children in situations of armed conflicts, are we seeing any change?

Humanitarian law is clear and a framework is in place for dealing with violations. The passage of Security Council Resolution 1612 in 2005 established a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the use of child soldiers and other violations committed against children affected by armed conflict. Progress has been made with regards to child soldiers, with six parties removed from the UN's 'list of shame' this year. But the report continues to present a disturbing picture of grave violations committed against children around the globe. The Security Council must now take measures against those who have repeatedly flaunted its

resolutions and who continue to recruit and use children.

The UN General Assembly thematic debate held in New York last March on education in emergencies called upon States to increase the protection of education during conflict and to regard attacks on schools as war crimes, which is not yet the case. We could push for a General Assembly Resolution that specifically condemns attacks against schools rather than grouping them with 'other civilian objects'.

What is your reading of attacks on schools?

At some point we have to deal with the fundamental issue that some people believe that girls should not go to school, that science should not be taught to girls or that government secular education is evil. We must find strategies to counter those fundamental prejudices. This is a big task that cannot only be addressed at UN level. It is also about getting a majority of people living in places where schools are being attacked to continue believing in education and advocating for it.

When I was in Afghanistan I spoke with Aisha, a ten-year old girl. Her parents' house was damaged in an aerial bombardment; she lost several relatives; her school was attacked and some of her teachers were killed. She told me how she was determined to go back to school and did. She said that school gave her courage and a sense of strength and security. In North Kivu Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I met with a 12-year-old girl who had joined the Mai Mai militia because her parents could no longer pay for school and because she thought carrying a gun would protect her from being raped. However, as with thousands of other children in Congo, she was sexually violated and abused by her commanders. Recently Mai Mai groups have entered into the peace process and Adila was released. She is now in an NGO Transit Centre and has just gone back to school. Her eyes lit up when she told me that she plans to be a school teacher.

Education is not yet a high priority in many humanitarian crises. How do you make a case for it?

The basic attitude is that if you have a humanitarian crisis, the immediate response is usually about food, shelter, water sanitation and if possible health issues. But emergency programs should also include education for children because it is a fundamental right and because it helps the situation. Children need safety and routine. This can prevent them from being recruited into armed groups. It is known that refugee camps and camps for internally displaced people are one of the main recruiting grounds because kids drift away and have nothing to do. Former child soldiers have also testified how going back to school has helped them to build trust and regain a sense of humanity. It is important to advance the notion of schools as zones of peace that all parties respect and where kids can feel secure.

How do you explain that education is such an underfunded part of humanitarian response?

I think because donors see emergency as one thing and development as another, and education is generally categorized as the latter. This is the reason why children fall between the cracks as in many cases, they need both. For example, child soldiers need to be followed through from reconstruction to development. We are pushing for education to be an integral part of emergency programmatic planning and response.

How can education heal rather than perpetuate intolerance?

We must ensure that education works towards bringing peace in a society. In countries torn by tribal and ethnic conflict, education can create many obstacles to peace. Curricula can instil hatred of the other by maintaining certain myths. This is why emergency education should be quality education that helps to build more peaceful attitudes. Encouraging a curriculum reform process during post-conflict

reconstruction is vital. The UN must be attentive to this in funding programs. There are cases of post-conflict education that now serve as models. Liberia and Sierra Leone for instance have done a lot of things right in peacebuilding through education; the reconciliation process in South Africa is another positive example.

Children and armed conflict

Afghanistan: Newslines

Beyond School Books – a podcast series on education in emergencies



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Children wait with their families to register at the Jalala camp in Mardan district, in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. The camp has been set up to accommodate people fleeing an army offensive against militants in the region.

NEW YORK, USA, 15 May 2009 – Last year in Afghanistan there were nearly 300 documented attacks on schools, killing 92 people and injuring 169. In Pakistan, 172 government and private schools, particularly girls' schools, have been destroyed in the Swat Valley district since 2007.

More schools have also closed due to security concerns following threats or attacks against teachers and students in both countries.

Against the backdrop of the intensifying conflict in Pakistan, the protection of children and their right to education must be kept at the forefront of dialogues about resolving the crisis – this according to a panel of experts speaking out in a podcast discussion moderated by Amy Costello at UN Radio.

'Ruining' a generation

"Going to school, if you're a girl or if you're a teacher at a school that serves girls, is a great risk," says United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Afghanistan Country Programme Director Wenny Kusuma.

Human rights lawyer and Equality Now Deputy Director of Programmes Yasmeen Hassan describes the pervading fear of long-term consequences for Pakistan after the Taliban banned girls education in the Swat region and broadcast radio messages threatening girls with acid attacks and death if they went to school.

"In the words of one person from Swat, 'Our future generations are getting ruined,'" notes Ms. Hassan.

Reasons for the conflict

Journalist and award-winning documentary filmmaker Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy – who recently travelled through Pakistan for her latest film, 'Pakistan's Taliban Generation' – argues that the failure of the government to provide its people with a legitimate education system is behind the escalating conflict, to the detriment of both girls and boys.

"There are over 15,000 schools in Pakistan which are known as ghost schools. The buildings exist just on paper. There are teachers who draw salaries, but nobody goes to school. There is no school. So the Government of Pakistan has failed its citizens," says Ms. Obaid-Chinoy.

"This lack of access to education is something that the militants and Islamic fundamentalists thrive on," she adds, "because then they set up centres where they provide food, clothing, lodging ... under the guise of teaching children the Koran. Right now, the biggest problem in Pakistan is that the war is not going to end tomorrow because no one is addressing the reasons for this war."

And the primary reason for the war, asserts Ms. Obaid-Chinoy, "in my view and in the work that I've seen in Pakistan, is education."

Rights disintegrating

Ms. Kusuma warns that if Pakistan continues down its current path, the erosion of human rights will only worsen.

"Afghanistan is fast-forward what will happen in Pakistan, where we have the absence and isolation of women from both the public and private spheres," she says. "There is no sense of women being collateral damage here. There is a conflict being waged... on a terrain that is the minds and bodies of women and girls."

Ms. Obaid-Chinoy similarly paints a worrying picture for Pakistan: "Women in Pakistan are really afraid. They're afraid for their future. Who knows if my daughter or the next generation will be able to get an education in this country, the way my generation did? Who knows if they'll be able to work the way I was able to work?"

"Everything is changing in Pakistan, and it's changing very rapidly."

Click here (Real player) to listen to a UNICEF Radio podcast discussion on education in the line of fire in Afghanistan and Pakistan, featuring these guests:

Wenny Kusuma, Country Programme Director, UNIFEM Afghanistan; Yasmeen Hassan, human rights lawyer and Deputy Director of Programmes, Equality Now; and Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, journalist and award-winning documentary filmmaker.

http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_2136.html

NEWS STORY: Financial Crisis Could Push More Girls into Child Labour, UN Agency Warns

(UN News)

News Story: Financial Crisis Could Push More Girls into Child Labour, UN Agency Warns (UN News)

The financial crisis threatens to push more children - especially girls - into child labour, the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) said in a new report.

Despite falling numbers of children involved in child labour worldwide, the current economic turmoil could roll back those gains, according to the new study, entitled "Girls a Chance: Tackling child labour, a key to the future," issued on the World Day Against Child Labour.

Most recent estimates indicate that over 100 million girls are involved in child labour, with many exposed to its worst forms, according to the report.

It also notes that the danger of girls being forced into labour is linked to evidence that families in many nations prefer boys when making decisions on children's education.

"Protecting girls - and all children - from child labour calls for integrated responses that include jobs for parents, and social protection measures that help them to keep both girls and boys in school," said ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. "Access to basic education and training for girls and boys must also be part of the solutions for the future."

Events were held in 50 countries to celebrate the World Day through events music performances, conferences and other public events.

For more details go to UN News Centre [here](#).

For access to the full United Nations International Labour Organization Report entitled "Give Girls a Chance: Tackling child labour, a key to the future," please click [here](#).

IRC/UoN: Partnership to Create Center of Excellence for Education in Emergencies
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Schools like this one in Shimelba Refugee Camp, Ethiopia, mean displaced children can still get a quality education.

IRC/Jo Offer

Around 40 million children currently out of school worldwide live in countries affected by conflict and instability. Ensuring that such children don't miss out on a quality education is vital to their development, so the University of Nairobi (UoN) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) are teaming up to launch a new Education in Emergencies initiative in Nairobi, Kenya.

The new project will build a hub of expertise in East Africa by offering a Master's and certificate program for Education in Emergencies at the UoN's School of Education. Courses will combine coursework, on-the-ground placements and research to help students and existing practitioners develop the essential skills and competencies to deliver education in complex emergencies.

"Since Nairobi is already a center for humanitarian aid workers in the region, the city is ideally suited to become a hub for education in emergencies' expertise and training in East Africa," says Kellie Leeson, IRC Country Director in Kenya.

The University of Nairobi, the largest and oldest university in Kenya, is ideally positioned to focus on Education in Emergencies. Professor Gerald Kimani, Chair for the Educational Administration and Planning Department, says: "While this program will greatly contribute to building the capacity of students,

practitioners and professors affiliated with the program, our ultimate goal is to ensure that more children affected by emergencies and conflict in Africa can continue to receive a quality education."

"All children, wherever they live, have the right to education. Those who have been displaced by conflict, natural disaster or other emergencies should not be deprived of this right. This new initiative will ensure there are more resources available to supporting these children in the years to come," Kimani adds.

The UoN and IRC plan to greatly expand this partnership to include other academic institutions and international organizations in developing the curriculum, creating practical learning opportunities for students, shaping the research agenda and hiring graduates.

This unique three-year project has been made possible with financial support from Unbound Philanthropy, a private U.S. foundation.

For more information:

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About the International Rescue Committee: A global leader in humanitarian assistance, the International Rescue Committee works in 42 countries offering help and hope to refugees and others uprooted by conflict and oppression. During crises, IRC teams provide health care, shelter, clean water, sanitation, learning programs for children and special aid for women. As emergencies subside, the IRC stays to revive livelihoods and help shattered communities recover and rebuild. The IRC also helps resettle refugees admitted into the United States. A tireless advocate for the most vulnerable, the IRC is committed to restoring hope, dignity and opportunity. For more information, visit www.theIRC.org

About the University of Nairobi: UoN is a world-class university committed to academic excellence. Located within the central business district of Nairobi, it offers 400 academic programs at both undergraduate and postgraduate level to a student population of over 45,000. The University is supported by a staff compliment of 5,000 and has an alumni base of over 100,000 spread worldwide. UoN provides quality university education to embody the aspirations of the Kenyan people and the global environment through creation, preservation, integration, transmission and utilization of knowledge. Visit www.uonbi.ac.ke for more information.

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