

Forum: General Assembly 3 Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

Issue: Improving access to education during times of conflict

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Introduction

“Conflict” has become a common word which is used regularly by many. Often, we hear news of raging wars in different parts of the world. We learn of different historical wars, and the impacts which they have had on people and their societies. However, we do not take enough time to consider the impact which current conflict will have on people and their societies in the future. One substantial effect of conflict is the negative impact it has on children’s education, which has many consequently devastating effects.

During times of conflict, education often becomes overlooked. Governments begin prioritizing security over education, and the country’s youth becomes left behind. However, education is the key to promote peace after conflict, and allows children in conflict-ridden areas to attain more of a sense of regularity and balance.

Education also gives children a voice and empowers them to stay strong during times of war and conflict. Children are the future of every nation, and without adequate education, nations will be unable to sustain themselves. Compared to the past, conflict has become more widespread. Thus, it is essential to ensure that despite waging wars which may exist, children are provided with adequate educational opportunities (Leinonen).

Educational opportunities are also being taken away from children in areas of conflict because of the constant fear of physical danger. Students are often dissuaded from attending school, due to the unsafety of the school environment, the inability of parents to pay tuition, and even lack of safe transportation, as well as the need to work to support the family. Additionally, if students believe their educators are not teaching them practical skills, they are often not motivated to attend school, which leaves them trapped in the cycle of poverty, making it very difficult for them to lead a more comfortable future.

Definition of Key Terms

Conflict

Conflict can generally be classified as any disagreement, argument, or situation with opposing opinions and ideals. For the purpose of this topic, we refer to conflict as any armed combat between different countries or groups within a country.

Inflation

Inflation is a major economic cause for lack of access to education during times of conflict, and is furthered outlined in a section below. Inflation is when the price of goods or services drastically increases, as a result of national debt, rise in demand of goods, and increased exposure to the foreign market.

Forced Displacement

Forced displacement is when civilians living in a country flee, due to conflict, human rights violations, or other events. Refugees often face marginalization and discrimination in their host country, and often have difficulty integrating themselves into the new society as a result of this.

National Debt

Often, governments borrow money from others in order to support their financial expenditures. A country's national debt plays an extremely large role in the nation's stability and a large national debt can cause many adverse effects on the nation, including inflation and reduced investment on public infrastructure.

Poverty Cycle

The poverty cycle is a devastating sequence of steps which occurs, rendering scores of generations of people to become trapped in a loop of poverty which they cannot escape from. The cycle begins with a poverty-stricken family, who is unable to provide their child with quality education. After the child grows up, they struggle to find a well-paying job, which again leaves them to start another poverty-stricken family. It is very difficult for families to

escape the cycle of poverty, which results in generations of families living in poverty.

Background Information

Access to Education

During times of conflict, access to education becomes increasingly difficult for students. Access to education refers to the the students' capability to attend a place of learning and receive quality instruction, without being hindered by factors such as religion, race, gender, ethnicity, or age as well as safety factors barriers such as roaming militias. During times of conflict, children have very limited access to education, not only due to the aforementioned factors, but also because of physical limitations, including lack of infrastructure, safety insecurity, and violence in or on-route to school. Improving access to education will eventually result in insurance that all students receive an equal opportunity to take advantage of the educational prospects offered to them ("Increasing Access").

Education and Sustainable Development Goal 4

Before the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations (UN) created 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were established in the year 2000. These goals focused on eradicating poverty in all its forms. This initiative was spearheaded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), who helped countries in their progression with these goals. As a result of the MDGs, many improvements have occurred including a decrease in global child mortality rates by almost half.

In September 2015, a new set of goals was created to build upon the MDGs, called the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs tackle three main pillars of sustainable development: social progress, economic growth, and environmental protection. The necessity for these goals have increased drastically due to major factors of climate change and extreme global population increase ("Transitioning").

SDG 4 is targeted towards the aim of improving quality education. The UN believes that quality education is an essential tool in a young child's life. However, due to conflict and war, some young students are unable to receive this valuable gift, and are thus limited to a never ending cycle of limited opportunities. SDG 4 aims to aid all children in receiving quality education, and aims to ensure that all children are give an opportunity to improve their futures ("Goal 4").

For example, indicator 4.a.1 states: "Proportion of schools with access to: (a) electricity; (b) the Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation

facilities; (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)” (Sdgcounting). However, this indicator is often not met, because governments often prioritize their funds towards rebuilding infrastructure after war. This is outlined in further detail under the “Restabilization” section.

Additionally, indicator 4.c.1 states: “Percentage of teachers in: (a) pre-primary; (b) primary; (c) lower secondary; and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (i.e. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country” (Sdgcounting). This indicator is highly relevant to the topic at hand, because if more teachers are equipped with proper teaching training and skills, students will feel that they are learning functional life skills, and will be more motivated to attend school, thus improving accessibility to school during times of conflict.

Economic causes for lack of access to education during times of conflict

War can have devastating effects on a nation’s economy, which in turn, has negative impacts on the country’s education sector. Factors such as inflation, national debt, restabilization and insufficient dedication of humanitarian funds towards education all contribute towards the inaccessibility of education to children during times of conflict. Inflation causes an increased price of goods and services, causing parents to prioritize expenditures of other basic necessities, rather than expenditures of tuition, transport to and from school, and required school resources. National debt also reduces accessibility to education, because governments will spend their funds on repayment and other priorities, rather than on improving educational infrastructure. Restabilization of the nation after war is one of the reasons why nations do not prioritize funds on education, as governments work to rebuild their country before they can re-establish focus on other sectors of the nation. These factors are outlined in more detail below.

Inflation

Often, war creates inflation of goods and services. This inflation ultimately results in families having to spend more of their savings and hard-earned money on basic necessities. The end of the conflict often results in a sweep of hyperinflation, where the inflation rates peak and the price of goods and services are at an all time high. Thus, we can see how inflation caused by conflict can result in children’s worsened access to education. If their parents are forced to spend more money on basic necessities, it becomes more difficult for them to spend money in order to pay for tuition in schools without free education, to pay for transport to and from school, and to pay for their children’s required school resources such as books and uniforms. Additionally, in areas with high poverty rates, children are often taken out of school in order to start a job to help their family keep up with the rising prices of goods and services. Therefore, inflation due to conflict ultimately reduces children’s access to education.

National Debt

During times of conflict, nations are often willing to borrow much more money, since the public is in patriotic support of the war effort. However, this leads to a large amount of national debt, which must be paid off. Thus, paying back the large debt will be prioritized by a country over dedicating the nation's funds towards improving the education sector by improving infrastructure, hiring educated instructors, and possibly even providing government-provided transport to and from school.

Restabilization

Dealing with the aftermath of war can be extremely difficult, as there are many components which must be handled before a country can re-establish itself as a stable nation. Firstly, countries must utilize funds in order to rebuild areas which were destroyed by the conflict. The cost of rebuilding infrastructure can be quite exorbitant, and creates a large loss of savings, which could have alternatively been used to improve the education sector and help children have better access to education. Additionally, after the war, as many soldiers return to their home country, they find it very difficult to find well-paying employment prospects. Thus, they are forced to settle for jobs with poor salaries, which makes it difficult for them to support their families. Due to a lack of savings, families will have a difficult time sending their children to school (Pettinger). Furthermore, nations will need to repay any debt which may have accumulated as a result of the war, and for a period of time, the nations savings will be dedicated towards repaying the national debt, as opposed to rebuilding educational infrastructures.

Insufficient dedication of humanitarian aid towards education

Another large factor which plays a role in children's inaccessibility to education during times of conflict is the minimal percentage of humanitarian aid which is dedicated towards revitalizing the role of education after war. Since education is not prioritized by nations during times of conflict, a small fraction of humanitarian aid goes towards renovating and rebuilding educational infrastructures, improving the quality of teachers, providing measures to keep students safe in school, or even providing chairs and tables. Due to the government's lack of encouragement of students to continue attending school, many students end up not going to school, and instead working on jobs at a young age, in order to contribute savings to their family ("Right").

Social causes for lack of access to education during times of conflict

A key factor preventing children from attending school during times of conflict is the fear created by conflict between countries. Parents and children alike are aware of the dangerous and violent occurrences which occur in a country during wartime. Thus, a constant fear may be instilled within parents and children alike, especially when having to send a child alone to school on a school bus, or even when children are within school. This trepidation ultimately results in less and less children attending school during times of conflict (“Right”).

Forced Displacement of Refugees

Because of war and conflict, millions of people are forced to leave their countries in search of safety and security. “Globally, there are an estimated 65.6 million people who have fled their homes either as refugees (22.5 million), internally displaced persons (40.3 million), or asylum seekers as a result of conflict and persecution (UNHCR, figures as of end-2016).” They often take off towards neighboring countries, with Turkey hosting the largest number of refugees with 2.9 million people. Refugee displacement results in suffering, as displaced refugees often have minimal economic acquisitions, and have no concrete plans to find livelihood. Children are most affected by refugee displacement, as they lose access to education. Their parents must prioritize savings on being able to afford basic necessities over their children’s education, and thus children are stripped of their opportunity to turn their lives around through education. Children who are fortunate enough to attend school while being displaced occasionally experience discrimination (“Forced”).

Physical inaccessibility due to safety insecurity

During times of conflict, there are also physical limitations which decrease accessibility of education for children. Occasionally, while travelling to or from school, there may be barriers such as violence, which hinder the children’s ability to attend school. Even safety at the school cannot always be guaranteed during times of conflict. If conflict shifts near the area of a school, the children’s education be be disrupted and thus, their access to quality education will be prevented (“Right”).

The importance of education

A major effect of inaccessibility of education due to conflict is the continuation of the poverty cycle. The poverty cycle begins with children from impoverished families. Because they do not have access to education, they grow up and often receive jobs with simple tasks, not requiring much education, with very low wages. This results in a continuation of poverty, and this cycle repeats for generations. However, if a portion of the nation’s funds were dedicated to improving the quality of

education, or even providing free education for children, this devastating cycle could be put to an end, and children could grow up to have different lives to their parents.

Improved access to education can also help improve food security. As people become more aware and educated of sustainable practices, they can be used to grow and cultivate healthy crops, which can ultimately prevent malnutrition. Knowing of healthy and nutritious meals can also help children grow healthily, and help pregnant women properly promote the growth of their children.

Additionally, proper education can help improve health and sanitation standards. As children learn of disease prevention and hygiene methods, they become less susceptible to common diseases which can prevent them from coming to school, and can cause harmful side effects, inclusive of death.

Finally, education helps improve gender equality, and empowers young children. As girls learn the same skills and information as boys, it empowers them to make responsible and informed decisions about their lives. Children of both genders can be taught about their rights, and it helps bridge the gender disparity which currently exists in many parts of the world. Through education, children are empowered to stand up for themselves, and make a difference in the world (“Poverty”).

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Syria is one of the most war-torn countries in the world. Syria is currently facing a civil war, and has been facing it since 2011. The war began with the wave of Arab Spring protests in the spring of 2011. The demonstrations and protests spread across the nation, and commanded the elimination of the government of President Bashar al-Assad. The government responded to the protests very violently, which caused the citizens’ protests to evolve into an armed rebellion. The war has continued ever since, and is now known as the Syrian Civil War. More than 11 million Syrians have been displaced (Nag).

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF is a branch of the United Nations which works to ensure that the rights of all children are protected. The organization works to aid vulnerable and disadvantaged children, especially children who are trapped in devastating cycles of poverty and violence. UNICEF also works to help children receive protection from disaster and conflicts. They ensure that children have the environment and will to learn, regardless of their circumstances or surroundings. They also interact with governments in order to encompass disaster risk reduction programmes (“Education in Emergencies”).

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

The NRC is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which works to provide children with the skills and confidence which is necessary for them to live out a successful, happy life. The NRC believes that quality education provides protection for children, and allows them to earn the voice needed to protect their rights and their future. This NGO focuses on the aid of displaced people, and combats the adverse issues which arise as a result of one's displacement. With reference to education during times of conflict, the NRC makes sure that displaced children receive education which cultivates their cognitive and emotional development from the beginning of their displacement ("Education" NRC).

Timeline of Events

| Date | Description of event |
|------------------|--|
| 10 December 1948 | Creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights |
| 20 November 1989 | Creation of Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| 19 December 2001 | Creation of United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all |
| 10 May 2002 | Creation of "A world fit for children" document |
| 30 June 2010 | Creation of key resolution: The right to education in emergency situations |
| 7 March 2014 | Creation of resolution: Children and Armed Conflict |

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- The right to education in emergency situations, 30 June 2010, **(A/64/L.58)**
- Children and Armed Conflict, 7 March 2014, **(S/RES/2143 (2014))**
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, **(A/RES/44/25)**
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948 **(A/RES/3/217)**
- United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all, 19 December 2001, **(A/RES/56/116)**
- A world fit for children, 10 May 2002, **(A/RES/S-27/2)**

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There have been many previous attempts to solve the issue at hand. Because the issue is present in most places which host conflict, many NGOs have dedicated themselves to the cause. An example is the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). The NRC provides a full cycle of basic education for children, between the ages of 6 and 18 years old, during times of conflict. Additionally, young women and men are given the chance to complete post-primary education. This education consists of technical and vocational instruction, agricultural training, and even tertiary guidance opportunities. The NRC also

supports governments in upholding their nation's educational sector, by providing teacher development programs and aiding in the construction or innovation of schools. The efforts of the NRC have been highly effective thus far. In just 2017, the NGO has been able to reach a total of 936,865 people, who have all benefited greatly from their education work ("Education" NRC).

Another effort which has been made in the past is an initiative called "Education in Emergencies" by the UK-based NGO, War Child. Through this initiative, children are provided with quality education through safe temporary learning areas. Learning materials and teacher training is provided by the NGO, and their programmes also allow for medical or psychological help to be identified and aided. An example of their work is in Afghanistan, where they provide advanced training to street-working children, parents, and other young children. In Jordan, they support Syrian refugee children and families, helping them improve skills such as literacy, numeracy and other life-skills. Their initiatives have been quite effective, in that they have been able to aid many displaced children and adults living in areas of conflict through providing them with medical and psychological aid, and by also teaching new skills to young people ("Education" War Child).

Possible Solutions

There are many solutions which could be adopted in order to solve the issue at hand. Firstly, governments and other international partners should be encouraged and aided in economically planning for the long-term future, so that nations are sufficiently prepared in order to accept and accommodate for displaced people. This will in turn allow nations to set aside adequate funding for the development of the education sector, and allow displaced children to receive the quality education which they deserve. Additionally, if host countries cooperate with other nations in their long-term economic preparation, they may be able to create a partnership which benefits the host country in terms of supporting and adapting to the inflow of refugees.

Another possible solution is that governments could create new laws and regulations in order to deem schools and educational institutes as areas of peace. These laws would entail consequences for bringing violence into the designated areas of peace, which will ultimately improve access to education. While other areas of the nation may be unsafe for children, schools would be considered as a sanctuary, which would also encourage more students to attend their school more regularly (United Nations).

Additionally, providing students in LEDCs with a form of academic scholarship would largely improve the accessibility of quality education for these students, and would also provide the students with a more powerful incentive to attend school. These scholarships could be funded by NGOs, and even

governments could help provide a small amount of funds in order to support children and their initiative to learn.

NGOs could also establish educator training programs, in which educators are provided with the opportunity to gather and discuss various teaching methods which best equip their students with life skills. By doing so, students will feel that they are genuinely learning skills which will aid them for the future, and they will be more motivated to attend school. This will ultimately help them escape the cycle of poverty as well.

A final solution would be to raise global awareness about the devastating effects on education which conflict has, as a large portion of the world is unaware of such effects of war. By raising awareness, hopefully native civilians of a refugee's host country will become more empathetic, and will avoid and stand up against marginalization and bullying due to stereotyping, which is another factor that often impedes a student's ability to receive quality education.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/book2011/05_Dialogues%20at%20ECOSOC%202011_A_The%20Education%20for%20All%20Agenda.pdf (UN ECOSOC The Education for All Agenda)