

EDUCATION IN CONFLICT ZONES-AN UNMET NEED.

*Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers?
Ere the sorrow comes with years.
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free.
"How long", they say, "how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart?"*

The provision of education is one of the essence functions legitimizing the modern nations. Behind education one finds the building of citizenship, demands for social and national identification, as well as the preparation of the labour force for the national economy. The moulding of a working education system remains a key challenge for new states and states emerging from conflict. Education can be an important medium of political mobilization or liberation during conflict. In this present global village, a child who is not educated is incapacitated in every sphere of life, viz a person sees abilities in severe physical disability but trivial and frivolous if not educated. In coming years, a society that does not educate its children will be disabled in terms of the economic productivity and social welfare of its people (Anderson, 1992, p.8). The returns to education at a personal level are high. By the same token, lack of education can be a serious social and economic handicap. Quality schooling gives children a better chance for a standard, healthy and secure future. Basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic, facilitate admittance to good employment in adulthood, as well as providing essential information which proves helpful to both adults and children for solving problems and making important decisions. Education also brings the rewards of confidence and self-esteem associated with achievement and encourages the development of analytical and reasoning powers. Education is a major instrument for change and social development which plays an important role in empowering the child economically and socially and assists the marginalized population out of poverty. Education also provides the children with the means to participate fully in their communities (UNESCO, 2000). Accelerated progress in education is critical for the all-round development of any nation and the achievement of the wider Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in areas such as poverty reduction, nutrition, child survival

and maternal health (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985; Lucas, 1988; Barro, 1991; Mankiw, Romer and Weil, 1992). According to the United Nations Children Fund, education is a fundamental human right and a key factor in reducing poverty and child labour as well as promoting development. The world recognized the importance and improvement in access to all in education systems through various international frameworks that can be traced back to 1948 when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. In this bill of rights, article 26 has a provision for a right to education for all. With the objective to provide education to the children and prepare them as the future citizens who will be able to contribute to the process of development of their societies and families and help them live a normal life, hundreds and thousands of schools all over the world are providing educational opportunities to the children. Yet, the rough estimates suggest that over 100 million children have no access to primary education.

Conflicts all over the globe have devastated humanity and the various facets associated with it. Suffering education because of conflict is clear and evident from some of the studies (Seitz, 2004 a, b; Tomlinson and Benefield, 2005 a). The Oxfam Education Report shows that 2/3 of African countries affected by conflicts had enrolment rates of less than 50% (Watkins, 2000). Furthermore, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) states that countries in conflict are likely to spend less on education. Wars and conflict impair the functioning of education systems and often lead to extensive damage to the original education infrastructure (Seitz, 2004). Education systems should be well geared up to prevent, cope with, deal with the after effects of conflict, and generally contribute to the promotion of non-violent solutions to the wide range of inequalities that have emerged out of recent processes of globalization (Stewart, 2003; Colenso, 2005). One of the best studies carried out by UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2010) reveals the quantitative impact of conflict on education. The study examines the impact of armed conflict on the population of twenty-five countries, finding substantial negative effects of exposure to conflict on educational attainment and literacy. The study also contributes to the growing literature in this field by demonstrating the lasting impact of conflict on education for a large and diverse set of countries.

Although it is easy to demand that children have no place in the world's violent conflicts, the reality is very much different. The latency of tasks undertaken by children in conflict zones is well known—be it the physical, mental and sexual scars as clear outcome. While child participation in conflicts is forced at the barrel of a gun, other involvement is forced by cruel circumstances and lack of alternatives. Furthermore, it is difficult to extract children from these conditions. Exposure to conflict affects children in several ways, ranging from direct killings and injuries, to more subtle, yet persistent and irreversible effects on schooling, health, nutrition, future opportunities and well-being. Children's educational attainment is particularly compromised by exposure to violence. Conflict-affected countries include over 20% of all children of primary school age, but account for around half of all out-of-school children of primary school age. (UNESCO, 2011, 2013). The likelihood of young children dropping out of school is also significantly higher in conflict-affected countries than elsewhere in the world; only 65% of children in these countries attend the last primary school grade, in comparison to 86% across low-income countries. Research has highlighted in particular the causal adverse impact of conflict exposure in terms of reducing the number of years children spend in school (Akresh and De Walque, 2008; Chamarbagwala and Moran, 2009; Merrouche, 2006; UNESCO 2010) and restricting grade progression (Akresh and De Walque, 2008; Alderman, Hoddinott and Kinsey, 2006; Justino, Leone and Salardi, 2013; Shemyakina, 2011). These effects have been shown in turn to affect considerably future life prospects of affected children, including access to labour market, earnings and health outcomes in adulthood which may aggravate risks associated with the outbreak or renewal of violent conflicts (Justino, Leone and Salardi 2013).

In the last decade, 2 million children have been killed in situations of armed conflict, 6 million children have been permanently disabled or injured, over 14 million children have been displaced, and over 1 million have been orphaned and separated from their parents. Over 250,000 children are associated with fighting forces and groups. And every year, 8,000 to 10,000 children are killed or maimed by landmines. The nature and methods of armed conflict means that the fighting takes place in civilians' communities, villages,

fields and homes, thus sharply increasing children's risk of harm. While many children are killed by weapons, many more die from the catastrophic impact the conflict has on their communities' infrastructure (often already weak to begin with) and families' access to food, health care and their ability to maintain their livelihoods. Some of the most visible impacts of violent conflict include the destruction of infrastructure, as well as the collapse of government provision of goods and services, including schooling, due to lack of financial resources or the diversion of finances to military efforts (Stewart et al., 2001a, 2001b). Reports from several conflict-affected countries show that schools, teachers and students are often targeted by violent attacks (O'Malley, 2007, 2010; UNESCO 2011). Schools are visible symbols of state presence and teachers are often perceived as leaders in their community, making them easy and visible targets of violence by armed groups intended on controlling populations and territories. As a result, the decision is often made to close down schools in areas likely to be affected by violence (IANS, 2009; Mulkeen, 2007). In addition, heightened perceptions of violence and insecurity may affect the recruitment of teachers to some areas, and disrupt exam systems, the supply of teaching materials and the development and update of curricula (UNESCO 2011).

These effects have been observed in several conflict-affected countries including Afghanistan, Colombia, D Congo, Iraq, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Thailand and Zimbabwe, and severely constrain the supply of schooling and the recovery of education systems in conflict-affected areas (O'Malley, 2007, 2010; UNESCO 2011)

Education though has a vigorous role to play in social reconstruction in the aftermath of conflict. The rebuilding of schools is a demonstration of confidence in the peace process. The development of new curricula and training of new teachers symbolise a departure from the violent past and the advance of norms, values and skills directed towards a peaceful and prosperous future. Children are the heart of the home front. Any injury to them will drastically affect national morale. Therefore, when schools remain open during the war, the public interprets this as a message that things are under control. On the other hand, nothing makes the population feel the danger threatening the home front more acutely than the closure of schools. (Noy, 1992). Access to education has improved remarkably in the

second half of the 20th Century, especially at the primary and secondary levels. Education budgets expanded in many cases in the 1960s and 1970s, with a corresponding expansion in literacy, enrolments, attendance and the number of schools and teachers. Political support for education is gathering momentum internationally. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and now the most widely ratified instrument internationally, the Convention on the Rights of the Child makes an important rallying point for governments with regard to education policies and interventions. Article 28 of the Convention provides for education as a basic right and for free and compulsory primary education as a matter of urgent priority. It encourages the development of different education, including general and vocational education, stating that they should be available and accessible to all children. Higher education is to be accessible to all on the basis of capacity. Measures to encourage school attendance and reduce drop-out are also envisaged. Specific mention is made in article 28 of the obligation of States Parties to promote international cooperation in matters relating to education, particular accounting being taken of the needs of developing countries. This provides a clear mandate for international agencies, non-governmental, bilateral and multilateral, to collaborate with governments in education provision in the context of conflict. Article 29 of the treaty outlines the overall aims and principles of education, providing for a holistic approach to child development which focuses not just on cognitive growth but also on the development of the child's personality, talents and physical abilities, as well as on preparing children for responsible adulthood in a free society. It recognises the importance of imparting respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the natural environment, as well as for children's cultural identity, language and values, and for the national values of the country in which children are living, the country from which they may originate and civilizations different from their own. These latter principles are clearly of particular relevance to conflict or post conflict societies. In article 38 of the Convention special note is made of the obligation of States Parties to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law as it applies to children, as well as to take all feasible measures to ensure the protection and care of children affected by armed conflict. Article 39 focuses on the treatment, recovery and

social reintegration of children who are victims of conflict. Education has a special role to play in the fulfilment of both of these articles, since it can be an important medium. In another important development internationally, the 1990 "Education For All" conference in Jomtien, Thailand, educators from more than 100 countries met to assess the state of education globally. They vowed to work for a future in which all children, everywhere, will have access to quality basic education. Also, in 1990, 71 heads of State and Government and 88 other senior officials attended the World Summit for Children at the United Nations, at which the commitment to deliver basic schooling and literacy to the 100 million children and nearly one billion adults globally without access was reconfirmed. Specific measures were cited, in particular the expansion of childhood development activities and universal basic education, vocational training, increased acquisition of knowledge, skills and values through all education channels and adult literacy.

Nevertheless, even with these gains, the goal of basic education for all children is far from being achieved. Indeed, it is often the first public service to be cut during periods of political turmoil-education funds being redirected into security and defence. And, perceived by many agencies as a development rather than a relief measure, education is seldom given priority in the context of emergencies. More serious still, educational philosophies and values and the effectiveness of educational systems are being questioned as never before: "Education is confronted at once with a crisis of faith and a growing array of hopes and aspirations to be satisfied in a world seeking solutions to so many complex challenges". Since the 1980s education expenditure has fallen in many parts of the world, especially in Latin American and sub-Saharan Africa, mostly because of indebtedness and structural adjustment. Many children are still not enrolled in school and there has been a fall in the rate of growth of enrolment. Retention and grade repetition are also persistent problems in some regions, reflecting the poor quality and irrelevance of education. Budgetary allocations to the various levels of education across national boundaries are extremely uneven, the greatest disparities existing in opportunities for education. Even though some developing countries are faring well in the education stakes, UNESCO reports a widening knowledge gap between the richest and poorest countries. This is associated

with a growing divergence in school life expectancy and total enrolment in education at all levels as a proportion of the population nationally aged 6 to 23. In some countries, for example Niger, Burkina Faso and Djibouti, school life expectancies remain below the level four years considered the minimum duration of formal education for the acquisition of literacy and other basic knowledge and life skills. In certain sub-Saharan African countries the average 6- year-old can expect to receive little more than two years of formal education, and girls not much more than a year, compared with nearly sixteen years for boys and girls in North America (UNESCO, 1993). Even in the wealthier Latin American and Caribbean region, where a full 99 per cent of children start school, some 20 percent of children start primary school late, 40 per cent repeat the first year and 30 per cent repeat the second, with an overall average of primary school repetition of about 30 per cent per year (Colbert, Garcia Mendez, & Himes, 1994).

Progress towards education for all will require more than just a levelling up of years of schooling (UNESCO, op cit). Radical reform is required in many areas to increase educational choice, upgrade curricula, devise methods that focus on the learner rather than the teacher and improve delivery systems. These are principles that apply in societies at peace as much as in societies at war, or in post-conflict societies engaged in reconstruction. But conflict presents a range of additional threats and challenges to education, more so because in many affected areas education was in a very poor state prior to the outbreak of violence. At independence in 1960 there were only 30 primary schools and 12 secondary schools throughout Somalia. Thus, the recent conflict in Somalia has merely exacerbated a situation that was already quite grave. Education needs to be given major priority in areas affected by conflict since it can offer many benefits additional to those provided in peace time. It can, for example, fulfil many important security and social functions. Children in war zones who are deprived of an education are thus be doubly jeopardised. Consequences of conflict on children are manifold, be it as observers, participants or targets. Their vulnerability leads them to being subjected to homicide, violent discipline and abuse of all kind

The pre-meditated murder of over 100 children in an armed attack on a military school in Peshawar in December 16, 2014 shocked the world. Images of children filling Gaza hospitals during the shelling of Palestinian villages and towns last year invoked a similar sense of outrage and despair. Boko Haram conducted a widely reported attack on a school in North-eastern Nigeria leading to over 200 girls being abducted to serve as “brides” for their cadres. In many ways, 2014 showed to the world the ugliest side of human nature.

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that violence experienced during armed conflict is at one egregious and extreme end of the spectrum of violence that is encountered and endured by millions of children. Children are not only vulnerable to attack during extreme conflict situations. Children’s vulnerability leads to them being subjected to homicide, violent discipline and abuse of all kinds even outside of conflict situations. Much of this is “hidden in plain sight” as a 2014 UNICEF report aptly reports. This report notes that homicide is a leading cause of preventable injury and death amongst children, especially boys, particularly in the second decade of their lives. Violence as a tool of “discipline” is a significant aspect of the daily lives of children worldwide.

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