Background

In the midst of conflict and humanitarian emergencies, education can be a lifesaving resource that reestablishes a vulnerable child’s sense of normalcy, security and hope for the future. During times of emergency and unrest, education becomes a stabilizing force, giving children and youth something they can depend upon, when their surroundings suggest otherwise. When asked what they wanted most, 99% of children in 17 different emergency contexts included education in their top priorities. Parents, caregivers and communities also consider education as an essential need that should be provided alongside food, shelter and water.

However, the reality is that in 2014, 21.5 million out-of-school primary aged children, 35% of the global number, lived in areas affected by armed conflict. An additional 41 million adolescents and youth of lower and upper secondary age are also out of school in those areas, and the numbers are likely much higher as refugees and internally displaced children are often not included in the data.

Children and youth in emergency and conflict settings are impacted in numerous ways and face multiple barriers to education including damaged school buildings, teacher shortages and a lack of supplies, an increase in sexual and gender-based violence, and trauma from being orphaned or separated from families. Even when schools are making efforts to function, chronic insecurity and acts of violence can make access to school unsafe and attendance sporadic. Economic insecurity, the breakdown of protective social safety networks and legal structures, reduced access to educational and economic opportunities, and restrictions on freedom of movement experienced during conflicts and humanitarian emergencies not only impact participation in education, but often lead to a significant increase in child marriage as families perceive it as a means to provide safety or economic support for their daughters.

Schools themselves have increasingly come under attack in conflict settings. In some countries, violent extremist organizations view educated girls as threats to their ideologies and seek to intimidate or harm girls who pursue an education. Other motives for targeting schools, students, or education staff include the desire to destroy symbols of government control or demonstrate control over an area by an anti-government group; prevent education perceived to teach alien religious or cultural values; abduct children for use as combatants, sex slaves or logistical support; or seize school buildings for strategic use.

CARE’s Approaches

With a focus on reaching the hardest to reach, and harnessing the power of education, CARE’s global work in education has become known for its focus on quality, and

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1 A humanitarian emergency is a man-made or natural disaster that represents a critical threat to the health, safety, security or wellbeing of a large group of people, usually over a wide area.
innovatively breaking down the barriers that keep girls and boys out of school, no matter what environment surrounds the learners.

As one of the founding organizations and strong proponents of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), CARE has long supported work globally on education in emergency and conflict settings. CARE’s education initiatives are part of an essential humanitarian response as well as contributing toward reconstruction and long-term development goals. CARE is engaged in education efforts in conflict and humanitarian emergency settings as diverse as Somalia, Syria, Pakistan, Yemen, Afghanistan, Mali, Egypt, Haiti and Nepal, through support to rebuilding or sustaining formal school systems, promotion of extra-curricular activities, and/or provision of alternative forms of education and training.

**PAKISTAN**

Improving access to safe, quality primary and secondary education is a priority for CARE in Pakistan where our focus is on increasing access of marginalized communities, particularly girls, to educational opportunities, while also working to improve quality and governance.

In those areas affected by conflict, CARE is refurbishing schools and water and sanitation facilities in addition to supporting vocational, life skills and peace-building training initiatives. CARE has worked with children and youth in 42 schools in an area of Swat Valley that has experienced both conflict and devastating floods. Through an integrated approach that includes renovating and reconstructing schools, working with Parent Teacher Councils, and teacher training, more than 5,600 students have experienced an increase in access to and the quality of education available.

CARE works closely with the provincial government and teacher education institutes to improve the quality of learning through continuous professional development of teachers in subject knowledge, instructional methods and creating child-friendly learning environments. CARE is also working to reduce the impact of future humanitarian emergencies on education services by advocating for the construction of disaster-proof schools, by ensuring government and community emergency preparedness plans include provisions for schools, and by training teachers and students in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies. The Parent Teacher Councils provide local and sustainable support to restart and sustain education for children, especially the thousands of girls who were denied their right to education as a result of conflict.

To foster long-term development, CARE works through partnerships with the media, academia and civil society networks to raise awareness, generate research, and advocate for policy reforms that remove discriminatory barriers against girls’ and women’s full participation in education. This includes supporting social movements, working with religious groups, and lobbying government to create a more favorable environment for female education, including greater acceptance of women’s and girls’ mobility, gender-sensitive curricula, and female teacher recruitment.

**SOMALIA**

Across Somalia, including the remote and rural areas of Somaliland, Puntland and Central Somalia, CARE is working with communities, students, teachers, and local leaders to address the multi-faceted challenges that students and their families face. Some of these challenges, including poverty, lack of infrastructure, resistance to secular education, poor quality teaching and lack of relevance to the reality of their lives, affect both girls and boys. Girls however, face the additional obstacles of restrictive traditional gender norms, cultural and religious practices resulting in a preference for boys’ education, mostly male teaching staff, lack of appropriate sanitation facilities, and customs of early
marriage. The recurring drought crisis and environmental degradation in the region prompts increased migration of adolescent girls and boys apart from their families, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In some cases, entire villages have been deserted, as the local population migrates in search of food and water.

CARE is working with a wide variety of partners in mobilizing Community Education Committees and local leaders to address gender roles and support for education; training teachers in child-friendly teaching methods; supporting extra-curricular and support activities, and building and updating infrastructure so that all children have access to quality education and safe sanitation facilities. A particularly important area of focus has been establishing schools for internally displaced children living in camps near Mogadishu.

In addition to the support of the formal school systems, CARE has established 10 alternative education centers, which provide a unique opportunity for older students who never finished primary school to quickly catch up and complete primary school. The flexible class schedules allow access to adolescents who work to supplement household income. Literacy classes for mothers have led to their increased support for girls to enroll and regularly attend school. Vocational training for youth provides critically needed skills for economic engagement and serves as a deterrent to recruitment into armed conflict or piracy. In the past two years alone, more than 30,000 children are back in school or attending for the first time as a result of CARE’s efforts across Somalia.

**SYRIA**

As individuals continue to flee from the conflict in Syria, CARE is supporting work with refugees in Turkey and Jordan. In Turkey, CARE is collaborating with UNICEF to train and support WASH clubs in 20 temporary education centers, training teachers and engaging 2,000 children in activities promoting hygiene in the schools. CARE is leading community-based activities, including recreational activities for children such as sports, drama, and art activities. Household management, conflict resolution, and parenting skills workshops are also being held to build supportive
networks for families, children and youth.

In Jordan, CARE is working with Syrian refugee families settling in urban areas to address the critical need for children to return to school. The Conditional Cash for Education program is helping to identify “at-risk” households and encourage them to keep their children in school, thus avoiding the potential for engaging them in forced child labor or early and forced child marriage. The financial assistance also serves as a substitute for income lost as a result of stopping the children’s engagement in the labor force, while CARE assists the families to identify alternative sources of income to meet their urgent financial needs.

In Azraq camp in Jordan, where more than half of the refugee population is under the age of 18, CARE is helping to address the psycho-social needs of adolescents who have lost their homes, schools, friends and even family members. One innovative approach is the provision of Taekwondo training, which helps to diffuse young people’s anger through developing self-confidence, discipline and focus. Parents report that the martial arts are helping their children to develop a sense of sportsmanship while providing an active physical outlet. Most importantly, they note that the training helps their children cope with the trauma of the civil war and their displacement.

HAITI

The devastating earthquake in 2010 greatly exacerbated an already dire socio-economic reality for millions in Haiti. Three million people were directly affected, of whom the government estimates 1.2 million lost their homes and their livelihoods. Education expenses pose a heavy burden to already struggling families. CARE is working with the government and other partners on a sustainable approach to rebuilding, including strengthening the capacity of education and other local officials to identify out-of-school children and secure space for them in classrooms, whether in public or private schools or accelerated learning programs.

To ensure that children stay in school, efforts to improve the quality of teaching and the learning environment include teacher training in classroom management methods that do not include corporal punishment, the provision of mini-libraries, and support for uniforms and school supplies. Through CARE’s efforts, over 19,600 formerly out-of-school girls and boys are now back in school and pursuing their hopes for a brighter future.

REFERENCES


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