Political Violence and Education
Missing out - adolescents affected by armed conflict face few education opportunities and increased protection risks

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Introduction

Beginning in the fall of 1998, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children conducted a study on patterns and practices regarding the health, education, livelihood, protection and psychological and social needs of adolescents affected by armed conflict. The work focused on the policies and programs of international entities, including Western donor governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions. It identified many of their endeavors, as well as gaps and barriers in their approaches to war-affected adolescents. Excerpts from the study's chapter on education are included in this article. The study is scheduled for release in November 1999.

War-affected adolescents are left behind in education programming

In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 28, established education for children as a right and not just a need. According to the CRC, States Parties shall ensure that primary education is free and compulsory and encourage and make accessible different forms of secondary education. In this case, primary education, which is mostly associated with younger children, is seen as a fundamental right. However, secondary schools and vocational training, which are usually associated with adolescents, are not mandatory, but rather considered to be progressive rights. In part, this acts as a policy barrier that may help to explain the absence of adolescents on the donor and international community education agendas[1]. Although only a minority of refugee adolescents may be ready for secondary education, its availability often serves as an incentive for adolescent participation in basic education opportunities. Similarly, while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recommends the provision of some secondary education opportunities, such as adolescent literacy (in addition to adult literacy), it continues to focus mainly on primary education. Adolescent literacy programs are the equivalent of primary education for children developed for adolescents who have not previously attended school or who have become illiterate - a kind of "basic education for adolescents." Such a program merely provides for first-level instruction for illiterate adolescents in the 12 to 18 years of age group.

The neglect of comprehensive educational opportunities for adolescents produces grave consequences, not only for these individuals, but also for the larger society. Political violence has a very direct and devastating impact on the education of adolescents[2]. As the provision of education in emergency settings is increasingly recognized as synonymous with the protection of war-affected populations, particularly children, the lack of education for adolescents in emergency situations should be seen as a stark shortfall in protection efforts made on their behalf. This paper challenges readers to

consider the following questions: What are the gaps in and barriers to education for adolescents affected by armed conflict, why are they there, and what are the consequences? What are appropriate and effective adolescent-specific educational interventions?

Policy barriers and other factors

As noted above, secondary education is not an international educational priority, which seriously limits educational opportunities for adolescents. In addition, other policy barriers and factors exacerbate this problem. It is central to note that few humanitarian assistance entities even prioritize education. Instead, other critical needs are emphasized and addressed, such as food, water, shelter and medical care, as education is seen more as a long-term development concern. Donors are reluctant to prioritize education in the initial emergency phase, for fear of long-term commitments (Hammock, 1998). Likewise, in some instances, host governments will not allow its provision. There may be political and resource-based barriers such as fear of creating a refugee pull factor, lack of consensus over curricula and the priorities of food and shelter. Also, the importance of education may not be recognized, particularly in the areas of health, psychosocial well-being and protection. As a result, with some exceptions, funding for and attention to education early on in emergencies for adolescents and others is limited.

Documenting the education gap for adolescents

The omnibus study, Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, presented by Graça Machel to the United Nations in 1996, as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 1997 evaluation of its education programming for refugees in its care, help to document both the lack of educational involvement and opportunity for war-affected adolescents. The Machel study, which was conducted in the wake of the widespread adoption of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, brings together current knowledge on the plight of war-affected children. Machel expressed that she was "particularly concerned to discover the lack of meaningful educational activity for adolescents, particularly at the secondary school level," and that "for older children especially, effective education will require strong components of training in life skills and vocational opportunity," and lists recommendations for the protection, care and overall security of adolescent rights. In addition, she also argues that educational opportunities provided at the outset of an emergency provide structure, stability and a sense of normalcy to the lives of children, adolescents and adults immediately following violent upheaval.

Similarly, the education evaluation conducted by the UNHCR, the organization principally charged with providing protection and care to the world's refugees, cited "nearly non-existent educational initiatives for adolescents". Furthermore, it calls education for refugee adolescents "the area which needs the most development by UNHCR" and notes that "…one of the most serious issues faced by UNHCR is the problem of adolescents without constructive activities." The evaluation reports that primary school drop-out rates are high and that most adolescent refugees are in need of basic literacy skills, although fewer numbers are in need of secondary and tertiary education opportunities. Adolescent girls, cited as being worse off than boys, range from 10 to 40 percent of total students in secondary and vocational studies and only 25 percent at the tertiary level (Inspection and Evaluation Service, 1997)[3]. Internally

displaced adolescents, who may have little to no access to humanitarian assistance or protection and may be at higher risk of continued exposure to violence, are even worse off than refugee adolescents.

Although these studies provide limited information documenting the education gap for adolescents, overall, the lack of information on the state of education for refugee adolescents is a formidable problem. With some exceptions, comprehensive reports and statistics on the attendance of refugee adolescents in primary, vocational, adult literacy or other courses are nearly non-existent. Quantitative and qualitative information on adolescent attendance and curricula is sorely needed.
Moreover, there are other factors that contribute to low school attendance for refugee adolescents. The following are some additional barriers war-affected adolescents face in attending school:

- Legal barriers: National law in some countries may bar adolescents from accessing primary education.
- Social pressures: For example, a 14-year-old may be laughed at and feel humiliated attending school with 8-year-olds or to perform more poorly than his or her younger counterparts[4].
- Economic factors: Adolescent boys are usually pressed to produce economically. Adolescent girls are often expected to perform the majority of domestic tasks, leaving little time to attend school or to study out of school.
- Cultural factors: War-affected communities themselves may not expect or value education for adolescent boys and girls. For some it may only appear valuable if it leads to gainful employment or an improvement in livelihood. Boys' education is also frequently valued over girls' education, and in some areas, there is pressure for girls to marry quite young.
- Other obstacles: Lack of sanitary supplies and fear of embarrassment or humiliation may deter girls from attending school as does a lack of privacy should lavatories have to be shared with boys. Long or insecure distances to travel to school may deter attendance, as may school hours that are incompatible with adolescents' other responsibilities. Curricula and teaching methods are often out of touch with the realities and priorities of adolescents' lives.

Consequences
Although the international community has articulated all children's and adolescents' right to primary education and has made commitments to fulfilling this right, its attempt to provide education beyond primary school[5] has largely failed in situations of armed conflict (UNICEF, 1990). This failure is not due to the lack of ideas or knowledge within the field of education about how best to provide education to "youth" in a variety of contexts. In fact, there are a number of important ideas about what might best meet war-affected adolescents' educational needs and rights; however, relatively few educational initiatives have been undertaken for these adolescents. Of those initiatives that have been implemented, very few have been replicated. This serious lack of attention to the provision of educational opportunities to war-affected adolescents has present and future consequences for these particular adolescent individuals, as well as for society as a whole. This neglect represents the failure to invest in adolescents' strengths and

capacities and build on adolescents' qualities as active survivors creating solutions for themselves, in addition to society as a whole.

Lack of education increases risks for adolescents in armed conflict

Whether or not adolescents expect to go to high school and eventually college, to be taught to farm by members of their family, to learn a trade as an apprentice, or to learn in another manner, traditional educational opportunities that prepare them for adulthood often disappear or are interrupted by the need to flee their homes due to armed conflict and the dissolution of their communities. In many cases, young people end up idle, and are consequently at risk for various forms of sexual and economic exploitation and abuse, criminality and indoctrination. Indeed, among refugee and displaced children, adolescents are at the highest risk of military recruitment, sexual violence, prostitution, contracting sexually transmitted diseases, losing opportunities for livelihood and many other ills. Adolescents may also be forced to take on adult obligations before they are ready, such as becoming the head of the household, and be left responsible for their own survival and the survival of others. In all cases, without access to meaningful education, these adolescents are at risk for entering adulthood illiterate, poorly trained or both. Their potential for personal growth, economic sustenance, and contribution to their communities is thereby diminished.

Even more, education is a primary means to psychological healing, skills-building, training for livelihood, peacemaking, social reintegration, good health practices and protection. Education is an essential stabilizing force in all phases of emergencies, re-establishing a sense of normalcy and structure after destruction and chaos. Education also provides an opportunity to build self-confidence and to regain a sense of hope about the future; without it, adolescents may see few opportunities and, faced with few options for escaping future poverty, may be driven to become a destabilizing and destructive force, continuing cycles of violence and vulnerability. Without certain forms of education, such as reproductive health education, adolescents are at increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and in the case of girls, sustaining unwanted and potentially dangerous pregnancies. As children make up the majority of refugee populations, with adolescents a significant proportion among them, ignoring the plight of adolescents not only risks continued rights violations committed against them, but also instability for the future of their societies.

Raising the profile of the need for education in emergencies

Several international conferences have raised the issue of the need to provide education for all throughout the different stages of responses to humanitarian emergencies, including education for adolescents. In November 1998, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Redd Barna (Norwegian Save the Children) and UNHCR sponsored a conference on Children and Adolescents in Armed Conflict. Working groups focused on the prevention of military recruitment, gender-based violence and sexual abuse, protecting separated children, and protecting adolescents. All the groups highlighted education as an important preventive tool, and the participation of children and adolescents in the development and implementation of protective and preventive measures was a recurring theme. Among the conference recommendations was that education be made the fourth component of emergency assistance (in addition to food and water, shelter and health care)[6] and that a position for an adolescent representative

be established in the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (NRC, Redd Barna, UNHCR). As a follow-up to this meeting, a workshop entitled "Basic Education in Emergencies and Transition Situations: A First Sharing of Program Lessons" was held in Washington, D.C. in March, 1999 and brought together 120 representatives of UN agencies, NGOs and donors. Co-sponsored by NRC, InterWorks, the Women's Commission and the Congressional Hunger Center and hosted by the World Bank, the conference found that education in emergencies, including education for adolescents, is essential and achievable. A Human Capacity Development Conference, also sponsored by USAID and a consortium of education organizations in August 1999, again focused attention on education in crisis situations.

What are effective "adolescent-specific" education interventions?

Although there is little evaluative literature regarding education programming geared specifically toward war-affected adolescents, available sources and experience in the field suggest an eclectic group of characteristics that best suit effective education programming for adolescents affected by armed conflict. Such education should be: non-formal, flexible, participatory, situation-based, equitably available for boys and girls, useful, age-specific, gender-specific, linked to realistic employment opportunities, rapid, related to peace-building initiatives and reconciliation efforts, geared towards psychological and social healing and more. It needs to realistically reflect adolescents' needs and circumstances, including their cultural context, whether they be demobilizing soldiers or heads of households. Demobilizing adolescent soldiers, for example, may need vocational alternatives to help prevent re-recruitment and to help facilitate their reintegration.

Although some organizations such as UNHCR, UNICEF, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children have begun to actively address education programming for adolescents, much work is needed. Until recently, attention to adolescents' education needs has relied heavily on enlightenment by field staff and war-affected communities themselves. The following two examples highlight a number of and policy discussions and educational interventions made on behalf of war-affected adolescents.

Preparation for Resettlement - When large numbers of refugees are accepted for resettlement to another country, some receiving countries, such as the United States, provide adolescents with training to prepare them for life in their adoptive country. One such example was the Consortium program run in the Phanat Nikhom refugee camp in Thailand from 1980 to 1990 for U.S.-bound refugees. The programs included English language courses, cultural orientation and work orientation components and also had a special module for adolescents called PASS (Preparation for American Secondary School). PASS familiarized refugee students, aged 12 to 19, with the learning process in American secondary schools through education in basic skills and subject areas, such as language, reading, writing, math, cultural information, interpersonal skills and coping strategies. It also had a specific curriculum component for 17- to 19-year-olds, which included a work orientation component, introducing them to behavioral and skills requirements of the American workplace (Chongcharueyskul, 1990).

Liberian Children's Initiative in 1998 to address the rights and needs of approximately 90,000 returnee and internally displaced children and adolescents. Assisting with their reintegration, LCI supports educational facilities, child tracing, income-generation activities and child rights awareness. Implemented by the International Rescue Committee and Adventist Development and Relief Association (ADRA), LCI's education programs focus on assisting schools in Liberia's five border counties with a high number of returnees, including teacher training; the provision of education materials, including sports equipment; and school-focused income-generation support. Programs targeting girls and environmental education complement the formal education program, and the tracing and integration assistance for unaccompanied children is also supported country-wide. Local persons are also being assisted (UNHCR, 1998).

As adolescents actively survive war situations, seek to create a future for themselves and find meaning in their lives, their need and right to participate in decisions made on their behalf is particularly important. Programs designed for adolescents that involve them in program implementation and evaluation are also important and warrant particular emphasis in further research and practice that takes on the challenge of providing much-needed education opportunities for adolescents. Given the critical connection of education to protection, health, psychosocial well-being, and livelihood, this work should not be done in isolation from that taking place in other programming sectors.

Conclusion

As the least likely among war-affected children to find opportunities to continue their education, adolescents are at increased risk of rights violations, which undermines the future stability of the larger community. While there is growing recognition of education as a key tool for promoting adolescents' livelihood, psychological and social well-being, health and protection, education in emergencies is not prioritized by donors or humanitarian assistance organizations. Some education programs have addressed war-affected adolescents, but information about these experiences is not readily available or widely shared, and successful adolescent-specific programs have largely not been replicated. Educational programming for adolescents is urgently needed. Increased efforts on the part of practitioners are also needed both to document, qualitatively and quantitatively, the lessons learned in the provision of education to war-affected adolescents, as well as to share information, identifying what successful "adolescent-specific" educational programming entails. A variety of sources and field experiences reveal adolescents' need for education programs that respond concretely to the realities of their lives. This may mean non-formal educational opportunities, flexible school hours, participatory approaches and more. In particular, identifying effective ways to involve adolescents as active participants in the programming design, implementation and evaluation process is particularly important. Addressing adolescents' education needs and rights should not and need not come at the expense of interventions for other war-affected populations, but rather should be a new, essential and regular emphasis of humanitarian assistance efforts.

Notes

Similarly, the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees states that refugees are entitled to elementary education. Since elementary education can be interpreted as basic education or specifically as primary school, again, mostly younger children will be targeted while adolescents will be left out.

As a group, adolescents can be defined chronologically, pertaining to a period of life between certain ages; functionally, involving a process of transition from childhood to adulthood, marked by certain rituals or physical changes; and culturally, in a societal context. Organizations identify adolescents differently, as do different societies and cultures. The World Health Organization, for example, defines adolescents as between the ages of 10 and 19. Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child identifies a "child" as "every human being below the age of 18 years, unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."

Girls may attend school in fewer numbers than boys for a number of reasons, including: boys' education is valued more than girls', or girls' education may not be valued at all by the refugee group; girls may have too much domestic work to attend to; they may be forced into early marriages; they may get pregnant and be barred from attending school; and they may suffer sexual and other harassment in school.

UNHCR's education evaluation also states that instead of the common way of educating refugee adolescents, by putting them in lower primary school classes with younger children, they should "learn with other adolescents or adults and use learning materials, which relate to their own life experiences."

"Education for All" became a rallying cry after the 1990 World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand. The expanded vision of education that emerged from Jomtien included emphasis on basic education, early childhood care and development and learning through adolescence and adulthood. It also made girls' education a priority. A review of progress in 1996 revealed that the drive to enroll 6- to 11-year-olds in primary school by the year 2000 overshadowed the conference's integrated vision of basic education. Adolescents and others had been left behind.

The Norwegian government is advocating that schooling be given priority in humanitarian assistance on a par with food, medicine and shelter and be delivered just as swiftly. Norway's Minister of International Development and Human Rights has explained that Norway's focus on education is due to education's ability to give children and adolescents a sense of continuity and security, an opportunity to develop and address psychosocial trauma, a chance to live a more meaningful life, prevent them from becoming soldiers and help them in the reintegration process both during and after the combat.

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