

World Vision International's Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child's Day of General Discussion:

“The right of the child to education
in emergency situations”

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World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by addressing the causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, gender or disability.

I. Introduction

The onset of a crisis situation of conflict or natural disaster can result in generous outpourings of humanitarian aid and assistance providing life-saving necessities of food aid, water, sanitation, shelter, protective measures and basic health services.

Ensuring the continuation of education has been generally considered to be less urgent, less important and secondary to other more imperative basic needs. The interest of the international community and extent of humanitarian response is often in proportion to the level of desperation conveyed by media who often seek out and portray images of serious physical suffering.

However, the reality of the majority of those caught up in such emergency situations is not a desperation due to hunger or disease, it is the desperation and hopelessness born from the belief that they have lost their future.

In 2001, a group of approximately 60 individuals who had escaped from the Lord's Resistance Army were detained in Khartoum, Sudan, awaiting repatriation to Uganda. Some of these individuals had been abducted as children or adolescents and were now young adults. For them, any opportunity for formal education had ended with their abduction, sometimes at the age of 10 or 11. Now in their late teens and twenties, many dealing with the consequences of untreated injuries, years of malnutrition, psychological trauma, and unknown HIV and AIDS status, they were asked about their concerns and ambitions for the future. Without exception, all of them wished to return to school, finish their education and improve their chances to have a future vocation.

The right to education is enshrined both in international human rights law as well as international humanitarian law.¹ In law, this right does not change or diminish in an emergency or situation of fragility but in practice it is treated as a right which can be suspended or dispensed with entirely.

World Vision believes that a child's right to education does not change with the onset of an emergency. Access to a safe learning environment in emergencies is not only a right but can save children's lives through disseminating messages that mitigate harm, increase resilience, protect against violence and exploitation, and build peace. We believe that the right for children to have access to non-formal education becomes even more critical at such times, and that minimum standards of safe, inclusive, quality education must be maintained.

¹ See the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (article 26), the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (articles 14) as well as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (articles 28 and 29). The right to education in a situation of armed conflict is further protected under international humanitarian law by the *Fourth Geneva Convention* (article 50), and Protocols I (article 52) and II (article 4), and the elementary education of refugees is protected by the *Refugee Convention 1951* (article 22).

World Vision welcomes the recognition at the international level that the promotion and protection of the right to education in emergencies has been neglected, treated as a secondary right – even as a luxury – to be fulfilled only if conditions and resources allow.

This recognition and growing awareness of the concern has been evidenced by the decision of the Committee on the Rights of the Child as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education to focus on this issue, and the creation of an Education Cluster of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee within the UN Humanitarian Reform Agenda. World Vision welcomes the increased awareness by governments of the work of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and its Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction.

2. World's Vision work to promote and protect the right to education in emergencies

Definitions

- In the context of the right to education in emergencies, World Vision understands “emergency” using the same language as that adopted by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education² to mean any crisis situation that disrupts, denies, hinders progress or delays the realisation of the right to education. Such crises can be caused by armed conflicts – both international (including military occupation) and non-international, as defined by international humanitarian law – by post-conflict situations and by all types of natural disasters.
- For World Vision, “education” includes both formal and non-formal systems that bring children and youth to functional levels of literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. Education starts during early childhood to prepare children to succeed in formal education, with the goal that a child is educated for life. Education incorporates the building of community learning and awareness to help parents and other adults take charge of their development future.

World Vision’s work for education in emergencies encompasses both programmes and advocacy. This paper will give a brief explanation of some elements of our programmes:

- a) the role of **life skills education** and
- b) early establishment of **Child Friendly Spaces** following the onset of an emergency.

This paper also covers two particular concerns for which we are advocating for greater attention:

- a) the situation of **girl’s education in emergencies**, and
- b) the **education in emergencies for children with disabilities**.

² A/HRC/8/10

a. Life skills education

Following a natural disaster or outbreak of conflict situation, children are at greater risk of suffering malnutrition, disease, neglect, sexual and gender-based violence, and of being trafficked for sexual exploitation or recruited to join armed forces. Giving children a chance to learn essential life skills becomes more critical at this time, as such skills can be life saving.

World Vision has developed a new model to provide children and adolescents with life skills in formal and non-formal education. World Vision trains teachers, youth and parents to stimulate children and adolescents in different ways through communication and expression, discussion of experiences, critical thinking and creativity, as well as literacy and numeracy.

This model has five different target groups and strategies:

1. Early childhood development (children 0–4 years old)
2. Pre-school and primary education programme for teachers
3. After-school primary education support programme
4. Vulnerable-youth income generation
5. HIV and AIDS peer education

This model was tested in Mexico with 14,000 children in different communities where World Vision works, and huge impacts were observed, with children developing more confidence and making great progress in managing their emotions and dealing with social situations. During the floods in Tabasco in October 2007, World Vision Mexico trained teachers and supervisors on this model, working in schools being used as emergency shelters.

World Vision is currently providing life skills education in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where we are assisting 26,000 children in 12 Child Friendly Spaces.

The new life skills model is being implemented, including psycho-social, recreative and creative activities, which give the children an opportunity to express their feelings and opinions. Children, youth and adults receive training about child rights, organise and play games, sing songs and play football with volunteers who respect the children's mother tongue and traditions. Committees have been organised to report incidents of violations against children.

The life skills model is being adapted to the specific needs of the local context, and plans are in place to train teachers to support literacy and numeracy, survival, thinking and communication skills in the Child Friendly Spaces. Parents will receive training on nutrition, health, survival skills, hygiene, HIV and AIDS and gender awareness.

b. Child Friendly Spaces

Emergencies present the risk of being separated from family members, or of being caught up or injured in hostilities or by the effects of the natural disaster. In all emergencies and according to the context, World Vision creates Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) as soon as the situation allows. These are spaces to shield children from the effects of the emergency and help them cope with emergency situations and loss. They are places of learning and of recreation, giving the community a chance to engage with the process of helping children return to a sense of normality.

CFS can be established anywhere, and can be as simple as a large tent or supervised open area. Children can meet their friends, play, take part in creative activities, share and process the trauma and experiences they have had. CFS provide a location in which children can receive formal or non-formal education, give parents or caregivers a chance to hand over the responsibility for the children for short periods and, critically, give the children a safe place to be.

CFS are staffed by local people, who might be living in a camp as a result of the emergency. World Vision staff ask the communities to recommend individuals who have experience teaching or are in other ways considered respected opinion leaders. These individuals are then trained and oriented by World Vision before beginning their work.

The World Vision response to the Asian Tsunami was a milestone in which we learned the extent to which education and the opportunity to receive training serve to help families in their return to normal lives.

Child Friendly Spaces were a key element of our Tsunami response, for example, in Aceh Province, Indonesia, where 26 Child Friendly Spaces were established to provide safe play areas for 3,600 children. Many of these children had lost one or both parents. Hygiene kits and toys were given to children in the Child Friendly Spaces, and activities such as drawing competitions, children's festivals, table tennis, poetry and story-telling were important in promoting the children's well-being.

On 2 May 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar. In a cyclone-devastated village in South Dagon, near Yangon, most of the wooden bamboo houses were completely destroyed by the storm. World Vision quickly set up a CFS in South Dagon, in a cottage that was previously used as a community library. More than 200 children could attend in two three-hour sessions each day.

Displaced and orphaned children, or children whose houses were destroyed by the storm and who were waiting for assistance to rebuild their homes, also participated at the centre. A volunteer teacher at the World Vision-initiated non-formal education classes said "This place gives them security, happiness and knowledge. If such places weren't set up, these children would have ended up on the streets, roaming around in the rain."

c. The impact of emergency on girls' education

World Vision is particularly concerned about the climate of violence in some emergency situations that affects the level of school attendance, as well as a child's ability to learn. Girls are particularly at risk of suffering sexual and gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation (SGBV) and may be pressured to engage in "survival sex" to cover basic needs and school-related costs. Others are forced into early marriage and to drop out of school.

Research carried out by World Vision's Africa Regional Office in 2006 revealed the impact of displacement on children in the Great Lakes region of Africa. In their learning environments, girls and boys living in refugee and IDP camps faced prevalent violence, abuse and exploitation perpetrated both by fellow students as well as teachers.³ For girls specifically, where teachers themselves are the perpetrators, the research found teachers are able to gain the girl's "consent" to sex with the promise of good grades or other assistance to continue attending school. Parents who fear the increased threat of violence against their daughters or pregnancy outside of marriage may keep their girls from leaving home to attend class.

SGBV can prevent girls from accessing school, from achieving quality learning in school and from exercising those outcomes of learning after school. While SGBV violates many different rights of women and children, the damage it can do to their education and future opportunities can be particularly devastating.

World Vision has noted that the presence of female teachers has been proven to have a positive impact on the climate of violence in schools, reducing SGBV and encouraging girls to continue and succeed in their education. Accordingly, World Vision works to ensure appropriate numbers of women are deployed and recruited into the classroom and that all people working with children understand the necessity for protection and the consequences of abuse. Ensuring appropriate and safe facilities (such as the location of toilets) and a safe learning environment through teacher training and student standards are critical for ensuring the enrollment, retention and completion of education of girls in emergencies.

In 2008, World Vision will carry out further research to better understand the link between SGBV and the impact on education, as well as examine the potential of life skills education to mitigate those impacts.

Following more than 20 years of armed conflict in southern Sudan, World Vision is applying a community-based, culturally appropriate approach to rehabilitate the returnees and find creative ways to send children, especially girls, to school. At a community meeting in one of the more traditional areas of south Sudan where World Vision works, children and youth shared their priorities and hopes for their community. Mary, a 13-year-old girl, described how the boys in her village walked long distances to a neighbouring school. Fears of rape or getting involved with boys prevented Mary's parents from letting her attend. She pleaded for a school in her village so that she could learn and have opportunities. She said she was afraid that if she didn't go to school, her father and brothers would marry her off soon. Mary's story is repeated in the lives of hundreds of thousands of young girls in southern Sudan for whom a basic education, freedom and choice remain distant dreams.

³ World Vision, *Their future in our hands*, 2006

d. Education in emergencies for children with disabilities

According to UNICEF, there are over 150 million disabled children in the world.⁴ These are among the most excluded and stigmatised of the world's children, often marginalised by society, communities and even their own families. UNESCO recently estimated that a third of all primary-aged children still out of school in developing countries are disabled children.⁵

World Vision is concerned that this exclusion of disabled children from education is only magnified in situations of conflict or natural disaster. This exclusion is largely due to discrimination against disabled children, failure to identify disabled children during the assessment phase of emergency response, and educational responses that fail to respond to the individual needs of each and every child.

This failure to include disabled children in education in emergencies is concerning for three reasons.

- It is a violation of every child's right to education.
- Emergency situations can lead to a greater incidence of impairment among children as a result of increased rates of injury, a lack of medical care, and disruption to preventive health care programmes⁶ and so more children miss out on an education.
- Disabled children – though 1.7 times more likely to experience violence and abuse than non-disabled children⁷ and at greater risk of being separated from their families in emergency situations⁸ – fail to benefit from the protection and psycho-social support provided by education interventions during times of emergency.

Key to including disabled children in education interventions is awareness amongst humanitarian personnel, communities, families and teachers about the right of disabled children to education. Training should also be provided on how disabled children can be effectively included in education programmes through child-centred teaching methodology, accessible buildings and countering negative attitudes towards disabled children and education.

⁴ UNICEF, *State of the world's children*, 2006

⁵ Education for All, *Global monitoring report*, 2007

⁶ A Haris and S Enfield, *Disability, equality and human rights: a training manual for development and humanitarian organisations*, Oxfam publication, Great Britain, 2003. A recent report by Save the Children estimated that at least 6 million children have been permanently impaired or seriously injured as a direct result of armed conflict between 1990 and 2005. (Save the Children, *Protecting children in emergencies escalating threats to children must be addressed*, Policy Brief, volume 1, No 1 2005)

⁷ UNICEF's 2005 report on Violence against children with disabilities states that while all children are at risk of being victims of violence, disabled children have significantly increased risk because of stigma, negative traditional beliefs and ignorance. Lack of social support, and limited opportunities for education, employment or participation in the community further isolate disabled children and their families, leading to increased levels of stress and hardship.

⁸ Early Childhood Matters : July 2005 , No 104. "Disabled children in conflict situations", M van der Kroft *Disabled Children's Rights: a practical guide*, Save the Children, Sweden, 2001

World Vision's experience suggests that in emergencies humanitarian staff often feel under immense pressure in a chaotic environment and state that they do not have the space or time to give much thought to ensuring that disabled adults and children are fully included in emergency programmes, including education. Many see disability as "a side issue to be worked on when we have the time" as well as something to be dealt with by specialist disability organisations.

Work must be done with humanitarian agencies and local education authorities to ensure issues of disability are mainstreamed through all aspects of emergency response and are no longer viewed as an "add on" or as belonging to the domain of "specialist" agencies. If this doesn't happen, a large proportion of affected communities, both previously and newly disabled people, will continue to be left out and face increased vulnerability. Existing community groups, such as disabled people's organisations (DPOs) and parents' organisations should be drawn on as important partners.

In order to include disabled children in education programmes, humanitarian agencies must ensure that they work with communities, families and DPOs to identify these children and address their needs.

Following the earthquake that hit Pakistan in 2005, World Vision – through 17 children's councils organised as part of World Vision's child protection programming – identified 512 children in and around the city of Balakot who had been left with physical impairments and were homebound since the quake. Most of the children were injured when schools collapsed during the disaster.

World Vision recognises that during the social upheaval often created in emergency contexts, there are new opportunities for previously excluded groups, particularly girls and people with disabilities, to be included in non-formal and mainstream education. This can be through modelling inclusive education practices and, in the post-crisis reconstruction phase, ensuring physical accessibility to schools for all children.

Annex: Recommendations

World Vision has five recommendations for the Committee on the Rights of the Child concerning measures to be taken by States Parties, as well as international agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to ensure the promotion and protection of the right to education in situations of emergency in accordance with articles 28 and 29 of the Convention. The fifth recommendation is addressed directly to the Committee.

- 1.** All states, international organisations and NGOs should adopt and implement INEE Minimum Standards as a foundational part of their emergency response, ensuring that policies and programming to support education in emergencies are in line with the Minimum Standards. The Minimum Standards provide a global framework for co-ordinated action to enhance the quality of educational preparedness and response, increase access to safe and relevant learning opportunities, and ensure humanitarian accountability in providing these services. Although not binding under international law, the Standards are founded on the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and other legal instruments
- 2.** Welcoming the UN Security Council's recent adoption on 19 June 2008 of Resolution 1820 to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, World Vision urges states, international agencies and NGOs to prioritise the protection of women and children from all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, during emergencies and especially in school settings. International commitments must be translated into local efforts to reduce SGBV and gender inequity through engaging men, women and children in grassroots advocacy.
- 3.** States should ensure that national curricula provide life skills education relevant to the context of the existing or threatened emergency. Such education might include practical elements such as land mine awareness, health and hygiene, HIV and AIDS awareness, environment education, and longer-term community-building skills taught through peace education and projects to address violent and anti-social behaviour.
- 4.** States Parties should prioritise the protection and inclusion of all children through training at least two teachers per school on child-centred teaching, the needs and opportunities for disabled children, and how to create and carry out Individual Education Plans. This would allow all children to move towards inclusion in education systems and enable schools to be prepared with the capacity to include all children in emergency response education.
- 5.** World Vision proposes that the Committee on the Rights of the Child begins work to draft a General Comment on the implementation of the right to education for children in emergencies, which would provide guidance to states as to activities they would need to undertake to ensure the implementation of, *inter alia*, articles 28 and 29 with respect to emergency situations.

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