Education in Emergencies: Understanding the integration of education into humanitarian responses

Over 15 million people around the world are forced out of their homes while confronting emergencies, extreme violence and economic crises. With the growing effects of climate change on global weather patterns, this number is expected to steadily increase culminating in a specialised focused on environmental migration. Forced displacement and extreme violence interrupt lives and impacts livelihoods. With nearly half of the refugee and asylum seeking population consisting of children and with the average length of displacement lasting up to two decades (Anderson et al., 2011), one can begin to construe the effects these 'interruptions' have on the opportunities available to future generations.

Formerly, humanitarian aid efforts for displaced and refugee populations focused on meeting the basic necessities for human survival: food, clean water, basic shelter, medical assistance and safety. Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 26's call to extend basic education to all—including those in crisis and emergency situations—the discourse on Education in Emergencies has begun to take hold. The United Nations (UN) played an integral role in establishing this discourse. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees' 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement established the goal of providing education to displaced children. Two years later, UNHCR alongside two other UN organisations (the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the UN Children's Fund) assembled at the First Global Consultation on Education in Emergencies, which led to the enactment of the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies and the creation of the approaches and objectives guiding the sector. Despite these grand declarations for education for *all*, Education in Emergencies remains severely underfunded, under researched and underrepresented by donor support and humanitarian aid efforts.

This paper will explore the impact and influence of the emerging sector of Education in Emergencies, with a special focus on the UN's involvement in the integration of education for responses to humanitarian crises. While the UN consists of 15 specialised organisations, with several of them participating in humanitarian relief aid, this paper will view the agency as a whole with the occasional highlight of the particular works implemented by UNESCO and the UNHCR. A background on the state of refugees and displaced persons from around the world and the causes of the crises they face will be given to add context to the vast challenges faced in humanitarian emergencies. The paper will review the advent of Education in Emergencies and the delineation of its objectives from its predecessor 'education for peace'. I will explain the Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction and the objectives created to guide current education efforts. The psychosocial and economic benefits of having Education in Emergencies and why agencies like the UN advocate for its inclusion in humanitarian efforts will also be detailed. The criticisms and concerns on the use of standardised approaches and the potential biases in global emergency education principles will be voiced to create a holistic appraisal of the 'two faces' this sector.

Background

Growing global refugee crisis

Global trends demonstrate that the refugee crisis is steadily growing. According to a 2012 UNHCR publication, 17 million people were labelled as refugees or asylum seekers (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2012), with a sharp increase of these populations centred in cities rather than refugee camps. 44% of the 17 million were noted as children (United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees, 2012). Displacement is prompted by a variety of reasons, ranging from economic hardships to conflict to famine. Extreme weather patterns are causing an exponential increase in the average number of natural disasters since the 1980s (Oxfam International, as cited by Burde et al, 2017), adding climate change and weather related emergencies to factors behind the global refugee crisis. Many emergency situations see the relocation of individuals *within* the boundaries of their countries, resulting in a focus on internal displacement. Around the world, 19 million children are internally displaced due to conflict (European Union, 2016). Displacement intervals have prolonged with refugee displacement lengths lasting an average of up to twenty years (Anderson et al., 2011). This has forced humanitarian organisations to reconsider traditional responses to emergency situations, moving beyond the provision of immediate supplies and towards the establishment of long-term, human rights-oriented aid interventions.

Education for peace or Education in Emergencies?

Just as approaches to humanitarian aid priorities have begun to be reassessed, education discourse in this sector have also evolved. Initially, discourse on the use of education as a preventative tool for conflict took precedence. Intercultural exchanges and curricula teaching 'mutual understanding' of human rights were prevalent in the agendas of international agencies, including UNESCO. Education in Emergencies began to emerge in the 1990s, as noted by Lerch and Buckner (2012), with a dramatic swing from the use of words such as 'peace' and 'understanding' to 'emergencies' and 'conflict'.

Education for peace and Education in Emergencies diverge in their aims. The goal of education for peace lies in the prevention of international conflicts, whereas Education in Emergencies is built around the idea of "individual human development through education" (Lerch and Buckner, 2018) regardless of the circumstances that the individual is found in. In essence, education for peace concerns itself with *preventing* global conflicts from occurring in the first place, while Education in Emergencies recognises the existence of current conflicts and calls for the delivery of educational opportunities *during* those times of crisis. Education in Emergencies does not limit itself to a focus on outbreaks of violence and, instead, takes a holistic approach in its definition of 'emergencies' encompassing widespread crises that may disrupt lives and access to education.

Education as a human right

Post-World War Two saw the start of the UN's involvement in refugee education (Lerch and Buckner, 2018). In 1948, education was declared a human right through the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Bromley and Andina, 2010). This call for education as a human right was echoed again eighteen years later in the UN's International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Extension of educational access to refugees was specifically emphasised in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Bromley and Andina, 2010) and bonded "states under international law (either through their signing of the convention or via customary global practice)" (Bruce Kendle, 1998) to administer this access. UN literature, also, grants "free and compulsory" primary education to displaced children that is suitable to the "recipients' cultural identity, language and religion" (Anderson et al, 2011). Detained asylum seekers under the age of 18 are equally protected and given the right to education (Ody, 2012). Led by the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, which advocated for the inclusion of Education in Emergencies (Sommers, 2005), UN organisations assembled for the First Global Consultation on Education in Emergencies and created the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (Anderson and Roberts, 2005). The UN has continually pressed for the "access to education in emergency situations for all affected populations and to implement strategies and policies to ensure and support the realization of this right as an integral element of humanitarian assistance and response" (Anderson et al., 2011). The implementation and practices of the agency, however, do not match its calls, which will be discussed further below.

The Minimum Standards in Education Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction

Despite the numerous appeals by the UN (and other international agencies) for the extension of education to all, "education in these contexts amongst agencies were uncoordinated" (Anderson and Roberts, 2005). The Inter-Agency Network for Education, spearheaded by the UN and other member agencies, serves as a community of practice allowing organisations to share ideas and best practices within the sector (Anderson and Roberts, 2005). This network set about to create the Minimum Standards in Education Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction in 2004, which helped set global guidelines for emergency education initiatives. The responsibilities of providing education and the types of curricula to be followed were laid out with this endeavour. Critics note the Minimum Standards' vague and ambiguous language and broad focus, creating opportunity for the Minimum Standards to "partially fail to fill their intended purpose of providing guidance to education service providers in emergency education" (Bromley and Andina, 2010). Despite this, the Minimum Standards play a monumental role in redefining "the boundaries of emergency humanitarian aid to include education, traditionally thought of as a long-term international development concern" (Bromley and Andina, 2010).

Importance of Education in Emergencies

Time and again, education has taken precedence in emergency discourse. Anderson et al. (2011) indicate that assessments show education as high priority to displaced communities. Community-initiated educational efforts amongst refugee populations accentuate this point (Bromley and Andina, 2010). Families recognise the importance of education in providing opportunity and breaking the poverty cycle. According to the UNESCO Education for All Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the Marginalised, as cited by Ody (2012), children from socio-economically marginalised families are in a disadvantage due to their economic level and their parent's low levels or lack of education, making education "particularly important".

The importance of Education in Emergencies stems beyond the more noticeable benefits of individual development, economic resiliency, vocational training and skills acquisition. Having well-educated people who can be trained in essential skills can facilitate agencies' relief efforts. Joyner (1996) demonstrates a case study from Sudan in which the lack of sufficiently qualified people led to aid organisations struggling to fulfil the need for health workers. Education can also bring about: lifesaving information relating to mental and public health (Joyner, 1996); protections against "radicalisation and criminal activities, forced recruitment and forced marriage" (European Union, 2016); and a return to normalcy in unsettling times (Ody, 2012).

Economic development

Access to current and future opportunities may be the most apparent value of Education in Emergencies for refugee and displaced communities. As Joyner (1996) suggests,

> The society affected continues to develop through the crisis. In this way, crisis itself can create opportunities as well as problems. The way in which the emergency is addressed must take into account these long-term implications. Education is a critical aspect of this approach.

By granting opportunities to gain newfound knowledge, education is able to contribute to "economic growth, reducing inequality, and building social cohesion" (Burde et al., 2017). Education programmes support increased literacy rates amongst returning refugees (Skran, 2008). As noted earlier, educated people can help with the implementation of humanitarian objectives, like public health and teaching.

Those who engage in these objectives often return home with "knowledge of NGO operating procedures" and "different experiences and skills" (Skran, 2008).

Education has the ability to alleviate conflict emergencies and *prevent* it from occurring in the first place. Collier, as cited by Versmesse et al. (2017), posits that the more educated a person is, the more likely he will avoid conflict and instead choose to engage in "peaceable economic activities" and break out of the 'conflict trap'. The 'conflict trap' indicates that the more impoverished a State is, the more likely it will suffer from civil violence further increasing the poverty rate (Versmesse et al., 2017). More education means more possibilities of income generation and self-sufficiency, thus decreasing the likelihood of violent emergencies.

Psychosocial impact

The learning environment is particularly important for the psychology of displaced children. The act of following a regular school schedule allows for the symbolic return to a 'normal' routine (Joyner, 1996) in unfamiliar circumstances. Winthrop and Kirk (2005) note the importance of teachers as predominate adult figures for children who were separate from their parents or who have been orphaned. The UNHCR *Handbook for Emergencies* outlines the UN's use of teachers to help mitigate mental trauma by training them on the identification of basic mental health and psychosocial problems (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2005). These teachers are integrated into the agency's psychiatric reporting systems. Schools, then, ease the ability of health professional to maximise psychiatric treatment by serving as an assembly point of large numbers of the children needing the psychiatric support (Burde et al., 2017).

Difficulties with Education in Emergencies

While education has notable qualities for improving the livelihoods of refugees and displaced populations in emergency circumstances, the 'other face' of education must be explored. Burde et al. (2017) note curricula's ability to "fuel hostility" through isolationist practices and cultural insensitivities. Bromley and Andina (2010) argue that education efforts for refugees can create "resentment among the citizens of host countries (many of whom lack access to education themselves)". Critics have voiced their concerns about unique conditions surrounding these crises being ignored by overarching objectives, like those within the Minimum Standards. UNESCO's outdated 'School in a box' programme is an example of the UN's priority for a 'one-size fits all' approach superseding the needs of deprived communities (Bird, 2005).

Additionally, critics cringe at the low calibre and limited financial support allocated to these undertakings. The UN has expressed its support for education for all on numerous occasions, yet budget lines within the agency do not reflect the importance that education is stated to have. According to Ody (2012), education within humanitarian organisations receives an average of 4% of agency funding. This total came about after a global call to education in 2012; before then, Education in Emergencies received less than *2%* of humanitarian funding (European Union, 2016). Limited funding hinders the quality of these efforts, leaving one to question the actual intentions of the schooling.

Creating hostility

What is included within school syllabi and how it is delivered may lead to the outbreak of further dissent and violence in emergency situations (Burde et al., 2017). Minority groups may be at a particular disadvantage if courses are taught in a language foreign to them, resulting in "deepening social inequality and potentially intensifying grievances" (Burde et al., 2017)—opening up the

possibility of conflict. Curricula have been known to create dissonance against oppositional minority groups. The heavy ethnic and tribal identification instilled on Rwandans, which often showcased itself in school settings, aided the lead up to the Hutu-led genocide against Tutsis. Divisiveness can also stem from religious education, a compulsory subject in many public school systems around the world. Take the tensions in Northern Ireland as an example. The religious (and deeply political) conflict between Protestant and Roman Catholic communities have brought about discourse on education, religion and its role in the conflict. Barnes (2005) writes about the rift between the schools of Christianity, stating "the segregated nature of schooling and Catholic opposition to integrated schools fit this paradigm: education conforms to the same pattern of religious division as that of the wider society and education mirrors the religious nature of the conflict".

Hostilities can arise between implementing agencies and the States responsible for displaced populations. Agencies are notorious for arriving at the scene of emergencies and beginning their programmes while "bypassing or undermining the education authorities" (Stephensen, 2010). Such insensitive practices create animosities towards agencies and removes the possibilities of strengthening education systems weakened by the conflicts. Furthermore, UN Education in Emergencies activities tend to rely on expensive methodologies, which cannot be sustained by the States' systems "leaving local officials feeling left in the dust" (Sommers, 2005).

'Regime of truth'?

Critics have noted that biases can arise in the curricula used by agencies. Versmesse et al. (2017) highlight how the use of phrases such as 'the cycle of anger' and 'instill attitudes' suggest that "conflict-affected communities […] only possess 'wrong truths': if they had known the truth, [the] crisis could have been prevented". Identifying education as the breaker of the poverty cycle can characterise conflict-affected areas as wholly uneducated and poor, and bitter about it. A 1999 UNICEF report, as cited by Versmeese et al. (2017), calls for the use of emergencies as an "opportunity for change". These calls suggest that foreign perspectives are superior or should override previous, local views.

Regional challenges and outlooks are often overlooked by Education in Emergencies interventions. There are distinct differences between the "global-level work of professionals with shared standards and the distinct, local context of each emergency", leading local initiatives to be "more relevant and beneficial to students than those stemming from global standards" (Bromley and Andina, 2010). The UNHCR is no stranger to this disconnect; with its education programmes running in over 90 countries, there are only two education-focused posts within the organisation (Ahlen, 2006). It is difficult to imagine that curricula for their programmes reflect the specific needs of recipients without the opportunity for UNHCR professionals to engage with local populations. Rather than trying to change people's thoughts, Versmesse et al. (2017) suggest a focus on challenging the structural injustices that contributed to violent emergencies.

Quality of Education in Crises

Scholars convey alarm for the quality of the education delivered during emergencies, noting a stark difference between student attendance and effective *learning*. The depth of the learning quality is not well captured due to the lack of data collected during crises. This lack of quantitative data is of grave concern because decisions for Education in Emergencies objectives are infrequently supported by evidence of effectiveness. The nature of emergencies does not guarantee the presence of suitably qualified teachers in each refugee or displaced community. Therefore, many humanitarian interventions are focused on teacher training and development. Yet, Tubbs Dolan (2018) finds that the limited studies indicate that children in crisis situations are "falling behind in achieving essential learning outcomes", meaning agencies are overlooking children's holistic learning and development

needs. Overburdened curricula with the "Inclusion of additional subjects—typically HIV/AIDS, life skills and peace education" (Bird, 2005) further complicate teaching for these inexperienced teachers and make absorption of all the content more difficult for children. When children fail to learn, they are "almost guaranteed sentencing to unskilled employment option and social and economic marginalization" (Ody, 2012), creating opportunities for conflicts to newly arise or worsen.

Final thoughts

As with any global initiative, an impartial assessment of Education in Emergencies merits the attention of humanitarian and development professionals alike. The advantages of education, a fundamental human right, for refugees, asylum seekers and displaced populations out weight the concerning weaknesses in the field. The types of emergencies and their frequency and duration are expanding, therefore humanitarian responses to these crisis should adapt to meet the needs of the growing populations of refugees and displaced persons. Education is starting to take a forefront in development and humanitarian work, yet a shockingly small amount of the UN's budget is being allocated towards it. This needs to change. The divide between humanitarian aid and developmental support creates needless rifts during critical times. Rather than staying divided behind these insignificant lines, the UN should call upon co-operative and synchronised efforts by their humanitarian *and* development divisions (such as the UN Development Programme), effectively bringing together expertise and resources from both branches. The involvement of State educational officials should be a requirement and should be effectively enforced in all educational programming to ensure the appropriateness of the curricula for global and national standards while meeting the actual needs of the local beneficiaries. Lastly, humanitarian and development actors must recognise that our world is facing turbulent times. There is no foreseeable end to instra-state conflict and climate disasters. Thus, more research is needed to support the expansion and growth of this sector.

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