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The role of education in the lives of young displaced adolescents in Darfur, Sudan

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Rationale

Education has been long neglected in emergency relief efforts. Historically, it has been viewed as a development activity, having little to contribute to the basic survival and security needs of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in temporary or transitional arrangements. In more recent years, international organizations providing humanitarian assistance have been making the case that education in humanitarian crises should be a vital component of basic protection for a range of reasons. First, schools, whether formal or non-formal, have the potential to save lives immediately by providing children and adolescents living in camps with protection from exploitation and harm. Second, educational programs which provide safe spaces for children and adolescents can provide venues where healing from traumatic experiences can take place. Third, education can provide children and youth with a range of life skills appropriate to their circumstances including knowledge of HIV/AIDS prevention and care, landmine awareness and hygiene. Fourth, and most importantly for the longer term, education can contribute to successful transitions to adulthood by positioning young people with the necessary knowledge and skills to become economically productive as adults. A recent study of the long term consequences of abduction for youth from Northern Uganda who are now returning to civilian life after a life as child solders has found that the most pervasive impact of abduction was an interruption of their education, with long term consequences for learning outcomes, quality of employment (skilled versus unskilled work) and earnings (Blattman 2006).

Despite education's potential for good, it must also be recognized, that, in conflict situations, education can become politicized among warring groups. The denial of education to certain groups within a society may be used as a weapon, or education may be used to suppress certain languages, traditions, art forms, and religious and cultural practices. Curricula can be manipulated for political purposes. Schools can become centers of recruitment for armed groups, direct targets in conflict or can reinforce traditional, harmful gender roles including the exploitation of girls. In particular, girls may face risks walking to school or exploitation by teachers and other authorities in positions of power. Therefore, while education can play a crucial role in the process of reconciliation and reconstruction, its potential for harm must also be recognized and addressed to mitigate any possible dangers.

Surprisingly, however, there is little empirical evidence documenting the actual extent of education during emergencies, its mode of delivery and quality, or its effects (either beneficial or otherwise) on girls and boys. Those few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which currently support educational efforts for children and youth in these contexts are typically too busy providing services while confronting the day-to-day challenges of operating in a conflict zone to document or share the lessons learned. Without such evidence, most donors who provide funds for humanitarian disasters, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), lack transferable models with the result that funding levels remain modest despite the need.

Research Setting

The research site is the Darfur region in western Sudan, a region that has been and continues to be significantly affected by displacement from ongoing conflict. Due to the sheer size of the affected population,[1] the level of international involvement, ongoing violence and displacement, the documented violations against children and youth (in particular rape), and the duration of the crisis (now extending beyond 5 years), Darfur serves as a compelling contemporary case study of the role of education in the lives of young adolescents in a setting of on-going conflict and displacement.

Coordination between the humanitarian agencies and the Government of Sudan's Ministry of Education is poor, as is the coordination among humanitarian agencies within Darfur. Hence we have not been surprised to find variations across camps in the accessibility, longevity and quality of schooling, as well as the type of schooling available (e.g. formal, non-formal and religious schooling). These differences in school type, access and quality are likely to have important implications for child outcomes. We will analyze and document the differences between—and within—IDP settings with respect to 2 major sets of school-related outcomes for children: (1) learning outcomes, including their knowledge of protective behaviors and (2) health, including psychosocial health.. We expect that this research study will contribute to a greater understanding of the role of education in emergencies and to improvements in the delivery of educational services to affected populations – both refugees and IDPs.

In Darfur, Sudan, like many other settings in conflict, ensuring a safe and productive transition to adulthood for young people is an urgent concern for policymakers and society at large. Striking geographic and gender disparities in enrollment can be found in Sudan because of the conflict. For example while the net attendance rate of primary school age children in Khartoum state is 84.6% for girls and 88.1% for boys, it is only 39.5% for girls compared to 53.7% for boys in West Darfur State, according to the 2006 Sudan Household Health Survey.

[1] Approximately two million people out of a population of six million—one in every three people—have been forced from their homes and subjected to widespread abuse. An estimated 220,000 have fled into neighboring Chad to seek safety. More than one million of the displaced are children under 18, with 320,000 of those aged five and under. Experts estimate that more than 300,000 civilians have been killed by government forces and *Janjaweed* militias or died from disease and illness related to the crisis.

The ultimate goal of this project is to improve the well-being of displaced children and youth through increasing the provision of quality and safe education. Empirical findings will determine the effects of existing educational services on children's health, learning and wellbeing during emergencies. We will provide recommendations for improvements in the design and implementation of schooling for refugee and internally displaced children.

The Data

The data on which the analysis will be based is being collected in two phases: (1) an exploratory phase covering a larger number of IDP camps/settlements (Summer and Fall 2008)and (2) an analytic phase covering a smaller number of IDP camps/settlements (Winter 2009). As our ultimate goal is to capture a range of educational conditions across IDP settings, this 2-phased approach allows us to expand our information base, before making a final selection of communities for our analytic sample. Not surprisingly given the ongoing conflict, information is lacking on critical dimensions of communities such as number of schools per capita, as well as various indicators of school quality that will serve as criteria for selection of communities for phase 2. Thus phase 1, which is more expansive and descriptive, will broaden and strengthen the information base allowing a final selection of communities as well as provide important contextual information about the settings we are studying.

The fieldwork for phase 1 started in June 2008 after the research team received all the necessary clearances from the Sudanese government and clearance from the Population Council Institutional Review Board. We are currently visiting 8-10 camps/settlements in each state (the final number will depend on access and security), which were selected using OCHA data on camp size and distance from nearest town from a much larger list of IDP communities. We are undertaking a complete community mapping of educational services along with a school census. In a subsample of these communities we are also conducting in-depth interviews (IDIs) with knowledgeable informants, including parents and children ages 10-14, in order to assess community perspectives as they relate to education.

The goal of Phase 2 of the project which is scheduled to start in January 2009 is to study some of the short-term effects of education on internally displaced children in North and West Darfur.[2] It is our understanding that children will have been living in these camps for 3-5 years on average but young adolescents' exposure to these camps, and by extension to any schools within these camps, will vary from at maximum 6 years (the conflict began in February 2003) to only a few months. Exposure to the schools will be determined from responses to a full education history.

We have chosen to focus our research on young adolescents ages 10-14 (born between 1994 and 1998) for several substantive and practical reasons. First, in many African countries, children continue to enter formal schooling until about age 10, but rarely start school after that age (Glewwe and Kremer 2006). The benefits of school to younger children will be hard to measure if they have not had much exposure to school. By ages 10-14, however, most children who are going to school will have had some experience with school and will be able to report their experiences. Second, this is a vulnerable age group, particularly for girls, because physical

[2] We would have liked to extend the study into South Darfur as well but the security situation precluded us from going there.

maturation accelerates at these ages and most young people reach puberty during these years– a life cycle phase in many cultures when young people are expected to begin to take up adult roles and responsibilities including economically productive work. It is interesting to note, for example, that these ages were the most common ages of abduction during the conflict in Northern Uganda (Blattman 2006). These ages capture a phase which is also a point of particular vulnerability for girls as they begin to face the risks of unwanted sex, pregnancy and HIV/AIDS in a context in which they have little negotiating power or control. Some research suggests that girls who are out of school face greater risk of unwanted sex and pregnancy than their age mates who are still enrolled; and girls who are still in school but behind grade for their age also face greater risk of dropout and unwanted sex and pregnancy than age mates who are progressing well in school (Lloyd and Mensch 2006; Biddlecom et al 2007; NRC/IOM 2005).

Some children who were born in this cohort may have become separated from their parents or become ill and died since they arrived in the camps. In order to form a more complete picture of child outcomes, we will seek information from parents or other responsible adults as part of a household schedule about the children of parents in our sample who would be of these ages but who are not directly observed in our study because of forced recruitment or abduction, absence, illness or death.

Schooling brings life-long benefits, including higher earnings and better health, to those who attend. In this study, however, our focus will be on its more immediate benefits to young adolescents as well as on proximate outcomes which are associated with the longer-term benefits mentioned above. In the case of children who have attended school while living in the camps, we will also assess the benefits of schooling in relationship to the length of a child's exposure to school in camp, which could vary from a few months up to a maximum of about four years.

The outcomes we will measure include educational outcomes and health and safety outcomes. Educational outcomes will include measures of attendance, attainment, literacy and numeracy and health knowledge. Health outcomes will include nutrition, psychosocial health, recent illness, recent injury, recent experience with violence, unwanted reproductive events, and participation in hazardous work. The indicators selected are relatively straightforward to measure and will provide good markers of children's current educational standing, health and safety.

Educational outcomes will include:

School attendance in week prior to survey.

- Grade-for–age (a simple measure of grade attainment relative to age – indicator is measured as current grade attended divided by current age minus recommended school starting age).
- Primary school attendance, regularity of attendance, and/or completion.
- Attendance in formal secondary school (we understand that there are very few secondary schools in IDP settlements so attendance requires traveling out of camps to urban areas nearby).
- Attendance in nonformal postprimary schooling alternatives (such as youth centers, livelihood training centers, etc).

- Results of simple literacy test and numeracy tests (we will draw on examples from textbooks in use and adapt the Early Grade Learning Assessment developed by RTI as part of EdData II project of USAID)
- Knowledge of HIV/AIDS transmission and treatment;
- Knowledge of reproduction;
- Knowledge of strategies for self-protection.

The addition of direct measures of early grade learning is a very important innovation in this study.

Measures of current health and safety will include:

- Height/weight for age;
- Illness or injury (in last month);
- Hunger/skipping meals (in last month)
- Indicators of psychosocial well-being and mental health;
- Co-residence with parents or other relatives;
- Reported incidences of violence in the past year, including forced abduction, rape, beating, and injury;
- Participation in child labor (in particular hazardous work);
- Unwanted sex, pregnancy;
- Marriage.

The development of indicators of psychosocial well-being and mental health will be developed in collaboration with Jeannie Annan, co-PI on the Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY) study in Northern Uganda, and Andy Rasmussen, who has done psycho-social research on Darfurian refugees in Eastern Chad. Both are well training as psychologists in war-torn areas.

We plan to sample approximately 1800 households in six camps/settlements; roughly 300 households per camp/settlement in order to identify our subjects of interest: children 10-14 and their parents. From information that we have about the camps, we expect that all children, even orphans, will live in households as there appear to be no orphanages or other institutional living arrangements in the camps. In order to select a representative sample of households in each camp, we will first do a household listing from which a sample of households will be chosen at random. If it is a relatively large camp composed of multiple blocks, we will choose some blocks at random for our household listing. For smaller camps, we will conduct a complete mapping and listing of all households in the camp. From the household listing, we then will randomly select households from this list for interviews (we can add more details here including the considerations behind the choice of 300 per camp).

In each selected household, we will ask a knowledgeable informant to help us create a picture of the household both before and after displacement using a household roster and drawing heavily on the retrospective household roster developed for the SWAY survey. As part of the roster, we will identify all children ages 10-14 currently living in the household (as well as same-age children of members of the household who are not currently living in the household as a result of

forced recruitment, abduction, absence, illness or death) and for each of those currently residing in the household we will identify their parent(s) or guardian.

Because our study is focusing on health and wellbeing of very young adolescents (10-14), we expect the parent/guardian to be the best source of information for some aspects of their situation and the child to be the best source of information for other aspects. In some cases, we will ask the same information of both to make sure that we don't miss anything and at the same time can weigh the accuracy of the information. For example, it would make sense to ask the parent/guardian about the child's education and migration history, including the name of the school currently attended but it would make sense to ask the child directly about their knowledge and their levels of learning. To assess psychosocial health, we expect to ask some questions of both parents and children. [3]

Data Analysis

We plan to use both descriptive and multivariate techniques to analyze the various implications of school attendance for young adolescents, since arrival in the camps. By learning about their schooling and migration histories while at the same time observing the actual conditions in the schools which they attend, we will be able to compare the experience of children who have attended camp-based schools to those who have not.

In order to isolate and analyze the effects of camp-based school access, type and quality on child outcomes, we will link information about the schools in each camp with the data collected on children, using multivariate techniques. We will explore the effects of cross-camp variations in school characteristics on child outcomes, controlling for other camp, household, and individual characteristics. Given that we plan to collect migration and school history data for each individual since arrival in the camps, we will also explore the possibility of developing some hazard models for the likelihood of specific outcomes in relationship to the timing and length of school participation. This hazard analysis will give a sense of how the length of exposure to school affects the likelihood of various outcomes.

Because this is a cross-sectional study with data collected at one point in time, it will be difficult to establish causality using any one research method. Our qualitative data will provide insights about some of the underlying pressures, constraints, and dangers. These will contextualize some of the statistical associations we observe in the quantitative data.

References

[3] We are currently unaware of other surveys of children ages 10-14 in conflict situations. In a study of the psychosocial situation of children ages 3-6 in Northern Uganda, parents were the respondents (Christian Children's Fund 2008). In a study of psychosocial situation of females ages 14-35 and males 14-30, the youth themselves were the respondents (Annan et al 2008)

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