Forum: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Writer: Alessandra Youssef (Chair)

Combatting Children's Limited Accessibility to Education in Underdeveloped Areas

Introduction

Accessibility to education is a fundamental human right and is a necessary step in reducing poverty. However, millions of children still lack access to education, specifically in underdeveloped areas. As of 2024, 273 million children are out of school, with 79 million of these being primary school aged, and 194 million of secondary school age. Upper secondary education is the most affected education level, with 130 million students out of school, which is 48% of the total number.

Barriers to education occur for many reasons, but most notably because of inadequate or unqualified teachers, lack of suitable infrastructure, armed conflict and racial or gender based discrimination.

Limited access to education not only causes harm to individuals, but contributes to poverty and unemployment over time. This is why it is so important for the UN to protect these children's right to adequate education. As the United Nations Children's Fund, we play a huge role in addressing this issue.

Historical Background:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948, reaffirms that everyone has the right to an education.

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, applies to children under 18. It recognises education as a legal right for every child on the basis of equal opportunity.

- According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2024, 110 million more children have entered school since the UN Sustainable Development Goal on education was adopted in 2015, and 40 million more young people are completing secondary school today than in 2015.

Current Situation

The global out-of-school population has reduced by only 1% in nearly ten years, meaning that 251M children are still not in school globally. 33% of school-aged children in low-income countries are out of school, compared to only 3% in developed countries. Additionally, more than half of all out of school children in the world are in sub-Saharan Africa.

The education investment gap between countries is significantly large, as low-income regions spent only $55 per learner in 2022, compared to $8,543 for developed countries. Additionally, the share of official development assistance going to education globally has dropped from 9.3% in 2019 to 7.6% in 2022.

Issues to be Addressed

- Chronic under-investment in education, particularly in low-income countries.

- Economic barriers: a significant issue as many families cannot afford to send their children to school. Although education, in most regions, is free, additional expenses are needed for school supplies, uniforms, and transportation. Some families depend on their children to work or assist with household responsibilities.

- Shortage of qualified teachers and limited educational resources, which compromises the quality of education.

- Discrimination and gender inequality: in many areas, young girls face expectations that require them to stay home with their mothers or are forced into early marriages so they are prevented from continuing their education past primary school.

- Displacement caused by armed conflict or natural disasters: armed conflict and natural disasters are major causes of the destruction of school infrastructure and the interruption of educational services

Countries Heavily Affected

Chad

In Chad, only 20 per cent of children who finish primary school have an adequate foundation in reading and maths. The rate of illiteracy among children is approximately

70 percent, which is more than 2 million youth who cannot read or write. Additionally, only one in four students are taught by teachers whose highest level of education goes beyond secondary schooling.

Afghanistan

An estimated 3.7 million children are out-of-school in Afghanistan, 60% of whom are girls. This is because girls continue to marry at a young age, 17 percent before they turn fifteen. The children who can go to school receive a lower quality of education because only 48 percent of teachers have even minimum qualifications.

Mali

More than two million Malian children aged 5 to 17 cannot go to school, and over half of Mali's youth are illiterate. The majority of fifth graders in Mali do not possess basic maths and reading skills. Girls from poor families face the highest risk of dropout. By the time they reach secondary school, the proportion of girls enrolled is 15 percent, compared with 21 percent of boys.

Possible Solutions

- Increase the funding that goes towards education. Developing nations should seek international funding.

- Establish mobile schooling that can be available in conflict zones or areas that have been heavily affected by environmental disasters so that education systems can continue without interruption.

- Provide free transportation and school supplies to children whose families cannot afford them.

- Invest in teacher training and mentorship programs and introduce higher salaries so as to retain and increase the number of qualified teachers in a region.

- Expand and build infrastructure that is closer to residential areas and encourage safe, low cost transport, such as cycling or walking.

- Condemn discrimination due to race, gender, disabilities and social status to ensure equitable education opportunities for all.

- Invest in digital learning so that children who cannot attend school physically still have access to education.

- Provide temporary emergency education systems for refugees and internally displaced children.

- Fund school/transportation infrastructure specifically designed for people with physical disabilities to easily access.

Legal Frameworks

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Articles 13, 14)

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 28, 29)

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Article 10)

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Articles 5, 7)

- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24)

- Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (Articles 12.4, 30, 43, 45)

- Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Article 22)

Sources Cited

https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/251m-children-and-youth-still-out-school-despite-decades-progress-unesco-report

https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/press-releases/cambodia-launches-national-campaigns-keep-every-child-school

https://worldtop20.org/out-of-school-children/

https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

https://www.right-to-education.org/page/united-nations-instruments

https://www.unicef.org/education/inclusive-education

https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/issues/issues33/

https://www.unicef.org/chad/education

https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education

https://www.unicef.org/mali/en/education

https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child