

United Nations Children's Fund

Novice Committee

Chair: Terence Kim

Co-Chair: Louisa Sollinger

Topic 1: Improving Access to Education for Children in Conflict Zones

Introduction

In recent years, concern of having access to education for children in conflict zones has significantly increased for UNICEF. This is due to multiple reasons, one being the world experiencing the highest number of conflicts since World War II, including recent conflicts such as the Israel-Hamas War. Instability, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure make education in conflict zones challenging and instill psychosocial trauma in children due to the environment around them. Without education, development in multiple areas could slow down significantly. If access to education is no longer available, the next generations could suffer major setbacks, no longer having the ability to pass down education to further generations. This can lead to halts in development, including medical and scientific research. To ensure every child can be given the knowledge needed for survival, delegates must explore strategies in order to create safe spaces for learning and mobile education units. They may also find ways to fund education initiatives in refugee camps, such as funding NGOs. Delegates are urged to consider the psychosocial support aspect of conflict/war to help children overcome trauma and learn effectively.

Definitions

NGO: Non-governmental organization. A group not affiliated with any government formed to provide services or advocate public policies.

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund. Works to protect children's rights and well-being worldwide, focusing on health, education, and protection from violence and exploitation.

GCPEA: Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. Inter-agency coalition to address the problem of targeted attacks on education during armed conflict.

ISKP: Islamic State – Khorasan Province. Transnational jihad movement loosely affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS). Also abbreviated as ISIS-K or IS-K.

History of conflict

During conflict, access to education within a conflict zone has always been extremely difficult. This is evident during global wars such as World War I and World War II, and ongoing, long-lasting wars and disputes, including territorial disputes and governmental disputes that led to war crimes and more armed violence, then starting wars. With refugee camps having so little space to hold all the people coming in, it is a struggle to run an education program for children, let alone be able to relieve them of trauma they would have experienced on their way to the refugee camp.

The percentage of out-of-school 6–15-year-olds barely decreased from 2007 to 2017, having 12.8% in 2007 to 11.5% in 2017. 40% of the 123 million children that did not go to school lived in the least developed countries, while 20% lived in conflict zones. Conflicts in Iraq and Syria brought the number of out-of-school children across the Middle East and North Africa back to 2007's level of around 16 million. Elevated levels of poverty paired with increasing

populations made Sub-Saharan Africa/South Asia account for 75% of the global out-of-school primary/lower-secondary school age population. Ethiopia and Niger have made the most enrolment rate progress regarding primary school children with increases of around 15% and 19%.

A GCPEA study in Afghanistan revealed that, in the first quarter of 2021, 25% of children were unable to access schools due to a report of mines or explosives present around the building, and that the fear and trauma regarding a threat of explosives create fear and trauma that prevent students from learning, with one of the contributing factors being the regaining of control by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Other non-state armed groups such as the ISKP have bombed, burned, and/or threatened schools and abducted/killed students and personnel who work in educational areas. Schools have also taken heavy damage in conflicts between Afghan armed forces, international forces, and non-state armed groups. Concerns about safety caused children (particularly girls) to not attend school or drop out of school.

From 2020 to 2021, the Global Coalition identified over 5,000 reported attacks on education, including military use of schools, resulting in more than 9,000 students and educators harmed in over 85 countries, with the most affected being Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Palestine. These situations have continued in 2022, having more than 2,400 educational institutions damaged and/or destroyed by bombings and shelling in Ukraine following the Russian invasion starting on February 24, 2022, according to Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science.

Safe Schools Declaration

The Safe Schools Declaration was originally created in 2015 from the process led by the governments of Norway and Argentina among United Nations Member States, outlining sets of commitments to strengthen the protection of education from attacks and to restrict the use of schools for military use. It was opened for countries to endorse at the First International Conference on Safe Schools in May 2015, located in Oslo, Norway. More progress was made in 2017 in the second conference hosted by the government of the Argentine Republic to build upon development to create an international community that is dedicated to protecting education in armed conflict, and in 2019 and 2021 when the third and fourth conferences happened in Spain and Nigeria, respectively. 121 states have endorsed the declaration.

Current situation

As of 2025, over 473 million children (19%) live in areas affected by conflict, and the world is undergoing the highest number of conflicts since World War II. 2024 was reported to be one of the worst years on record for children in conflict by UNICEF in its history in the number of children affected and the level of impact. Children in the Gaza Strip and in a significant portion of Sudan have missed out on more than a year of school, and countries such as Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Syria have had schools damaged, destroyed, and/or repurposed, giving children no more access to education.

In Africa, over 2,500 attacks on schools have been verified since the launch of the Safe Schools Declaration. This represents 38% of verified attacks on schools globally, affecting countries such as Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and Somalia. More than 14,000 schools are closed in West and Central Africa alone, with many of these closings being due to conflict. Collaborating with partners and communities, UNICEF worked on strategies to ensure that education remains accessible by

advocating for evacuation of armed forces from schools, clearing militarization traces including unexploded artillery equipment and working with school authorities/communities to make sure children can return to school, providing psychosocial and/or socio-emotional learning support to affected children and teachers, and establishing emergency response plans to protect schools and those within schools.

With other factors that can affect access to education such as climate change and financial struggle, conflicts only bring worse results to what UNICEF aims to do. Many have called for children's rights to be sustained and for countries to act, one being UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell, stating that "This must not be the new normal. We cannot allow a generation of children to become collateral damage to the world's unchecked wars."

Questions to consider

1. How can it be ensured that each child has access to education suitable for their needs?

What can be done to prevent any distortion of educational material provided?

2. What can be done to make a safe space in school so that those who previously experienced trauma can comfortably go to school?
3. In what ways can education be made accessible (ex. Refugee camps) to those in conflict zones? Are schools secure enough to provide education safely?
4. Is it possible to give every child access to education? If not, what is the best solution that can be provided?

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Eradicating Child Malnutrition Globally

Introduction

With eradicating malnutrition being only the second goal of the SDGs, this topic plays a significant part in the United Nations' progress to achieve a sustainable future. In children, malnutrition has risen to high levels with conflicts and armed violence becoming primary factors to disrupting food systems and displacing populations. Without the proper nutrition, children developmental delays are sure to happen, causing disabilities in education, mental and cognitive function, and social understanding. Death may also happen if the malnutrition cannot be tended to properly and/or in time. As climate change increases, food resources also begin to become scarcer in areas previously filled with large yields of crops, causing food shortages that result in not having enough food for everyone to consume. If malnutrition continues at a high rate, the mental understanding in children can decrease, leading to little ability to do research in the future and halting societal development towards the way the United Nations aims to go to. To create progress on eradication of malnutrition, delegates must come up with strategies on how to provide nutritional supplements at the highest effectiveness and efficiency levels and strengthen local food systems to ensure secure access to healthy diets. Delegates may also collaborate with the WFP and other governmental bodies to implement school nutrition programs.

Definitions

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal. Call for action created to protect the planet and promote prosperity.

WFP: World Food Programme. Established 1961, world's largest humanitarian organization.

Uses food assistance to build pathways to peace, stability, and prosperity for those recovering from conflict, disasters, and climate change.

Wasting: Refers to child too thin for one's height. Form of malnutrition resulted from rapid weight loss or failure to gain weight. Causes increased risk of death.

Stunting: Refers to child that is too short. Form of malnutrition that causes physical/cognitive damage.

Overweight: Refers to a child too heavy for one's height. Form of malnutrition that causes risk of diet-related diseases.

RUTF: Ready-to-use therapeutic food. Made of peanuts, sugar, oil, and milk powder to effectively treat severely wasted children in emergency settings.

WHO: World Health Organization. Founded in 1948, United Nations agency working to promote health for all and responds to global health emergencies.

Zamzam Camp: Refugee camp/internally displaced persons camp in Sudan, 15km (9.3mi) south of Al-Fashir, North Darfur.

History of conflict

Throughout time, many global events contributed to child malnutrition. World War I and World War II significantly decreased food rations available both during and after the war due to heavy economic spending on both wars, leading to buying cheaper meals and less nutritious foods. The Great Depression caused many products to become unaffordable either causing families to buy cheaper options or to not buy anything at all. Not having access to proper diet

needs such as in the Great Depression or World War I/World War II would have led to buying heavily processed foods, causing overweight malnutrition to spread. Meanwhile, not having access to any foods would lead to wasting and/or stunting.

Colonialism of many years heavily affected many parts of the world, when multiple powerful countries colonized land and forced people who lived sustainably in the past to only plant the crops that the colonizers would want. This significantly disrupted local food systems and countries that were previously colonized have not yet recovered. This is specifically evident in Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa, as well as Southern Asia. With past droughts, wildfires, floods, hurricanes, and multiple other occurrences of natural disasters, many producers of agricultural crops have experienced setbacks and therefore are not able to provide the expected number of crops for yielding. This disrupted local food systems that supply specific areas that are heavily dependent on these crops and cause malnutrition without fresh and nutritious foods.

From 2000 to 2019, stunting in children decreased overall (32.4% to 21.3%) while the percentage of overweight children increased overall. In 2019, the percentage of overweight children was shown to be higher in Australia/New Zealand (20.7%), Southern Africa (12.7%), and Northern Africa (11.3%), while the lowest percentages were recorded in Western Africa (1.9%), Southern Asia (2.5%), and Eastern Africa (3.7%). The highest percentages of stunting in children were in the regions of Oceania (excluding Australia/New Zealand) at 38.4%, Eastern Africa at 34.5%, Southern Asia at 31.7%, and Middle Africa at 31.5%. Southern Asia also had the highest percentage of wasted children (14.3%).

In June 2022, UNICEF warned that almost 8 million children affected by the global food and nutrition crisis could begin to suffer from severe wasting, an extreme form of wasting that is the most lethal form of malnutrition. These children faced an increased risk of death. UNICEF

then called to raise \$1.2 billion USD, to which many philanthropists, United Nations branches, and governments (the United States, Canada, Ireland, Senegal, Netherlands) responded. A historic \$766 million USD in funding was used to aid the 8 million children. Much of the funding was used for products needed for making RUTF, as high interest rates and raw material prices caused costs for RUTF production to increase.

Current situation

As of 2023, 200 million children under the age of 5 suffer from undernutrition (having not enough nutritional intake); however, the number of children with stunted growth and development has declined by 55 million. The inability to access and consume nutritious and diverse diets (child food poverty) affects 181 million children under the age of 5 and is the primary cause of child malnutrition. This can lead to increased mortality risk and poor growth. Countries that had the highest number of children under 5 years of age affected by severe wasting included India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Niger, and South Africa. In Central Darfur, Sudan, acute malnutrition is at 15.6% among children under 5, while in the Zamzam camp, it is closer to 30%.

UNICEF introduced a Nutrition Strategy that spans from 2020-2030. With this strategy, 434 million children and caregivers were reached with policies, programs, and services for the prevention of malnutrition in early childhood, 123 million school-age children and adolescents were reached for prevention of malnutrition in schools and communities, and 9.3 million children were admitted for treatment of wasting.

RUTF production continues to upscale with new facilities being created in countries such as Kenya, Haiti, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Nigeria, India, and Pakistan, making RUTF more

affordable. However, the price of RUTF is increasing. Currently, the price for treatment over a six to eight-week period as of 2023 is \$100 USD. Because the Russian Federation and Ukraine are some of the top agricultural producers and exporters, the supply lines are blocked because of the Russo-Ukrainian War, and packaging prices and transportation/delivery costs increased significantly during the pandemic. UNICEF has called for flexible funding which will allow them to work with suppliers easier.

UNICEF's Global Nutrition Thematic Fund received \$5.8 Million in USD in 2023. Top contributors in the public sector included Norway and Luxembourg while in the private sector, there were many contributions by funds/committees for UNICEF in countries such as the United States, Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, South Korea, New Zealand, and Slovenia. These funds were included in \$60.7 million USD allocated to preventing malnutrition in countries such as the United Republic of Tanzania, Ghana, Lebanon, Kenya, Malawi, and Thailand.

UNICEF, WFP, and WHO have joined forces to improve nutrition for children and women in humanitarian crises. They intend to build on the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting by operating through three areas: supporting governments to reduce prevalence of child wasting by 2030, nation-led approaches to prevent child wasting in food insecure settings and supporting governments to integrate the 2023 WHO guidelines as national policies, more specifically to create programming for emergency response. The UK Prime Minister confirmed the UK's commitment when at the G20 Leaders' Summit. Ireland has stated that they will also commit to the partnership. The partnership between UNICEF, WFP, and WHO will be supported by a combined funding of 14 million in GBP and 36 million Euros from 2023 to 2027.

Questions to consider

1. What effect does malnutrition have on under-developed countries?
2. In the situation where UNICEF cannot provide aid, what can happen?
3. How can money be invested to be used effectively regarding providing nutritional supplements?
4. How can nutritional supplements be provided affordably and securely? If there is a limited supply, where are the areas that UNICEF should prioritize and why?
5. What are strategies to strengthen local food systems? How will they help?
6. Could school feeding programs work? Why or why not?

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