

Global 'learning crisis' threatens future of millions young students – World Bank report

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26 September 2017 –

Schooling without learning is a terrible waste of precious resources and of human potential, the World Bank said today, warning in a new report that millions of young students in low and middle-income countries face the prospect of lost opportunity and lower wages in later life because their primary and secondary schools are failing to educate them to succeed.

Warning of 'a learning crisis' in global education, the [World Development Report 2018: 'Learning to Realize Education's Promise'](#) said that schooling without learning is not just a wasted development opportunity, but also a great injustice to children and young people worldwide.

"This [learning crisis is a moral and economic crisis](#)," World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim said in a press release on the report's launch.

The report argues that without learning, education will fail to deliver on its promise to eliminate extreme poverty and create shared opportunity and prosperity for all. Even after several years in school, millions of children cannot read, write or do basic math.

"When delivered well, education promises young people employment, better earnings, good health, and a life without poverty. For communities, education spurs innovation, strengthens institutions, and fosters social cohesion. But these benefits depend on learning, and schooling without learning is a wasted opportunity. More than that, it's a great injustice: the children whom societies fail the most are the ones who are most in need of a good education to succeed in life," underscored Mr. Kim.

Learning crisis is widening social gaps, not narrowing them

According to the World Bank, this learning crisis is widening social gaps instead of narrowing them. Young students who are already disadvantaged by poverty, conflict, gender or disability reach young adulthood without even the most basic life skills.

The report recommends concrete policy steps to help developing countries resolve the crisis by using stronger learning assessments as to what works and what doesn't to guide education decision-making; and mobilizing a strong social movement to push for education changes that champion 'learning for all.'

While not all developing countries suffer from such extreme learning gaps, many fall far short of levels they aspire to.

Leading international assessments on literacy and numeracy show that the average student in poor countries performs lower than 95 per cent of those in high-income countries. Many high-performing students in middle-income countries – young men and women who achieve in the top quarter of their groups – would rank in the bottom quarter in a wealthier country, explained the World Bank.

The report notes that when countries and their leaders make ‘learning for all’ a national priority, education standards can improve dramatically

The report, which was written by a team directed by World Bank Lead Economists Deon Filmer and Halsey Rogers, identifies what drives these learning shortfalls – not only the ways in which teaching and learning breaks down in too many schools, but also the deeper political forces that cause these problems to persist.

The report notes that when countries and their leaders make ‘learning for all’ a national priority, education standards can improve dramatically. For example, from a war-torn country with very low literacy rates in the 1950s, South Korea achieved universal enrolment by 1995 in high-quality education through secondary school – its young people performed at the highest levels on international learning assessments.

“The only way to make progress is to ‘find truth from facts.’ If we let them, the facts about education reveal a painful truth. For too many children, schooling does not mean learning,” said World Bank Chief Economist Paul Romer.

After extensive consultations with governments, development and research organizations and the private sector in 20 countries, the report offers the three policy recommendations: assess learning, so it can become a measurable goal; make schools work for all children; and mobilize everyone who has a stake in learning.

[UN rights experts urge Member States to ‘go beyond statements,’ take concrete actions to help Rohingya](#)

attacks on police outposts in Myanmar's Rakhine province, seven United Nations rights experts have called on the Government to stop all violence against the minority Muslim Rohingya community as well as on the global community to "go beyond" statements and take action to save them.

"There have been credible allegations of serious human rights violations and abuses committed against the Rohingya, including extrajudicial killings, excessive use of force, torture and ill-treatment, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced displacement, as well as the burning and destruction of over 200 Rohingya villages and tens of thousands of homes," [said](#) the experts (see end for list) in a news release issued today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

In the news release, the experts, including the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, recalled the briefing last week by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, in which she urged the international community to learn along with the country's Government, the possible reasons behind the current exodus from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

"No one chooses, especially not in the hundreds of thousands, to leave their homes and ancestral land, no matter how poor the conditions, to flee to a strange land to live under plastic sheets and in dire circumstances except in life-threatening situations," stressed the experts.

According to estimates, more than 430,000 people have crossed into Bangladesh since the violence erupted.

SEE ALSO: [UN rights chief points to 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing' in Myanmar](#)

Further in the release, the experts also called on Myanmar authorities to ensure unfettered access to humanitarians to the affected locations and displaced people as well as for rights monitors, including the Human Rights Council Fact-Finding Mission for an independent and impartial assessment of the situation on the ground.

We call on Aung San Suu Kyi to meet the Rohingya personally in Rakhine state as well as in Cox's Bazar to talk to those who have fled, as well as those who have stayed, as she says the Myanmar Government is interested in doing UN rights experts

They further urged the state Counsellor to personally meet the Rohingya.

Concluding the news release, the rights experts also called on UN Member States to "go beyond statements and start taking concrete action" to stop the military and security forces from what they noted "accomplishing their so-called 'unfinished business' of getting rid of the Rohingya minority from Rakhine state."

Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis across the border, in Bangladesh continues to worsen by the day.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), one of the UN humanitarian entities involved in the response, [reported](#) that despite every effort by those on the ground, the massive influx of people seeking safety has been outpacing capacities to respond, and the situation for these refugees has still not stabilized.

“Many of those who have arrived recently are deeply traumatized [and] despite having found refuge in Bangladesh, they are still exposed to enormous hardship,” Adrian Edwards, a UNHCR spokesperson, [said](#) at a media briefing in Geneva today, urging for a redoubling of the international humanitarian response in Bangladesh.

UNHCR along with other UN agencies, including the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)), UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) are also on the ground and [assisting](#) in the response efforts.

WFP and UNICEF are [distributing](#) food and therapeutic nutrition interventions (such as high-energy biscuits) and have set up child-friendly spaces. WHO is [providing](#) critical medical supplies for over half of the 38 mobile medical teams covering refugee settlements and camps.

The UN human rights experts noted above include Yanghee Lee, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar; Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Fernand de Varennes, Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Leilani Farha, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing; Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, Special Rapporteur on the rights of internally displaced persons; Mutuma Ruteere, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; and Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council – the highest intergovernmental forum in the UN system on rights issues – to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[The only world safe from use of nuclear weapons is a world completely free of them – UN chief](#)

26 September 2017 – The only world that is safe from the use of nuclear weapons is a world that is completely free of them, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said today as the United Nations marked the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

"A world free of nuclear weapons is a [global vision](#) that requires a global response," Mr. Guterres told a high-level General Assembly meeting held in commemoration of the [International Day](#), observed annually on 26 September.

Although the goal of such a world is universally held, he said, it has lately been subject to numerous challenges, including a series of provocative nuclear and missile tests conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

He added that the States possessing nuclear weapons have a special responsibility to lead by taking concrete steps, including those agreed at various review conferences of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons ([NPT](#)).

Expensive campaigns to modernize nuclear weapons – combined with the absence of planned arsenal reductions beyond the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between Russia and the United States – make it difficult to see how disarmament can make progress, Mr. Guterres said, warning against misguided assertions that prevailing security conditions do not permit disarmament initiatives.

"It is true that we live in challenging circumstances, but this can be no excuse for walking away from our shared responsibility to seek a more peaceful international society," he said. The General Assembly declared 26 September as the International Day devoted to furthering the objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons through a resolution adopted in December 2013.

Also addressing the event was Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák, who noted that thousands of nuclear warheads still exist and they are being stored across three different continents. More than half of the world's population lives in countries which have nuclear capabilities, or are member of nuclear alliances, he added.

Since the designating the International Day, the world has witnessed three nuclear tests.

"One nuclear test is one too many. Six nuclear tests in the 21st century is, frankly, alarming. So too is the reckless rhetoric we are witnessing. It can bring us all to the verge of a cliff, which we cannot afford to fall off," he said.

Last week, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was opened for signature. Not everyone agrees that this was the right step to take, but it demonstrates a determination, which is beyond dispute, he said.

"We can live in a nuclear-free world, as long as we all believe that it is possible. And as long as we are all willing to work to make it possible," he concluded.

Warring parties in South Sudan show 'little interest' pushing peace process forward, UN envoy warns

26 September 2017 – A window of opportunity for compromise over the 2015 peace agreement by warring parties in South Sudan is narrow, the United Nations envoy for the country said today, stressing the urgency to find a political solution and for international support to the process.

“The parties have shown little interest in engaging in serious negotiations on the way forward, despite the various initiatives aimed at finding a political solution to the conflict,” David Shearer, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for South Sudan, told the Security Council.

With only a few months remaining in the transitional period stipulated under the peace agreement, external momentum to support peace is not keeping pace with developments in the country, he added.

He urged the international community to show a [unity of purpose](#) to support an implementable peace process that leads to credible elections in due course, but only after a period of transition marked by inclusivity and stability.

Political mediation through the high-level revitalization forum of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) must be the central conflict resolution strategy, he said.

IGAD comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

On the humanitarian situation, Mr. Shearer said the total number of people in need of aid in the country has risen to 7.6 million, citing UN agencies assessment.

The number of people displaced in South Sudan rose to nearly four million during the first half of this year, with two million of them having fled to neighbouring countries – Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Within the national border, some places, such as parts of the Greater Upper Nile region, parts of the Equatorias, and areas south and west of Wau, are inaccessible due to the ongoing government military operations against the SPLA in Opposition. The splintering of opposition forces also has a negative consequence for humanitarian efforts. For example, the World Food Programme’s regular convoys to Yambio – two days’ travel from the capital, Juba – now requires 13 separate permissions from armed groups along its route, he said. Increasingly, civilians and aid convoys are being targeted along major

roadways. This year, 18 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan. Mr. Shearer, also the head of the UN Mission in South Sudan, said the Mission will soon open a permanent presence in Yei and reinforce presence in Torit and Yambio to deter violence and human rights abuses, and build confidence for people to be able to safely return to their homes.

The small Melut protection site in the country's north is closing in coming weeks as people there want to return to their homes, he said. Further downsizing of protection sites in Wau and possibly even Bor are also being considered.

But ultimately, this movement critically depends on how the government and opposition forces behave, he said. Where those forces continue to prey on civilians, the POC sites will remain a necessary refuge, he added.

The deployment of the UN-mandated Regional Protection Force will enable peacekeepers to extend their reach into areas most in need. This includes establishing a permanent presence in Yei, and reinforcing troops in Torit and Yambio in the Equatorias to deter violence and human rights abuses and build confidence among local communities, Mr. Shearer said.

[Civilians pay 'very heavy price' amid unfolding violence in western Central African Republic – UN](#)

26 September 2017 – Since the beginning of September, the humanitarian situation in western Central African Republic (CAR) has deteriorated as armed groups have taken over several localities – particularly Bocaranga and Niem – which has forced thousands of people to flee into the bush where they cannot access aid, the United Nations relief wing reported today.

“Again, [civilians continue to pay a very heavy price](#) for clashes between the armed groups,” said the Humanitarian Coordinator in the CAR, Najat Rochdi.

The vast majority of the 15,000 Bocaranga inhabitants and the 8,000 from Niemtook took refuge in the bush, rendering them inaccessible to humanitarian assistance. As these incidents occurred, acts of violence against relief workers also prompted several organizations to temporarily suspend their activities in the area.

“While fleeing, the population is not only cut off from much needed assistance but is also more vulnerable to the adversity and abuse by armed groups and the destruction of their properties,” added Ms. Rochdi.

The Humanitarian Coordinator warned against a new outbreak of violence in the

west, but also in the east of the country, threatening new humanitarian needs.

Ms. Rochdi recalled that the operational capacities of the humanitarian community are already under intense pressure in a context marked by the lagging funding.

“The simultaneous emergence of new outbreaks of tension in several regions will undoubtedly exacerbate the already fragile situation of thousands of displaced people and the communities that are barely recovering from repeated crises,” she stressed.

The persistence of violence in the CAR since the beginning of 2017 and the dramatic rise in needs have led the aid community to revise the Humanitarian Response Plan.

The statement noted that to date, only 30 per cent of the required funding has been secured. If not addressed, this would lead to a quantitative and qualitative reduction of the humanitarian response.

In some regions, a number of actors have had to withdraw because of the financial shortfall –halting the only assistance available to those in need.

Ms. Rochdi called on the international community “not to abandon the[CAR] where half the population needs assistance for its survival.”