ARMED CONFLICT AND EDUCATION

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Abstract: armed conflict or war has been described as development in reverse. War or conflict causes dead, destruction of personal property insecurity, psychological trauma, dislocation of family etc. But above all, there is also a hidden cost of war or armed conflict. Armed conflict is destroying the educational system of a country. It is not only destroying just school infrastructure, but also the hopes the hopes and ambitions of a whole generation of children. It is depriving the children, youth and adult for education that could transform their lives. This paper is divided in two sections, first section documenting: armed conflict attacks on children, teacher & school infrastructure and the impact of conflict on education and second section is documenting how education can fuel in armed conflict.
Key word: Education, armed conflict, war

Introduction

War has been described as development in reverse (Coolier, 2007). Even short episodes of armed conflict can halt progress or reverse gains built up over generations, undermining economic growth and advances in health, nutrition and employment (Education For All Global Monitoring Report hereafter EFAGMR, 2011). The impact is most severe in the countries or regions or among the people who are living in poverty.

Global community and international media are giving focus on mediate effect of conflict or violence, ignoring the hidden costs and legacies of violence. Across many of the worlds' poorest countries, armed conflict is destroying not just school infrastructure, but also the hopes and ambitions of a whole generation of children (EFAGMR, 2011). Conflicts cause injury, insecurity, psychological trauma, dislocation of family etc. But it is also depriving children, youth and adults for education that could transform their lives. They also hold back the human development progress of whole nations leaving countries trapped in self-reinforce cycle of violence, poverty and educational disadvantage. Breaking this cycle is one of the greatest development challenges of the 21st centuries.

When international community adopted the Dakar frame work for action 2000, armed conflict has been identified as a major barrier towards attaining Education for All. Violent conflict is still one of the greatest obstacles to accelerate progress in education and in reaching the target of Education for All by 2015.

Attackson Child and Teacher

We were on the way to school when two men on motorbikes stopped next to us. One of them threw acid on my sister's face. I tried to help her, and then they threw acid on me, too.

– Latefa, 16, Afghanistan (CNN, 2008)

It is estimated that over 2 million children were killed in conflict and 6 million disabled from 2000 to 2008. Around 300,000 school aged children are being exploited as soldiers. And about 20 million children have had to flee their homes as refugees (UNICEF, 2010).

In 2009 more than 1000 school aged children were injured or killed in conflict related violence in Afghanistan. In Iraq, bomb attacks by insurgents in public areas killed 223 children from April to December 2009 (United Nations, 2010a). Israel's operation cast lead in late 2008 and early 2009 left 350 children dead and 1815 injured in Gaza (United Nations, 2010a). In Sudan, aerial bombardment by government force, attacks by pro-government militants, inter-communal violence and fractional fighting between armed groups have killed thousands of children (United Nations, 2009a). Children are either deliberately targeted or insufficiently protected- or both. Armed groups see the destruction of schools and the targeting of schoolchildren and teachers as a legitimate military strategy. And as a result of this, there is a growing fear among the children to attend school, among teachers to give classes, and among parents to send their children to school (United Nations, 2010b).

Armed groups have used attacks on schoolchildren and teachers to '*punish*' participation in state institutions. Groups opposed to gender equity in education have targeted girls in particular. Some recent examples:

- In Afghanistan, some insurgent groups have actively sought to undermine access to education. In the first half of 2010, seventy-four children were killed as a result of suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices (UNAMA, 2010). They sometimes deliberately placed explosive in the root used by school children to reach their school.
- Insurgent groups in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province and federally administrated tribal areas have targeted girls' primary and secondary schools. In one attack, ninety-five girls were injured and they left school (O'Malley,2010a)
- In Thailand's three southernmost provinces, many teachers and children have been killed over last five years (EFAGMR, 2011). In 2008 and 2009, sixty-three students and twenty-four teachers and educational personnel were killed on injured (United Nations, 2010a).

Attacks on School Infrastructure

Parents were scared to send their children to school – my parents sometimes forbid me from going school, saying it might be bombed.

– James, 22. Southern Sudan (Save the Children, 2007)

Motives for attacking educational institutions vary country to country or region to region. Schools may be seen as embodying state authority and therefore as a legitimate target, especially when insurgent groups oppose the type of education promoted by government. This is the main cause of attack in schools of Afghanistan. On the other hand, the use of schools by armed force can lead to their being targeted by anti-state groups (for example in India, Somalia, Yemen).Moreover, destruction of school sometimes an element in a wider strategy aimed at destabilizing areas and distrusting communities (EFAGMR, 2011). To estimate the number of schools damaged, closed and destroyed in conflict is a difficult task. Some of the examples are:

- Education infrastructure in Gaza was severely damaged during Israeli military attacks in 2008 and 2009. Some 280 schools were reported damaged, of which 18 were destroyed. The lack of materials for reconstruction and rehabilitation along with shortage of supplies has forced thousands of students to learn in overcrowd and unsafe environment (United Nation, 2010 a).

- Insurgent groups have routinely targeted schools in Afghanistan. Most of the attacks are planned and deliberate rather than a consequence of discriminate violence. In 2009, about 70 per cent schools of Helmand province and about 80 per cent schools of Zabul were closed due to insurgency and damage. In early 2010, about 450 schools of Northern Province were closed due to insurgency and security fears.

- In 2007, 144 schools in five districts of Mogadishu have been closed (United Nation, 2009b). In 2009, some sixty schools were closed in Mogadishu, Somalia.

- Attacks on education infrastructure have been a feature of armed conflict in Pakistan. Some of the most intensive have taken placed in Khyber Pakhunkhwa and neighbouring Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Reports from Swat district in Khyber Pakhunkhwa indicate that 172 schools were destroyed or damaged between 2007 and 2009 (O' Malley, 2010b).

- In India, Naxalite insurgent groups have systematically attacked schools to damaged government infrastructure as security forces are widely using schools as their accommodation.

- In Yemen, about 725 schools in the northern governorate of Saada were closed during five months of fighting in 2009 and 2010 between government forces and Houthi rebels, and 220 schools were destroyed, damaged or looted (O'Malley, 2010a)

The Impact of Conflict on Education

The experience of Iraq provides a stark example of how conflict can reverse achievement in education. Until the 1990s, the country was a regional leader in education (UNESCO, 2003).it had achieved near-universal primary education, high level of secondary education enrolment and established universities that enjoyed an international reputation. As a result of golf war (1990-91) and the imposition of sanctions followed by eight years of violence since 2003, the country has slipped down in a poor condition as far as education indicators are concerned.

To find out the adverse affect of violent conflict on education, we have selected some countries which experienced the violent conflict during 1999-2008. Two primary institutions collecting and analysis data on conflict affected countries are Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP). They use established criteria for identifying conflict-affected states. Armed conflict has to entail 'contested incompatibility' over government and or territory where use of armed force is involved and where one of the parties to the conflict is the state. This definition is an attempt to differentiate between organised, political motivated violence and generalized violence linked to criminal activity. The selection criteria also include a threshold for battle related death—any country with 1000 or more battle related death over 1999-2008, plus any country more than 200 battle related death in any one year between 2006 and 2008. Battle related deaths include fatalities among civilians and military actors (see Strand and Dahi 2010 for further details).

In this article, we have only used the conflict affected countries list prepared by PRIO. They have identified 35 countries that were affected by armed conflict from 1999-2008. Out of 35 countries, 16 countries are low income countries, 14 countries are lower middle income countries and 5 countries are upper middle income countries.

These thirty-five countries have some of the world's worst educational condition/indicators – far worse than the countries at comparable income level that are not affected by conflict. Some of the characteristics of these countries are:

- They have more than 28 million children of primary school age out of school, or 42 per cent of the world's total. Within the group of poorer developing countries, they account for around one-quarter of the primary school age population but nearly half of the out of school.
- Children in conflict affected countries are not only less likely to be in primary school, but also more likely to dropout. Survival to the last grade in poor conflict affected countries

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is 65 per cent, where as it is 86 per cent in other countries which are not affected by conflict.

- Gross enrolment ratio in secondary schools nearly 30 per cent lower in conflict affected countries than the other countries which are not affected by conflict.

- The legacy of conflict is evident in literacy levels. Only 79 per cent of young people and 69 per cent of adults are literate in conflict affected countries compared with 93 per cent and 85 per cent in other countries.

- In conflict affected countries problem starts before children reach school age. In conflict affected countries, the average mortality rate for children under 5 is more than double the rate in other countries: on average twelve children out of a hundred die before their fifth birth day, compared with six out of hundred in non-conflict countries.

- UNICEF estimates that 98.5 million under nourished children under five, two third of the global total live in conflict affected areas (UNICEF, 2009).

- Apart from destruction of schools and economy of the country, armed conflict also increased the poverty of the people as they either lose their job or agricultural land which reinforces child labour, human trafficking, prostitute and crime.

- From the above discussion, we can say that armed conflict directly attacks on education. But there is also an indirect consequence of conflict on education. We all know that financial limitation is one of the main barriers to meet the goal of Education for All by 2015. But armed conflict countries are spending more on military and security sectors compared to education. Instead of financing productive investment in education, some of the world's poorest countries waste a large share of their limited budgets on purchase of unproductive weapon- system (Oscar Arias Sanchez: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 1987).

Conclusion

From the above, we can say that education is more affected than any other factors by armed conflict. Armed conflict not only destroying school infrastructure and security of the child, but also it is destroying the opportunities, hope and ambition of the children, the future citizen of a nation.

There is another association between education and armed conflict. Very seldom, education is cited as the primary cause of conflict (EFAGMR, 2011). What is taught in school, how it is taught and how education delivered are have early and lasting impact, for better or for worse. Problems arise not only when there is not enough education, but also when schooling fails to provide young people with relevant skills, they need to success in labour market. Moreover, more education is not an automatic panacea for armed conflict. When education level of a country rise, but their labour market are stagnant, it rise the threat of conflict as better educated

young people resentful over their lack of prospects. In a study, Brett and Specht (2004) have conducted several interviews with young people of insurgent groups in Congo. One young boy's respond was – education does not lead to employment, so why we bother? You have a PhD and you are a taxi man!... The shortest route, the easiest job in Congo is army (underground groups). They are always hiring and above all they are paid.

So our education system must be formed in a manner which provides us up-to-date knowledge with skills and competencies so that children or youth after getting education will became successful in labour market. Moreover, moral education, value education and the concept of non-violence of Gandhi should be included in curriculum.

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