Why Education should be part of the humanitarian response

While the traditional components of humanitarian aid (food, shelter and health) remain at the core of humanitarian response today, it is recognized that humanitarian aid should consider the overall welfare of human beings. In this spirit, emergency education is on the path to recognition as the fourth core pillar of humanitarian assistance.

Providing education in emergencies contributes to the respect of children’s human rights and dignity in a humanitarian crisis. Article 28(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child delineates the right of every child to education. This convention is the most widely adopted piece of international law to date.

Emergency Education

Emergency education is the provision of a quality basic education during emergencies and through the recovery process. It has many impacts, both immediately as part of a well-rounded humanitarian response, and as an opportunity for positive long-term change, with implications for future social, political and economic stability. Moreover, education can be seen to support some of the central goals of humanitarian assistance, fulfilling critical functions beyond learning:

**Protection:** Child friendly spaces such as schools are critical to the protection of children during any humanitarian crisis. Keeping children in school, under the supervision of adults and off the streets can protect them from such dangers as sexual abuse, kidnapping or exploitation -- all of which are common place during the chaos of a humanitarian crisis. While this is especially critical for primary-aged children, schools can also provide mothers with temporary safe spaces in which to care for their younger children. Parents whose children attend school are also free during the school day to pursue their recovery and rebuild their livelihoods.

**Familiarity and support:** Schools can be safe spaces for children not only physically, but also emotionally. They can help to restore a sense of normalcy in their lives through routine, and specialized programming designed for learning in emergency environments can help alleviate some of the psychological impact on children during a humanitarian crisis.

**Teaching survival:** Schools provide a key channel through which children can be taught survival skills. In complex emergencies such as situations of armed conflict this may be landmine safety, in regions that have been struck by a natural disaster it may be information about basic hygiene such as hand-washing. Moreover, children and their communities can be taught skills for coping with and reducing the impact of future disasters.

**Provision of social services and community gathering:** Schools and temporary learning spaces can also act as central platforms through which other critical humanitarian interventions can be delivered to children. In these spaces, they can receive reliable health services, lifesaving vaccines, and many children will receive their only daily meal at school. Outside school hours, these spaces can also be used as hubs for the distribution of aid materials to the community.

Plan Canada CEO Rosemary McCarney visits a local school during a visit to the Sahel
Photo Credit: Plan Canada

Children at school in Khairpur, Sindh Province, Pakistan
Photo Credit: Oxfam Canada
The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies

An important international actor in advocacy for emergency education is the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). The INEE is an open, global network of practitioners, academics, students, NGOs, governments and UN agencies who work together to ensure the right to education in emergencies and during early recovery.

The Inter-Agency Network facilitates collaboration, information and resource sharing, and the development of international standards regarding the right to education in emergencies. The Network has developed a comprehensive set of “minimum standards” for education in emergencies, to guide both policymakers and practitioners and continues to play an important role in highlighting the critical role of education in humanitarian response.

Find out more:

“Every Child Has the Right to Learn”- Save the Children

Convention on the Rights of the Child
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)
http://www.ineesite.org/

School in Haiti, part of the Humanitarian Coalition’s 2011 final evaluation.
Photo Credit: Patrick Robitaille