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RIGHT TO SAFE AND QUALITY EDUCATION STILL DENIED TO MILLIONS OF CHILDREN IN CAMEROON

September 2023

EDUCATION TREND IN CAMEROON

Armed conflict constitutes one of the most devastating barriers to education. Schools and universities – places to foster development and social cohesion - are attacked to spread fear and then closed or abandoned due to insecurity and dysfunctionality. In the midst of such threat, children, students and teachers are denied their right to access quality education.

Due to the impact of the three humanitarian crises affecting Cameroon, including the cholera epidemic, and recurrent floodings in the Far North, **1.4 million school-aged children need humanitarian assistance in education in 2023**. These needs are caused and exacerbated primarily by structural challenges of the education Sector, including violence, threats, and attacks on schools. According to HNO 2023, in the Far North region of Cameroon, an estimated 482,000 school-aged children, including 366,654 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), need humanitarian assistance, while in the Northwest and Southwest regions an estimated 667,000 school-aged children need humanitarian assistance, including 367,000 IDPs.

By the end of the 2022-23 school year, thousands of schools were closed in Cameroon, either because they were a direct target of attacks by Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) or because teachers have fled leaving no-one to teach, or because parents are too frightened to send their children to school or are themselves in a process of repeated forced displacement to safer areas. The spread of conflict is having an ever more devastating effect on access and continuity of learning, affecting the future of entire generations of children. Illustrative examples shows that between 2020 and 2021, Cameroon recorded 145 attacks on schools, with 263^[1] students and educators harmed, as well as sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school.^[2]

Children out of school in Cameroon were reported at 346,513 in 2019.^[3] For forcibly displaced children, access to education is even more difficult. As of 2022, attacks on schools and educational infrastructure continued at a similar pace compared to previous years, severely compromising the functioning of the education system in key hotspots throughout the country. Attacks, which often involve gun shooting, killing, arson, and abductions, resulted in 68 per cent and 39 per cent of non-operational schools in the Northwest and Southwest regions, which brings to a total of 2,245 schools thus still not functioning in these two regions due to violence.^[4]

PARTNERS RESPONSES

The Multi-Year Resilience Programme funded by Education Cannot Wait (ECW) has secured a seed grant of USD \$25 million, enabling the construction and rehabilitation of classrooms, water points, and blocks of latrines. Support has also been provided for the technical validation of the National Policy for Inclusive Education, acquisition of school materials, and identification of vulnerable children for targeted support. In addition, partners in the education sector have actively engaged in the preparation of the Joint Education Needs Assessment, identifying urgent needs and priorities. An orientation session on the Safe School Declaration was conducted, receiving technical support from the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attacks.^[5]

Despite these initiatives, challenges remain. The volatile security situation, especially in the Northwest and Southwest regions, continues to hinder progress. Funding shortages are also a barrier to fully meeting the intended targets, impacting thousands of children and obstructing essential education services, given that **as of August 2023, only 19.2 per cent of the required funds for the humanitarian response in Cameroon was received with less than 4% of the requirements of the education sector received for 2023**.^[6]

[1] Attacks on education dataset 2020-2021

[2] Education Under Attack 2022

[3] Cameroon - Children Out Of School - Primary

[4] HNO 2023

[5] Cameroon Humanitarian SitRep Mid Year 2023

[6] OCHA situation report Aug 2023

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 2601 on the protection of schools in armed conflict,^[7] we call on the Government of Cameroon, all parties to conflict and the international community to:

1. Adopt holistic, integrated and multisectoral approaches to the implementation of the Safe Schools protocols and frameworks, by ensuring that decision making bodies, and inclusive and transparent coordination mechanisms are put in place and functioning to operationalize and implement the Safe School Declaration (SSD).^[8]

2. Immediately negotiate the non-occupation of schools by parties to conflict and re-opening of closed schools, by taking concrete measures - for example, through legislation, standing orders, and training - to end the military use of schools, and at a minimum, implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict.^[6]

3. Develop and implement response plans based on quantitative and qualitative data, prioritizing the most at risk, by establishing early warning systems and emergency response plans (in consultation with school communities), building the capacity of education personnel and training children and teachers in self-protection, including through the Safe Schools Common Approach.^[9] In addition, Government of Cameroon and the international community should increasingly prioritize children living in hard-to-reach areas, as well as other marginalized children, including internally displaced children and refugees.

4. Reinforce alternative, innovative, accelerated, and flexible learning solutions for educational continuity, by introducing or expanding initiatives that promote continued learning for children who have had to drop out of school or those that have had long interruptions in their learning. This requires ministries in charge of education to be flexible in their approaches and requires partners to be innovative and experiment with various alternative education options including distance learning.

5. Increase predictable flexible and long-term financing for education in emergencies, by advocating for increased budget allocations that allow for flexible disbursements. In addition, donors should promote synergies and complementarities of funding to ensure the best usage thereof, and fund specific measures to prevent, mitigate, and respond to attacks on education across the development-humanitarian nexus.

[7] United Nations Security Council (2021). [Resolution 2601 on the protection of schools in armed conflict](#)

[8] [Safe School Declaration](#)

[9] [Safe School common approach](#)