



BRECHTJE VAN LITH > THE GIRL-CHILD

Empowering girls in emergencies is very crucial to their survival

On October 11, we celebrated girls, a source of joy, energy and inspiration. Every one of us can point to a girl that has made a remarkable difference in their lives. They are our daughters, grand-daughters, sisters, cousins and friends.

As we commemorate the day of the girl-child, we are reminded of the millions of girls caught up in crises all over the world. The theme for this year: 'EMPOWER girls: Before, during and after crises' is cognisant of the need to ensure that girls are able to survive in a rapidly changing world that grapples with conflict, climate change, violent extremism and forced displacement.

In Uganda, we continue to host more than one million refugees from neighbouring countries such as South Sudan and the DR Congo. Women and children are the majority of those affected by this displacement. We are seeing young girls separated from their parents, having limited access to education, and having to take care of younger siblings at a time when they can barely take care of themselves.

The United Nations Girls Education Initiative highlights that women and girls are uniquely and disproportionately affected by conflict. Insecurity, displacement and breakdown of social support systems coupled with limited access to financial resources, social capital and legal support, leave girls at risk of discrimination and exploitation on many fronts.

Research has shown that girls are almost two

and a half times more likely to be out of primary school if they live in conflict-affected countries, and nearly 90 per cent are more likely to be out of secondary school than their counterparts in countries not affected by conflict. In northern Uganda, data indicates that violent conflict has had little effect on the education of boys from the wealthiest one-fifth of households. However, the poorest girls from the same area are twice as likely to face risk of extreme education poverty.

We must work together to ensure that girls are protected before, during and after crises. We need to strengthen our engagement with local authorities and communities to ensure that social support systems necessary to ensure that girls are safe and protected continue to function even when communities experience political, economic and social shocks as is common during emergencies. We need to ensure that there are strong policies on protection of women and girls in conflict and that these are implemented effectively.

Through our work in northern Uganda responding to the needs of the displaced, we have found that protection, education and access to basic services continue to be among the greatest needs for girls in the refugee settlements. We are also helping children to recover from emotional and psychological trauma caused by conflict and hunger, which has left them scarred by the past, wondering about today and hoping for a better future.



Way forward. Save the Children is running an Accelerated Learning Programme that follows an approved fast-tracked curriculum to assist conflict and poverty affected children with opportunities to join, re-join and complete their formal education or access relevant vocational skills and livelihood trainings.

We continue to work with the government and partners to help children recover and survive. Save the Children is running an Accelerated Learning Programme that follows an approved fast-tracked curriculum to assist conflict and poverty affected children with opportunities to join, re-join and complete their formal education or access relevant vocational skills and livelihood trainings.

A good number of girl-mothers have enrolled too, and some come to class with their babies. They have a thirst to learn because they know what education can accomplish for them as individuals, their children and their future.

Despite these great efforts, dropout rates among girls remain high, especially in the higher levels, further underpinning the challenges that girls face when attending school.

These include early marriage, household chores, responsibility over siblings, poor menstrual management and for many, the need to

sacrifice their own education so that their younger brothers and sisters can go to school. No single girl should have to make this sacrifice. Every child - girl or boy - has a right to an education and should enjoy this right.

We need to invest in education systems as a sustainable means to ensure access for all girls and boys and improve its quality. This should include system strengthening, building schools, and training and remuneration for teachers. We also need to scale up funding and support for quality complementary and catch-up programmes to provide educational opportunities to children for whom the formal system is inaccessible.

To get all children, particularly girls, back in school, we ask the international community to increase funding to help refugee host countries like Uganda to provide children with a quality education. Currently, refugee education gets only a fraction of the funding it needs. We also call on the Ugandan Government to develop and implement policies that ensure refugee children can attend school and learn from a quality education. At Save the Children, we are committed to doing whatever it takes to ensure that all children learn, survive and are protected by 2030.

We continue to work towards achieving significant breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and girls are no exception. We believe that working together with children and their communities, partners, donors and government can result in real transformation.

Nelson Mandela said that there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children. We owe it to our girls to ensure that they have equal access to opportunities, are protected from harm and have hope for the future. Indeed, they are our future.

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