

*The Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement*

**PROTECTING DISPLACED CHILDREN IN EMERGENCIES &  
PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION**

A SEMINAR HOSTED BY

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION – UNIVERSITY OF BERN  
PROJECT ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

**November 19, 2008**

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On November 19, 2008 The Brookings Institution- University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement held a roundtable discussion entitled “Protecting Displaced Children in Emergencies and Preparing for the Future: The Role of Education.” The panel, with an introduction provided by Ambassador Michael Klosson, Associate Vice President and Chief Policy Officer from Save the Children and moderated by Jacqueline Geis, Project Manager from the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, consisted of Gene Sperling, Director of the Center for Universal Education at the Council on Foreign Relations; Rod Snider, Senior Technical Advisor for the American Red Cross; and Jerry Farrell, Director of the Darfur Office for Save the Children.

The main purpose of the discussion was to hear various perspectives on whether education should be included as part of emergency response by donor governments. Currently more than 72 million children are out of school worldwide. More than half of these children live in conflict-affected states that receive less than one quarter of international basic education assistance. Historically, education has not been considered a live-saving activity. However, there is a growing view at the UN and within the NGO community that education can be considered a live-saving measure and, therefore, should be considered in every emergency response.

In his remarks, Gene Sperling noted that the international community first responded to the global education crisis in 2000 when it formed a global compact to provide

governments with funds for their education programs through the World Bank's Fast Track Initiative. He went on to point out that the initiative did not reach the most vulnerable children because of the so-called trust gap between unstable governments and donors fearful that their money would be wasted on war and corruption. Lastly, Mr. Sperling said the criteria for countries being accepted for Fast Track Initiative funds needs to be standardized. Also, money for the Fast Track Initiative is all or nothing with countries either qualifying for funds or receiving nothing. Mr. Sperling believed that there should be an interim fund for countries that do not qualify for the Fast Track Initiative but are working toward increasing their education capacity in the post-conflict period.

From the perspective of a first responder, Rod Snider argued that at the outset of every disaster, hard choices have to be made based on limited resources. He stated that without first addressing basic needs it is difficult to educate children. Also, there are ethical questions about providing education in emergencies, when it means spending less on other life saving programs, such as water and sanitation, health, and food distribution. Mr. Snider addressed a concern that providing education in IDP camps can create false expectations about what services will be provided after the emergency is over and the international community withdraws from the region. He also expressed apprehension that providing services in IDP camps that are not available to the general population will draw people to the camps and be a disincentive to return to their places of origin.

Jerry Farrell of Save the Children discussed his on-the-ground experience as the Director of the Darfur Office. Mr. Farrell spoke of Save the Children's great strides in providing education in Darfur, including building 48 schools, creating PTAs, women's committees and children's committees, in spite of the security issues in the region. He underscored that while the security situation in Darfur is deteriorating, children continue to receive an education and that this, more than anything else, gives the IDP communities hope for the future. Mr. Farrell also pointed out the need to "reinstate the state" in terms of education. In Sudan, the Government needs to fund education in Darfur, instead of NGOs creating a parallel education system. The last point that Mr. Farrell made was on the prioritization of education in an emergency. He stated that every emergency is different; therefore there is no one way to prioritize needs during an emergency.

In the ensuing discussion, participants agreed that basic education is generally underfunded and that the international community should do more to help those children affected by conflict to receive education. They further agreed that even governments affected by conflict should be encouraged to take on this responsibility, with the support of the international community, so that parallel structures are not created. Participants raised the issue of funding for education during emergencies. Many were concerned that donor governments limit their emergency responses to what they define as life-saving activities. However, others feared that if organizations were to provide more funding for education programs during the emergency response, this might have a serious impact on their operational budgets and spread their funds too thin. Another concern expressed was the importance of proper sequencing during the response to a natural disaster or a conflict. Most participants agreed that the international community's first priority in an

emergency is to provide essentials, such as water and food. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that conducting educational programs during emergency situations can promote linkages between other life saving measures that are being provided.

Providing education in emergencies was agreed to be important and attainable; however, funding and priorities present significant obstacles to implementing programs.