

## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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### **Armed Conflict Emerges as a Major Barrier to Education Access in Africa, Continental Conference Reveals**

The devastating impact of armed conflict on education access and quality across Africa took center stage during the seventh breakout session at the ongoing Continental Education Conference, revealing alarming statistics about the scope of the challenge facing the continent's education systems.

As highlighted during the session, approximately 80 million African children are currently affected by conflict, representing one in three children on the continent. Save the Children International's Senior Humanitarian and Education Advocacy Advisor, Chantal Mutamuriza, noted how conflicts not only disrupt education but expose children to increased violence and displacement.

The session brought forward stark examples from various conflict-affected regions. In Nigeria's northeast, the impact of the 15-year protracted conflict has been severe, with attacks reported on 313 schools since 2009. More than 2,000 teachers have lost their lives, and over one million children have been forced out of school. The situation has particularly affected girls' education, with multiple instances of school attacks and abductions leading to long-term educational disruption.

South Sudan's experience highlighted the generational impact of prolonged conflict on education. With more than four decades of intermittent conflict, the country now faces one of sub-Saharan Africa's lowest literacy rates, with only about 2.3 million of the country's 6.3 million school-age children currently enrolled in education. The situation is further complicated by displacement, with many children residing in refugee camps across neighboring countries.

The Norwegian Refugee Council presented alarming data about school closures in West and Central Africa, where more than 40,000 schools have been closed due to insecurity. The situation is particularly severe in the Central Sahel region, where school closures have quadrupled in the last five years, affecting countries such as Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.

Beyond the immediate impact on education access, the session explored the psychological toll on children in conflict zones. Studies revealed that more than half of children in affected areas don't feel safe at school, and over 60% express having no hope for a better future. This psychological impact significantly affects learning outcomes, with many students struggling to concentrate and engage in educational activities.

Educational experts at the session emphasized the need for comprehensive responses that go beyond traditional schooling. These include accelerated learning programs, psychosocial support, and flexible education options for displaced students. South Sudan's experience with alternative education programs for older students and young mothers who had left school was highlighted as a potential model for other conflict-affected regions.

The discussions underscored the urgent need for increased investment in education in conflict-affected areas, with speakers noting that military spending far outweighs peace-building investments. In 2023, global military spending reached approximately 2.3 trillion dollars, while peace-building investments remained at just 15.3 billion dollars.

The session concluded with calls for strengthened protection of education systems in conflict zones and increased support for affected communities. Participants emphasized that addressing education in conflict situations is crucial for breaking cycles of violence and building sustainable peace across the continent.

These discussions form part of the broader Continental Education Conference, which continues through December 11, focusing on transforming African education systems under the theme "Educating and Qualifying Our Youth for a Prosperous Integrated and Dynamic Africa."

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