CONCEPT NOTE

Online event: Responding to the Education Crisis in Central Sahel
12th October 2020 at 3:30 – 5:00 p.m. CEST

Side event to the Ministerial Roundtable on Central Sahel in October 2020

An education crisis is facing Central Sahel, requiring urgent response in order to build the future of the region.

Education in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger is under threat due to armed conflict, displacements, climate change and recently the Covid-19 crisis, leaving 13 million out of school and exposing especially vulnerable children and girls to risks of abuse, child labour, early marriage or radicalisation.

There is vital need for the education emergency to be addressed in a consolidated response to the Sahel crises through increased financing and stronger and more holistic partnerships.

Side event: Responding to the education crisis in Central Sahel

The event brings together ministers, technical and financial partners, NGOs, and the voices of affected children and youth to highlight the multidimensional crisis in education and its impact on the region, present best practices, and provide concrete recommendations. It is co-hosted by the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and Promotion of National Languages Burkina Faso, The Government of Spain, Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), and Save the Children.

Recommendations from the side event will be put forward to the High-Level Ministerial Roundtable on Central Sahel to be held on October 20th 2020, hosted by the Governments of Denmark and Germany, the European Union, and the United Nations. The Roundtable is organised with a view to identify solutions, new approaches, gather momentum and mobilise support from donors in response to current humanitarian challenges in the region.

Background

The Central Sahel region is fast becoming one of the most challenging and complex humanitarian crises worldwide. More than 13 million people require urgent humanitarian assistance in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger; five million more than estimated at the beginning of the year [consultations held prior to the High-Level ministerial roundtable]. The region is amongst the poorest in the world, with over 8 million children (55% of children in the age group 6-14) out of school even before Covid-19 school closures [Relief web]. Today this number reaches an alarmingly high level of 13 million students without any educational opportunity [Regional consultation in preparation of Ministerial Roundtable of Central Sahel]. According to Save the children's 2020 report Save our Education, children in the Sahel are at great risk of being left behind when it comes to our global collective goal of ensuring education for all children by 2030.
Since 2017, direct attacks on education have resulted in the closure of app. 4,000 schools, with insecurity and displacement impacting on the operation of many thousands more schools across the region. According to GCPEA research, over 430 attacks on education reportedly occurred in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger between 2015 and 2019. Attacks on schools, teachers and students and the use of schools by military and non-state armed groups across the Sahel region doubled in the countries between 2018 and 2019. Nearly 100 attacks on education and military use of schools reportedly occurred between January and July 2020 in the three countries, despite Covid-19-related school closures, and in some cases prevented children from resuming their studies even as schools began to reopen (Supporting Safe Education in the Central Sahel).

The governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, alongside others in the Sahel region, have all endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, committing to the protection and continuation of education in armed conflict, including the use of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict. These countries have taken positive steps toward implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration. However, coordinated, targeted, and sustainable support and action is required to ensure safe, continuous access to education for children in the Sahel region. This includes prioritising and funding measures to prevent, mitigate, and respond to attacks on education within humanitarian response and development plans and programs.

Climate change is severely affecting the Central Sahel.

In all three countries, floods in 2020 swept away schools and leaving others in use as temporary shelters, only days before the start of the school year. COVID-19 has left millions more out of school, which limits many children’s ability to continue learning and access the other critical supports offered in schools, such as nutrition, WASH and protection services. The double burden of violence and the pandemic has had a devastating impact on education. States and civil society have worked to enable remote learning for children, however, most children in the region do not have access to the internet, tablets, or computers. So, only limited ways of distributing physical materials and radio programmes are used for reaching children. As schools are reopening, many children face an elevated risk of not returning to the classroom, and many of these children may enter child labour, early marriages, or risk other forms of abuse. In particular, girls are at risk of early marriage and early pregnancy hindering their return to school (Plan International reports: Halting Lives, The impact of COVID19 on girls and young women and Adolescent girls in crisis: Voices from the Sahel).
Urgent response needed to the education crisis in central Sahel

The education emergency should be addressed in a consolidated response to the Sahel Crises through increased long-term financing and stronger and more holistic partnerships; it is integral to all three tracks to be discussed at the Ministerial Roundtable in October 2020:

- The response should see education as a core sector in securing the provision of basic social services. In a region with approximately 50% of the population under 15, education is an empowering tool to equip children and youth to unlock the Central Sahel’s potential for the future. Education builds a bridge to peace and stability, by providing hope and essential skills for a large youth population to engage in developing their societies. There is a need for donors, states, and civil society to work closely together to ensure continued learning and wellbeing for all children and youth, and that students and teachers can go back to schools that are safe.

- Education provides protection for vulnerable children and youth otherwise at risk of abuse and radicalisation. In the Central Sahel, education is not only empowering but also lifesaving, providing critical information to keep children protected and healthy. Education is essential for meeting the mental health and psychosocial needs of children and youth in crisis; maintaining a sense of normalcy, providing opportunities for recreation and play, and linking to additional specialized services for students who may be experiencing severe distress or other protection issues.

- Within humanitarian spaces for civil-military coordination, schools must be explicitly protected, with operational efforts from all actors to ensure a halt to attacks and military use of education institutions. National- and regional-level dialogue on humanitarian civil-military coordination should include focus on ensuring the Safe Schools Declaration and its Guidelines are fully implemented.

Speakers:

H.E. Stanislas Ouaro  
Minister of Education, Ministry of National Education, Literacy and Promotion of National Languages of Burkina Faso

Ms. Yasmine Sherif  
Director, Education Cannot Wait (ECW)

Mr. Michael Köhler  
Deputy Director-General, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)

Ms. Goundo Odette Keita  
National President, Organisation des Jeunes Africains pour le Développement et l’Emergence, Mali

Ms. Yasmina Mohamed Boubacar  
Advocate for children’s and girls’ education, Plan International Niger

Mr. Issoufou Ouedraogo  
Education in Emergencies Specialist, Save the Children Burkina Faso

Moderator:

Mr. Eric Hazard  
Panafrican Campaign and Policy Director, Save the Children West and Central Africa Regional Office