SUMMARY REPORT

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. 13 million children are out of school and with vulnerable girls and boys especially at risk of abuse, child labour, early marriage or radicalisation. There is vital need for this education crisis to be addressed, and long-term structural investment in the education sector should not be forgotten. On October 12th 2020, an online event brought together ministers, technical and financial partners, NGOs, and the voices of affected children and youth to put a spotlight on the education crisis in Central Sahel. Speakers in the side event urged all actors to answer to this education crisis in a consolidated response to the Sahel crises through increased financing, stronger partnerships, and a more holistic approach. A set of concrete recommendations on the way forward is included in this report to 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.

Side event Co-hosts:
The Ministry of National Education, Literacy and Promotion of National Languages of Burkina Faso
The Government of Spain
Education Cannot Wait (ECW)
The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)
Save the Children

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
KEY MESSAGES:
Urgent response needed to the education crisis in central Sahel

**Track 1:** Education is essential in a holistic response to the Sahel crisis by providing **basic social services** and building the future of the region.

In the Central Sahel one out of two people is under 15 years of age. This large population of children and youth will need education as an empowering tool to address the immense burden of multiple challenges faced by the region in terms of poverty, climate change, armed conflict, displacement, Covid-19 and financial recession. Yet, these same children and adolescents are deprived of their access to education due to the complex humanitarian crises faced by the Sahel region, leaving 13 million out of school and many more millions with teaching and learning conditions that are unsafe and of poor quality. Findings from a participatory consultation conducted by the **Burkina Faso Education Cluster** which engaged 300 children was presented during the side event, and showed that with schools closed due to Covid-19, more than half of children have no access to learning materials and no support from teachers, parent or caregivers.

The message from these children and youth is clear: They want to go back to school, they want to learn - but they cannot because of poverty, insecurity, forced/domestic labour and forced marriage as the four main difficulties they are facing. As amplified by **Yasmine Sherif, Director of Education Cannot Wait (ECW):** their education cannot wait until terror groups have been eliminated and the conflict has come to an end. It cannot wait until climate disaster no longer affects the lands; until Covid-19 has passed; and until the countries have risen out of extreme poverty. Indeed, as highlighted by Michael Köhler, **ECHO Deputy Director General:** Education can and must be an answer to all these systemic challenges. Education is the key to overcome insecurity, to counter the risk of epidemics and disease, and to foster peace, resilience and development.

For this to happen, a holistic approach across sectors is needed to ensure the potential of education in terms of building peace and bridging the nexus between humanitarian situations and longer-term development. Governments need to be accompanied by all partners to implement comprehensive strategies that address all aspects of the crisis; collect data in unstable contexts; and engage all district and local level actors as well as youth and children themselves in planning responses. The holistic approach also applies to the package of interventions offered to children and adolescents at all levels which needs to include: support to their wellbeing; initiatives to provide safe and accessible learning environments; support to teachers; encouraging the engagement of parents and the community. Financial support is needed to meet an **ECW estimated funding gap of 94 million $** to deliver quality education in Central Sahel, and funds need to be earmarked to education in emergencies within humanitarian budgets as well as within development assistance.

**Track 2:** Education is vital in providing **protection** for vulnerable children and youth otherwise at risk of abuse and radicalisation.

A child out of school in Central Sahel is not safe. According to youth activists and speakers **Yasmina Mohamed Boubacar** from Niger and **Goundo Odette Keita** from Mali, the many barriers to education affect girls in particular: When girls don’t go to school, they risk being married or exposed to sexual abuse or unwanted pregnancies. Gender responsive programming is required across all interventions to protect vulnerable girls and boys. The youth speakers also pointed out that one of the main consequences of living in contexts affected by multi-dimensional humanitarian crisis, is that many children and youth are suffering from psychosocial distress. Outreach programmes for severely distressed children and youth can help, such as safe spaces for peer interaction, mobile clinics and access to psychologists. Several speakers marked the growing trend in the number of children recruited by force, a new phenomenon that cannot be ignored and must be urgently addressed. For boys in particular, there is the risk of recruitment by terror groups. **Stanislas Ouaro, Minister of Education of Burkina Faso** underlined, that the goal of terror groups is to create discontentment among youth, and that quality education is necessary to protect against radicalization. For schools to be safe also in terms of Covid-19, measures are needed to make space for social distance in classrooms; access to proper water, sanitation and hygiene facilities as well as key lifesaving information.
1. A coordinated and holistic approach among all humanitarian, development and security actors to address the education crisis:

All actors should come together to support Central Sahel Governments in addressing the education crisis. Emphasis should be laid on comprehensive strategies that include all aspects of the crisis. Cooperation is needed to address structural issues through both short-term emergency interventions and long-term multiyear and multi-country programmes, such as those supported by ECHO and ECW. The holistic, cross-sector approach should use the potential of education as a tool for addressing all aspects of the crisis such as: protection, health, Covid-19 prevention, poverty, gender equality, psychosocial support, displacement, climate resilience, peacebuilding. Approaches should include engagement with actors at national, district and local levels, including communities, parents, children and youth.

2. Measures to protect vulnerable groups integrated across all education interventions and linking up to other sectors:

Vulnerable groups in particular should be protected through education interventions, including girls (at risk of school dropout, sexual abuse, early marriage, early or unwanted pregnancy); boys at risk of abuse or recruitment by terror groups; children exposed to violence or experiencing severe distress and in need of mental health or psychosocial support; refugees and displaced populations; children with disabilities or other vulnerabilities. Measures should include data collection on vulnerable groups and programming that is responsive to gender equality and inclusion of all children and youth. Children and youth themselves should be consulted in designing protections measures, and should be seen as a resource when offering solutions.

3. Measures and policies to ensure protection of schools from armed attacks:

All Central Sahel governments have signed the Safe School Declaration. They need to implement it in a gender-responsive manner, taking concrete actions to protect schools, students and teachers from attack and military use of schools. 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, including data collection, and holding perpetrators to justice. This should be reflected in education budgets integrating protections issues such as building walls around school grounds – a need highlighted by the Minister of Education of Burkina Faso.

4. Increased funding to respond to the education crisis in modalities that address short term intervention needs as well as long term programming:

Donors will need to step up financial support to meet an ECW-estimated funding gap of 94 million $ needed to properly fund quality education to meet the SDG 4 in Central Sahel. Donors should also allocate an earmarked percentage of humanitarian aid to education in emergencies. Funding should be aimed also towards interventions to integrate child and youth organisations to build their capacities and engage them in designing and developing interventions that respond to the needs of children and youth.