

## Where Peace Begins

Education's role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding

**"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed."**  
Preamble of UNESCO's Constitution

**"Education – the right kind of quality education – can give children hope and opportunities, and heal divisions and the traumas of war. A school can and should be a place of peace."**

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia

**"When you are educated, you can reason by yourself. You can understand that war is not the best way out. You will be able to solve problems, and you can understand, because war is about misunderstanding."**

Liberian primary school student



### Children in armed conflict

Children are particularly affected by conflict. Millions of girls and boys grow up surrounded by actual or threatened violence in conflict-affected fragile states. They grow up without access to basic services, including education. These countries are more often than not the furthest away from reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Over half the world's 72 million out-of-school children – 37 million – live in conflict-affected fragile states (CAFS), even though these countries make up just 13 % of the world's population. Education is a human right that demands fulfilment even in situations of danger and deprivation. It is also what children clearly want.

### Peace begins in the minds of children

Most people recognise instinctively the role of education in preventing conflict and in building peace. Most people also understand the dangers inherent in the abuse of education systems. Our world community – donors, national governments, civil society, and others – must work together to find ways to ensure that quality education is a reality in conflict-affected fragile states and is implemented in a way that promotes peace. This is a challenge to Save the Children and many others in the international community to ensure quality education before, during and after conflicts, and when peace settlements are negotiated.

### Education as the peace dividend: Opportunities for change

Peace processes provide an important opportunity to improve education systems and help foster peace. When parties to a conflict are engaged in a peace process there is a rare focus and opportunity to agree on a shared new education blueprint for the country. However, of the 37 full peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2005 that are publicly available, 11 make no mention of education at all. Even in those that do address education, there is great variation in the way it is addressed and the type of education that is suggested.

As well as opportunities, there are of course challenges to overcome in order to address education in peace processes, and to address it sufficiently well. As part of a global debate on education and peace, Save the Children wants to raise these issues, in order to ensure that quality education will be included as part of all peace processes.

### The power to heal: Quality education for all

A quality educational system makes a positive, transformative contribution to conflict-affected societies, and operates as a counterweight to conflict and those who seek to promote conflict. Across society, every additional year of formal schooling for males can reduce the risk of their becoming involved in conflict by 20%. Quality education provides a platform from which other Millennium Development Goals can be achieved, and can promote peace and development more broadly. The benefits of education are lasting because the children who acquire them will transfer them to the next generation. For example, one year of education can raise the living wage of men and women by an average of 10%.

### **The potential to divide: Education as a weapon**

Educational systems can be a force for good, but they can also be abused. Exclusion from education plays a crucial role in fuelling conflict. Governments may intentionally manipulate teachers to shore up their power base, as happened in Burundi in the 1990s and Germany in the 1930s. Curricula, textbooks and educational policies can all be turned into platforms for propaganda.

Direct attacks on the education sector are a characteristic of confrontations around the world. In its 2007 report 'Education under Attack' UNESCO maintains that attacks on education will continue unless the international community supports the development of an independent monitoring system.

### **Time for change: Quality education for peace**

Four critical elements are needed to shore up education's role in peacebuilding and conflict prevention:

- **Inclusion/access** Primary schools must be free and close to home, and must do all they can to attract all children in a community.
- **Safety/protection** Schools must be safe from attack and must be perceived as places where intellectual curiosity and respect for universal human rights is fostered.
- **Relevance** Schools must use a non-biased curriculum and relevant educational materials.
- **Accountability** Schools should be managed at local level to ensure relevance but also should be managed transparently and fairly. The opinions of children, parents and the community must be taken into consideration.

This type of education may cost more and may be more difficult to implement, but the benefits of quality education for children and entire societies justify it being a priority at every stage before, during and after a conflict.

### **Education for peace: Beginning a global debate**

Peace begins in the minds of children. But how do we make sure children receive the quality education that will help them build peace? To try to answer this question, Save the Children is launching a global debate on education for peace. Please read our full report *Where Peace Begins*, a discussion document based on our programme experience in many countries, which is intended to spark the debate. We want to engage with others concerned with education and peace to find the answers to the following questions:

1. **If the right sort of education is important to sustain a peaceful society, why is it not included in all peace agreements?**
2. **Who are the key actors (education and others) who peace negotiators engage with when deciding how education is to be included (or not) in a peace agreement, and how do education authorities play a role in this?**
3. **How does the role of education in promoting peace and stability differ between various contexts, for example in fragile states before a conflict, countries in the midst of conflict, and post-conflict situations?**
4. **Do you have evidence that you are willing to share (in the form of case studies or concrete examples) of where quality education has been implemented successfully in conflict situations and has made a difference to mitigating conflict?**
5. **What evidence do you have (perhaps from research or programme experience) that demonstrate which aspects of quality education promote peace?**
6. **Have you observed education systems that have undergone a positive transformation as a consequence of conflict? Please can you describe these and the key factors that transformed a negative situation into a positive situation.**

When you submit a contribution to the global debate, you must own all rights to the content of your contribution or provide references to any citations. Your contribution needs to be publicly distributable on our website, and through other media. All contributions used will be fully referenced to you.

Write to [rewritethefuture@save-children-alliance.org](mailto:rewritethefuture@save-children-alliance.org) or Rewrite the Future, International Save the Children Alliance Secretariat, Cambridge House, 100 Cambridge Grove, London, W6 0LE, UK.

**Read the full report and join the global debate at [www.savethechildren.net/rewritethefuture](http://www.savethechildren.net/rewritethefuture)**