

Contribution to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education's report on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment at the service of the right to education

Education as a form of reparation for children conflict-affected children

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1. This note focuses on children and young people affected by conflict-related sexual violence while under the age of 18¹ and their fundamental right to reparation, although most considerations are also relevant to children having suffered other types of human rights violations. This contribution focuses on question 1(d), 2(a), 2(d) and 3(a). It draws on the experience of the Global Survivors Fund (GSF) and the Neem Foundation in northeast Nigeria to demonstrate how education as a form of reparation can inform policy debates on curriculum flexibility, trauma-responsive pedagogy, and inclusive assessment. The model described below offers concrete lessons for education systems to realise children's rights to education and reparation in contexts of armed conflict.

Introduction

2. Conflict is widely recognised as one of the biggest factors disrupting children's access to education globally. In Nigeria, Boko Haram has systematically targeted the education system since 2009, attacking schools and kidnapping hundreds of young schoolgirls to propagate its extremist anti-western education rhetoric. In captivity, students were subjected to rape, forced marriages, forced pregnancies, sexual slavery, and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence. Today, approximately 8.9 million crisis-affected girls and boys are unable to access basic primary school education.²

¹ Children affected by conflict-related sexual violence represent a diverse and largely invisible community that includes children who were subjected to sexual violence, children born of rape, children who have witnessed sexual violence, and children whose caregivers have been subjected to sexual violence.

² Education Cannot Wait, Education Cannot Wait announces US\$15 million multi-year resilience programme, <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/news-stories/press-releases/education-cannot-wait-announces-us15-million-multi-year-resilience>

3. For children and young people affected by sexual violence in conflict settings, the challenges in accessing education are further exacerbated. Dropping out of school is the norm due to the bullying, stigmatisation, fear and trauma they experience. They are also forced to cope with the severe physical consequences of sexual violence, such as fistula and unwanted pregnancies. When children return from captivity, they have often missed out on many years of schooling, their age no longer matching their level of education. For children born of conflict-related sexual violence to Boko Haram fighters, specific additional challenges in accessing education arise from community stigmatisation and exclusion by immediate and extended family members. This exposes them to further violations, including sexual exploitation and/or recruitment by armed groups. While education could be the key factor in their healing process, it is incredibly difficult for children and young people affected by conflict-related sexual violence to simply return to school and pick up where they left off. For them to re-enter the education system, significant efforts are needed to overcome the many obstacles they face.
4. Through a flagship project started in February 2024, the Neem Foundation and GSF support children and young people who were affected by the insurgency in Nigeria to return to the classroom with a flexible, trauma-responsive education model in the Lafiya Sarari Learning Center in Borno state.

Education as reparation

Under international law, all victims of gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including conflict-related sexual violence, have a right to adequate, effective and prompt reparation, which includes restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition³. The right to reparation of children was further recognised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its General Comment No.5 (2003) in line with Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which states that *“where rights are found to have been breached, there should be appropriate reparation, including compensation, and, where needed, measures to promote physical and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration”*.⁴ Survivors and victims across the globe frequently mention education as a priority and a desired form of reparation.⁵ However, children affected by conflict-related sexual violence remain overlooked.

Education as reparation was explicitly recognised by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education in her Policy Brief on Protecting the Right to Education in Armed Conflict in which the Special Rapporteur recommended that States, international and regional organisations, United Nations entities, donors and civil society actors “recognize education as a form of reparation that

³ [UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law](#), (2005).

⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.5 General measures of implementation of the convention on the rights of the child (2003)

⁵ GSF, Briefing on reparation for children born of conflict-related sexual violence, exploring survivor’s perspectives from the Global Reparations Study (2024), https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Policy_Briefs/Briefing_on_children_born_of_CRSV_web_Final.pdf

requires States to go beyond existing obligations by providing adequately financed, gender- and age-sensitive measures that acknowledge the harms suffered, and education measures designed to help repair wrongdoing, including psychosocial and financial support and community reintegration” (§53(c)).⁶

To be truly reparative, a supportive school environment must offer a **safe space for emotional recovery with trauma-responsive education, flexible enrolment policies, and accelerated learning programmes**. Support in obtaining legal and academic documents are also measures that can restore what was taken away from a child. Moreover, economic support to pay for tuition fees, books, and food can compensate for the financial consequences faced by survivors and their families. Support to caregivers and communities helps reduce stigmatisation of children and provides a sense of belonging.

Education is also a tool to **address discrimination and promote equality**. It provides economic empowerment, reduces the risk of further abuse and of further recruitment, and promotes social reintegration and recognition. Reparative education therefore supports peacebuilding and stability, by addressing the root causes of conflict, supporting deradicalisation and community cohesion, encouraging reconciliation, and strengthening intergenerational healing.

Education as a form of reparation must **go beyond the right to education** that States are already obligated to provide. This requires tailored measures that address the unique needs of children and young people affected by conflict-related sexual violence, ensuring that the education they receive is accessible, inclusive, and transformative.

Key recommendations:

GSF and the Neem Foundation recommend that the Special Rapporteur encourage States, international organisations, and civil society actors to:

1. **Explicitly recognise education as a form of reparation** for children and youth affected by armed conflict, requiring formal acknowledgement of the harms suffered and education measures designed to help repair wrongdoing.
2. **Affirm that education as reparation must go beyond States’ existing obligations** under the right to education, and require additional, adequately financed, gender- and age-sensitive measures.
3. **Integrate education as reparation within national frameworks** through holistic models based on three core pillars:
 - **Quality:** trauma-responsive pedagogy, trained educators, community-based support systems, and cross-sector collaboration (e.g., mental health, legal identity, protection).

⁶ OHCHR, The right to education in armed conflict: a human rights imperative, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, UN Doc. A/80/479 (2025), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a80479-right-education-armed-conflict-human-rights-imperative-report>

- **Flexibility:** Accelerated and non-formal pathways that meet learners where they are - whether within the classroom, at home, or in displacement.
- **Accessibility:** Financial, social, and infrastructural supports to remove barriers to education and psychosocial support including barriers to accessing legal identity.

4. Recognise that education as reparation initiatives also contribute to community reintegration, social cohesion and peacebuilding.

I. Conception, design and implementation of the curriculum

Question addressed: 1(d) – Flexibility of curriculum design

5. In Nigeria, the formal national curriculum is centrally developed and relatively standardised, which poses challenges in conflict-affected contexts where children have experienced prolonged school disruption, trauma, displacement, and stigma. While national policy frameworks recognise inclusive education and education in emergencies, they provide limited guidance on adapting curriculum delivery to the needs of children and young people affected by armed conflict.
6. In response to these challenges, the Neem Foundation, in partnership with GSF, is implementing a flexible, trauma-responsive curriculum. This model demonstrates how curriculum design can be adapted to respond to conflict related challenges. Key features of this model include:
 - a. **Flexible learning pathways:** Recognising that rigid age-grade norms exclude conflict-affected students, children and young people affected by conflict-related sexual violence while under the age of 18, are not placed in age-based classrooms; rather, they are grouped according to learning level in specific subjects.
 - b. **Extended learning timelines:** educational progress is measured over a six-year period rather than through rigid annual promotion requirements, allowing children to learn at their own pace.
 - c. **Microlearning approaches:** Curriculum content is broken into manageable learning units to accommodate concentration difficulties, trauma symptoms, and uneven prior learning.
 - d. **Values-based education:** Core values such as peace, tolerance, integrity, respect, and coexistence are embedded across subjects, directly responding to social fragmentation and conflict consequences.
7. This model illustrates how flexibility can operationalise education as a form of reparation, particularly for children and young people affected by gross violations of human rights, by restoring access to learning pathways that were disrupted or denied due to conflict and violence.

II. Pedagogy and classroom learning

Question addressed: 2(a) – Alignment of pedagogy with human rights aims

8. The education as reparation model advances a trauma-responsive, learner-centred pedagogical approach that aligns closely with the aims of the right to education, including dignity, non-discrimination, participation and inclusion. It includes:
 - a. **Creation of safe and supportive learning environments:** children and young people are protected from harm, their unique needs are acknowledged, and their healing and development are supported. Teachers are trained to prioritise emotional safety, and trust, recognising that learning and healing are interdependent for children and young people affected by conflict.
 - b. **Participatory and strengths-based teaching:** teachers focus on students' strengths, enabling them to rebuild confidence, and establish environments where they feel valued and supported.
 - c. **Use of creative and play-based methods:** art, storytelling, and play-based learning are used both as pedagogical tools and as psychosocial support mechanisms.
 - d. **Psychosocial and medical support:** students have access to psychosocial support and therapeutic interventions, as well as support for medical needs, ensuring that learning is not undermined by untreated trauma or health needs.
9. This approach has proven particularly effective for children and young people who have experienced conflict. From 2017 to 2021, students of the Lafiya Sarari Learning Center saw a 76% reduction in trauma symptoms and a 65% increase in literacy and numeracy; by 2024, 31 graduates had enrolled in university.

Question addressed: 2(d) – Teacher capacity

10. A critical component of the model is capacity-building for teachers and educators, many of whom may be affected by conflict themselves. They receive targeted training on teaching methods, child-centred approaches, inclusive education, and effective classroom management. They are also specifically trained in trauma-responsive education, including recognising signs of trauma, addressing them, and avoiding re-traumatisation. This underscores the importance of recognising teachers as key actors in realising the rights to education and reparation, rather than solely as curriculum deliverers.

III. Student assessment

Question addressed: 3(a) – Alignment of assessment systems with the aims of education

11. For children and young people affected by conflict-related sexual violence, standardised assessment models often exacerbate exclusion, anxiety, and failure, as they do not account for interrupted schooling, or trauma-related learning difficulties. The education as reparation model in Nigeria adopts a flexible assessment approach, including by focusing on individual progress rather than age-based benchmarks. The model promotes non-exam based assessment tools, such as portfolio based learning, teacher observation and narrative feedback as well as continuous formative assessment. Students are given the freedom to learn at their own pace,

with educational attainments measured over the course of six years instead of having to meet yearly goals to progress. This approach supports learners' dignity and motivation and reduces the risk of disengagement and dropout.

Conclusion

12. The experience in northeast Nigeria demonstrates that **trauma-responsive, flexible, accessible and inclusive approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are both feasible and effective within existing education systems**, when grounded in survivors' needs. Embedding such approaches within national frameworks would strengthen States' compliance with their obligations under international human rights, including to realise the right to education and the right to reparation of conflict-affected children and young people, while contributing to healing, reconciliation, and long-term peacebuilding.
13. What is being achieved in Nigeria can be replicated with victims and survivors elsewhere. In the coming years, GSF and the Neem Foundation will capitalise on this experience and galvanise efforts to work with national and international organisations, experts, survivors, victims, donors, and States committed to making education a reality for all children and young people, including those affected by conflict-related sexual violence.

Neem Foundation

The Neem Foundation is a leading crisis response organisation committed to promoting the protection and wellbeing of populations and communities living in contexts affected by conflict, violence, and fragility. We strengthen the resilience and capacity of crisis-affected communities across Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region to adopt inclusive approaches to recovery from the effects of instability and mitigate future crises. We achieve these by providing and raising the standards of mental health and psychosocial support for trauma-affected populations. We design and deliver reintegration and stabilisation services that target displaced communities as well as former associates of violent armed groups. Through our communications and advocacy work, we promote social cohesion, reconciliation, and community action to maintain peace and progress. Our education component advocates for, and improves access to, quality education for marginalised and disadvantaged groups, especially girls.

Global Survivors Fund

Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence face a cascade of consequences, from permanent physical injuries and long-term debilitating trauma to stigmatisation and socio-economic exclusion from their families and communities. As with all victims of human rights violations, survivors of these crimes have a right to reparation. We work with and for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence to realise their right to reparation. This is achieved through an approach built on the following core elements: co-creation, contextualised solutions, and a multistakeholder approach.