



NEEM
FOUNDATION



**GLOBAL
SURVIVORS FUND**
FOR AND WITH SURVIVORS OF
CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

ADVOCACY BRIEF

Education as a form of reparation for children affected by conflict and conflict-related sexual violence

Context

Conflicts have reached their highest levels since World War II. In many of these contexts, education is not only disrupted but deliberately targeted. Across the Sahel, thousands of children, many of them girls, have been abducted in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Nigeria, while armed groups opposing state-administered education burn and loot schools and threaten, abduct, or kill teachers. The consequences are immense: it is estimated that 17.4 million children are out of school in Sudan, 2.8 million in South Sudan, and 235,000 Rohingya refugee children remain out of school in Bangladesh.

For children affected by conflict-related sexual violence, the challenges in accessing education are further exacerbated. Dropping out of school is not the exception but rather the norm, as children struggle with the psychological and physical consequences of violence. Many must cope with severe health consequences, such as fistula, sexually transmitted diseases and infections, along with unwanted pregnancies. When children return from captivity, they have often missed years of schooling, their age no longer matching their level of education, making reintegration into formal systems incredibly difficult. Likewise, schools and teachers are rarely prepared to address the unique harms affecting these children and are often unable to provide adequate support. Lack of access to education exposes them to further violations, including sexual exploitation and/or recruitment by armed groups.

Children born of conflict-related sexual violence face additional barriers. They bear the weight of especially severe discrimination and stigma from their community and family members. Many are denied legal identity documents, including birth certificates, which are often required to enrol in school, sit examinations, or access public services.

Even when children affected by conflict and conflict-related sexual violence can access school, many are unable to meaningfully learn without additional support. Trauma, fear, chronic stress, stigma, and untreated physical and mental health conditions affect concentration, memory, emotional regulation, attendance, and behaviour in the classroom. Education systems that fail to recognise these realities risk perpetuating exclusion rather than repairing harm.

While education can be one of the most powerful factors in a child's healing and recovery process, it is profoundly challenging for children and young people affected by conflict-related sexual violence to return to school and reintegrate. For these children to re-enter the education system, sustained and targeted efforts are needed to overcome the many barriers they face.

Education as a form of reparation

Under international law, States and other duty-bearers must provide victims of gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law - including children - with prompt, full and effective reparation, which includes restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. However, children affected by conflict-related sexual violence remain overlooked in reparation initiatives worldwide.

Survivors and victims across the globe consistently identify education as a priority and a desired form of reparation. 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.

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 education programmes. Support in obtaining legal and academic documents are 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. Additionally, support to caregivers and communities helps the destigmatisation 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 enrolment, and promotes social integration 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 functions as rehabilitation, by rebuilding emotional stability and confidence;**
- **as restitution, by restoring access to schooling that was forcibly interrupted;**
- **and as compensation, by offsetting the long-term economic damage faced by survivors and their families;**
- **It also serves as a guarantee of non-repetition by reducing exposure to further violence, exploitation, stigmatisation, exclusion, and recruitment by armed groups.**

Project: Education as reparation in northeast Nigeria

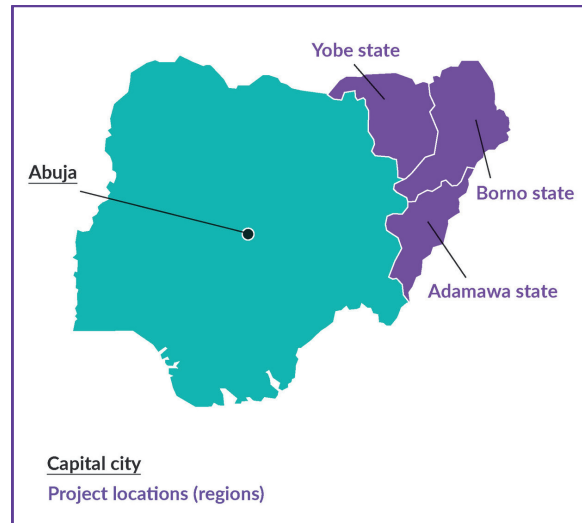
Target 200 children affected by conflict-related sexual violence from Nigeria’s Boko Haram insurgency (120 enrolled so far)

Location Borno state, Nigeria

Starting date February 2024

Partner Neem Foundation

Nature of the project Provision of trauma-responsive education as a form of reparation



Boko Haram systematically targeted the education system, depriving children of access to schools. Years later, education is now being reclaimed by survivors and communities as a pathway for recovery and for rebuilding futures disrupted by violence.

Through its flagship Lafiya Sarari Initiative, Neem Foundation has been supporting children affected by conflict to return to learning since 2017 through a flexible, trauma-responsive, and healing-centred accelerated education model. More recently, the Global Survivors Fund and Neem Foundation have partnered to ensure that children affected by conflict-related sexual violence and the Boko Haram insurgency can also benefit from this approach, recognising the unique barriers they face in accessing and remaining in education. This model is one example that can be scaled up to create transformative impact on a large scale for children affected by conflict, including children affected by conflict-related sexual violence.

In the coming years, the Global Survivors Fund and Neem Foundation will work together to advance a multi-country initiative that seeks to transform education into a meaningful form of reparation for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence and other forms of conflict-related trauma. By combining trauma-responsive approaches, flexible pathways back to learning, and inclusive and accessible education systems, the initiative will help thousands of children not only return to school, but recover, rebuild their confidence, and reclaim opportunities that conflict has taken from them. Together with survivors, governments, donors, and local partners, we aim to demonstrate that education can be both a right fulfilled and a powerful means of repair.

“I want to resume school because if I finish school and graduate, then Boko Haram will not have won. I will then be the winner.

- A survivor from Nigeria

Our call to action: rallying around education as a form of reparation

Education, when delivered as reparation, is not only a right, but also a tool for healing, justice, recognition, social reintegration, and reconciliation.

When education is adapted to the realities faced by children affected by conflict and conflict-related sexual violence, children who are often left behind by existing education responses can begin to recover and rebuild their futures.

We call upon all stakeholders, in particular States and donors, to:

- Explicitly recognise children affected by conflict-related sexual violence as victims eligible for reparation and ensure that reparation programmes are designed with their specific needs in mind.
- Integrate education as an explicit form of reparation in national reparation frameworks and post-conflict recovery plans, going beyond the baseline obligation to provide education. This means acknowledging harms, designing and appropriately funding tailored measures that help repair wrongdoings, including flexible and inclusive enrolment, accelerated education, community mobilisation and stigma reduction initiatives, support for obtaining legal identity and academic documents, healing-centred and trauma-responsive teaching approaches, psychosocial support and community reintegration that address the unique barriers faced by children affected by conflict-related sexual violence.
- Invest in the capacity of teachers and school communities to adopt healing-centred and trauma-responsive approaches, ensuring that schools become safe spaces for healing and reintegration rather than sites of further stigmatisation. This should include supporting schools and communities to recognise and respond to the specific realities faced by children affected by conflict-related sexual violence.
- Support the scaling of locally led, survivor-centred approaches to education as a form of reparation across conflict-affected contexts. This includes investing in community-driven models that integrate healing-centred and trauma-responsive education, and ensure that approaches are adapted in partnership with affected communities and national actors.

Who is the Neem Foundation?

For more information:



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.

Who is the Global Survivors Fund?

For more information:



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 multi-stakeholder approach.