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SOCHUM[†] 1 BRIEFING PAPER



[†] Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee

The Question of Literacy Rates in Sub-Saharan Africa

Background

Lacking basic reading and writing skills is a tremendous disadvantage in life. Literacy not only enriches an individual's life, but it creates opportunities for people to develop skills that will help them provide for themselves and their family. Assisting in the development of the wider community, reducing infant mortality rates, and empowering women, literacy is a key fuel for social and economic development in any society.

However, In 2008, nearly 796 million adults (17% of the adult population worldwide) could neither read nor write. Approximately two thirds were women. A large majority of illiterates live in Sub-Saharan Africa. 10 countries account for 72% of adult illiterates in the world. According to a report from UNESCO, in the last ten years significant advances have been seen in education. However, there is a fear that it is slowing up. In any case, even today 43% of children with no access to schooling live in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Literacy is an essential human right. A good quality and basic education equips pupils with literacy skills for life and further learning. Literate parents are more likely to keep their children healthy and send their children to school. Literate people are able to better access other education and employment opportunities; and collectively, literate societies are better geared to meet development challenges.

Definitions

Adult literacy rate: Percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who can both read and write, with understanding a short simple statement on his/her everyday life. Generally, "literacy" also encompasses "numeracy", the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.

Sub-Saharan Africa: The geopolitical region consisting of all of Africa that is south of the Sahara Desert.

Key Points

In Sub-Saharan Africa

- More than 1 in 3 adults cannot read.
- More than 9 in 10 children cannot read at the age of 10.
- 182 million adults are unable to read and write.
- 48 million youth (ages 15-24) are illiterate.

- 22% (30 million) of primary aged children are not in school.

The low literacy rate on the continent can be attributed to a few things: lack of adequate teacher training and overall investment in training, where teachers teach what they were taught as children rather than keeping up with the evolution of education, access to tools and reading resources for children as a result of poverty, and poor school literacy programs and curriculum planning.

Literacy improves the development of the wider community

The positive knock-on effect of educating girls can be seen in the wider social and economic benefits yielded for their communities. Increasing the emphasis towards women's education positively impacts on each generation through raised expectations and increased self-esteem. Improving literacy facilitates employment whereby both males and females can contribute, helping the wider economy and community to thrive.

Literacy reduces infant mortality rates

Illiteracy directly affects an individual's health and wellbeing, so the importance of education on physical health is vital. Those without education are more likely to be vulnerable to health problems, for example increased schooling reduces the risk of HIV infection. According to one study of women in 32 countries: literate women are three times more likely than illiterate ones to know that a person in seemingly good health can be infected with HIV, and four times as likely to know how to protect themselves from AIDS.

Infant mortality rates drop significantly for women who have had primary education, and even more for those who complete secondary school. It is estimated that infant mortality decreases 9% for every year of education attained. This is because girls and women are able to educate themselves on health issues, which can help reduce the cycle of poverty and mortality rates in the long term.

Literacy empowers women and girls

The global illiterate population of young girls is 61.9 per cent so the importance of education for women cannot be understated.

Breaking the cycle of illiteracy and improving self-esteem is crucial for women and girls in the developing world. By enabling them to become economically productive and independent, they become empowered and can take control of their lives. The importance of education in fostering personal autonomy, and creative and critical thinking skills is central to helping girls contribute to their societies.

Literacy positively impacts economic growth beyond the local community

The impact of improving literacy in girls not only has a positive economic impact at a local and community level, but the productivity of the workforce flourishes at country level too by enhancing a country's economic strength.

Education, Education, Education

Education is one of the key instruments to reduce poverty and lay the foundations for sustained economic growth. Although access to education in Sub-Saharan African countries

has improved, the youth literacy rate remains the lowest in the world: 72% compared to 90% in the Middle East and North Africa, or 97% in Latin America and the Caribbean.

By extending education and improving its quality, people have more chances in life.

Previous Action

In 2000, the international community met at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal. Through the Dakar Framework for Action, it defined six goals for 2015 to achieve substantial improvements in education for children and adults, paying special attention to promoting gender equality in access to quality education.

In 2000, the 189 member countries of the UN also established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the same deadline of 2015. The objectives set in Dakar help to achieve the MDGs, especially Goal 2, which is to achieve universal primary education, and Goal 3, which focuses on eliminating gender disparity in education at all levels.

To speed up progress in meeting the EFA goals, the FTI (Fast Track Initiative) was launched in 2002, renamed the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in September 2011. Out of the 58 developing countries supported by this partnership, 38 are in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The African Union is currently implementing the "Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education" (2006-2015), which states that "education is an important area whose results directly affect and determine the quality and extent of development in Africa."

Questions to consider

1. Are current measures to increase literacy rates in Sub-Saharan Africa sufficient? How can they be improved?
2. Can cultural and tribal practices traditions prevent women and children from receiving a sufficient education? Should the UN attempt to sabotage this tradition? Why/Why not?
3. How can we tackle the endemic shortage of resources and qualified teachers?
4. Does addressing this problem help the international community - if yes, how? If not, is this a fair use of UN funds?

Useful Links

[YouTube - The future of literacy in Africa](#) (3 minute video)

[African Library Project](#) (about the issue)

[Global Partnership for Education](#)

The Question of Child Trafficking

Background

Human Trafficking, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud, or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit.

Child Trafficking in particular is regarding the trafficking (as defined above) concerning children. The United Nations defines a child, under the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child, as every human being below the age of 18 unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Trafficking (in general) may be internal (within a nation's borders) or cross-national (across borders) and comes in many forms. These include exploitation in the sex, entertainment and hospitality industries, and as domestic workers or in forced marriages. Victims are forced to work in factories, on construction sites or in the agricultural sector without pay or with an inadequate salary, living in fear of violence and often in inhumane conditions. Some victims are tricked or coerced into having their organs removed. Children, in particular, are forced to serve as soldiers or to commit crimes for the benefit of the criminals.

The exploitation of individuals for profit has a long history and international efforts to address it can be traced back at least a century, well before the birth of the modern human rights system. However, it is only over the past decade that trafficking has become a major concern.

During that same period, a comprehensive legal framework has developed around the issue. These changes confirm that a fundamental shift has taken place in how the international community thinks about human exploitation.

Trafficking in persons (including Child Trafficking) is a crime. According to the UNODC, it consists of three elements the act, the means, and the purpose.

The Act

A trafficker must do one of the following to people for them to be convicted: recruit, transport, transfer, harbour or receive a child.

The Means

A trafficker must use one or more of these methods: threat or use of force, coercion, fraud, deception, abuse of a position of vulnerability, giving payments or benefits, or abduction.

The Purpose

A trafficker must be trafficking for the purposes of exploitation, which include exploiting the prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, or similar practices, and/or the removal of organs

Key Issues

Mental health consequences

The types of physical and psychological abuse child trafficking victims experience often lead to serious mental or emotional health consequences, including feelings of severe guilt, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance abuse (alcohol or narcotics), and eating disorders.

Physical health consequences

In Europe, the most common physical health symptoms which trafficked children include headaches (81%), memory problems (63%), back problems (69%), random fatigue patches (82%) and various sexual health problems including STIS and STDS (65%)

Intersectionality

Child Trafficking is an intersectional issue. The vast majority of children who are trafficked are girls (66%), and a large number of people who are trafficked are forcibly displaced and are possibly refugees. 99% of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation are women and girls.

Culture

Given that most of the children that are trafficked are girls, there is a culture (especially in developing countries) of selling off of women and girls and seeing them as commodities to increase the household wealth. Moreover, child marriages can also lead to those entering into the institution being trafficked.

Smuggling v. trafficking

One must be clear of the difference between human (child) trafficking and human (child) smuggling, as they are two very different crimes whilst intertwined. Human trafficking is involuntary, and victims are exploited. Smuggling is voluntary, yet still bears life-threatening risks. A smuggling case can become human trafficking if the victims are exploited, for example being held for ransom or through forced labour.

There is often a misconception by government, politicians, and the general public between human (child) smugglers and traffickers. Both are illegal, however mean very different things as pointed out.

Key Facts

The United Kingdom is the most prominent country of origin for trafficked children - a total of 2,874 reported cases - followed by Vietnam (246 children), Sudan (163 children), Albania (160 children), Romania (138 children) and Eritrea (132 children). Children from Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, and Iran also made-up significant numbers of those identified.

1 in 4 victims of people trafficking in 2016 were children – a total of 10.1 million child victims.

27% of all trafficking victims are children

Children are 4x more likely to be trafficked for labour rather than sex

Human Rights & Child Trafficking

- Right not to be submitted to slavery, servitude, forced labour or bonded labour
- Right of children to special protection
- Right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Relevant Organisations

- United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- International Labour Organization (ILO)

Questions to consider

1. Is it possible for child trafficking to be tackled on an international level? Is it the duty of member states individually, or a matter for international law?
2. What legal protections can be internationally implemented to protect children against traffickers?
3. How do we tackle misinformation surrounding child trafficking?
4. How do we protect the mental and physical health of trafficking victims?
5. How can we help trafficking victims after they are 'rescued'?
6. How can we eliminate child trafficking?

Useful Links

[UNGA Meeting for the Global Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking](#)

[Human Rights and Human Trafficking](#)

[Save The Children](#)

[Theirworld](#)

[International Labour Organization](#)

[Case Study: Italy](#)

The Question of the Safety of Refugees in Transit

Background

The world is currently witnessing the largest number of people displaced on record, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' 2017 estimates of global displacement - 68.5 million people.

This number translates to one person being forcibly displaced every two seconds as a result of conflict or persecution. Against the claims that countries in the Global North are overrun by refugees, about 85 per cent of all displaced people are living in the Global South (UNHCR 2019). Whereas most forced displacements take place in the Middle East and Eastern Africa at present, the Asia-Pacific region is hosting about 11 per cent of all globally displaced people.

Depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder are frequently reported in the literature as highly prevalent mental health problems among refugees and asylum seekers. Often, for individuals in transit, experiences of torture, trauma, loss, economic hardship, and physical illness are coupled with difficult living conditions, and fear and uncertainty regarding the future.

Key Issues

On several occasions, large numbers of often traumatised and sick people were kept at sea for days before permission to disembark was granted, sometimes only after other states had pledged to relocate the majority of those who had been rescued. By the end of the year, this situation had not been resolved despite UNHCR's and IOM's continuous call to establish a predictable regional disembarkation mechanism in the Mediterranean Basin.

Long-term uncertainty, isolation and harsh conditions in emergency transit facilities have led refugees waiting there to develop psychological problems.

For many people, the sea crossing is just the last step in a journey that has involved travel through conflict zones or deserts, the danger of kidnapping and torture for ransom, and the threat from traffickers in human beings.

Transit migration has become more visible due to the increasing levels of displacement worldwide and its increasingly protracted nature. While most refugees remain close to the countries from which they originate, for example 1.5 million Afghans in Pakistan, 4 million Syrians in neighbouring countries and 500,000 Somalis in Kenya, others move on again in the hope of finding permanent protection or a better life outside of refugee camps. These onward journeys are lengthy, uni-directional, and often facilitated by smuggling networks. During these journeys people are considered to be in transit, even though they are often stuck in transit countries. Not only is their onward mobility restricted, but they are also prevented from local integration.

When developing their asylum and migration policies, countries in the Global North need to pay more attention to the unseen and unintended consequences of their increasingly restrictive regimes onto the neighbouring countries and transit states, which has helped to create more exploitation and harm for transiting asylum seekers and refugees.

Timeline

The number of refugees and migrants making the Mediterranean Sea crossing fell in 2018 but it is likely that reductions to search and rescue capacity coupled with an uncoordinated and unpredictable response to disembarkation led to an increased death rate as people continued to flee their countries due to conflict, human rights violations, persecution, and poverty.

Throughout 2018, there were significant changes to the pattern of routes taken by refugees and migrants heading for Europe. For the first half of the year, more people arrived in Greece than Italy or Spain, in the second half, however, the primary entry point became Spain as increased people attempted the perilous sea crossing over the Western Mediterranean.

Although arrivals were markedly down compared to the large numbers who reached Italy each year between 2014-2017 or Greece in 2015, the journeys were as dangerous as ever. An estimated 2,275 people perished in the Mediterranean in 2018 - an average of six deaths every day. Furthermore, the Libyan Coast Guard stepped up its operations with the result that 85% of those rescued or intercepted in the newly established Libyan Search and Rescue Region (SRR) were disembarked in Libya, where they faced detention in appalling conditions (including limited access to food and outbreaks of disease at some facilities, along with several deaths). As a result, more vessels containing refugees and migrants attempted to sail beyond the Libyan SRR to evade the coast guard - either to make land in Malta and Italy or at least to reach the search and rescue regions of those jurisdictions. This trend is expected to continue in 2019.

Although the overall number of deaths at sea in the Central Mediterranean more than halved in 2018 compared to the previous year, the rate of deaths per number of people attempting the journey rose sharply. On the crossing from Libya to Europe, for instance, the rate went from one death for every 38 arrivals in 2017 to one for every 14 arrivals last year. Elsewhere in Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina recorded some 24,100 arrivals as refugees and migrants transiting through the Western Balkans searched for new routes to EU (European Union) Member States; Cyprus received several boats carrying Syrians from Lebanon, along with arrivals from Turkey and more by air, straining accommodation and processing capacity; and towards the end of the year, small numbers of people tried to make the sea crossing from France to the UK.

The past 12 months did bring some positive developments. More states committed to resettling refugees evacuated from Libya, thus enabling UNHCR to bring more people to safety via the Emergency Transit Mechanism established in Niger. At the end of the year, UNHCR opened the Gathering and Departure Facility in Tripoli, enabling the release of more people from detention. Several EU Member States also committed to relocations of people rescued in the Central Mediterranean - a sign of the potential for joint international action.

By the end of 2020, 3,318 individuals had been evacuated from Libya to Niger via the Emergency Transit Mechanism while 515 had been evacuated to Rwanda, according to UNHCR. Although these were intended to be temporary stops, long processing times paired with very few resettlement places has left many stuck there - with their lives on hold.

Questions to consider

1. How can we remove the incentives for migrants to undertake dangerous journeys?
2. Can cultural and tribal practices traditions prevent women and children from receiving a sufficient education? Should the UN attempt to sabotage this tradition? Why/Why not?
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Written/Sourced by Francisco Coiai, Head Chair, and Burhan Yurtseven, Co-Chair, of the SOCHUM 1 committee, for use at the thirteenth annual Haberdashers' Boys' School Model United Nations Conference, 11th-13th March 2022.