

# A CREEPING CRISIS

The neglect of education in  
slow-onset emergencies



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Cover photo: A session for pre-school children in a temporary tented classroom set up by Save the Children in Dollo Ado camp, Ethiopia. (Photo: Ingrid Lund/Save the Children)

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# INTRODUCTION

*“We have food, water, shelter. Now we need education.”*

A resident of the Dollo Ado camps, Ethiopia<sup>1</sup>

The lives of millions of children in many countries are blighted by recurrent, slow-onset emergencies. In two current chronic crises – the food crisis in east Africa that began in 2011, and the 2012 crisis in the Sahel region of west Africa – children’s well-being has plummeted.

Food scarcity and malnutrition jeopardise the survival and health of the youngest children. And the knock-on effects of these crises permeate all aspects of children’s lives. That includes, of course, their education: many children are forced to drop out of school in slow-onset emergencies – either to migrate, or to support their families by doing household work or income-generating activities.

Yet education has a key role to play in helping children survive and progress in slow-onset emergencies. It provides a platform for an integrated emergency response. And, in the longer term, through disaster preparedness and adaptation, education builds the

resilience of children and their communities to cope with future droughts, and secures learning that is relevant to children’s needs.

Given this, it is alarming that discussions about how to mitigate the impact of drought in east Africa and in the Sahel have failed to incorporate education as part of the key interventions and strategies. The failure of donors and governments to prioritise education from the outset threatens to:

- exacerbate the impact of the crises on children
- over-stretch education systems
- affect the implementation of good-quality education interventions – both immediately and in the long term.

Even before these crises, high numbers of children were out of school, and there are large and growing young populations in these areas.

This report focuses on the role and importance of education in mitigating the impact of droughts in east Africa and west Africa. Its recommendations are relevant both to those crises and to other countries likely to face slow-onset emergencies in the future.

**Hani, 13, and her brother, Abdi, at a child-friendly space run by Save the Children at the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. With their mother and three siblings, Hani and Abdi had to flee Somalia during the drought because they had no food.**



PHOTO: HELLE KJÆRSQAARD/SAVE THE CHILDREN



# I THE IMPACT OF THE EAST AND WEST AFRICA CRISES ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

In 2011 in the Horn of Africa, drought exacerbated a malnutrition and hunger crisis spanning Somalia, a number of dry areas in Ethiopia, and northern regions of Kenya. In the same year, Niger was also hit by drought. 2012 has seen an increase in the number of west African states experiencing food insecurity, drought and displacement. Insecurity in Mali and Somalia has exacerbated the crisis, causing higher levels of displacement.

Staggeringly, 8.5 million children are missing out on primary school across the crisis-affected countries.<sup>2</sup> In the coming school year, families' increased vulnerability due to the crises will contribute to even higher drop-out rates and lower levels of enrolment.

Towards the end of the 2011/12 school year large numbers of children dropped out of school early to take part in income-generating or household activities or to migrate with their families in search of work, food, or water. In addition to losing out on schooling, trekking long distances to collect water exposes these children to risks including assault, kidnapping and forced recruitment into armed groups.

The following section provides country-specific evidence of the impact of the crises on children and their education.

## EAST AFRICA

In **Somalia** in 2011, school enrolment rates plummeted due to the food crisis and large-scale displacement. The Education Cluster estimates that more than 1.8 million children aged 5–17 are out of school in South and Central Somalia alone<sup>3</sup> – the worst-affected region, due to persistent and ongoing conflict and drought. The current education coverage and response supports only 20% of the school-age population in this zone.<sup>4</sup> The availability of education

for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and local host communities has not been sufficient to meet the need.

Challenges to effectively delivering education in Somalia include:

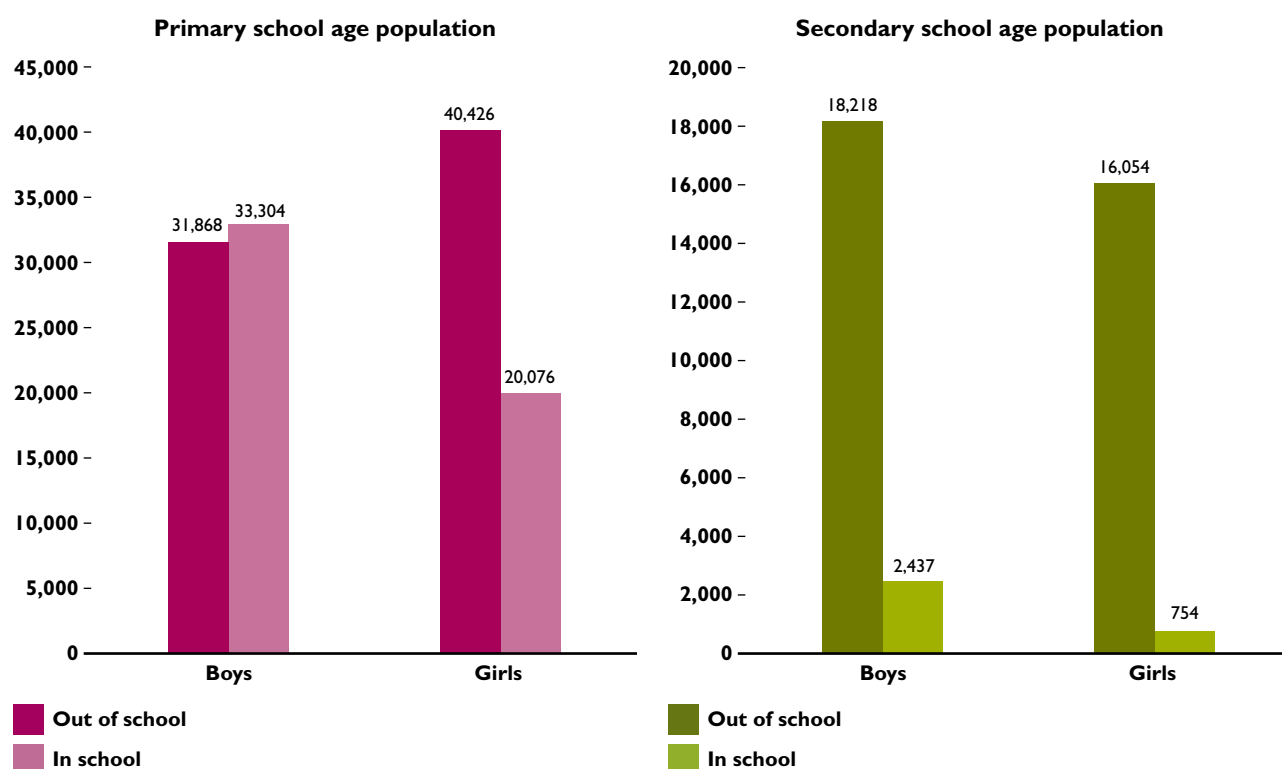
- the lack of an appropriate curriculum
- inadequate learning spaces
- a lack of trained teachers from affected communities
- insufficient teacher remuneration and incentives for teaching
- the underlying challenge of the absence of a governance structure.

Scarce teaching and learning materials are not enough to cover even the current low enrolment rates, made worse by the continued lack of funding for education in emergencies.

In the Dollo Ado camp in **Ethiopia** and the Dadaab camp in **Kenya**, resident populations increased significantly during the 2011 crises – from already high levels. More than a quarter of a million Somali refugees arrived at the two camps in 2011 alone.<sup>5</sup> The camps now host more than 600,000 Somali refugees, approximately 60% of whom are children.<sup>6</sup>

Providing education in the camps is particularly challenging given the chronic lack of services for the host populations in marginalised, drought-affected areas, where many refugees have settled. Many refugee children have had little or no previous access to formal education in Somalia, making it even more difficult to integrate them into the limited formal schooling in host communities. In Dollo Ado, only an estimated 15–20% of children are currently accessing education services.<sup>7</sup> In 2011, UNHCR, UNICEF and Save the Children reported an urgent need for temporary learning spaces and for teaching and learning materials, especially for younger children.<sup>8</sup> And in late 2011 UNHCR reported that, with one teacher for every 100 pupils

FIGURE I. STATUS OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN DADAAB CAMP, NORTH-EASTERN KENYA AS OF MARCH 2012



in Dadaab, more teachers and teacher training were desperately needed.<sup>9</sup>

Figure I shows the number of out-of-school children in Dadaab, at primary and secondary level respectively. In particular, urgent attention is needed to ensure more girls are able to access school, at primary level and also at secondary level.

Recurrent drought across east Africa is having a particularly severe effect on girls. UN agencies report that more girls are getting married early to offset costs for families experiencing hardship.<sup>10</sup> It is likely that these girls will never go back to school. They are at risk from early pregnancy – even in normal circumstances in this region, girls under 15 are five times as likely to die in pregnancy as women in their 20s, and approximately one in five is out of school.<sup>11</sup>

## WEST AFRICA

Drought, rising food prices, and displacement of parts of the population, combined with chronic poverty and vulnerability, have created a situation of food insecurity for more than 18 million people in the Sahel, more than 9 million of them children.<sup>12</sup>

The situation is compounded by ongoing insecurity in Mali, causing the displacement of an estimated 330,000 people as of June 2012, 60% of whom are children.<sup>13</sup> Even before the crisis, some countries in the Sahel had some of the weakest education indicators on the continent, with 25–41% of primary-age children out of school in Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the issues facing children in **Mauritania**, **Burkina Faso**, and **Niger** today are structural problems – such as absenteeism of schoolchildren during the agricultural season, poor quality of teaching, and absenteeism of teachers in rural areas – which have been exacerbated by the current crisis. Furthermore, high rates of early marriage, especially in rural areas, mean that many girls are taken out of school and do not attend secondary schools. As of May 2012, the Education Cluster in **Niger** estimated that in the areas that are worst-affected by the food crisis one in five primary students had dropped out of school.<sup>15</sup> The Nigerien Ministry of Education and Education Cluster estimated that at least 47,000 children had dropped out of school as a result of the food crisis in the worst-affected regions by May 2012.<sup>16</sup>

## PASTORALIST AND NOMADIC CHILDREN

Many children affected by drought in east and west Africa live in pastoralist communities. Extreme drought can challenge or destroy these communities' livelihoods as the need to travel further for water and pastures changes migration patterns. These conditions increase the barriers to education in communities that already have low school enrolment rates and low learning outcomes.

Nomadic and pastoralist families may perceive education as a danger to their livelihoods,

undermining social institutions and altering social learning. This is particularly the case in areas where enrolment in permanent schools has been part of a national strategy to promote an alternative livelihood for pastoralist families, moving them towards more sedentary communities. Pastoralist children face additional barriers in accessing and continuing education programmes, as there is often a misalignment between the formal academic calendar and their migratory lifestyles.

Even before the crises in **Mali**, UNESCO estimated that more than 800,000 children were out of school. The conflict and drought have compounded the problem with hundreds of thousands of children at risk of failing to complete the 2011–12 academic year.<sup>17</sup> An inter-agency assessment in four provinces of southern Mali<sup>18</sup> indicates that the food and nutrition crisis is putting children at further risk of family separation, neglect, violence, and abuse. Children are at higher risk of leaving school to engage in work opportunities, and more girls are exposed to sexual exploitation and sexual violence.

The insecurity in the north of Mali has had a devastating impact on children. UNOCHA has reported six incidents involving unexploded ordnance, killing four children.<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch reports an estimated 1,000 children have been recruited by rebel groups, and girls as young as 12 have reported

incidents of sexual assault by members of armed groups in the north.<sup>20</sup> In July 2012, UNICEF estimated that more than 300,000 students were unable to return to vandalised and closed schools in the north due to insecurity.<sup>21</sup>

In June 2012, there were more than 202,700 **refugees from Mali** in Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Niger, with many refugee children not enrolled in formal education programmes.<sup>22</sup> The Education Cluster estimates that 80% of Malian refugee children of primary school age do not have access to school.<sup>23</sup> Although some schools have been built around the camps, they are insufficient, and government schools in the neighbouring villages are often more than 10km away. Communities are finding ways to set up their own education activities – demonstrating how, in times of crisis, families see education as crucial.



PHOTO: KATIE SEABOURN/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Yarba is about ten years old. He lives in a village in the west of Mali, near the town of Diema in the region of Kayes. "I like to learn so I can get a proper job in the future. That is the most important thing to me," he says.

But Yarba's schooling is being affected by the crisis. "Sometimes I don't go to school because there isn't anything to eat," he says.

## 2 EDUCATION AS PART OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

In the crises in east Africa and the Sahel, children's nutritional and survival needs are centre stage.

It is crucial to consider the vital role early childhood interventions can play in meeting:

- immediate humanitarian needs – such as tackling malnutrition
- longer-term development needs – such as tackling children's learning
- longer-term adaptation and resilience – such as teaching children about risks and how to protect or prepare themselves to face these risks.

Education is particularly relevant to meeting the needs of the youngest children (aged zero to eight), and the most marginalised children and young people, including pastoralist children.

### EDUCATION CAN HELP TACKLE CHILD MALNUTRITION

Tackling child malnutrition is an urgent priority for a number of compelling reasons:

- Malnourished children will struggle to reach their full physical and cognitive potential, suffering lifelong consequences as a result.<sup>24</sup>
- Malnutrition has a direct impact on learning outcomes and can have irreversible effects on children's ability to learn.<sup>25</sup> A stunted child is more likely to enrol late, miss classes, or repeat a year in school.<sup>26</sup>
- People affected by malnutrition throughout their lives are estimated to earn almost 20% less income than their non-affected counterparts, controlling for other factors.<sup>27</sup>
- Children born from mothers who have suffered malnutrition will face physical and cognitive development challenges, in addition to the many challenges brought about by poverty.<sup>28</sup>

Good-quality, relevant education and adequate nutrition positively reinforce one another; both are

vital interventions in an emergency. Early childhood care and development (ECCD) programmes ensure the youngest children's needs are met holistically through joint health, protection, nutrition and education activities.<sup>29</sup> School-based nutrition interventions provide: emergency school feeding or take-home rations to assist children and families during the 'hunger gap'; discourage dropouts; and equip teachers to identify and refer at-risk students to appropriate clinics.

Other examples of integrated interventions in slow-onset emergencies that are centred on education and schools include:

- **Referral processes for the most vulnerable children:** teachers and education personnel are trained on nutrition, health, psychosocial, and child protection issues so that they can identify children in need of further help and ensure they are put in touch with the services they need.
- **Health screenings in schools:** health and education personnel identify and treat early malnutrition, worms, diarrhoea, and other illnesses prevalent in periods of drought.
- **Hygiene and sanitation in schools:** education personnel implement activities that focus on: hand-washing and other hygiene practices; ways to mitigate environmental factors that contribute to diarrhoea; and sharing health messages to prevent diseases like cholera.
- **Water-tanking and rainwater harvesting in schools:** clean water is available to students for drinking, hand-washing, and cleaning, and for school feeding programmes, from providing and filling water tanks (including through water harvesting and rainwater catchment). In camps, schools and child-friendly spaces should be connected to the camp water system.<sup>30</sup> This could be supported by:
  - **take-home water rations** – discouraging drop-outs and allowing children to assist with water collection and contribute to their family's supply.



PHOTO: COLIN CROWLEY/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Primary-school children in Habaswein, Kenya test out the new clean drinking water facility provided by Save the Children. The girls also learned how to use tablets to purify water for drinking.

- **distribution of water containers in schools** – implemented through school-based child-led water management committees.
- **Cash transfers:** parents receive cash as a condition of their children’s attendance in school.<sup>31</sup> This can be linked to existing safety net programmes implemented in communities.

## HOW EDUCATION PROMOTES RESILIENCE

Access to good quality education is not only every child’s right; it is vital to bringing an end to generational cycles of poverty, and to encouraging economic growth and stability.

Putting plans in place to secure children’s right to education is one of the most valuable actions a

government can take before a disaster strikes.<sup>32</sup> Disaster risk reduction is a key component of all sustainable humanitarian responses and is absolutely crucial in the context of slow-onset, recurring emergencies.<sup>33</sup> Education that incorporates disaster risk reduction and awareness reduces children’s vulnerability to crisis. Children who are taught environmental education, information on better and more sustainable farming practices, and other relevant disaster risk reduction subjects will be better equipped to cope with current crises and to support innovative solutions for their families and communities in future crises.<sup>34</sup> Good-quality education can therefore mitigate the impact of current and future droughts by building children’s resilience and, through them, the resilience of their communities.<sup>35</sup>



# 3 INADEQUATE FUNDING FOR EDUCATION

**Education continues to be grossly underfunded in all UN Humanitarian Consolidated Appeals Processes (CAP) in comparison to other sectors; it is consistently among the least funded sectors in all relevant CAPs.**

Slow-onset emergency interventions often lack adequate, timely funding, and education needs in this context are acutely underfunded.<sup>36</sup> This exemplifies one of the biggest challenges in enabling Education Cluster agencies and partners to deliver education to the most vulnerable children. For example, education was not included in the original CAPs for either Niger or Mali and, as of July 2012, was still absent in the Burkina Faso CAP.<sup>37</sup>

As the figures on pages 8 and 9 show (based on updated UN Financial Tracking Service (FTS) data from June 2012), a comparison of funding needs versus needs met in Somalia and Mali illustrates the disparities in overall humanitarian funding and the alignment of funding according to children's needs.

In both cases, education and protection remain the least funded sectors, in stark contrast with sectors such as food security and food aid, which are well funded.

Overall, a comparison of funding needs versus needs met in east Africa, Niger and Mali shows a trend in inconsistent levels of funding for education, with education's highest level of funding met reaching 13% in Somalia (amounting to \$5.5 million). Kenya's 2012 Emergency Humanitarian Response Plan CAP reflects the lowest allocation for education in 2012, reporting only 2% of its overall needs met (amounting to \$148,000).

Such a bleak funding picture for education is even more worrying, given that humanitarian aid requests for education, as reflected in CAPs, do not always reflect the education needs in their entirety.<sup>38</sup> In this limited context, it is even more important to see an increase in funding to guarantee that even the minimum of education programmes can run.

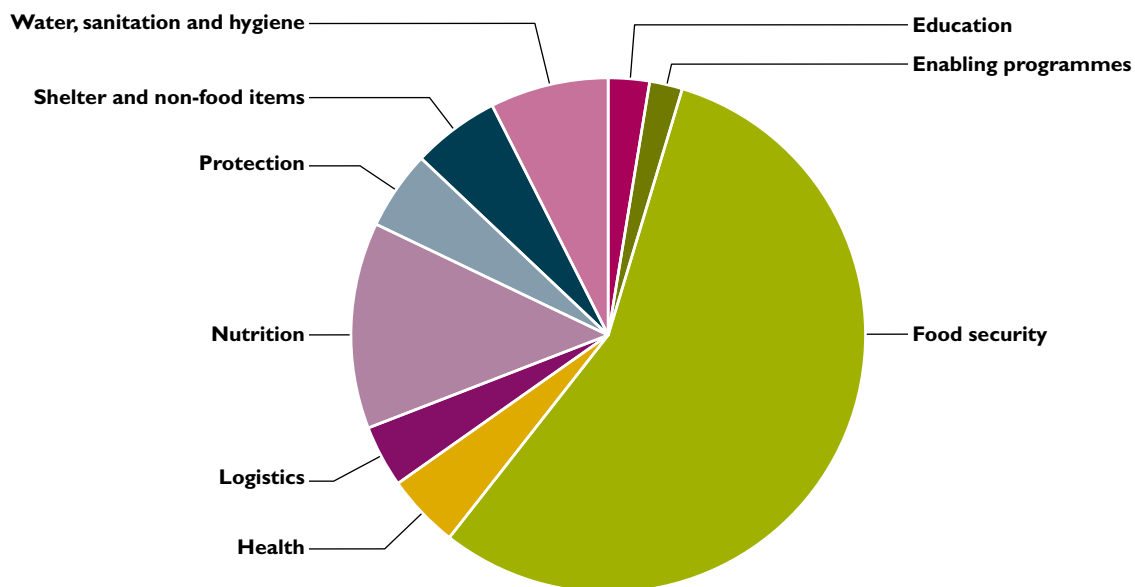
**After fleeing their home in Mali, Oumou and her family are now living in a refugee camp in Burkina Faso. Restricted education resources in the camps only provide limited learning opportunities, and only a small number of children are able to go to local schools outside the camp.**



PHOTO: HEININ HALDORSSON/SAVE THE CHILDREN

FIGURE 2. SOMALIA CONSOLIDATED APPEAL

Funding requirements by cluster



Proportion of funding requirements met, by cluster, in US\$

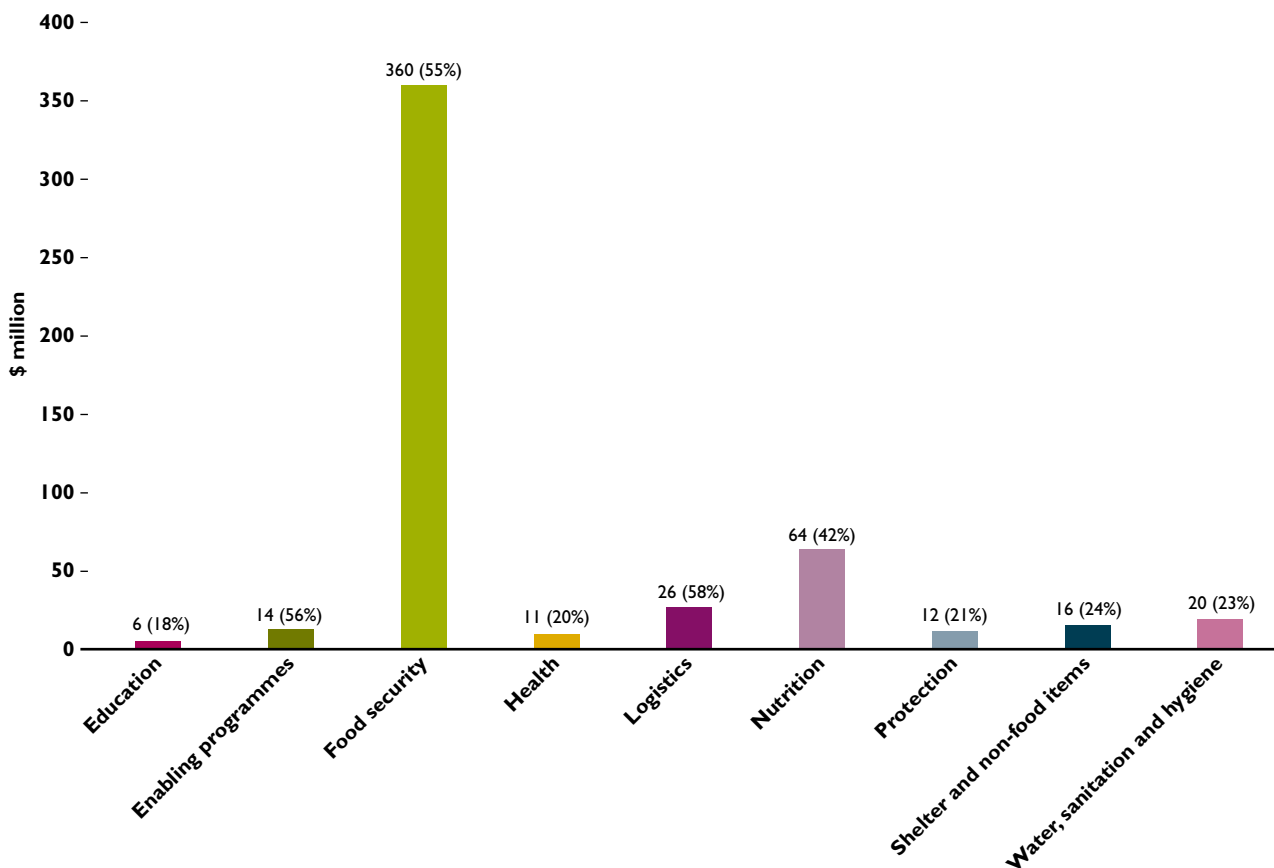
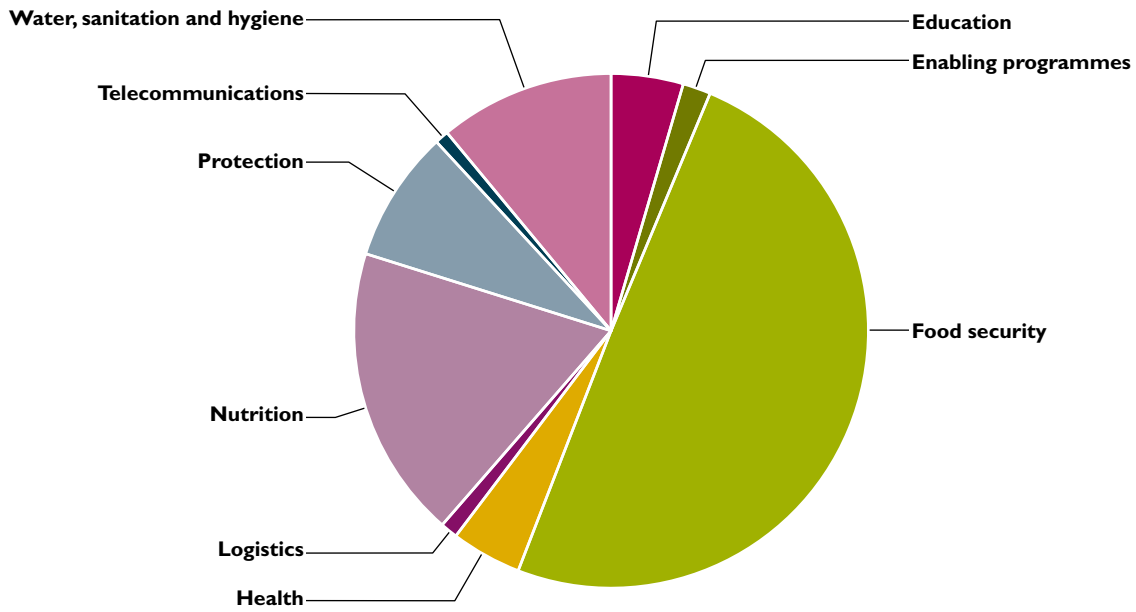
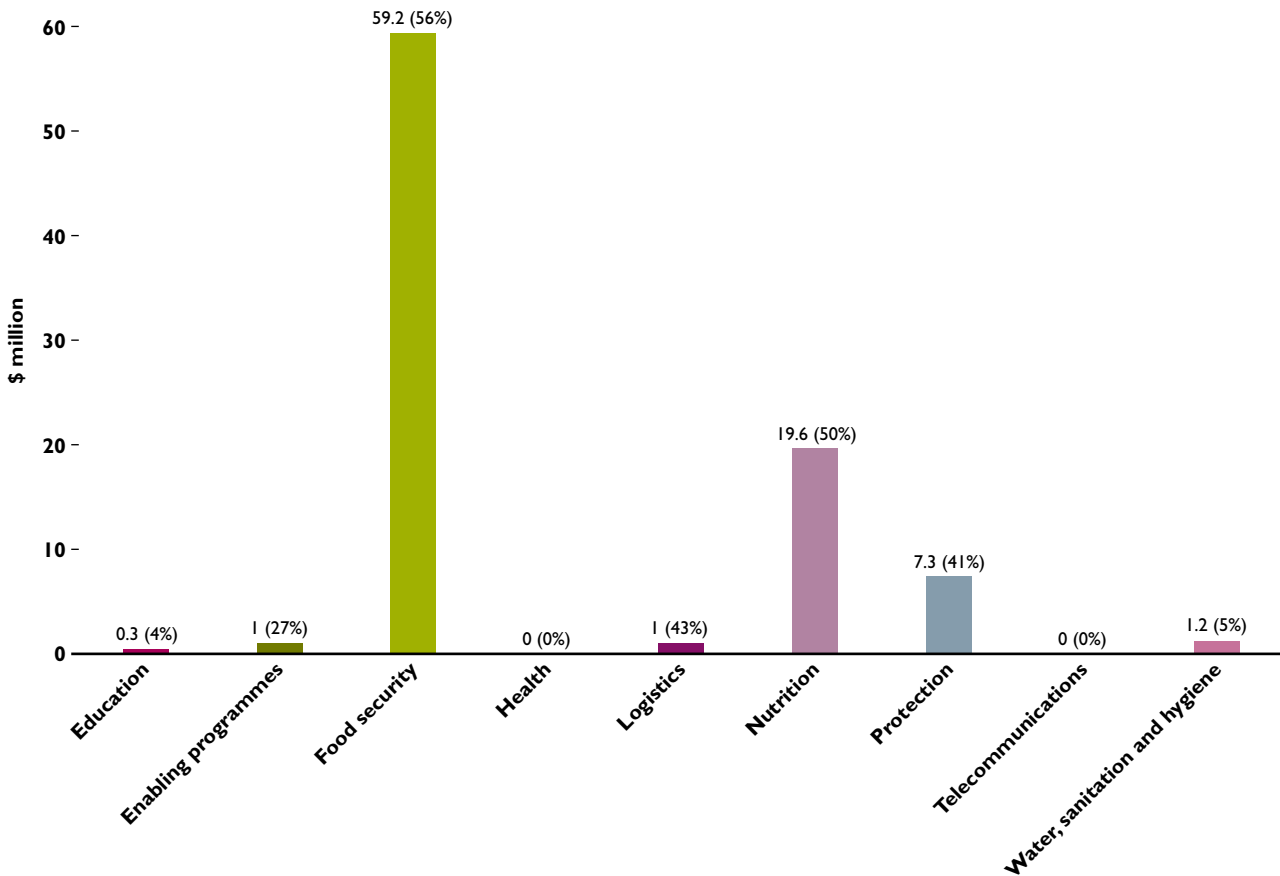


FIGURE 3. MALI CONSOLIDATED APPEAL 2012

Funding requirements by cluster



Proportion of funding requirements met, by cluster, in US\$



# 4 SECURING AN EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN

In the crisis-hit countries of east Africa and the Sahel, it is crucial to implement an immediate humanitarian education response. This should address priority educational needs and restore or set-up learning spaces for children affected.

Education is the cornerstone of a holistic, sustainable response that secures the protection and development of all children. In slow-onset emergencies, education is vital to improve the resilience of children and their communities through disaster preparedness lessons and to prevent current and future generations from losing out on opportunities for growth and development.

In order to protect development gains and to achieve progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and on other key agendas,<sup>39</sup> it is equally important to think long term and to take big steps to tackle the underlying, chronic situation. That includes giving many children their first opportunity to go to school.

## STRENGTHENING EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Education in slow-onset emergencies must be geared towards securing access and good-quality learning for all children – in particular, reducing the barriers to education that affect the most vulnerable children. It must also meet the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial needs of children through safe learning spaces and through the content that is relevant to the context, with safety and survival messages. In some contexts, scaling up support to existing education programmes and ensuring social protection programmes target the most vulnerable families will enable children to stay in school during crises.

In slow-onset emergencies, education systems need to be strengthened to ensure:

- schools are able to absorb and accommodate new children who have become displaced, as well as refugees who are joining education systems in a different language
- schools and temporary learning spaces promote a resumption of good-quality learning – with additional training for teachers and school managers; provision of teaching materials; and key lessons to build resilience and increase preparedness
- back-to-school campaigns, timed for the summer recess, target the most vulnerable families – who may not prioritise sending their children to school – through raising awareness to mobilise parents and communities
- schools stay open during school breaks when appropriate to continue feeding programmes and to provide ‘catch-up’ opportunities for those who have missed school and/or exams they need to pass to progress.

Overall, flexibility and creativity are needed to respond to slow-onset emergencies. The reasons why children or teachers are out of school and schools close are varied, complex, and interrelated – taking in issues around mobility, resource scarcity, endemic poverty, and conflict. As a result, making a response is conceptually as well as operationally challenging.

Education practitioners and donors should consider implementing and supporting creative initiatives, particularly those that will target the most marginalised children, such as those from pastoralist communities.

Examples include:

- **Early childhood initiatives** – the youngest children, from zero to eight years, participate in play, education, care and development programmes, ensuring they are stimulated and engaged.
- **Term-time flexibility** – advocating for local authorities in drought-affected areas to be able to set context-specific term times, so that they avoid the worst drought months, and to introduce



school hours that are flexible, so that schools are accessible to children supporting family livelihoods through work and domestic tasks.

- **Accelerated learning programmes** – an alternative, flexible education programme targeting older children who have missed out on basic education and who would otherwise be unlikely to attend formal schooling.
- **School networking and mobile school cards** – a flexible scheme to ensure that children who migrate with their families are able to continue education in other areas, with some consistency in curriculum and knowledge of their progress.
- **Portable student learning kits** – kits with portable independent self-study materials (linked to the curriculum) are provided to children who migrate and are unable to access other forms of education during drought periods, so that they can continue to learn.
- **Education courses delivered by radio** – course content for many subjects and years can be delivered via radio, allowing continuity for children on the move.
- **Child-to-child learning models** – older children can become valuable peer tutors to younger children, while at the same time solidifying their own learning – thus permitting a smaller number of qualified teachers to reach a larger number of children.

## SECURING ESSENTIAL FUNDING

Given the national and regional impact of the crisis on the provision of education, long-term development donors and UN humanitarian decision-makers and humanitarian agencies should ensure education is factored into all planning processes that have an impact on children's lives. To resolve immediate education and learning needs, they should ensure that the Education Cluster and partners, including governments, local civil society organisations, and NGOs, have adequate funding to plan, coordinate, and implement education in emergencies interventions, and in back-to-school campaigns that provide a sustainable entry into school. This requires an immediate increase in funding of education needs in the CAPs and the inclusion of education in all CAPs, in particular those countries experiencing high numbers of out-of-school children.

Donors should also consider supporting creative approaches to slow-onset emergencies, such as an

NGO-managed crisis modifier fund for NGO Cluster members. This would allow development programmes to modify and expand their normal activities to reflect the changing needs of their beneficiaries during the emergency, following the patterns of the protracted emergency rather than funding patterns.

Additionally, the Global Partnership on Education, the World Bank and the African Development Bank, among key regional education and development donors, should devote attention to the impact of the environment on education systems. They should support adequate, long-term funding mechanisms for flexible approaches to education in the most-affected regions. In particular, interventions that are known to work well with the most vulnerable communities should be supported.



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

Isina at a centre for early childhood care and development established by Save the Children in a refugee camp in Dollo, south-west Ethiopia. She came here with her family from Somalia.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Education in slow-onset emergencies helps meet children's immediate humanitarian needs and build resilience in the longer term. Save the Children has identified four key areas for action – both in the current crises in east Africa and the Sahel, and beyond:

## **Make education a key part of an integrated approach focused on meeting children's needs.**

- IASC Clusters, humanitarian agencies and governments should develop joint interventions that cover children's needs holistically and innovatively, ensuring education is factored into resilience-building approaches.
- Humanitarian agencies and ministries in charge of disaster risk reduction management must effectively integrate approaches that use the full potential of schools as key learning centres for preparedness and resilience-building.
- Education and nutrition experts within ministries and humanitarian agencies should adopt joint interventions to ensure that nutrition and education needs are equally met and resources are available, and that school-centred interventions are used more effectively.

## **Secure essential humanitarian funding for education interventions in slow-onset emergencies.**

- Donors and multilateral agencies must recognise education as an essential part of humanitarian responses.
- Humanitarian decision makers – in particular, UN humanitarian coordinators and UN humanitarian country teams – must guarantee a space for education in decisions that will shape the common humanitarian plan and support other interventions in countries affected by drought.
- UN Humanitarian Coordinators should ensure education needs are reflected in all relevant Consolidated Appeals Processes (CAPs) from the outset.
- Donors should provide immediate funding for education needs in CAPs in all countries affected.

## **Close the gap between humanitarian and development planning and funding for education.**

- Governments and donors, in particular the World Bank, the Global Partnership on Education, local education groups (LEGs) and national donor committees, should ensure education sector plans and other education planning processes factor in contingency plans for an education emergency response, and prioritise disaster risk reduction and resilience programmes.
- Education development partners should work closely with Education Cluster working groups, where established, to ensure there is a joined-up approach to education needs.

## **Ensure the most vulnerable children – including children from pastoralist communities – do not miss out on education.**

- Education Cluster partners, working with governments and donors, should begin to plan ahead for back-to-school and enrolment campaigns from August–October, in order to seize this key opportunity. They should ensure the necessary resources are available to guarantee that all affected children are able to re-enter or start school after the summer recess.
- Donors should provide full support for national campaigns that tackle enrolment and quality objectives.
- Governments in countries with high levels of pastoralist children should adopt common measures with neighbouring countries, taking into account especially high levels of displacement and migration.
- Governments and ministries of education should adopt flexible approaches that cater to pastoralist children and teachers, and ensure the education curriculum responds to their needs.

# ENDNOTES

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# A CREEPING CRISIS

## The neglect of education in slow-onset emergencies

The lives of millions of children in many countries are blighted by recurrent, slow-onset emergencies. In two current chronic crises – the food crisis in east Africa that began in 2011, and the 2012 crisis in the Sahel region of west Africa – children’s well-being has plummeted.

*A Creeping Crisis* focuses on the role and importance of education in mitigating the impact of droughts in east Africa and west Africa. Its recommendations are relevant both to those crises and to other countries likely to face slow-onset emergencies in the future.

[savethechildren.org.uk](http://savethechildren.org.uk)



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