EDUCATION ABOVE ALL:

Protecting the Right to Education and Building Peace



Photo credit: Education Above All Foundation

Written by Siraj Khan

Insecurity and conflicts have increased in severity, duration, and modality. As a result, the fundamental human right to education continues to face relentless threats, creating a dangerous environment for children, youth, and educators. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) reported approximately 6,000 attacks on schools and education in 2022 and 2023, affecting over 10,000 students and educators. Amidst this fragility, there are significant pockets of resilience dedicated to safeguarding learning and building pathways towards lasting peace.

The Education Above All (EAA) Foundation is one such organization committed to working for the provision of quality education and safe learning environments which can serve as a foundation for building peaceful societies. Established in 2012 by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Education Above All Foundation is a global foundation with a profound mission: to transform lives of millions through education and economic opportunities. Operating with unwavering commitment in some of the world's most challenging environments to unlock the full potential of every child and youth, the Foundation believes that education is the single most effective means of reducing poverty and fostering peaceful and just societies.

EAA's dedication extends beyond the mere provision of schooling; it recognizes the intrinsic link between education and sustainable peace. Embodying the spirit behind Kofi Annan's statement that "Education is quite simply, peace-building by another name", EAA's multifaceted approach not only ensures access to quality education but also works to actively protect it from attack, promoting social cohesion and resilience as foundations for peace.

Programming for Polycrises: Protecting Education at All Cost

The Foundation's work is strategically channeled through its programs, addressing the educational needs of vulnerable and marginalized individuals and communities. These programs work holistically to strengthen the right to education and the education lifecycle.

Since its inception, EAA's Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (PEIC) program has been instrumental in strengthening legal and policy frameworks necessary to protect the right to education in insecurity and conflict and advocating for the rights of learners. PEIC envisions a world where the right to education is protected for all individuals and communities affected by conflict, including the most vulnerable. To achieve this, PEIC works along three main areas of strategic intervention: (1) Data and Advocacy, ensuring there is accurate data to allow a consistent level of advocacy, awareness-raising, informed development of relevant law and policy, and education on the issues, prevention, and resilience; (2) Thought Leadership, to address the various challenges and potential solutions; and (3) Law and Policy, the provision of technical assistance to strengthen law and policy frameworks to hold perpetrators of attacks on education to account.

Since it was launched in 2012, Educate A Child (EAC) spearheaded significant breakthroughs in the lives of out-of-school children worldwide, focusing on enrollment in primary education through partnerships and innovative solutions. EAC crucially mitigates the impact of conflict, poverty and forced displacement on marginalized children and provides routes back into education for those out of school. To date, EAC has enrolled more than 14.6 million out of school children including more than 7.3 million from fragile and conflict-affected countries.

For refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), Al Fakhoora provides a lifeline by



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placing students at the heart of its programming and tailoring scholarships to their students' unique contexts. Believing in their indefatigable strength and adaptability, Al Fakhoora works to empower young people whose education has been disrupted by conflict to continue their education and become engaged and productive individuals, excelling and leading their communities even in the most challenging circumstances. Since April 2024, Al Fakhoora has committed to provide over 10,000 higher education scholarships through its Qatar Scholarship program, benefiting the most vulnerable communities and engaging youth with the potential for positive change.

Complementing these efforts, Reach Out To All (ROTA) has a mandate to focus on 'Education for Climate Action', recognizing the interconnectedness of global challenges and the role of education in building a sustainable and peaceful future. ROTA supports the integration of climate change education in secondary schools and capacity building for refugee and community-based youth in green skills.

Through the cutting-edge work of the Innovation Development directorate, more than 4.2 million learners have benefitted from Education Above All's award-winning Internet Free Education Resource Bank (IFERB), 800,000 of whom are from conflict countries, including Ukraine, Palestine, Sudan, and Yemen. IFERB provides accessible, cost-free, interdisciplinary learning modules to ensure continued access to education despite crises and conflict.

EAA Foundation's focus on education is not limited to formal education but positively recognizes opportunities after education to empower younger generations to develop their infrastructure, economies and workforces to provide an environment where they can grow and flourish professionally, whether through artisan crafts or vocational training, professional development, or higher studies. EAA's Silatech program tackles youth unemployment by creating large-scale job creation, promoting entrepreneurship, and improving access to capital and markets for young people. The program has connected over 3.3 million youth to economic activities in over 23 countries, including conflict-affected regions such as Sudan, Somalia, and Syria, through partnerships with UNDP, FAO, the Qatar Fund For Development (QFFD), and UNHCR.

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A Proactive Stance Against Attacks on Education Worldwide

Attacks on education are defined by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) as "any intentional threat or use of force—carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, or religious reasons—against students, educators, and education institutions."

Other forms of attack include the denial of humanitarian access for children, the use of schools for military purposes and structural and other means of preventing children from their right to accessing education. The Foundation has been and continues to bring attention to these grave violations against children, students, and education professionals.

EAA Foundation has played a pivotal role in supporting the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) since its establishment in 2010. This unique inter-agency coalition brings together leading organizations from the fields of education, human rights, and international humanitarian law to address the global problem of targeted attacks on education during armed conflict. GCPEA’s flagship report, Education under Attack, is published every two years and profiles countries experiencing significant patterns of attacks on education, verifying crucial data and analysis.

EAA Foundation also contributed to the establishment of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, declared by the UN in 2020, and co-organizes its annual observance on 9 September. This day serves as a vital reminder of the criticality of protecting education from attack by both state and non-state actors across the globe.

Law, Policy, and Data to Protect Education from Attack

In addition to the existing international treaties and conventions that protect children and schools as civilian institutions, domestic and international consensus is crucial to ensure common standards and practice in the protection of education from attack. To this end, EAA Foundation, supported by the State of Qatar and the Kingdom of Norway, played a central role in the establishment of the Safe Schools Declaration, an inter-governmental political commitment to protect students, teachers, schools, and universities from the worst effects of armed conflict. To date, 121 states have endorsed the declaration, signifying an important growing global consensus on respecting the civilian nature of educational institutions and developing good practices for their protection, especially during armed conflict.

The most recent innovation in this context is the Track Attacks on Education (TRACE) data portal, launched in 2020, which uses the latest



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verified data to identify and track the location, modality, and frequency of attacks on education. The portal serves as a crucial tool for monitoring attacks on education during insecurity and conflict, providing early warnings for attacks on education, and valuable insights for advocacy and other interventions.

Fostering Peace through Education and Psychosocial Support

EAA Foundation recognizes the crucial role of education in promoting social cohesion and reducing violence as strategic and practical ways for building peace for current and future generations. To build peace for future generations, it is crucial to provide support for those who have already been, or are still, affected by the trauma that accompanies conflict. As a result, EAA Foundation's projects often integrate psychosocial and emotional support to address the trauma and stress experienced by children and educators in conflict-affected areas.

Through its Al Fakhoora Programme, the Foundation addresses food security and hygiene, as well as psychosocial support, for vulnerable populations in an active war zone, including children and displaced families in Palestine. Similarly, the Self Learning Programme (SLP) in Syria, a collaboration between EAA Foundation's Educate A Child (EAC) program and UNICEF, integrates learning materials and teacher training with psychosocial support to cater to the needs of children with limited access to education due to the ongoing conflict, and create safe learning environments enabling more than 360,000 out-of-school children to continue their education.

EAA Foundation's Ukraine Emergency Education Programme focused on social-emotional learning, refugee integration, and mitigating learning loss for Ukrainian refugees. The program addressed mental health challenges through educational content broadcast on TV and online. The Mobilising the Power of Grassroots Youth project in Uganda and South Sudan, a collaboration between EAA Foundation's PEIC and ROTA programs and the Whittaker Peace and Development Initiative (WPDI) mobilized over 678,000 youth from conflict-affected regions through training and engagement in conflict resolution education, fostering a culture of peace and recognizing the critical role of young people for long-term peace and development.

Empowering a New Generation of Peace Leaders

EAA Foundation's commitment to sustainable peace extends to fostering peace leadership among youth and within communities. The Foundation supports initiatives that equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to address conflict and build peace at various levels. To that end, EAA has established

> “Investing to protect education does not only benefit individuals, it leads to a more peaceful and sustainable world.”

the EAA Youth Advocacy Programme as well as an international EAA - OHCHR Youth Advisory Board comprised of talented young leaders from across the world who can act as agents for change. Alongside this, the Youth Empowerment System (www.youth4yes.com) is a platform developed in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights aimed at strengthening awareness of human rights amongst youth and empowering them to better advocate for the rights of youth, especially the right to education. This is essential for building the foundations of peace in societies reeling from the impact of past and ongoing conflict. EAA Foundation facilitates the engagement of more young people and extends the global reach of this advocacy network under the social media campaign #UniteToProtect, to further amplify this message, reaching hundreds of thousands of youth and others across the globe.

Building Bridges through Partnerships

Effective collaboration with local and international partners is a cornerstone of EAA Foundation’s crisis response, boosting the impact of global and local educational and peacebuilding initiatives. The scale and complexity of the dual challenge of protecting education in conflict and fostering peace necessitates strong collaborations with various actors, including with local communities.

EAA Foundation deeply values partnerships and actively works with a wide range of actors, including global partners like UNICEF and UNHCR, international NGOs, multilateral development banks, bilateral agencies, and newer partners such as municipalities and community-based local organizations. The Foundation also partners with humanitarian actors from civil society, including faith-based organizations and local entities, recognizing their strong presence on the ground, crucial contextual knowledge and the trust they have garnered among their communities. These partnerships highlight the importance of a unified approach in addressing the multifaceted challenges in conflict-affected settings.

Building a Legacy of Hope and Peace

The work of the Education Above All Foundation stands as a testament to the unwavering belief in the transformative power of education, even in the most volatile and insecure contexts such as war, conflict, displacement, and poverty. Through its diverse programs, proactive advocacy against attacks on education, programmatic interventions on accountability for attacks on education, capacity building to facilitate the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups, and a deep commitment to fostering psychosocial well-being and peace leadership, EAA Foundation is making a profound and lasting contribution to protecting education for sustainable peace.

By protecting educational institutions and personnel, ensuring access to quality education, and empowering individuals and communities with the tools for peacebuilding, EAA Foundation is not only mitigating the devastating effects of conflict but also laying the foundations for more resilient, cohesive, and peaceful societies.