In Sudan – the third largest country in Africa – almost seven million children do not go to school. Yet, desperately, these boys and girls need to be afforded opportunities for learning. Without urgent action, the learning crisis in Sudan will become a generational catastrophe.

With the exacerbating socio-economic situation, recurring conflicts, and prolonged school closures, once children drop out of school, the chances of girls and boys returning to school are low. Girls are especially vulnerable: evidence suggests that the economic crisis is deepening gender inequalities in Sudan, especially among adolescent girls.

Moreover, globally, due to the worst shock to education and learning in recorded history, learning poverty has increased by a third in low- and middle-income countries. This generation of students now risks losing USD 21 trillion in potential lifetime earnings in present value, or the equivalent of 17 per cent of today’s global GDP. No country can afford to have one-third of its school-age children with no basic literacy, numeracy, or digital skills. Education is a win-win investment: Improving access to and quality of education is key for the development of children and countries.

**BACK TO SCHOOL**

7 MILLION OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

REFUGEES, NOMADS, GIRLS, DISPLACED CHILDREN LIVING IN REMOTE AREAS

3/10 school-age children are out-of-school
Less than half of six-year-old children are eligible to start grade one and enroll in schools: Poor access, poor retention and poor learning outcomes in basic education come from complex and mutually reinforcing patterns of disadvantage including: poverty, geographical disparities, gender inequities, disability, conflict and displacement, which all raise barriers to schooling in Sudan. Social-cultural beliefs related to child marriage, girls’ education and domestic work pose a great threat to young girls in accessing, transitioning and completing the primary school cycle. Poverty at the household level and school fees also negatively affect retention and significantly contribute to high drop-out rates.

The quality of education is generally poor: The 12 million children that are in school are not learning fundamental skills. It was found that 70 per cent of 10-year-olds could not read and understand a simple sentence.

There is a shortage of basic school infrastructure, notably classrooms, school furniture, water and sanitation facilities: Only 60 per cent of the available classrooms in government schools are permanent with an average classroom pupil ratio of 1:76. This results in overcrowded classrooms, open air classes under trees, or children learning in unsafe temporary classrooms. Separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys and access to clean and safe water is a challenge in Sudan. More than 370,000 learners are enrolled in schools without any water supply with significant variations between states. Nationally, only 50 per cent of the schools are connected to the piped water network. The average toilet to pupil ratio was estimated at 1:132, which is much higher than the recommended acceptable ratios (1:30 for girls and 1:60 for boys).

School environments are often unsafe, with cases of bullying, gender-based violence, abuse, and corporal punishment happening in schools, but seldom officially reported: School fencing is one of the recommended safety measures for securing learners, as well as codes of conduct for teachers, and community advocacy around positive parenting. Half of primary schools are not fenced. There have been cases of schools losing property including learning materials or occupation of schools by militia groups. The absence of school fences is also linked to availability of teachers, who preferred to teach in schools where they feel safe. Furthermore, there is a high level of violence within the classroom setting due to the high acceptance of corporal punishment and other forms of violence within communities and families.

There is an acute shortage of qualified teachers in Sudan with just over a quarter of teachers in primary schools meeting the minimum requirement for teaching: Moreover, the teacher training programmes need support to build upon theory and move to practical - developing pedagogical skills for instruction.

Adolescents and youth present a new series of challenges and opportunities: Sudan has a youthful population that grows at a considerable rate. While the young population of Sudan presents a great socio-economic potential, if properly equipped with relevant skills for a healthy and productive life, it also exerts pressure on government resources. Investment in young people starts with life skills, citizenship and skills training. However, for skills training to be effective, basic literacy should be addressed first.

**CHALLENGE:** To curb the learning and earning loss - we need to increase the number and quality of learning spaces – both physical and digital – so all Sudanese children will be learning by 2025.
To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education (SDG 4), UNICEF and its partners are working together to improve learning outcomes of students in Sudan.

**UNICEF and partners improve access through:**
- Provision of education opportunities, especially in conflict-affected areas, through establishment of schools, temporary learning centres, and provision of teaching and learning materials.
- Establishing alternative learning programmes for out-of-school children, including with innovative e-learning technologies.
- Conducting community enrolment campaigns and awareness campaigns address the social norm barriers to accessing quality education.

**UNICEF and partners improve the quality of education through:**
- Building the capacity of teachers and education stakeholders, for strengthened learning environments.
- Addressing the learning loss through remedial education opportunities.
- Bridging the digital divide by the introduction of e-learning in formal education, complementing the government curriculum.

UNICEF is also the coordinating agency of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE): a multi-stakeholder partnership and funding platform that aims to strengthen education systems and increase the number of children who are in school and learning, as well as the co-chair of the Local Education Group.

UNICEF’s technical and financial support contributed to increasing children’s access to quality basic education. In 2020/2021, the education sector was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in school closure for many months. Despite this, UNICEF and its partners ensured continuity of learning and the health and safety of children upon school reopening, reaching more than 425,272 students and 3,000 teachers.

**WITHOUT URGENT ACTION, THE LEARNING CRISIS IN SUDAN WILL BECOME A GENERATIONAL CATASTROPHE**

The allocation for the Education sector in 2022 budget is alarmingly at 0.8 per cent of the total government expenditure, dropping from a level of 12 per cent in the 2021 budget. Approximately 80 per cent of the education sector budget is recurrent, allocated for teacher salaries. Families contribute greatly to education costs including goods and services, capital costs, salaries to volunteer teachers, and food provision to teachers and pupils. The economic crisis and high inflation result in less families being able to afford schooling of their children.

Partners are called upon to take the following actions:
- Enhance funding and support for the education sector to curb the learning and earning loss in Sudan.
- Support joint advocacy for the authorities to comply with national and international protocols on education.
- Support joint advocacy for the authorities to increase social sector spending, in particular for education and social protection.
- Enhance coordination and collaboration between education sector partners to optimize the results of current investments.

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