EU and UNICEF aim to mitigate risk of violence in schools in the Lake Chad Basin

Improving protective environment for children and teachers central to the UNICEF/EU collaboration

Dakar 27 April, 2017 - A multi country effort to protect children and teachers from the effects of conflict is underway in the Lake Chad region. One pillar of the initiative is to train teachers to identify risks and to develop emergency preparedness and response plans together with the community child protection focal points to reduce the danger for children in an area where bomb explosions, armed attacks and abduction remain a constant threat.

Since the start of the conflict in 2009, Boko Haram has killed more than 611 teachers, and some 19,000 educators have fled from the violence. The Conflict & Disaster Risk Reduction campaign in schools is part of a specially designed intervention funded by the European Union, one of the leading donors for Education in Emergencies.

The 18 month project not only supports children impacted by the Boko Haram violence by helping them access education and protection services, it also develops detailed plans with communities so schools can offer safer learning environments. The programme addresses the complex nature of the crisis across Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria. Reducing the vulnerability of school systems in this emergency is a key part of the multi sectoral response that draws on expertise from Education and Child Protection specialists. In conflict situations, the education sector is vulnerable to violence and insecurity, so it is a particularly relevant area for Conflict and Disaster Risk Reduction.

“With 1.3 million children displaced in this crisis, it is imperative to support schools so parents can get their children back in the classroom,” said Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF’s Regional Director for West and Central Africa. "Ensuring access to education for crisis affected children is important, however opening schools is not enough. Children and teachers need to be equipped with knowledge and skills, to be prepared and able to mitigate the effects of something dangerous happening around the school premises.”

Yvan Hildebrand, head of regional office in Cameroon for EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), said: “Education is crucial for both the protection and development of girls and boys affected by crises. It can restore a sense of normalcy and safety, help heal the psychological trauma and provide them with important life skills and a space to play. Since 2012, the EU has scaled up its humanitarian funding for educational projects in crisis settings every year. In 2017 it will dedicate 6% of the annual EU humanitarian budget to education in emergencies.”
1,261 schools remain closed across the four countries due to insecurity and fear of violence. To help schools anticipate and reduce risks, nearly 100 trainers have been coached by UNICEF to guide teachers through the learning process. After receiving training by UNICEF, almost 1600 teachers throughout the region – including over 800 in Cameroon, Nigeria, and Chad under this initiative - have received special instruction from their Ministries of Education to identify security risks with their students and work with communities to put in place and implement Emergency Response Plans. Community based child protection committee members have been participating in the training with teachers, to learn to collaborate on risk reduction and to help teachers identify the available protective resources in the community.

While the project aims at mitigating the risks to children in schools and in the surrounding community, many dangers remain for institutions in the region. Schools are vulnerable to bomb attacks or even raids to abduct children. While direct attacks have decreased in recent years, there is still a high possibility that an explosion at a market near a school could disrupt education, create panic, or even cause family separation.

“As the conflict continues, it’s imperative that we scale up our response to ensure that every child can get to school and feel protected and supported,” said Poirier. “With our partner the European Union we share a common agenda to mitigate risks and enhance the protective environment where children live, whether through the schools or the existing community systems.”

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Note for the Editor

The attack on a school in Chibok in 2014 sparked international outrage at the abduction of the 276 girls. In early January 2017 seven students and eight teaching staff, including a professor were killed and 11 others wounded in an attack by Boko Haram on the University of Maiduguri in Borno state. In Niger – three incidents of attacks on schools were reported in the Diffa region between June and November 2016, with destruction and burning of infrastructure.

The joint EU-UNICEF initiative began in July 2016 and runs until December 2017. The €6.3m program will have trained over 1059 teachers and aims to reach at least 185 schools and 84 child protection community based mechanisms, benefiting a total of 158, 900 children through education and protection services, before the end of the year.

About European Commission’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations:
The European Union and its Member States are one of the world’s leading donor of humanitarian aid. The EU’s humanitarian aid funds relief operations for victims of natural disasters and conflicts, helping over 120 million victims of conflict and disasters every year. Aid is channeled impartially to victims, regardless of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation. The European Commission is among UNICEF’s largest humanitarian donors.

About UNICEF:
UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org

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