

IS EDUCATION THE SOLUTION TO PROBLEMS IN AFRICA?

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Dear readers!

In the last weeks the world has been facing a dramatic situation called as “Mediterranean migration”. In one week at least 1.000 migrants have died trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach European territories. More than 2.500 lives have been lost since June 2014, the United Nation refugee agency UNHCR believes, and the majority of them are coming from Africa and Middle East countries.

Recently the Malta’s prime minister warned after the Lampedusa tragedy, that the Mediterranean Sea was in danger of becoming a “cemetery” for desperate migrants. The situation is dramatic, considering that UNHCR figures suggest that some 25.000 people fled to Italy from North Africa in 2005, a number which dwindled to 9.573 in 2009.

As it can be seen, the problem is growing up, the number of migrants is increasing and there is no chance to solve this problem easily.

According to international law, refugees fleeing persecution have the right to asylum, but when hundreds of migrants come ashore, the authorities have a difficult task of identifying the genuine asylum seekers. In this dramatic scenario, it seems too complicated to define who is who. Often they lack papers to prove their nationality or place of origin, so how to decide who is refugee or who is trying to find a better condition for living.

As it was announced on general media, European leaders are scrambling to find a way to stem the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean, after a large spike in deaths drew public condemnation. But, this is not a new situation or a new problem. Also, in accordance with media, the most attractive of the plans is the push for a military mandate to destroy boats used by people traffickers before they set out to sea.

Even calling for the use of military force to destroy the boats the problem continues. Thousands of people will risk their lives trying to escape the sub human conditions that are set. In many countries children around 5-6 years of age have been recruited to be young soldiers by terrorist groups. At this age these younger’s should be at schools, but in most of these countries they don’t have the chance to early childhood education.

It seems that these thousands of euros that would be spent to destroy boats to avoid migrants could be used to build schools in these countries. In this way their life conditions could be improved and they wouldn’t need to risk their lives trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

Has the international community provided adequate support to improve the education in these countries?

Considering the sub-Saharan Africa region, unfortunately some countries have lagged behind and some goals – such as early childhood care and education (ECCE), the learning needs of young people and adults, adult literacy and the quality of education – have received not sufficient attention to attenuate the real problem. Most of these countries failed to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2012.

For primary education, considering the period from 1999 and 2012, pre-primary enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa rose by almost two and half times, but the average gross enrolment ratio (GER) was still very low at only 20% in 2012.

It is not possible to improve the quality of education if the number of teachers is not enough. But also, if these teachers are not well prepared, the quality of training programs for teachers is essential. In 2012, the average pre-primary pupil/teacher ratio was about 28:1, ranging from 12:1 in Swaziland to nearly 57:1 in the United Republic of Tanzania. It's clear that it is not sufficient the number and the untrained teachers to change the situation.

Many countries have a shortage of trained teachers. The percentage of trained pre-primary teachers has increased in many of the few countries with data available, because in some of them there is no data available. For example, it is increasing from 63% to nearly 86% in Ethiopia between 1999 and 2010. But in several countries including Eritrea, Mali and Sierra Leone, the proportion of trained teachers has shrunk.

The result of this situation is obvious; many children spend two or three years in school without learning to read a single word. The focus should be moved from quantity to quality, as it can be noticed to give them a chance to change their reality.

In 2012, 35% of the nearly 30 million of children out of school in sub-Saharan Africa lived in conflict-affected countries, more or less the same proportion, 37%, as in 1999. It seems there are few changes; in this scenario these younger's will be easily recruited to be soldiers. And for many of them to risk their lives trying to cross Mediterranean Sea seems to be the only chance.

Considering the average adult literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa increased from 53% to 57% between 1990 and 2000, it is four points in one decade. After 12 years only by two percentage points since 2000 to reach nearly 59% in 2012. At a first moment it seems an improvement, but this region records the highest adult illiteracy rate, 41%, and the lowest progress.

The situation is not positive because according to UN estimates, about 187 million of adults lacked basic literacy skills in 2012, of which 61% were women. As can be noticed, the inequality of gender results in a huge gap. Despite the increase in adult literacy rate, the number of adults who are illiterate increased from 134 million in 1990 to about 157 million in 2000 and is projected to reach 197 million in 2015, due to the region's continuing population growth. It is expected that in 2015, sub-Saharan Africa will account for 26% of the global number of adult illiterates, up from 20% in 2000.

The Dakar Framework highlighted the need to allocate a larger share of aid to basic education in sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, donors failed to live up to their promises. It seems that donors could spend more money building schools instead of using military attacks. In this sense, maybe the migrants' problems could be attenuated.

The answer is yes for the question title of this text. The education, in fact the quality of education could be a real solution for these people in Africa.

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